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Efforts by Public K–8 Schools to Involve Parents in Children's Education: Do School and Parent Reports Agree?

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Executive Summary

The importance of parent involvement in children's education has long been established. Research over the last two decades has demonstrated that children whose parents are involved are more likely than other youth to have positive educational outcomes such as improved academic performance, better school attendance, higher aspirations, reduced dropout rates, and increased graduation rates (Catsambis 1998; Desimone 1999; Keith et al. 1986; Ma 1999; McNeal 1999; Miedel and Reynolds 1999; Nord and West 2001; Trusty 1999). Given the clear evidence of positive returns to parent involvement, schools nationwide are being called upon to develop policies and practices that encourage parents to become more involved in their children's education both in school and at home (Partnership for Family Involvement in Education 2000; U.S. Department of Education 1994).

What practices do schools adopt to promote parent involvement? What programs do schools offer parents to encourage them to participate? To what extent do parents attend school-sponsored activities designed to increase their involvement? In 1996, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) conducted two surveys to investigate these issues from two different perspectives.

The first survey, the Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, gathered data from public K–8 schools on their efforts to involve parents in their children's schooling.[1] Conducted as part of the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), this survey was designed to provide information on the ways that schools engage parents in their children's education and the extent to which parents respond to the opportunities for involvement that schools provide (Carey et al. 1998). Specific questions included the frequency with which schools communicated with parents about various matters relating to the processes and progress of their children's learning and development, the resources that schools provided to parents to assist them in parenting and participating in their children's schooling, volunteering opportunities available to parents, and parents' involvement in school governance.

The second survey, the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996), collected data from parents on several topics similar to those schools were asked about in the FRSS: the activities or events involving parents held by their children's schools, schools' efforts to recruit parents as volunteers in schools, school-initiated communication with parents and dissemination of information to parents, and schools' policies or organizations that involve parents in school decisionmaking.[2]

Using these two data sets, the purpose of this report is to study the level of agreement between

[1]This survey targeted public schools that offered no grade higher than 8. These schools are referred to as "public K–8 schools" in this report.

[2]This survey targeted parents of children age 3 through grade 12. To be comparable with the FRSS schools, parents of children who were enrolled in grades K–8 in public schools that offered no grade higher than 8 were selected for this study.

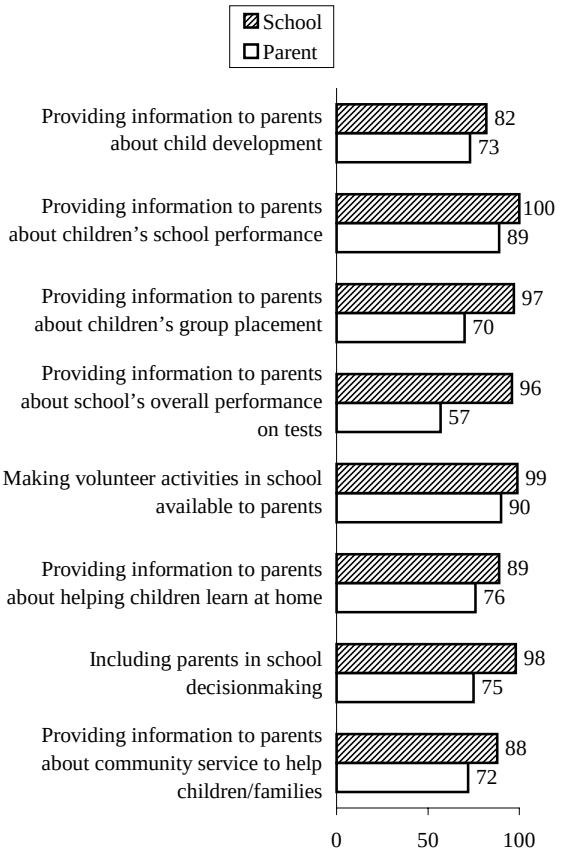
parents' and schools' views of how schools involve parents in their children's education and how parents respond to the opportunities for involvement that schools provide. Specifically, this report addresses two major questions: Do children's parents acknowledge the efforts that schools reportedly are making? and Do schools report the same level of parent participation in school programs as parents do? The findings of this report can assist policymakers, educators, researchers, and school staff in their future efforts to evaluate parents' involvement in their children's education and further encourage it. For example, discrepancies between the reports of schools and parents may indicate that despite schools' efforts, many parents are unaware of what schools do to encourage their involvement. Schools may then use this information to develop better ways to reach parents who may be unaware of school-provided opportunities.

Schools' and Parents' Reports on School Practices to Involve Parents

Discrepancies were apparent between the schools' and parents' reports on whether schools used various practices to involve parents in their children's education. For each school practice examined in this study,[3] public K–8 schools were more likely than parents of children in such schools to indicate that schools used that practice to involve parents (figure A).

The investigation into how schools' and parents' responses varied by school characteristics further revealed that the discrepancies between the two reports were not consistent across school characteristics. For some practices, the discrepancies were found in some types of schools, but not in others. For example, 81 percent of large schools and 85 percent of schools in cities/urban fringes reported giving parents information about child or adolescent development, whereas lower proportions of parents in large schools (71 percent) and

Figure A.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported using various practices to promote parent involvement in children's education, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that their child's school used such practices: 1996



NOTE: Some items may not be strictly comparable between the two surveys. See table 1 for the exact wording of the survey items used in this report.

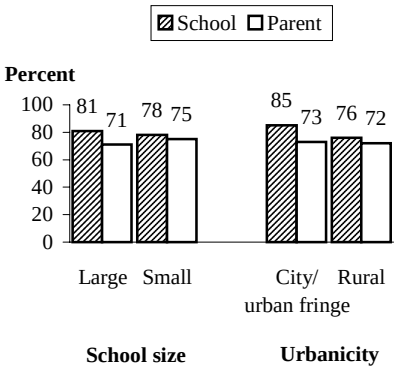
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

[3]Some items may not be strictly comparable between the two surveys. See table 1 for the exact wording of the survey items used in this report.

in city/urban fringe schools (73 percent) reported that their children's schools helped them understand the issue of child development (figure B). However, this school/parent difference was not found in small schools (78 and 75 percent) and rural schools (76 and 72 percent).

For other practices, while the discrepancies were found in all types of schools, the magnitude of the discrepancies increased with school level, size, and minority concentration. For instance, the difference between schools' and parents' reports on whether the school provided parents with information about helping children with homework was larger in middle schools than in elementary schools, in large schools than in small schools, and in high-minority enrollment schools than in low-minority enrollment schools (figure C).

Figure B.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported providing parents with information about child or adolescent development, and percentage of public K–8 school students whose parents reported that their child's school helped them understand what children at the child's age are like, by school size and urbanicity: 1996

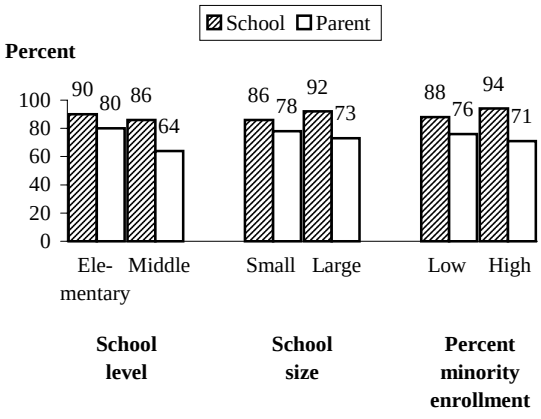


NOTE: Schools that enrolled 600 students or more were defined as large schools and those with fewer than 300 students were defined as small schools.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

There could be several explanations for these inconsistent reports, although none of them can be established empirically by this study. First, the discrepancy pattern suggests that despite schools' reported efforts, some parents were still not aware of what schools were doing to encourage their involvement. It is possible that schools have not done enough to reach out to every parent in implementing various practices. The varying gaps between schools' and parents' reports across school characteristics also suggest that schools might not be equally effective in reaching out to parents and making them aware of school programs. Elementary schools, small schools, and

Figure C.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported providing parents with information about helping children with their homework, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that they received such information from their child's school, by school level, size, and percent minority enrollment: 1996



NOTE: Schools that enrolled 600 students or more were defined as large schools and those with fewer than 300 students were defined as small schools. Schools with more than 75 percent of minority students were defined as high-minority enrollment schools and those with less than 25 percent of minority students were low-minority enrollment schools.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

schools with low minority enrollment may have done a better job at this than secondary schools, large schools, and schools with high minority enrollment.

Parents may also share some of the responsibility. Although it is possible that schools are not doing "enough" to involve parents, some parents simply may not set aside enough time to pay attention to the information or opportunities provided by the school because of demanding work schedules and other family and work obligations. It is also likely that some parents, particularly those who are less involved, may have poor information about their children's school, and thus, may be providing less accurate and reliable data about school programs.

The second potential explanation for the inconsistent reports may come from inaccuracy of the schools' and parents' reports. The pressure to provide socially appropriate responses may affect the responses of both schools and parents. The fact that schools consistently provided more favorable reports than did parents suggests that schools may have over-reported their actions to involve parents. The social desirability of outreach practices may lead schools to exaggerate their efforts and report them in a favorable way. The same explanation can also be given for parents' responses. Responding to interviewers in a socially desirable way may lead parents to overstate their own behaviors and understate the actions of the schools.

In addition, schools may have inadvertently provided inaccurate information about certain practices, particularly those that are typically initiated by teachers rather than by the school (e.g., informing parents about their children's performance). For these practices, teachers' responses perhaps would be more accurate than the school reports. To remedy over-reporting or reporting of inaccurate information, objective data (e.g., data collected by direct observation) or more reliable data (e.g., from teachers) may need to be collected in the future.

A third potential source for the discrepancies between the reports of schools and parents may be related to differences in the way the questions were worded in the two surveys. For example, schools in the FRSS were asked whether they provided information to parents about child development. However, the question in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 was posed differently: parents were asked whether their child's school helped them understand what children at their child's age are like. It is possible that parents may have received information from the school about child development, but they may not have thought that the school helped them understand the developmental characteristics of children at their child's age.

In addition, the FRSS did not ask schools whether their practices were targeted to all parents or only to specific groups of parents; therefore, detailed examination of schools' and parents' behaviors was not possible. This may have contributed to the discrepancies between the reports of schools and parents. For example, schools may provide child-development information only to parents of kindergartners and sixth-graders (i.e., children in "transitional" grades), not to parents of children in all grades. Although these schools may say that they used this practice, parents with children who were not in the targeted group certainly would not agree with this statement. Consequently, parents would be less likely than schools to report such school effort.

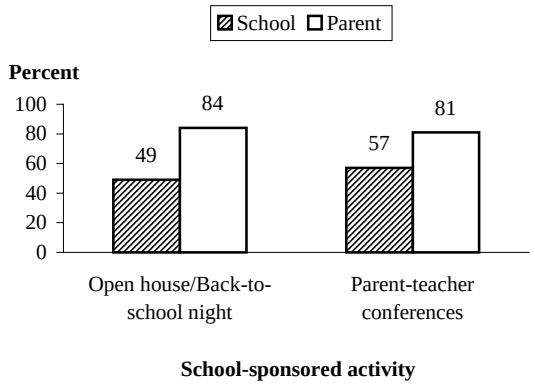
Finally, readers should be aware that differences between the surveys in the response rates (i.e., the school response rate in the FRSS was

higher than the parent response rate in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996) and response bias (e.g., parents in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 underreported the size of their children's schools) may also have contributed to the school/parent discrepancies. However, it is not possible to investigate how these differences may have affected the results presented in this report.

Schools' and Parents' Reports on Parent Participation in School-Sponsored Activities

Comparisons of schools' and parents' reports on the extent to which parents attended school-sponsored activities (e.g., an open house or back-to-school night and schoolwide parent-teacher conferences) also revealed discrepancies. The direction of the differences, however, was the opposite of that found for school practices, in which schools gave more favorable reports than parents did. A majority of parents said that they attended various school-sponsored events, whereas lower proportions of schools holding these events said that "most or all" parents attended them (figure D).[4] The differences between schools' and parents' reports were generally found to increase with school level, size, and the percentage of minority students enrolled (figure E), suggesting that the problem of the inconsistent reports was more pronounced in middle schools, large schools, and schools with high minority enrollment than in elementary schools, small schools, and schools with low minority enrollment.

Figure D.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported that most or all parents attended various school-sponsored activities, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that they attended such activities: 1996

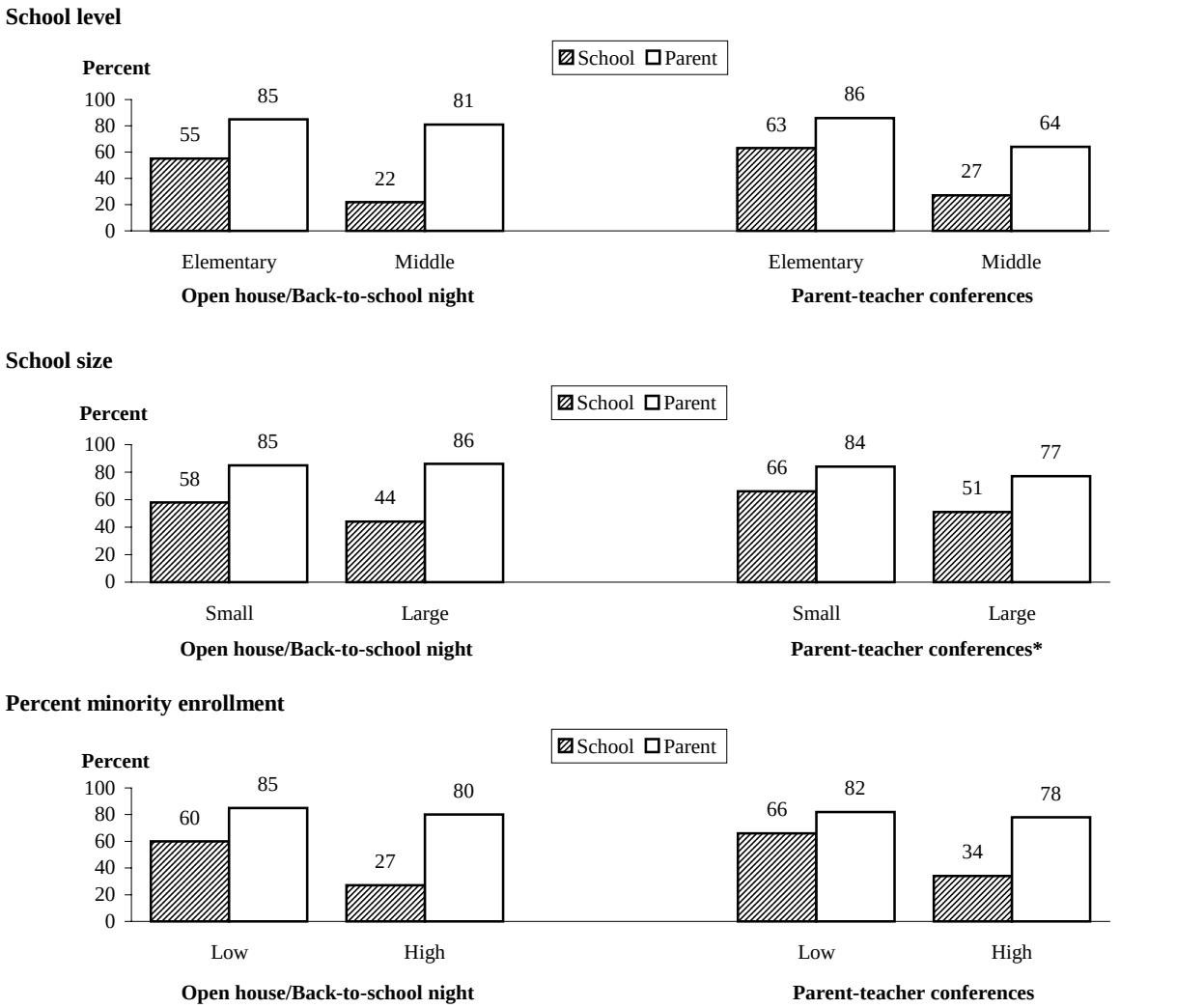


SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

These findings create uncertainty about the credibility of both schools' and parents' reports. Because schools and parents may both have a vested interest in reporting parents' behavior in a certain light, the reports may be distorted on both sides. The critical question becomes: did parents over-report their participation, did schools under-report parents' participation, or did both of these problems occur? In the future, more objective data may be needed to verify self-reports and obtain reliable and accurate data on parent participation in school activities. In addition, comparisons between schools' and parents' responses with samples of parents and the schools that their children actually attend may result in more reliable infor-

[4]These inconsistent reports may, to an extent, be due to some differences in the question wording in the two surveys. For example, in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996, parents were asked whether they attended a school-sponsored event during the school year ("yes" or "no"). In the FRSS, schools were asked to report the best representation of typical parent attendance at a school-held event ("most or all," "more than half," "about half," "less than half," or "few"). A school could hold a particular type of event more than once during the school year. It is possible that many parents attend at least one such event, but not all of them, and the school may just consider the parent attendance at one "typical" event. Thus, the school-reported parent attendance rate is likely to be lower than the rate reported by parents.

Figure E.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported that most or all parents attended various school-sponsored activities, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that they attended such activities, by school level, size, and percent minority enrollment: 1996



*The gap between schools' and parents' reports was not larger in large schools than in small schools.

NOTE: Schools that enrolled 600 students or more were defined as large schools and those with fewer than 300 students were defined as small schools. Schools with more than 75 percent of minority students were defined as high-minority enrollment schools and those with less than 25 percent of minority students were low-minority enrollment schools.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

mation about schools' perceptions on parents' behaviors or vice versa. In other words, to examine the consistency between parents' and schools' reports, it would be better to collect parent and school data within the same survey framework rather than from two different survey systems.

Foreword

In 1996, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) conducted two surveys to examine parent involvement in their children's education. The first survey, the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996), collected data from parents on the activities or events involving parents that were held by their children's schools, schools' efforts to recruit parents as volunteers in schools, school-initiated communication with parents (frequency and content), and schools' policies or organizations that involve parents in school decisionmaking.

The second survey, the Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, gathered data from public elementary and middle schools on their efforts to involve parents in their children's schooling. This survey was conducted as part of the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) and specifically asked schools about issues similar to those that parents were asked about in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996.

These two data sets provide an opportunity to study the level of agreement between parents' and schools' views of schools' efforts to involve parents in their children's education. This report was designed to examine this level of agreement by examining responses of parents of kindergarten through eighth-grade students in public schools compared with responses of public K–8 schools. In particular, this report first compares schools' and parents' reports regarding whether schools used various practices to encourage parents to become involved in their children's education. It then compares the two reports to identify the extent to which parents participated in school-sponsored activities. The analyses presented here provide information that may be useful to educators, policymakers, school administrators, parents, and the general public.

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Introduction

The importance of parent involvement in children's education has long been established. Research over the last two decades has demonstrated that children whose parents are involved are more likely than other youth to have positive educational outcomes such as improved academic performance, better school attendance, higher aspirations, reduced dropout rates, and increased graduation rates (Catsambis 1998; Desimone 1999; Keith et al. 1986; Ma 1999; McNeal 1999; Miedel and Reynolds 1999; Nord and West 2001; Trusty 1999). These outcomes extend to nearly all forms of parental involvement, regardless of whether engagement occurs in the home or at school or whether parents are directly or indirectly involved. Given the clear evidence of positive returns to parent involvement, encouraging parents to become involved in their children's education has become a special focus of government agencies, policymakers, educators, researchers, and other members of the education community (Partnership for Family Involvement in Education 2000; U.S. Department of Education 1994).

Many factors influence parents' involvement in their children's education, and schools' efforts to encourage various kinds of parent involvement are among the most important factors. A growing body of research shows that various school practices, such as communicating with parents about school activities and programs, and assisting parents to help their children learn at home, increase the level of parent involvement in the home and at school (Crosnoe 2001; Dauber and Epstein 1989; Epstein and Dauber 1991; Vaden-Kiernan and Chandler 1996). Research further suggests that whether or to what extent parents become involved depends more on school and teachers' practices than on family characteristics such as race/ethnicity, parent education, family size, or marital status (Dauber and Epstein 1989; Epstein 1990). Therefore, ongoing research and policy have recommended that schools engage parents in working with their children at home by monitoring homework, setting up a time and place for studying, and encouraging reading (Partnership for Family Involvement in Education 2000). Furthermore, given the essential role of schools in engaging parents in their children's learning, all schools are being called upon to develop policies and practices that encourage parents to become more involved in their children's education both in school and at home. In fact, such major recent legislation as the Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) have made parent involvement in their children's education a national priority (U.S. Department of Education 1994). School districts nationwide are being encouraged to reexamine their parent involvement policies and programs and to demonstrate innovative approaches in or-

der to obtain federal education dollars. In particular, eligibility for Title I funding, available to school districts in high poverty areas, is now contingent upon the development of "compacts" in which families and schools agree to assume mutual responsibility for children's learning.

What practices do schools adopt to promote parent involvement? What programs do schools offer parents to encourage them to participate? To what extent do parents attend school-sponsored activities designed to increase their involvement? This report investigates these issues from two different perspectives: those of schools and parents. Although a recent report provided some answers to these questions based on schools' reports (Carey et al. 1998), it tells only part of the story. Parents' reports are needed to verify their experiences with various schools' practices to further parent involvement.

Thus, to provide more information about how parents perceive their involvement, this report addresses the following two questions: Do parents acknowledge the efforts that schools report they are making? Do schools report the same level of parent participation in school programs as do parents? In other words, this report is intended to assess the level of agreement between parents' and schools' views of how schools involve parents in their children's education and how parents respond to opportunities for involvement that schools provide. The findings of the report can assist educators, school principals, and policymakers to improve future efforts to involve parents in their children's education. For example, discrepancies between parents' and schools' reports could indicate that despite schools' efforts, many parents are unaware of what schools do to encourage their involvement. Schools may then use this information to develop better ways to reach parents who may be unaware of school-provided opportunities.

School Practices to Involve Parents

Schools often sponsor various activities to involve parents in school. Typical activities include scheduling parent-teacher conferences to give parents feedback on their children's school progress; holding various events, including recitals, science fairs, or sporting events; or organizing activities such as an open house or back-to-school night. The popularity of these school-sponsored activities can be illustrated by a recent survey that collected data on the efforts of public K–8 schools to involve parents (Carey et al. 1998). According to this survey, during the 1995–96 school year, 97 percent of public K–8 schools sponsored an open house or back-to-school night for parents; 92 percent scheduled schoolwide parent-teacher conferences; and many also organized arts events (96 percent), sports events (85 percent), or science fairs (84 percent).

While a majority of public K–8 schools organize these activities to involve parents in school, advocates of parent involvement look beyond these traditional activities for new ways to

improve parent participation (Becher 1984; Epstein 1992; Hardin and Littlejohn 1994; Swap 1990; U.S. Department of Education 1994). Rather than striving only to increase parents' attendance in these traditional activities, schools are now advised to take more active approaches to reach out to parents, such as establishing school-home communication lines, inviting parents to perform school service in the classroom and on field trips, including parents in school advisory committees and decisionmaking activities, hiring home-school liaisons or coordinators to work with teachers and parents to integrate school and home learning, and contacting all parents early in the semester. These recommendations are based on the principle that effective parent involvement requires building an active partnership between schools and parents rather than merely asking parents to attend school events. To establish the school-parent partnership, schools must develop collaborative working relationships with parents; create an environment that welcomes parents and encourages them to raise questions and voice their concerns; and provide parents with the information and training they need to become involved in school and at home.

Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement

This report uses a framework developed by Joyce Epstein, a leading researcher on school-parent partnerships, to characterize parent involvement practices. According to Epstein (1994), there are six essential practices for developing effective school-family-community partnerships: (1) basic obligations of families, such as providing for the health, safety, and nutrition of children; (2) basic obligations of schools to communicate well with families about school programs and children's progress; (3) school responsibilities to reach out to parents in order to enlist their voluntary participation in the operations of the school; (4) parent involvement at home, such as helping children learn or providing learning activities; (5) parent participation in school decisionmaking; and (6) collaborations and exchanges with the community to increase family and student access to community resources. The six essential components offer a foundation upon which educators and parents can build their own outreach strategies. For example, by targeting each component, schools can organize their parent involvement efforts by doing the following:

- Helping and improving parents' understanding of parenting and child development.
- Communicating with parents and keeping them informed about their child's progress and school programs.
- Encouraging parents to become involved at school (e.g., by volunteering and attending school activities or events).
- Helping parents help children learn at home.

- Encouraging parents to participate in school decisionmaking activities.
- Supporting families by collaborating with community organizations to increase family and student participation in the community and access to community resources.

To date, Epstein's model has emerged as the primary framework to study the topic of parent involvement, and the six components of this model were used to develop the questionnaire items on parental involvement for one of the surveys used in this study—the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996). As a result, in order to compare schools' and parents' reports on school efforts to promote parent involvement in their children's education, this analysis is organized around these six types of school practices.

Data Sources

The data for this report came from two surveys conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 1996. The first survey, the Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, gathered data from a nationally representative sample of public K–8 schools on their efforts to involve parents in their children's schooling. Conducted in 1996 as part of the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), the survey was designed to provide information on the ways that schools engage parents in their children's education and the extent to which parents respond to the opportunities for such involvement (Carey et al. 1998). A total of 810 public schools enrolling kindergarten through eighth-graders completed the survey, with a response rate of 92 percent. Public schools that offered grades higher than 8 were included in the survey.

The second survey, the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996), collected data from parents of children age 3 through grade 12 on the activities or events involving parents that were held by their children's schools, schools' efforts to recruit parents as volunteers in schools, school-initiated communication with parents, and schools' policies or organizations that involve parents in school decisionmaking (Collins et al. 1997). Parents of 20,792 children age 3 through the 12th grade participated in the telephone interview.[1] The overall response rate for the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 interview was 62.5 percent.

[1]It should be noted that the unit of observation in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 was the child and not the parent. That is, the survey targeted a nationally representative sample of children, not their parents. Thus, the parent data described in this report are discussed in reference to the children.

School and Parent Samples

All 810 schools that participated in the FRSS survey were used in this analysis. These schools were public schools with no grade higher than 8. Special education schools, alternative schools, "combined" schools that house both elementary and secondary grades, and schools not classified by grade span were excluded from the survey. In addition, principals or designated school staff who completed the survey were asked to exclude pre-K classes when they filled out the questionnaire. Thus, these schools are referred to as "public K–8 schools" in this report.

To be comparable with the FRSS schools, children from the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 sample were selected if they had the following characteristics: (1) were enrolled in public schools that offered no grade higher than 8; (2) were enrolled in grades K–8;[2] and (3) were not home schooled at the time of interview. About 9,700 children met these criteria.[3] The responses of parents of these children became the focus of the analyses.[4] It should be noted that certain family-involvement questions were only asked of parents of about half the children in the sample.[5] Analyses of these data had sample sizes of about 4,900 children.

Measures

Measures of school practices to involve parents. Since the purpose of this report is to determine the level of agreement between parents' and schools' reports, it is essential that the relevant survey items are comparable between the two surveys. Table 1 lists survey items in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 and FRSS surveys that correspond to Epstein's six types of parent involvement practices initiated by schools. Examination of items covering each type of parent involvement indicated that the NHES and FRSS items were sometimes quite similar to each other, and, in other cases, rather different. The differences mainly came from different wording or scaling of the items in the two surveys.

[2]Parents of pre-K children were not asked the questions about various parent involvement programs and activities in school or their attendance in these activities.

[3]The PFI/CI–NHES:1996 sample may include children who attended special education or alternative schools—schools that have been excluded from the FRSS. However, since the percentage of children attending these schools is expected to be small (based on the *Digest of Education Statistics 1997* [U.S. Department of Education 1997], in 1996, about 2 percent of all U.S. elementary and secondary schools were classified as such schools), including these children in the sample was unlikely to introduce a major problem for comparability purposes.

[4]The respondents who participated in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 interview were the parents/guardians who were most knowledgeable about the education of the sampled children. Although most respondents were parents (95 percent), some were children's brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, or other relatives. Since these nonparental guardians account for a small percentage of the sample (5 percent), they were included in the study. In the interest of brevity, all respondents were referred to as "parents."

[5]If the telephone number of the household ended with an even number, the parents were asked one set of family involvement items. If the telephone number ended with an odd number, parents were asked another set of family involvement items. Since this was a random process, children in the two samples should have similar demographic characteristics. Examination of the distribution of some demographic variables, such as sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level, indicated that the two groups were quite similar.

Table 1.—Survey items on parent involvement from the FRSS and PFI/CI–NHES:1996 that correspond to Epstein's six types of school practices

Epstein's six types of school practices	Corresponding survey items from the FRSS	Corresponding survey items from the PFI/CI–NHES:1996
I. Helping and improving parents' understanding of parenting and child development.	School provides information to parents about child or adolescent development *(yes or no).*	Child's school *(does very well, just ok, or does not do it at all)* to help me understand what children at child's age are like.
II. Communicating with parents and keeping them informed about their child's progress and school programs.	School provides following information to parents *(always, frequently, sometimes, or never):* 1. Written interim reports during grading or positive phone calls or notes when the child's performance improves at school. 2. Children's ability-group placement. 3. Written information about the school's overall performance on standardized tests.	Child's school *(does very well, just ok, or does not do it at all)* to: 1. Let me know (between report cards) how child is doing in school. 2. Provide information about why child was placed in particular groups or classes. 3. Child's school gave written information about standardized test scores or attendance rates of students as a group *(yes or no).*
III. Encouraging parents to become involved at school, e.g., by volunteering and attending school activities.	School makes volunteering opportunities in the classroom or outside the classroom available to parents *(yes or no).*	Child's school *(does very well, just ok, or does not do it at all)* to make me aware of chances to volunteer at the school.
IV. Helping parents help children learn at home.	1. School provides information to parents about helping with homework *(yes or no).* 2. School provides ideas for learning activities outside of school *(yes or no).* 3. Parents *(always, frequently, sometimes, or never)* have access to a school-sponsored homework helpline for information on assignments.	Child's school *(does very well, just ok, or does not do it at all)* to: 1. Provide information about how to help child with homework. 2. Provide workshops, materials, or advice about how to help child learn at home.
V. Encouraging parents to participate in school decisionmaking activities.	Parent input is considered *(in great, moderate, small, or no extent)* on the issues of the school, including allocation of funds, curriculum or overall instructional program, design of special program, library books and materials, discipline policies and procedures, and health-related topics or policies such as drug or alcohol abuse.	1. Child's school includes parents on committees or in other groups that make decisions about school policies having to do with the school budget, what will be taught, discipline, or other policies *(yes or no).* 2. At child's school, parents have a real say in school policy decisions (yes or no).
VI. Supporting families by collaborating with community organizations to increase family and student participation in the community and access to community resources.	School provides parents with information about community services to help children or their families *(yes or no).*	Child's school (does very well, just ok, or does not do it at all) to provide information about community services to help child or my family.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

In this study, there have been various efforts to make the items from the two surveys as comparable as possible. These include combining two or more variables to create composite measures that were comparable between the two surveys or collapsing certain categories of variables with different scales to make them more similar. In some cases, when none of the above techniques could be used, attempts have been made to identify an overall pattern of consistency between parents' and schools' reports. For instance, "making parents aware of volunteer opportunities at school" (item from the PFI/CI–NHES:1996) is different from "providing parents with volunteer opportunities at school" (item from the FRSS). However, they are related: "making parents aware of opportunities" implies that "the opportunities are already there for parents to take." Although these two items are not directly comparable, there is an overall association that could be evaluated. If a high percentage of schools reported providing parents with volunteer opportunities at school, then it would be expected that a correspondingly high percentage of the parents of students in schools would say that their child's school made them aware of such opportunities. The appendix provides a full description of all measures used in this report.

School characteristics. To assess how schools' use of various parent involvement practices varied across schools, several school characteristics were considered in this analysis, including school level, size, minority enrollment, and urbanicity. These characteristics were chosen because 1) past research has validated the significant relationship between these variables and parent involvement in their children's education; 2) they are available in both the FRSS and PFI/CI–NHES:1996; and 3) they are comparable between the two surveys.

Unlike school size and percent minority enrollment in the FRSS, which were obtained directly from the 1993–94 Common Core Data (CCD) (Carey et al. 1998),[6] school size and percent minority enrollment in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 were based on parents' perceptions about their child's school rather than on actual school reports. Therefore, these variables may be inaccurate. To assess the quality of these parent-reported data, the distribution of students in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 according to parent-reported school size and percent minority enrollment was compared with the distribution of similar students from the 1995–96 CCD (see table A1 in the appendix).[7] The comparison suggested that the distribution of students in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 according to school size and minority enrollment was not similar to the distribution derived from the CCD. Students in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 appeared to be underrepresented in large schools (600 or more students) and overrepresented in small- or medium-sized schools. They were also underrepresented in schools with either low- or high-minority enrollment (under 25 percent or above 75 percent). In other words, parents of students in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 tended to

[6]The CCD is an annual survey that collects information about all public schools in the United States.

[7]The reason for using the 1995–96 CCD is that the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 was conducted in the 1995–96 school year.

underreport the size of the school that their child attended, and to either overstate or understate the minority concentration in their child's school.

The seemingly inaccurate data provided by parents may affect the findings of the report, particularly the school-parent comparison according to school size and percent minority enrollment. For example, the school/parent discrepancies found in small or large schools might be diminished or disappear if more accurate data on school size were obtained. Unfortunately, this supposition cannot be addressed empirically in this study because it is impossible to identify the parents of students in particular types of schools who gave inaccurate information in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996.

In addition, because the two surveys used different sampling frames (i.e., the schools in the FRSS were sampled directly from the 1993–94 CCD Public School Universe File, and the children in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 were sampled by sampling households first via telephones), the schools selected in the FRSS may be slightly different from the schools described by parents of children in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996.[8] This potential coverage problem may also have contributed to the discrepancies between the reports of schools and parents, although it is impossible to determine how this problem may have affected the results presented in this report.

Organization of the Report

Increasing parent involvement in their children's education entails two important actions: *schools* making various efforts to encourage parents to be involved and *parents* responding to the opportunities for involvement that schools provide. This report examines these two aspects by comparing parents' and schools' reports. Organized around the six types of school practices identified by Epstein, this report focuses on comparing schools' and parents' reports on the extent to which public K–8 schools adopted various practices to increase parents' involvement in their children's education. In addition, it examines how schools' use of various parent involvement practices varied across schools.

The second part of the report compares schools' and parents' reports on the extent to which parents participated in school-sponsored activities. In particular, it begins by comparing schools' and parents' reports on whether schools held various activities for parents. It then compares their reports on the extent to which parents attended these activities. Finally, it examines the relationship between parents' participation rates and the selected school characteristics described above.

[8]For more information about this problem, see the technical appendix.

It should be noted that all comparisons presented throughout are of aggregate data at the school level. The parent and school data come from two different surveys, and therefore there is no way to connect parental perceptions on the efforts that their child's school made to the school reports. To compare schools' and parents' responses in this report, parent data were first aggregated to the school level (e.g., parents of children in elementary schools or parents of children in large schools). The comparisons were then made between average school responses and average parental perceptions about their children's schools. In other words, the analyses were based on the average responses of parents of children in particular types of schools rather than the response of individual parents.

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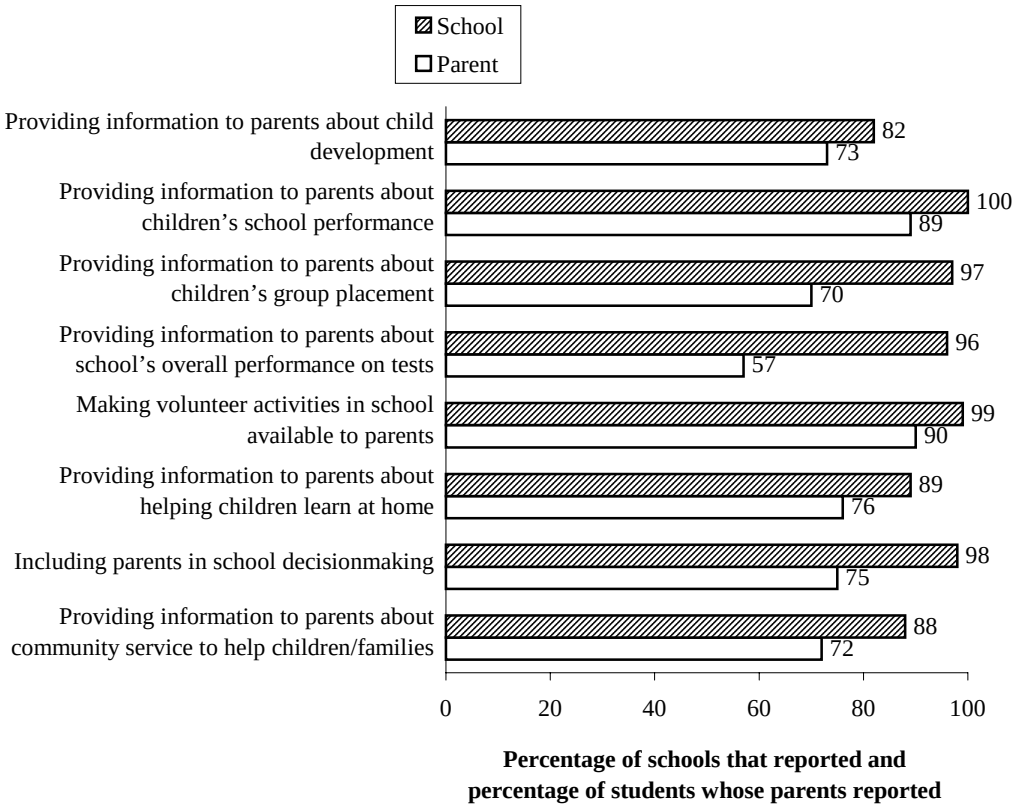
Schools' and Parents' Reports of School Practices to Involve Parents

Schools' and parents' reports on whether schools used various practices to involve parents in their children's education differed consistently. For each school practice examined in this study, public K–8 schools were more likely than parents of children in such schools to report that schools used that practice to involve parents (figure 1). For example, 82 percent of public K–8 schools reported that they provided information to parents about child or adolescent development in the 1995–96 school year, compared with parents of 73 percent of public K–8 school students

Figure 1.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported using various practices to promote parent involvement in children's education, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that their child's school used such practices: 1996



NOTE: Some items may not be strictly comparable between the two surveys. See table 1 for the exact wording of the survey items used in this report.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/ Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

who reported that schools helped them understand the issue of child development during the same period. Almost all public K–8 schools (approximately 100 percent) reported that they gave parents written reports during grading periods; however, parents of 89 percent of students in public K–8 schools reported that this was the case. Most public K–8 schools (97 percent) reported notifying parents about their children's ability-group placements, whereas parents of 70 percent of students reported that the schools did so. Furthermore, 96 percent of public K–8 schools reported giving parents information about the school's overall performance on standardized tests; however, parents of only 57 percent of students in public K–8 schools said that they received similar information from the school.

Discrepancies between schools' and parents' reports were also observed in other areas, including whether schools made volunteering activities available to parents, provided parents with information about how to help their children do homework, included parent inputs in school decisionmaking, and provided parents with information about community services. The consistent pattern of discrepancies suggests that parents of children in public K–8 schools did not fully acknowledge the efforts that most public K–8 schools claimed to make. Despite school's reported efforts, some parents were not aware of what schools did to encourage their involvement. The remainder of this section examines each school practice, focusing on how schools' and parents' reports varied with school characteristics and how the magnitude of the discrepancies between the two reports varied with school characteristics. This investigation helps identify the kinds of schools where there were large discrepancies between the reports of parents and schools.

Providing Parents With Information/Understanding About Child Development

The overall difference between schools' and parents' reports regarding school efforts to aid parents in understanding child development was reflected in the different types of schools examined in this study (table 2). For example, in both the elementary and middle levels, schools' reports were more favorable than parents' reports. About 83 percent of elementary schools and 77 percent of middle schools reported giving parents information about child or adolescent development, whereas 76 percent of elementary school students and 63 percent of middle school students had parents who acknowledged that their child's school helped them understand the issue of child development.[9] Furthermore, whereas elementary and middle schools were equally

[9]This difference could be partially due to the different wording of questions that appeared in the two surveys. In the FRSS, schools were asked whether they provided information to parents about child or adolescent development. In the PFI/CI–NHES:1996, parents were asked the extent to which schools helped them understand what children at their child's age are like. It is possible that parents in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 were given information on child development, but they were not directly helped by schools to understand the issue of child development. Also, the FRSS question concerns child development in general, whereas the question in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 addresses the developmental characteristics of children at the age of the parent's child. The PFI/CI–NHES:1996 question asks about more specific information than the FRSS question.

Table 2.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported providing parents with information about child or adolescent development, and percentage of public K–8 school students whose parents reported that their child's school helped them understand what children at the child's age are like, by school characteristics: 1996

	Percentage of schools that reported providing parents with information about child or adolescent development[1]		Percentage of students whose parents reported that their child's school helped them understand what children at their child's age are like[2]	
	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.
Total	81.5	1.50	72.9	0.58
School level				
Elementary	82.5	1.73	75.7	0.65
Middle	77.2	4.89	63.0	1.20
School size				
Less than 300	78.0	4.23	74.8	1.36
300–599	83.7	1.95	73.3	0.83
600 or more	81.3	2.20	71.3	0.91
Percent minority enrollment				
Less than 25	81.7	2.34	73.0	0.87
25–75	80.1	2.61	73.9	0.94
More than 75	83.5	2.72	70.3	1.52
Urbanicity[3]				
City/urban fringe	84.7	1.74	73.2	0.74
Town	80.3	3.25	73.5	1.69
Rural	75.9	4.20	71.6	1.40

[1]The percentage was based on schools that responded 'yes' to the question.

[2]The original codings included 'does very well,' 'just ok,' and 'does not do it at all.' The percentage was based on those students whose parents responded 'does very well' or 'just ok' to the question.

[3]Urbanicity in the FRSS was categorized as 'City/urban fringe,' 'Town,' and 'Rural.' Urbanicity in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 was categorized as 'Urban, inside urbanized area,' 'Urban, outside urbanized area,' and 'Rural.' See the appendix for a discussion of comparability of urbanicity variables from the two data sources.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/ Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

likely to report that they provided information to parents about child development,[10] parents of middle school children were less likely than parents of elementary school children to report that their child's school helped them understand the issue of child development.

With respect to each level of minority enrollment identified in this study, schools' reports were again more favorable than parents' reports. For example, 84 percent of high-minority en-

[10]However, the estimate for middle schools was associated with a large standard error (4.9), which made this estimate somewhat unreliable, and the difference was not statistically significant.

rollment schools (more than 75 percent minority enrollment) and 82 percent of low-minority enrollment schools (below 25 percent minority enrollment) reported providing parents with information about child or adolescent development. The corresponding percentages for parents who reported that their child's school helped them understand the issue of child development were lower: 70 and 73 percent, respectively.

With respect to school size, discrepancies between the two reports were found in large schools (600 or more students) and moderately sized schools (300–599 students), but not in small schools (fewer than 300 students). About 81 and 84 percent of large and moderately sized schools, respectively, reported giving parents information about child or adolescent development, compared with parents of 71 and 73 percent of students in these schools, respectively, who reported that the schools helped them understand child development. However there was no difference between schools' and parents' reports in small schools. Although differences between schools' and parents' reports were observed in city/urban fringe schools, they were not found in town or rural schools.[11]

Communicating With Parents About Children's Progress and School Programs

In terms of keeping parents informed about their children's learning and progress, schools' reports were also more favorable than those of parents (table 3). Almost all schools reported giving parents information about their children's performance and progress in school, while parents of 89 percent of students reported receiving such information. This discrepancy occurred in all types of schools, regardless of level, size, minority concentration, and urbanicity.

Schools also nearly universally (97 percent) reported providing parents with information about children's group placements. However, parents of 70 percent of students reported that they received information from the school about why their child was placed in a particular group or class.[12] The differences between the reports of schools and parents were observed in all types of schools, regardless of level, size, minority concentration, and urbanicity. Although school reports did not vary by the selected school characteristics, parents' reports did. In particular, parents of children in middle schools were less likely to report that they received such information than

[11]The estimates for town and rural schools were associated with large standard errors, which made these estimates somewhat unreliable, and the differences were not statistically significant.

[12]This difference could be partially caused by the difference in the wording of the questions between the two surveys. In the FRSS, schools were asked whether they gave parents information about their children's ability-group placements. In the PFI/CI–NHES:1996, parents were asked whether schools provided them with information about why their children were placed in particular groups or classes. It is possible that parents could receive information from the school about which group or class their children were placed in but not receive explanations of why they were placed in those groups or classes.

Table 3.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported providing parents with information about children's learning and progress in school, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that they received information from their child's school about their child's schooling, by school characteristics: 1996

	Percentage of schools that reported providing parents with the following information:						Percentage of students whose parents reported receiving the following information from school:					
	Child's school performance[1]		Ability-group placement of the child[1, 2]		School's overall performance on standardized test scores[1]		Child's school performance[3]		Child's group placement[3]		Standardized test scores or attendance rates for students as a group[3]	
	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.
Total	99.8	0.22	96.8	1.26	95.8	0.96	88.5	0.48	70.0	0.60	57.3	0.68
School level												
Elementary	99.7	0.28	97.3	1.27	95.6	1.16	88.3	0.57	72.3	0.68	56.5	0.74
Middle	100.0	0.00	95.2	3.22	96.8	1.37	89.1	0.75	63.1	1.24	59.9	1.23
School size												
Less than 300	99.1	0.87	97.6	2.52	92.7	2.79	89.2	1.05	73.3	1.51	53.8	1.58
300–599	100.0	0.00	96.5	2.12	97.8	0.94	88.1	0.62	70.5	0.97	56.5	1.03
600 or more	100.0	0.00	96.6	2.08	95.6	1.37	88.5	0.70	67.8	1.17	60.0	1.03
Percent minority enrollment												
Less than 25	99.6	0.37	95.4	2.09	95.0	1.43	88.3	0.73	69.5	0.91	56.1	1.01
25–75	100.0	0.00	98.9	0.79	97.0	1.96	89.4	0.72	71.1	1.09	58.1	1.08
More than 75	100.0	0.00	98.1	1.92	97.2	1.49	86.9	1.15	68.8	1.53	58.5	1.42
Urbanicity[4]												
City/urban fringe	100.0	0.00	99.1	0.70	96.1	1.31	88.2	0.56	70.6	0.82	58.2	0.80
Town	100.0	0.00	91.8	3.91	97.3	1.02	88.8	1.06	67.7	1.56	55.7	1.76
Rural	99.1	0.94	98.1	2.02	93.7	2.63	88.9	0.90	69.5	1.31	55.7	1.53

[1]The original codings included 'always,' 'frequently,' 'sometimes,' and 'never.' The percentage was based on those schools that responded 'always,' 'frequently,' or 'sometimes' to the question.

[2]The percentages were based on the schools that reported that they had ability grouping. About 65 percent of FRSS schools reported so.

[3]The original codings included 'does very well,' 'just ok,' and 'does not do it at all.' The percentage was based on those students whose parents responded 'does very well' or 'just ok' to the question.

[4]Urbanicity in the FRSS was categorized as 'City/urban fringe,' 'Town,' and 'Rural.' Urbanicity in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 was categorized as 'Urban, inside urbanized area,' 'Urban, outside urbanized area,' and 'Rural.' See the appendix for a discussion of comparability of urbanicity variables from the two data sources.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

parents of children in elementary schools; likewise, parents of children in large schools (600 or more students) were less likely to report having received such information than parents of children in small schools (fewer than 300 students), although no differences were found between parents of children in moderately-sized schools (between 300 and 599 students) and parents of children in small or large schools.

With respect to informing parents about the school's overall performance on standardized tests, most schools (96 percent) reported that they did so, whereas parents of 57 percent of students said that their child's school gave them this information.[13] This discrepancy was found in all types of schools identified by the level, size, minority concentration, and urbanicity. Although the proportion of schools that reported telling parents about the school's performance did not vary by any of the school characteristics, elementary schools and small or moderately sized schools were identified by parents as being less likely to do so than middle schools and large schools, respectively.

Making Volunteer Opportunities in School Available to Parents

Virtually all schools (99 percent) reported that they made various volunteer activities in the school available to parents, compared with 90 percent of students whose parents reported that schools made them aware of volunteer opportunities (table 4).[14] This difference was observed in all types of schools, regardless of level, size, minority concentration, and urbanicity.

Although school reports did not vary by the selected school characteristics, parents' reports did. In particular, parents of children in middle schools and in high-minority enrollment schools (more than 75 percent minority enrollment) were less likely than parents of children in elementary schools and in low-minority enrollment schools (below 25 percent minority enrollment), respectively, to report awareness of school volunteer activities.

Helping Parents Help Children Learn at Home

Schools' and parents' reports also differed as to whether schools provided information to parents about helping their children with homework: 89 percent of schools said they did so,

[13]Specifically, schools in the FRSS were asked whether they gave parents written information about the school's overall performance on standardized tests. Parents in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 were asked whether schools provided them with information about standardized test scores or attendance rates of students as a group. The fact that the parent-reported item was broader than the school-reported item makes the discrepancy even more dramatic.

[14]This difference could be partially due to the difference in the wording of the questions between the two surveys. It is possible that schools made volunteer activities available to parents but did not make any special efforts to let parents know what they were.

Table 4.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported making volunteer opportunities in school available to parents, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that their child's school made parents aware of chances to volunteer at the school, by school characteristics: 1996

	Percentage of schools that reported making volunteer opportunities in school available to parents[1]		Percentage of students whose parents reported that their child's school made them aware of chances to volunteer at the child's school[2]	
	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.
Total	99.0	0.37	89.7	0.45
School level				
Elementary	99.2	0.40	92.6	0.47
Middle	98.3	1.03	80.0	1.20
School size				
Less than 300	98.4	1.08	90.8	0.92
300–599	99.1	0.51	90.4	0.64
600 or more	99.4	0.42	88.3	0.68
Percent minority enrollment				
Less than 25	98.7	0.57	91.4	0.56
25–75	99.7	0.32	90.2	0.65
More than 75	99.0	0.98	84.3	1.14
Urbanicity[3]				
City/urban fringe	99.6	0.30	90.1	0.46
Town	99.6	0.37	88.6	1.25
Rural	97.1	1.35	89.3	0.88

[1]The percentage was based on schools that responded 'yes' to the question.

[2]The original codings included 'does very well,' 'just ok,' and 'does not do it at all.' The percentage was based on those students whose parents responded 'does very well' or 'just ok' to the question.

[3]Urbanicity in the FRSS was categorized as 'City/urban fringe,' 'Town,' and 'Rural.' Urbanicity in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 was categorized as 'Urban, inside urbanized area,' 'Urban, outside urbanized area,' and 'Rural.' See the appendix for a discussion of comparability of urbanicity variables from the two data sources.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/ Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

compared with parents of 76 percent of students who reported that the schools provided them with such information (table 5). Moreover, the discrepancy between the two reports was larger in middle schools than in elementary schools, in large schools (600 or more students) than in small schools (fewer than 300 students), and larger in schools with a high-minority enrollment (more than 75 percent) than in schools with a low-minority enrollment (less than 25 percent) (figure 2).

Although schools' reports did not vary by any of the school characteristics, the reports of parents whose children attended different types of schools showed such variation. For example, parents of children in middle schools, large schools, and schools with higher minority enrollment

Table 5.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported providing parents with information about helping children with their homework, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that they received information from their child's school about how to help their child with homework, by school characteristics: 1996

	Percentage of schools that reported:				Percentage of students whose parents reported that they received:			
	Providing parents with information about helping child with homework[1]		Providing parents with ideas for learning outside of school or letting parents access a school-sponsored homework help-line for information on assignments[2]		Information from child's school about how to help child with homework[3]		Workshops, materials, advice from school about how to help child learn at home[3]	
	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.
Total	89.0	1.35	88.5	1.37	75.7	0.59	75.1	0.56
School level								
Elementary	89.8	1.36	90.2	1.35	79.5	0.64	79.5	0.67
Middle	85.7	3.88	81.2	4.20	64.3	1.25	59.9	1.11
School size								
Less than 300	85.9	3.46	80.8	3.32	77.7	1.38	76.7	1.31
300–599	89.1	1.78	90.9	1.63	77.0	0.80	76.8	0.75
600 or more	91.7	1.70	91.5	1.71	73.1	0.93	72.0	1.00
Percent minority enrollment								
Less than 25	87.5	2.01	86.4	2.11	76.4	0.86	75.0	0.82
25–75	89.7	2.16	92.2	1.91	77.0	1.04	76.3	1.05
More than 75	94.4	1.67	90.5	2.88	70.9	1.55	72.7	1.41
Urbanicity[4]								
City/urban fringe	91.9	1.46	92.7	1.71	76.6	0.70	76.5	0.69
Town	89.4	2.33	88.4	3.00	75.3	1.46	71.7	1.52
Rural	82.5	4.08	79.5	4.10	73.5	1.23	73.3	1.21

[1]The percentage was based on schools that responded 'yes' to the question.

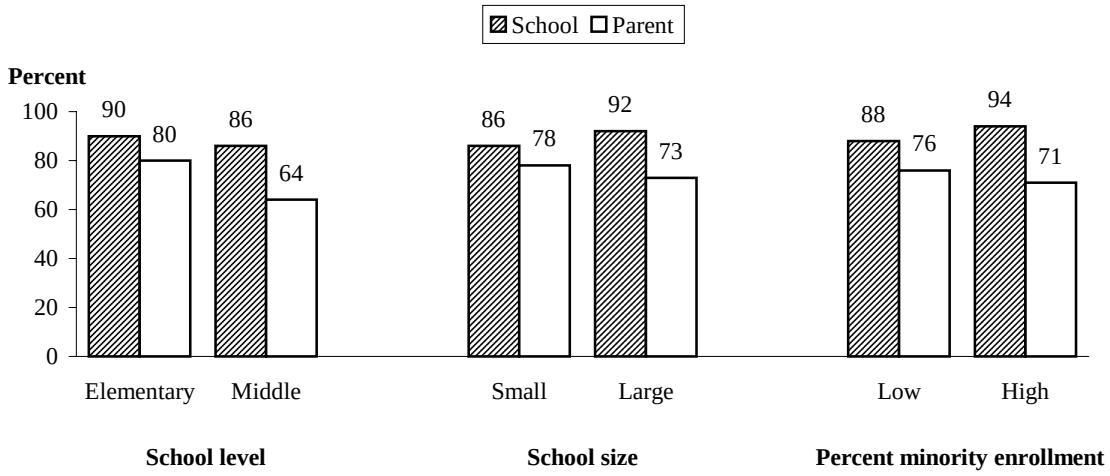
[2]The original codings for providing parents with ideas for learning activities outside of school were 'yes' or 'no.' The codings for letting parents access a school-sponsored homework helpline for information on assignments included 'always,' 'frequently,' 'sometimes,' and 'never.' This percentage was based on those schools that either responded 'yes' to the first question or responded 'always,' 'frequently,' or 'sometimes' to the second question.

[3]The original codings included 'does very well,' 'just ok,' and 'does not do it at all.' The percentage was based on those students whose parents responded 'does very well' or 'just ok' to the question.

[4]Urbanicity in the FRSS was categorized as 'City/urban fringe,' 'Town,' and 'Rural.' Urbanicity in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 was categorized as 'Urban, inside urbanized area,' 'Urban, outside urbanized area,' and 'Rural.' See the appendix for a discussion of comparability of urbanicity variables from the two data sources.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/ Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

Figure 2.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported providing parents with information about helping children with their homework, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that they received such information from their child's school, by school level, size, and percent minority enrollment: 1996



NOTE: Schools that enrolled 600 students or more were defined as large schools and those with fewer than 300 students were defined as small schools. Schools with more than 75 percent of minority students were defined as high-minority enrollment schools and those with less than 25 percent of minority students were low-minority enrollment schools.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/ Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

were less likely than parents of children in elementary schools, small or moderately sized schools, and schools with lower minority enrollment, respectively, to report that schools provided information on how to help their children with homework.

About 89 percent of schools reported providing parents with ideas for learning activities outside of school or letting parents access a school-sponsored homework hotline for information on assignments (table 5). The reports of schools varied according to their level, size, and urbanicity. Elementary schools, large or moderately sized schools, and schools in cities/urban fringes were more likely than middle schools, small schools, and rural schools, respectively, to report giving parents information on learning tasks. Although not strictly comparable, 75 percent of public K–8 students had parents who reported that schools provided workshops, materials, or advice about how to help children learn at home. Parents of children in elementary schools, small or moderately sized schools, and schools in cities/urban fringes were more likely than parents of children in middle schools, large schools, and town schools, respectively, to report giving parents assistance in this area.

Involving Parents in School Decisionmaking

Most schools (98 percent) reported that they considered parent input in making decisions about various school issues, and 78 percent of schools said that they considered this input to a great or moderate extent (table 6). The responses from parents, however, were different: parents

Table 6.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported considering parent input in making decisions at school, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that their child's school involved them in school decisionmaking, by school characteristics: 1996

	Percentage of schools that reported:				Percentage of students whose parents reported:			
	Parent input was considered in making decision on various school issues[1]		Parent input was considered to a great or moderate extent in decisionmaking[2]		Schools included them on committees that make decisions about school policies[3]		Parents had a real say in school policy decisions[4]	
	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.
Total	97.6	0.73	78.4	1.52	74.8	0.50	63.8	0.65
School level								
Elementary	97.3	0.81	79.0	1.72	76.4	0.64	66.6	0.68
Middle	98.6	0.72	75.9	4.34	69.4	1.21	54.3	1.25
School size								
Less than 300	95.7	2.11	74.9	4.14	74.0	1.42	61.6	1.42
300–599	97.6	0.99	79.3	2.13	74.6	0.84	64.9	0.79
600 or more	99.2	0.39	80.3	2.40	75.5	0.93	63.5	1.13
Percent minority enrollment								
Less than 25	97.4	0.99	78.4	2.20	74.8	0.88	62.4	1.05
25–75	97.3	1.33	78.2	3.17	74.7	0.81	65.2	1.10
More than 75	99.0	0.61	79.1	3.37	75.0	1.16	64.3	1.56
Urbanicity[5]								
City/urban fringe	98.0	1.05	79.7	2.29	76.7	0.59	65.9	0.70
Town	96.6	1.45	77.0	3.40	71.7	1.28	61.4	1.63
Rural	97.8	1.21	77.2	4.20	71.5	1.09	59.4	1.61

[1]Decisionmaking issues include allocation of funds, curriculum or overall instructional program, design of special programs, library books and materials, discipline policies and procedures, and health-related topics or policies, such as drug or alcohol abuse. The codings included 'to great extent,' 'to moderate extent,' 'to small extent,' and 'to no extent.' The percentage was based on those schools that reported considering parent input on at least one issue to a great, moderate, or small extent.

[2]The percentage was based on schools that reported considering parent input on at least one issue to a great or moderate extent.

[3]Policies on school budget, curriculum, discipline, and other school issues. The percentage was based on students whose parents reported 'yes' to the question.

[4]The percentage was based on students whose parents responded 'yes' to the question.

[5]Urbanicity in the FRSS was categorized as 'City/urban fringe,' 'Town,' and 'Rural.' Urbanicity in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 was categorized as 'Urban, inside urbanized area,' 'Urban, outside urbanized area,' and 'Rural.' See the appendix for a discussion of comparability of urbanicity variables from the two data sources.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/ Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

of 75 percent of students said that schools included them in schoolwide decisionmaking, and 64 percent said that they had a real say in such decisions.[15] The differences between school and parent responses were found in all types of schools, regardless of level, size, minority enrollment, and urbanicity. Moreover, the difference was larger in middle schools than in elementary schools. For example, about 97 percent of elementary schools reported including parent input in school decisionmaking, and parents of 76 percent of students who attended elementary schools agreed that this was so. When looking at the middle schools, the proportion of schools (99 percent) that reported including parent input in school decisionmaking was about the same as for elementary schools. However, the proportion of middle school children with parents who agreed with the school reports was 69 percent compared with the 76 percent of parents of elementary school students. Thus, the gap between the schools' and parents' reports was larger in middle schools than in elementary schools.

According to the school reports, there was no variation by school characteristics regarding whether they considered parent input in making decisions. However, parents' reports indicated that schools varied in terms of involving parents in school decisionmaking. For example, parents of children in middle schools and town or rural schools were less likely than parents of children in elementary schools and schools in cities/urban fringes, respectively, to report that schools included them in decisionmaking about school issues and that parents had a real say in school policy decisions.

Providing Parents With Information About Community Services

Once again, there was a discrepancy between schools' and parents' reports on whether schools provided parents with information about community services to help children and families: 88 percent of schools said they did, and parents of 72 percent of the students agreed (table 7). Moreover, the gap was larger in middle schools than in elementary schools, in large schools than in small schools, and larger in schools with a high minority enrollment than in schools with a low minority enrollment (figure 3).

There was also a discrepancy between schools' and parents' reports in city/urban fringe and town schools, but not in rural schools. A majority of city/urban fringe schools (93 percent) and town schools (88 percent) reported providing parents with information about community

[15]These differences could be partially caused by the differences in the wording of the questions between the two surveys. The first item for parent reports seems more specific than the corresponding item for school reports in that the parent-reported item asked about parents being included on committees or in decisionmaking groups, whereas the school-reported item could include input in other ways as well. Similarly, the second item also seems more specific for the parent reports in that it asked about parent input on "school policy" decisions, whereas the corresponding school-reported item includes a broader range of issues in which to get parent input.

Table 7.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported providing parents with information about community services to help children and their families, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that they received information from the school about community services to help children and families, by school characteristics: 1996

	Percentage of schools that reported providing parents with information about community services to help children and families[1]		Percentage of students whose parents reported that they received information from their child's school about community services to help children and families[2]	
	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.
Total	88.0	1.67	72.2	0.62
School level				
Elementary	88.3	1.75	75.7	0.68
Middle	87.0	3.70	60.2	1.37
School size				
Less than 300	75.7	5.11	73.9	1.27
300–599	91.0	1.77	72.7	0.96
600 or more	94.4	1.26	70.7	0.85
Percent minority enrollment				
Less than 25	84.2	2.65	72.7	0.84
25–75	92.5	1.82	73.3	1.03
More than 75	96.5	1.17	68.4	1.52
Urbanicity[3]				
City/urban fringe	92.6	1.59	74.1	0.72
Town	88.1	2.62	67.6	1.62
Rural	78.2	5.00	69.8	1.42

[1]The percentage was based on schools that responded 'yes' to the question.

[2]The original codings included 'does very well,' 'just ok,' and 'does not do it at all.' The percentage was based on those students whose parents responded 'does very well' or 'just ok' to the question.

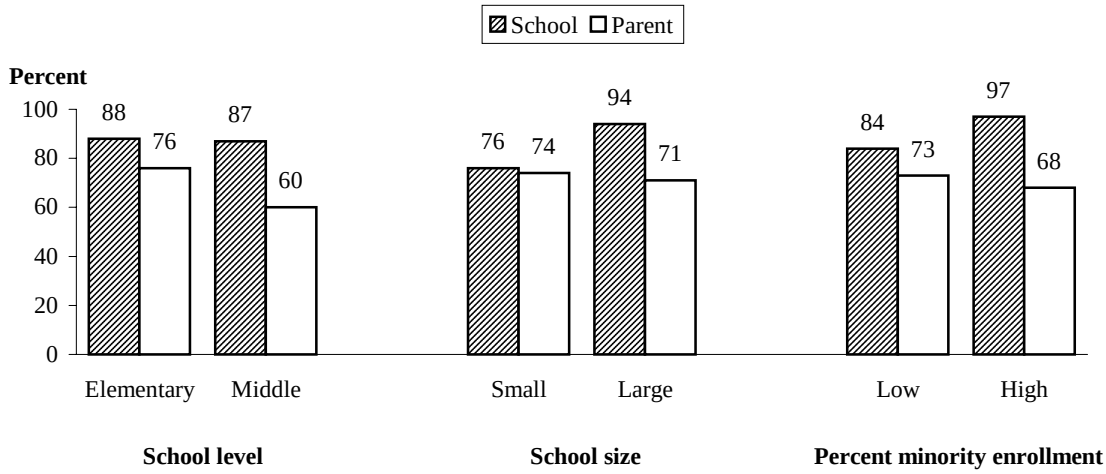
[3]Urbanicity in the FRSS was categorized as 'City/urban fringe,' 'Town,' and 'Rural.' Urbanicity in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 was categorized as 'Urban, inside urbanized area,' 'Urban, outside urbanized area,' and 'Rural.' See the appendix for a discussion of comparability of urbanicity variables from the two data sources.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/ Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

services, higher than the corresponding proportions of the parents of students who reported this (74 and 68 percent, respectively). However, there was no difference between the two reports among rural schools.

Another notable pattern is that small schools (fewer than 300 students) were less likely than large schools (600 or more students) to report that they provided parents with information about community services (76 vs. 94 percent). However, this same pattern was not found with what the

Figure 3.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported providing parents with information about community services to help children and their families, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that they received such information from their child's school, by school level, size, and percent minority enrollment: 1996



NOTE: Schools that enrolled 600 students or more were defined as large schools and those with fewer than 300 students were defined as small schools. Schools with more than 75 percent of minority students were defined as high-minority enrollment schools and those with less than 25 percent of minority students were low-minority enrollment schools.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/ Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

parents reported. The smaller school/parent gap found in schools with less than 300 students may be a consequence of these schools being less likely than large schools to inform parents about community services. On the other hand, the larger gap observed in large schools may be caused by several factors. First, despite the fact that almost all large schools reported informing parents about community services, they may not have provided enough information. Second, parents in large schools may be more likely than parents in small schools to ignore school-provided information.

Compared with schools with a low minority enrollment, schools with a high minority enrollment were more likely to report that they provided parents with information about community services. However, the opposite occurred in parents' reports: parents whose children attended high-minority enrollment schools were less likely than parents with children attending low-minority enrollment schools to report that the schools provided them with information about community services.

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Schools' and Parents' Reports of Parent Participation in School-Sponsored Activities

The results of the previous section showed that schools were more likely than parents to report that they used various practices to help parents become involved in their children's education. In this section, however, the results show a different pattern. Across all types of schools, parents were more likely to report they had participated in various school-sponsored activities than were schools to report high parental participation. Detailed findings are presented below.

Parent Attendance at an Open House or Back-to-School Night

Almost all public K–8 schools (97 percent) reported that they held an open house or back-to-school night during the 1995–96 school year (table 8). This was confirmed by a majority of parents with children in public K–8 schools (86 percent). Nevertheless, public K–8 schools were more likely than parents to report that schools held such an event. This discrepancy occurred in all kinds of schools, regardless of level, size, minority concentration, and urbanicity.

Small schools and rural schools were less likely than large or moderately sized schools and city/urban fringe or town schools, respectively, to report having held such an event. This variation was partially confirmed by the parents' reports: parents of children in rural schools were less likely than parents of children in city/urban fringe schools to report that schools held these kinds of events. With respect to minority enrollment, parents whose children attended high-minority enrollment schools were less likely to report that their child's school held such an event than parents whose children attended low-minority enrollment schools. However, this relationship was not apparent when looking at the school reports: schools, regardless of the level of minority enrollment, were equally likely to report that they had held such an event.

Although schools were more likely than parents to report that schools organized an open house or back-to-school night, schools were less likely than parents to report high rates of parent attendance at such events. For example, among parents who reported that their child's school organized an open house or back-to-school-night, most (84 percent) reported that they attended this event; however, about half (48 percent) of schools that held these events reported that *most or all* parents attended them. Moreover, the differences between the two reports on the parent attendance rate were larger in middle schools, large schools, and schools with a high minority enroll-

Table 8.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that held an open house or back-to-school night during 1995–96 and their estimated parent attendance for this event, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that an open house or back-to-school night was held by child's school during 1995–96 and they attended the event, by school characteristics: 1996

	Percentage of schools that reported:												Percentage of students whose parents reported:			
	An open house/ back-to-school night was held 1995–96		The event was attended by … parents[1]										An open house/ back-to-school night was held in child's school		They attended the event[2]	
			Most or all		More than half		About half		Less than half		Few					
	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.
Total	96.9	0.80	48.6	1.94	31.4	1.63	12.8	1.41	5.8	0.89	1.5	0.41	86.2	0.68	84.0	0.73
School level																
Elementary	96.5	0.95	54.8	2.31	28.7	1.80	10.9	1.37	4.2	0.80	1.4	0.46	86.4	0.80	84.8	0.72
Middle	98.4	0.96	22.1	4.06	43.1	4.98	20.7	4.65	12.4	3.21	1.7	0.78	85.7	1.42	81.3	1.42
School size																
Less than 300	90.9	2.54	58.5	5.09	23.8	4.52	10.3	3.13	4.8	1.87	2.6	1.26	83.5	1.50	85.1	1.40
300–599	99.0	0.46	46.5	3.09	34.3	2.46	13.0	1.79	5.7	1.28	0.4	0.31	86.5	0.86	82.3	1.14
600 or more	98.8	0.56	43.8	3.26	33.1	3.39	14.3	2.17	6.6	1.39	2.1	0.72	87.1	1.04	85.7	1.28
Percent minority enrollment																
Less than 25	96.1	1.25	60.0	2.72	26.2	2.09	10.1	1.57	3.1	1.07	0.5	0.35	87.6	0.95	85.4	1.17
25–75	98.9	0.55	33.2	3.64	41.7	3.51	16.8	3.17	6.3	1.51	2.0	0.83	86.4	0.95	83.8	1.05
More than 75	96.1	1.61	27.3	3.88	34.4	3.72	16.8	3.13	16.7	3.29	4.8	1.91	82.2	1.87	80.0	2.03
Urbanicity[3]																
City/urban fringe	98.8	0.46	47.3	2.23	32.1	2.28	14.0	1.79	5.5	1.05	1.1	0.48	88.1	0.83	84.4	0.91
Town	98.9	0.77	48.3	4.10	35.4	4.32	9.6	2.26	4.9	1.87	1.8	0.96	85.3	1.77	82.3	2.20
Rural	90.6	3.00	52.1	4.28	25.2	3.76	13.4	2.68	7.4	2.04	1.9	1.02	81.4	1.46	83.7	1.78

[1]Estimates were based only on schools that reported holding the event in 1995–96. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

[2]Estimates were based only on students whose parents reported that schools held the event during the school year.

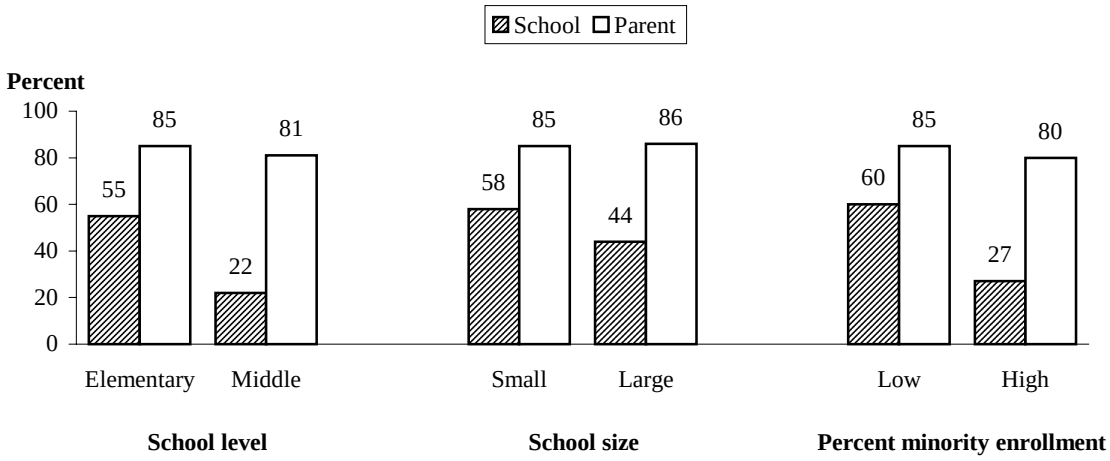
[3]Urbanicity in the FRSS was categorized as 'City/urban fringe,' 'Town,' and 'Rural.' Urbanicity in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 was categorized as 'Urban, inside urbanized area,' 'Urban, outside urbanized area,' and 'Rural.' See the appendix for a discussion of comparability of urbanicity variables from the two data sources.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

ment than in elementary schools, small schools, and schools with a low minority enrollment, respectively (figure 4).

With only one exception,[16] the attendance rate reported by parents did not vary significantly across types of schools. However, the parent attendance rate reported by schools (i.e., attendance by most or all parents) did vary: middle schools, large schools, and schools with a high minority enrollment reported lower parent attendance rates than did elementary schools, small schools, and schools with a low minority enrollment, respectively.

Figure 4.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported that most or all parents attended a school-organized open house or back-to-school night, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that they attended it, by school level, size, and percent minority enrollment: 1996



NOTE: Schools that enrolled 600 students or more were defined as large schools and those with fewer than 300 students were defined as small schools. Schools with more than 75 percent of minority students were defined as high-minority enrollment schools and those with less than 25 percent of minority students were low-minority enrollment schools.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/ Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

Parent Attendance at a Regularly Scheduled Parent-Teacher Conference

There was no difference between schools' and parents' reports on whether schools held regularly scheduled parent-teacher (PT) conferences during the 1995–96 school year: 92 percent of schools reported that they did, as did parents of 91 percent of students (table 9). The two re-

[16]Parents of middle school children were less likely than parents of elementary school children to report attending this school-organized event (81 and 85 percent) (t=2.17).

Table 9.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that held regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences during 1995–96 and their estimated parent attendance for the conferences, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference was held in child's school during 1995–96 and they attended it, by school characteristics: 1996

	Percentage of schools that reported:												Percentage of students whose parents reported:			
	Regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences was held in 1995–96		The conferences were attended by … parents[1]										A regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference was held in child's school		They attended the conference[2]	
			Most or all		More than half		About half		Less than half		Few					
	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.
Total	92.1	1.18	57.0	2.12	20.8	1.88	10.7	1.34	8.9	1.13	2.6	0.62	91.4	0.38	80.9	0.57
School level																
Elementary	94.9	1.03	62.9	2.24	20.4	1.82	8.5	1.23	5.9	1.15	2.3	0.65	94.3	0.36	85.8	0.57
Middle	79.9	3.77	26.6	5.20	22.9	5.03	22.1	4.27	24.2	4.16	4.2	1.85	81.7	1.02	64.0	1.30
School size																
Less than 300	96.3	1.64	65.5	5.55	16.1	4.00	8.3	2.58	7.2	2.65	2.9	1.28	93.4	0.67	84.4	1.24
300–599	92.0	2.21	55.6	2.89	22.4	2.62	11.6	2.11	8.3	1.56	2.1	0.91	93.1	0.50	82.7	0.69
600 or more	88.4	2.11	51.0	2.94	22.7	3.06	11.7	2.08	11.6	1.91	3.0	0.91	88.3	0.78	76.7	1.02
Percent minority enrollment																
Less than 25	94.1	1.47	66.2	3.05	17.1	2.43	8.8	1.86	7.0	1.55	0.9	0.49	91.9	0.61	82.3	0.86
25–75	88.4	2.50	46.1	4.36	27.6	3.35	11.7	2.08	10.7	2.11	4.0	1.69	90.9	0.56	80.6	0.83
More than 75	90.4	3.03	34.3	4.52	25.2	4.24	17.8	4.55	14.5	2.43	8.1	2.19	91.3	0.84	77.7	1.27
Urbanicity[3]																
City/urban fringe	92.3	1.38	55.4	2.34	22.3	2.43	9.7	1.56	9.9	1.55	2.6	0.88	91.6	0.45	81.3	0.68
Town	88.7	3.20	62.8	4.48	17.2	3.42	11.0	2.98	7.3	2.22	1.7	0.97	93.3	0.80	83.7	1.21
Rural	95.2	1.81	54.7	4.83	21.0	3.76	12.6	2.94	8.4	2.24	3.3	1.60	90.0	0.79	78.0	1.16

[1]Estimates were based only on schools that reported holding the event in 1995–96. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

[2]Estimates were based only on students whose parents reported that schools held a conference during the school year.

[3]Urbanicity in the FRSS was categorized as 'City/urban fringe,' 'Town,' and 'Rural.' Urbanicity in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 was categorized as 'Urban, inside urbanized area,' 'Urban, outside urbanized area,' and 'Rural.' See the appendix for a discussion of comparability of urbanicity variables from the two data sources.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

ports were fairly consistent in all types of schools except for rural schools, where parents were less likely than schools to report that schools held PT conferences during the school year.

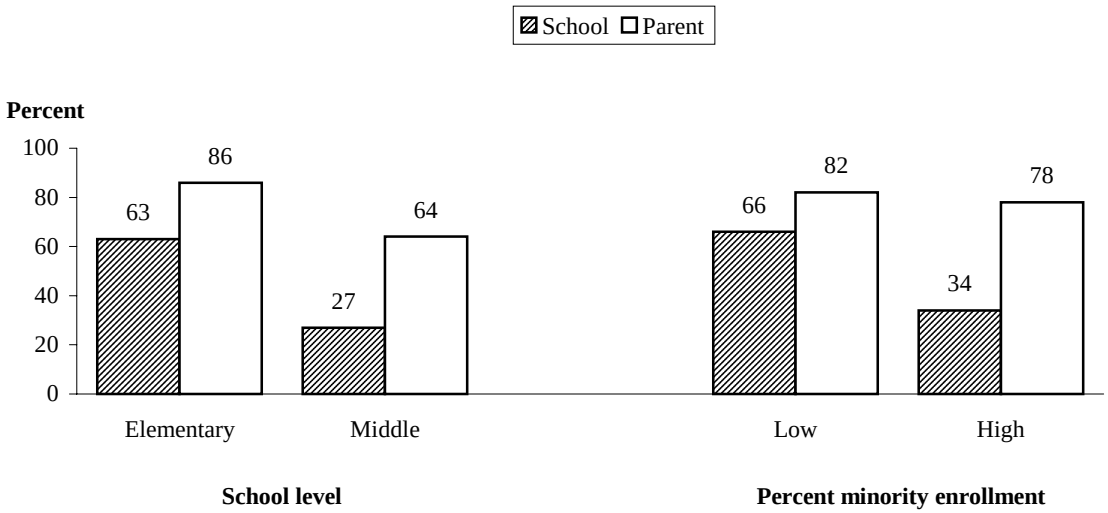
Middle schools and large schools (600 or more students) were less likely than elementary schools and small schools (fewer than 300 students), respectively, to report having scheduled PT conferences. Schools with different levels of minority enrollment, however, were equally likely to report scheduling such conferences. These patterns in the school reports were largely consistent with the parents' reports. For example, parents of middle school students were less likely than parents of elementary school students to report that their child's school scheduled a PT conference; parents of students attending large schools were also less likely to indicate that this was the case than parents of students attending small schools; and regardless of the level of minority enrollment in the school that the child attended, parents were equally likely to report that their child's school scheduled a PT conference.

Parents and schools that reported that parent-teacher conferences were scheduled also reported on parents' attendance at these conferences. A discrepancy between the two reports was observed: most parents (81 percent) who reported that their child's school scheduled a PT conference said that they attended such a conference, whereas 57 percent of schools that scheduled PT conferences reported that *most or all* parents attended them.[17] This discrepancy was not consistent across schools. For example, it was larger in middle schools than in elementary schools, and also larger in schools with a high minority enrollment than in schools with a low minority enrollment (figure 5).

The attendance rate reported by schools varied by school level and minority enrollment. Whereas 27 percent of middle schools reported that most or all parents attended school-scheduled PT conferences, 63 percent of elementary schools reported such attendance. Schools with a high minority enrollment were also less likely than schools with a low minority enrollment to report a high parent attendance rate at PT conferences (34 versus 66 percent). This pattern was confirmed by parents' reports: the attendance rate reported by parents of middle school students and parents of students attending a high-minority enrollment school was lower than the rate reported by parents of elementary school students and parents of students attending a low-minority

[17]One should be cautioned that the observed difference could be attributable to the differences in question wording, rather than differences in school perceptions or parent behaviors. In the PFI/CI–NHES:1996, parents were asked if they attended a PT conference held by their child's school. If a parent responded that he/she had attended even just one of the conferences mentioned in the question, then his/her response was considered "yes." In the FRSS, schools were asked differently: they were asked to report the best estimate of typical parent attendance for PT conferences. If a school holds more than one PT conference during the school year, many parents may attend at least one, but not all of them. Because not all parents who attend one conference attend all conferences, the average attendance rate reported by schools over the course of the school year would be expected to be lower than the percentage of parents who attend at least one conference. While this explanation is reasonable, there are no data in the FRSS and PFI/CI–NHES:1996 to lend empirical support for it.

Figure 5.—Percentage of public K–8 schools that reported that most or all parents attended school-organized parent-teacher conferences, and percentage of K–8 public school students whose parents reported that they attended a conference, by school level and minority enrollment: 1996



NOTE: Schools with more than 75 percent of minority students were defined as high-minority enrollment schools and those with less than 25 percent of minority students were low-minority enrollment schools.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; and the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/ Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996).

enrollment school. In addition, lower attendance rates were also reported by parents of students attending large schools (compared with small schools) and rural schools (compared with city/urban fringe or town schools); however, these parents' reports were not confirmed by the school reports.

Summary and Conclusions

Schools' and Parents' Reports on School Efforts to Promote Parent Involvement

Did schools and parents agree as to how much schools did to encourage parent involvement in children's education? The answer to this question is generally no. The comparisons between schools' and parents' reports indicated that there were differences between the reports of schools and parents regarding whether schools used various practices to increase parent involvement in their children's education. Although most schools claimed that they used various practices to encourage parent involvement, relatively lower proportions of parents acknowledged that schools made these efforts. The investigation into how schools' and parents' reports varied according to school characteristics such as level, size, minority enrollment, and urbanicity further revealed that the differences between the two reports were not consistent across schools. For some practices, the school/parent differences were observed in large and moderately sized schools, but not in small schools, or the differences appeared in city/urban fringe schools, but not in rural schools. For other practices, while these differences were found in all types of schools, their magnitude increased with school level, size, and percentage of minority enrollment.

There could be several explanations for these inconsistent reports, although none of them can be established empirically by this study. First, the school/parent discrepancies suggest that despite schools' reported efforts, some parents were not aware of what schools were doing to encourage parent involvement. It is possible that schools have not done enough to effectively reach out to every parent in implementing various practices. Schools, for example, may rely on students alone to pass on information to their parents (either verbally or through take-home memos), or they may just mail newsletters, announcements, or other materials to parents without doing more to inform them. The FRSS data lend some support for this explanation. For example, among public K–8 schools that reported providing parents with information on helping their children with homework, the majority of schools (84 percent) relied on newsletters or other printed materials to pass on such information to parents; only 37 percent of schools scheduled workshops or classes, and 8 percent offered parents take-home audio/visual materials (Carey et al. 1998).

The varying gaps between schools' and parents' reports by school characteristics also suggest that schools might not be equally effective in reaching out to parents and making them aware

of school programs. Elementary schools, small schools, and schools with low minority enrollment may have done a better job at this than middle schools, large schools, and schools with high minority enrollment.

Parents may also share some of the responsibility. Although it is possible that schools are not doing "enough" to involve parents, some parents simply may not set aside enough time to pay attention to the information or opportunities provided by the school due to demanding work schedules and other family and work obligations. It is also likely that some parents, particularly those who are less involved, may have poor information about their children's schools, and thus, may be providing less accurate and reliable data about school programs. Because these parents lack information about their children's schools, there might be larger discrepancies between what they said about the school and what the school actually did than would otherwise be the case.

However, an important task for schools in the future may be to increase parents' awareness of school programs designed to encourage parent involvement. Schools need to work harder, or perhaps differently, than they claimed to have done to let parents know the importance of being involved in their children's education. In addition, middle schools, large schools, and schools with a high minority enrollment may need to strive especially hard to develop alternative strategies aimed at engaging parents and helping them to become involved. For example, to increase the involvement of parents of children in high-minority schools, schools may need to address cultural differences through multicultural awareness programs and develop other effective strategies to involve the parents (Sileo, Sileo, and Prater 1996). To work with parents with limited-English skills, schools need to take an active role in initiating involvement (such as visiting students' homes) and provide various services to make it easier for parents to get involved (e.g., offering translations or interpreter services for parents) (Inger 1998). Finally, to reduce the barriers to communication between schools and parents, schools can make use of newly developed information technology, such as voice mail, e-mail, and the World Wide Web, to communicate with parents (Smerdon et al. 2000).

The second potential explanation for the inconsistent reports may come from inaccuracy of the schools' and parents' responses. The pressure to provide socially appropriate reports can affect the responses of both schools and parents. The results indicating that schools consistently provided more favorable reports than did parents suggest that schools may have over-reported their actions to involve parents. The social desirability of outreach practices may lead schools to exaggerate their involvement efforts and report them in a favorable way. The same explanation can also be given for parents' responses. Responding to interviewers in a socially desirable way may lead parents to overstate their own behaviors and understate the actions of the schools.

In addition, schools may have inadvertently provided inaccurate information about certain practices, particularly those that are typically initiated by teachers rather than by the school (e.g., informing parents about their children's performance). For these practices, teachers' responses perhaps would be more reliable and accurate than the school reports. To remedy over-reporting or reporting inaccurate information, objective data (e.g., data collected by direct observation) or more accurate data (e.g., from teachers) may need to be collected in the future. Without objective and reliable assessments, the "true" level of school efforts cannot be determined with confidence.

A third potential source for the discrepancies between the reports of schools and parents may be related to differences in the way the questions were worded in the two surveys. For example, schools in the FRSS were asked whether they provided information to parents about child development. However, the question in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 was posed differently: parents were asked whether their child's school helped them understand what children at their child's age are like. It is possible that parents may have received information from the school about child development, but they may not have thought that the school helped them understand the developmental characteristics of children at their child's age. Although the wording differences may be a contributing factor, they cannot provide the entire explanation for the discrepancies between the reports of students and parents. In fact, even questions with similar wording in the two surveys, such as "schools provide information to parents about helping their children with homework," yielded similar discrepancies between the two reports.

In addition, the FRSS did not ask schools whether their practices were targeted to all parents or only to specific groups of parents; therefore, detailed examination of schools' and parents' behaviors was not possible. This may have contributed to the discrepancies between the reports of schools and parents. For example, schools may provide child-development information only to parents of kindergartners and sixth-graders (i.e., children in "transitional" grades), not to parents of children in all grades. Although these schools may say that they used this practice, parents with children who were not in the targeted group certainly would not agree with this statement. Consequently, parents would be less likely than schools to report such school effort.

Finally, readers should be aware that differences between the surveys in the response rates (i.e., the school response rate in the FRSS was higher than the parent response rate in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996) and response bias (e.g., parents in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 underreported the size of their children's schools) may also have contributed to the school/parent discrepancies. However, it is not possible to investigate how these differences may have affected the results presented in this report.

Schools' and Parents' Reports on Parent Attendance at School-Organized Activities

This report also compared schools' and parents' reports on the extent to which parents attended various school-sponsored activities. Again, there was a discrepancy between the two reports on parents' attendance rates. A majority of children's parents said that they attended school-sponsored events, whereas a lower proportion of schools said that *most or all parents* attended.[18] The differences between schools' and parents' reports were generally found to increase with school level, size, and the percentage of minority students enrolled, suggesting that the problem of the inconsistent reports was more pronounced in middle schools, large schools, and schools with high minority enrollment than in elementary schools, small schools, and schools with low minority enrollment.

These findings created uncertainty about the credibility of both reports. Because both schools and parents may have a vested interest in reporting parents' behavior in a certain light, the reports may be distorted on both sides. The critical question becomes: did parents over-report their participation, or did schools under-report parents' participation, or both? Although this report cannot answer this question, the findings are consistent with earlier research (e.g., Reynolds 1992) that found low correlations among parents', teachers', and students' reports on parent participation rates in school activities. Other research also indicated that parent self-reported data are often unreliable (Baker and Soden 1998). This suggests that in the future, more objective data may be needed to verify self-reports and obtain reliable and accurate data on parent participation in school activities. In addition, comparisons between schools' and parents' responses with samples of parents and the schools that their children actually attend may result in more reliable information about schools' perceptions on parents' behaviors or vice versa. In other words, to examine the consistency between parents' and schools' reports, it would be better to collect parent and school data within the same survey framework rather than from two different survey systems.

[18]Because of some differences in question wording in the FRSS and PFI/CI–NHES:1996, readers should interpret this finding with caution. See footnote 17 for a detailed explanation.

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Appendix—Technical Notes and Methodology

Data Sources

In this report, two survey data collections conducted by NCES in 1996 were used. *The Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8,* conducted through the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), supplied the school data in this study, whereas the *Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996* (PFI/CI–NHES:1996) supplied the parent data. Each survey is briefly described below.

The Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8 of the FRSS

The Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8 was conducted through the NCES Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) during spring of 1996 (Carey et al. 1998). The FRSS is a survey system designed to collect small amounts of issue-oriented data with minimal burden on respondents and within a relatively short time frame. The sample of schools for this FRSS survey was selected from the 1993–94 CCD Public School Universe File. Over 84,000 public schools are contained in the 1993–94 CCD universe file, of which 60,000 are identified as elementary schools. This survey targeted schools that offer no grade higher than 8. Special education schools, alternative schools, schools not classified by grade span, and "combined" schools that house both elementary and secondary grades were excluded from the survey. In addition, principals or designated school staff who completed the survey were instructed to exclude information on pre-K classes when they filled out the questionnaire.

To select the sample, the frame of schools was stratified by concentration of poverty in the school, as determined by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Within these primary strata, schools were also sorted by enrollment size and then by urbanicity. The sample sizes were then allocated to the primary strata in rough proportion to the aggregate square root of the enrollment of schools in the stratum. A total of 900 schools were initially selected to participate in the survey.

In early April 1996, questionnaires were mailed to the principals of 900 selected schools. The principal was asked either to complete the questionnaire or to have it completed by the per-

son in the school who was most knowledgeable about parent involvement in the school. Telephone follow up of nonrespondents was initiated in late April, and data collection was completed by June 1996. Five schools were found to be ineligible, and a total of 810 schools completed the survey. The unweighted final response rate was 91 percent, and the weighted final response was 92 percent (Carey et al. 1998). For this study, all 810 schools that participated in this survey were selected. These schools were referred to as "public K–8 schools."

The Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program

The National Household Education Survey of 1996 (NHES:1996) is a telephone survey conducted by Westat for the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Data collection took place from January through April of 1996. Drawing from the civilian, noninstitutionalized population in households in the 50 states and the District of Columbia, the sample was selected using list-assisted, random-digit-dialing (RDD) methods, and the data were collected using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) technology.

The Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the NHES:1996, which is the basis of this report, targeted a sample of children and youth from age 3 through 12th grade. Up to three instruments were used to collect the school and family experiences of these students. A set of household screening items (Screener), administered to an adult member of the household (age 18 or older), was used to determine whether any children of the appropriate ages lived in the household, to collect information on each household member, and to identify the appropriate parent/guardian to respond for the sampled child. For sampling purposes, children residing in the household were grouped into younger children (age 3 through grade 5) and older children (grades 6 through 12). One younger child and one older child from each household could have been sampled for the PFI/CI–NHES:1996. If the household contained more than one younger child or more than one older child, one from each category was sampled with equal probability. For each selected household, a Parent and Family Involvement interview was conducted with the parent/guardian most knowledgeable about the care and education of the youth. For households with youth in 6th through 12th grade who were sampled for the PFI/CI survey, following completion of the PFI/CI interview and receipt of parental permission, an interview also was conducted with the youth.

For the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 survey, Screeners were completed with 55,838 households, of which 19,337 contained a child sampled for the PFI/CI component. The response rate for the Screener was 69.9 percent. The completion rate for the interview with parents of children age 3 through 12th grade students was 89.4 percent. Thus, the overall response rate for the interview

with parents of students age 3 through 12th grade was 62.5 percent (i.e., the product of the Screener response rate and the parent interview completion rate).[19] This report was based on the responses of 9,741 parents whose children were enrolled in grades K through 8 in public schools that offered no grade higher than 8. Home schooled children were excluded from this study.

Description of Variables Used

There were three broad sets of variables used in this report. The first set included the variables that came from schools' reports (FRSS) and parents' reports (PFI/CI–NHES:1996) on whether schools used various practices to encourage parent involvement in their children's education. The second set of variables described schools' and parents' perspectives on the extent to which parents attended various school-organized activities. The third set of variables included the measures that described the characteristics of public K–8 schools that children attended, such as level, size, percentage of minority enrollment, and urbanicity. Detailed information about all variables used in this report is described below.

A. Variables describing school practices to involve parents

Providing parents with information about child development

From the FRSS—This variable was taken directly from the school response to the question on "whether the school provided information to parents on child or adolescent development" (*Q4AA, 1=yes; 2=no*).

From the PFI/CI–NHES:1996—This variable was based on the parent response to the question on "how their child's school helped parents understand what children at child's age were like" (*FSSPCDEV, 1=does very well; 2=just ok; 3=does not do it at all*). The variable was recoded so that 1=does very well or just ok and 2=does not do it at all.

Communicating with parents about their child's progress and school programs

From the FRSS—There were three school variables falling into this category. The first variable, "Whether school provided information to parents about children's school performance,"

[19]The response rate for the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 is below 70 percent, the threshold at which a nonresponse bias analysis is required according to NCES standards. A bias analysis of the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 indicated that nonresponse generally decreased as a child's age/grade and parents' education level increased. However, it should be noted that nonresponse bias associated with children's age/grade is somewhat alleviated in the data weighting process. Detailed information about data reliability and response rates can be found in the Working Paper, *Unit and Item Response Rates, Weighting, and Implementation Procedures in the 1996 National Household Education Survey* (Montaquila and Brick 1997).

was created by combining two variables that measured the extent to which "parents were given written interim reports by the school during grading periods" and "parents received positive phone calls or notes from teachers when their children's performance improved at schools" (*Q3A and Q3F, 1=always; 2=frequently; 3=sometimes; 4=never*). The resulting variable was assigned a score of 1 if the school responded "sometimes," "frequent," or "always" to at least one of the two questions and 2 if the school responded "never" to both questions.

The second variable was based on the school response to the question regarding the extent to which the "school notified parents about their children's ability-group placements" (*Q3H, 1=always; 2=frequently; 3=sometimes; 4=never*). The variable was recoded so that 1=always, frequently, or sometimes and 2=never.

The third variable was based on the school response to the question regarding the extent to which "schools gave parents written information about the school's overall performance on standardized tests" (*Q3E, 1=always; 2=frequently; 3=sometimes; 4=never*). The variable was recoded so that 1=always, frequently, or sometimes and 2=never.

From the PFI/CI–NHES:1996—Three variables fall into this category. The first variable was based on the parent response to the question regarding whether their child's school "let parents know (between report cards) how the child was doing in school" (*FSSPPERF, 1=does very well; 2=just ok; 3=does not do it at all*). The variable was recoded so that 1=does very well or just ok and 2=does not do it at all.

The second variable was based on the parent response to the question regarding whether their child's school "provided parents with information about why their child was placed in particular groups or classes" (*FSSPCOUR, 1=does very well; 2=just ok; 3=does not do it at all*). The variable was recoded so that 1=does very well or just ok and 2=does not do it at all.

The third variable was taken directly from the parent response to the question on whether their child's school "gave them written information about standardized test scores or attendance rates of students as a group" (*FSPROFIL, 1=yes; 2=no*).

Making volunteer opportunities available to parents

From the FRSS—This variable was created by combining two questions asked to schools "whether they provided parents the opportunities to volunteer inside the classroom (*Q11AA, 1=yes; 2=no*) and outside the classroom (*Q11BA, 1=yes; 2=no*)". The resulting variable was assigned a score of 1 if the school responded "yes" to at least one of the two questions and 2 if the school responded "no" to both questions.

From the PFI/CI–NHES:1996—This variable was taken directly from the parent response to the question on "whether the child's school made parents aware of chances to volunteer at the school" (*FSSPVOLN, 1=does very well; 2=just ok; 3=does not do it at all*). The variable was recoded so that 1=does very well or just ok and 2=does not do it at all.

Helping parents help children learn at home

From the FRSS—There were two school variables falling into this category. The first variable was taken directly from the question regarding "whether school provided parents with information about helping their child with homework" (*Q4DA, 1=yes; 2=no*).

The second variable was a composite variable, created by combining the following two measures: (1) "school provided parents with ideas for learning activities outside of school" (*Q4FA, 1=yes; 2=no*); and (2) "school provided parents with a school-sponsored homework helpline for information on assignments" (*Q3C, 1=always; 2=frequently; 3=sometimes; 4=never*). The composite variable was assigned a score of 1 if the school responded "yes" to the question of Q4FA or "always," "frequently," or "sometimes" to the question of Q3C; and assigned a score of 2 if the school responded "no" to the question of Q4FA and "never" to the question of Q3C.

From the PFI/CI–NHES:1996—The two corresponding parent variables came from the parent response to the question regarding (1) "whether the child's school provided information about how to help child with homework" (*FSSPHW, 1=does very well; 2=just ok; 3=does not do it at all*) and (2) "whether the child's school provided workshops, materials, or advice about how to help child learn at home" (*FSSPHOME, 1=does very well; 2=just ok; 3=does not do it at all*). Both variables were recoded so that 1=does very well or just ok and 2=does not do it at all.

Involving parents in school decisionmaking

From the FRSS—There were two school variables falling into this category, each created by combining a set of variables that measured the extent to which parent inputs were considered by school on various school issues, including allocation of funds (*Q13A*), curriculum or overall instructional program (*Q13B*), design of special program (*Q13C*), library books and materials (*Q13D*), discipline policies and procedures (*Q13E*), health-related topics or policies such as drug or alcohol abuse (*Q13F*) (*Q13A to Q13F, 1=great extent; 2=moderate extent; 3=small extent; 4=not at all*). The first variable was assigned a score of 1 if the school responded "great extent," "moderate extent," or "small extent" to at least one of the questions listed above; and assigned a score of 2 if the school responded "not at all" to all questions. The second variable was assigned

a score of 1 if the school responded "great extent" or "moderate extent" to at least one of the questions listed above; and assigned a score of 2 if the school responded "not at all" or "small extent" to all of the questions.

From the PFI/CI–NHES:1996—Two variables were taken directly from the parent response to the following two questions: (1) their child's school included parents on committees or in other groups that made decisions about school policies having to do with the school budget, what will be taught, discipline, or other policies (*FSDECIS, 1=yes; 2=no*); and (2) parents had a real say in school policy decisions at their child's school (*FEPOLICY, 1=yes; 2=no*).

Providing parents with information about community services

From the FRSS—This variable was taken directly from the school response to the question on "whether the school provided parents with information about community services to help children or their families" (*Q4GA, 1=yes; 2=no*).

From the PFI/CI–NHES:1996—This variable was based on the parent response to the question regarding "whether the child's school provided parents with information about community services to help child or family" (*FSSPSERV, 1=does very well; 2=just ok; 3=does not do it at all*). The variable was recoded so that 1=does very well or just ok and 2=does not do it at all.

B. Variables describing parent participation in school-organized activities

Parents' attendance at an open house or back-to-school night

From the FRSS—There were two school variables. The first variable described whether an open house or back-to-school night had been held by school during the 1995–96 school year (*Q2AA, 1=yes; 2=no*). The second variable described parent attendance at this event if this event was held by the school (*Q2AB, 1=most or all; 2=more than half; 3=about half; 4=less than half; 5=few*).

From the PFI/CI–NHES:1996—There were two corresponding parent variables. The first variable was created based on the parent response to the two questions on (1) "whether they attended an open house or back-to-school night" during the school year (*FSBAC, 1=yes; 2=no*) and (2) if they did not attend, "whether their child's school had this type of event during the 1995–96 school year" (*FSHADBAC, 1=yes; 2=no*). The resulting variable was assigned a score of 1 if parents said that they attended the event or they said that the event was held although they

did not attend it; and assigned a score of 2 if parents who said that they did not attend the event also said that the event was not held at school.

The second variable was only for parents who reported that an open house or back-to-school night was held at their child's school (FSBAC=1 or FSHADBAC=1). The coding of this variable was "1" if parents said that they attended the event and "2" if they said that they did not.

Parents' attendance at a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference

From the FRSS—There were two school variables. The first variable described "whether regularly-scheduled school-wide parent-teacher conferences have been held by school during the 1995–96 school year" (*Q2BA, 1=yes; 2=no*). The second described parent attendance at these conferences if the conferences were held by the school (*Q2BB, 1=most or all; 2=more than half; 3=about half; 4=less than half; 5=few*).

From the PFI/CI–NHES:1996—There are two corresponding parent variables. The first variable was created based on the parent response to the two questions on (1) "whether or not they attended a regularly scheduled parent teacher conference" (*FSATCNFA, 1=yes; 2=no*) and (2) if they did not attend, "whether their child's school had this type of event" (*FSHADCN, 1=yes; 2=no*). The resulting variable was assigned a score of 1 if parents said that they attended the PT conference or they said that the PT conference was held although they did not attend it; and assigned a score of 2 if parents who said that they did not attend the conference also said that the conference was not held at school.

The second variable was only for parents who reported that the conference was held at their child's school (FSATCNFA=1 or FSHADCN=1). The coding of the variable was "1" if parents said that they went to the conference and "2" if they said that they did not.

C. Variables describing school characteristics

School level

From the FRSS—In this report, elementary schools were defined as those that begin with grade 4 or lower and have no grade higher than 8; and middle schools were defined as those that begin with grade 5 or higher but have no grade higher than 8.

The school level variable in the FRSS was derived from a set of variables that identified whether a particular grade (e.g., K through 8) was taught at the school (*Q1A to Q1I, 1=yes; 2=no*). If a school had grades K, 1, 2, 3, or 4, the school was identified as an "elementary school"

and assigned a score of 1. If a school did not have grades K through 4 but had grades 5, 6, 7, or 8 (i.e., Q1A=2 and Q1B=2 and Q1C=2 and Q1D=2 and Q1E=2 and (Q1F=1 or Q1G=1 or Q1H=1 or Q1I=1)), the school was identified as a "middle school' and assigned a score of 2.

From the PFI/CI–NHES:1996—The school level variable was derived from the variable of "the lowest grade taught at child's school" (*SLOW*). The variable was assigned a code of "1" for elementary school if the lowest grade taught at school reported by the child's parent was K, 1, 2, 3, or 4. The variable was assigned a code of "2" for middle school if the lowest grade taught at school reported by the child's parent was 5, 6, 7, or 8.

School size

From the FRSS—The school size variable (i.e., the number of students enrolled in school) was taken directly from the data set. It was originally based on the 1993–94 CCD. The variable was recoded into three levels: 1=fewer than 300 students; 2=300–599 students; 3=600 students or more.

From the PFI/CI–NHES:1996—This variable was based on the parent's estimation of the number of students enrolled in their child's school (*SNUMSTUD, 1=under 300; 2=300–599; 3=600–999; 4=1,000 or more*). The variable was recoded so that it had the same coding category as the school size variable in the FRSS.

Percent minority enrollment in school

From the FRSS—This was derived from the 1993–94 CCD. First, the count of students in each minority group (i.e., American Indian, Asian and Pacific Island students, Hispanic, and Black, non-Hispanic) in a school was obtained. Second, these counts were summed and divided by the total membership of the school. Third, the resulting score was recoded into three levels: 1=less than 25 percent; 2=25–75 percent; 3=more than 75 percent.

From the PFI/CI–NHES:1996—This variable was created by (1) parent's estimate on the percent of the students at their child's school who were the same race or ethnic background as the parent's child (*SETHNIC, 1=less than 25 percent; 2=25–75 percent,; 3=more than 75 percent*) and (2) child's race/ethnic background (*RACEETHN, 1=White, non-Hispanic; 2=Black, non-Hispanic; 3=Hispanic; 4=all other races*). The resulting variable has the same coding as SETHNIC if the child's race/ethnicity was "Black, non-Hispanic," "Hispanic," or "all other races." It has the reverse of the coding of SETHNIC if the child's race/ethnicity was "White."

Urbanicity

From the FRSS—This variable was obtained from the 1993–94 CCD. The variable from CCD has seven categories based on the classification of the Geography Division, Bureau of the Census (*LOCALE93, 1=large city; 2=mid-size city; 3=urban fringe of large city; 4=urban city of mid-size city; 5=large town; 6=small town; 7=rural*). According to the definitions of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, "city" is a central city of a Metropolitan Statistical Area, and "urban fringe" is a place within an MSA of a central city, but not primarily its central city. "Town" is a place outside an MSA, but with a population greater or equal to 2,500 and defined as urban by the Bureau of the Census. "Rural" is a place with a population less than 2,500 and is designated as rural by the Census Bureau. To be most comparable to the urbanicity variable from the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 (see the description below), the original urbanicity variable from 1993–94 CCD was recoded into three categories: 1=city/urban fringe (corresponding to the original coding of 1 through 4); 2=town (original coding of 5, 6); 3=rural (original coding of 7).

From the PFI/CI–NHES:1996—This variable was obtained from the NHES:1996, Household and Library Proprietary Data File (*ZIPURBAN, 1=urban, inside urbanized area; 2=urban, outside urbanized area; 3=rural*). The definitions for these categories were taken directly from the 1990 Census of Population. "An urbanized area" comprises a place and the adjacent densely settled surrounding territory that together have a minimum population of 50,000 people. "Urban, outside of UA" includes incorporated and unincorporated places outside of a UA with a minimum population of 2,500 people. Places not classified as urban are rural.

Comparison Between Samples and Populations

Unlike school size and percent minority enrollment in the FRSS, which were obtained directly from the 1993–94 CCD (Carey et al. 1998), school size and percent minority enrollment in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 were based on parents' perceptions about their child's school rather than on actual school reports. Therefore, their responses may be inaccurate. In order to assess the quality of these parent-reported data, the distribution of students in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 according to parent-reported school size and percent minority enrollment was compared with the distribution of similar students from the 1995–96 CCD. A similar comparison was also conducted for the FRSS schools—i.e., the distribution of the FRSS schools according to school size and percent minority enrollment was compared with the distribution of schools obtained from the 1993–94 CCD.[20] The results are presented in table A1.

[20]The main reason for using the 1993–94 CCD rather than the 1995–96 CCD is that 810 public K–8 schools in the FRSS were sampled from the 1993–94 CCD Public School Universe File, and both school size and the percentage of minority enrollment available in the data set were obtained from the 1993–94 CCD.

Table A1.—Percentage distribution of public K–8 schools based on the FRSS and 1993–94 CCD, and percentage distribution of K–8 public school students based on the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 and 1995–96 CCD, by school size and percent minority enrollment

	Percentage of public K–8 schools		Percentage of public K–8 students	
	From FRSS	From 93–94 CCD	From PFI/CI–NHES:1996	From 95–96 CCD
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
School size				
Less than 300	25.9	27.5	17.5	9.8
300–599	45.1	45.2	47.1	41.8
600 or more	29.1	27.3	35.4	48.5
Percent minority enrollment				
Less than 25	60.5	57.8	44.8	49.3
25–75	26.2	26.8	38.2	30.6
More than 75	13.3	15.3	17.0	20.1

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K–8, FRSS 58, 1996; the Parent and Family Involvement in Education/Civic Involvement Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1996 (PFI/CI–NHES:1996); and 1993–94 and 1995–96 Common Core of Data Survey (CCD).

While the distribution of schools in the FRSS was similar to the distribution of the population, the distribution of students in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 was not. Students in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 appeared to be underrepresented in large schools (600 or more students) and overrepresented in small- or medium-sized schools. They were also underrepresented in schools with either low- or high-minority enrollment (under 25 percent or above 75 percent). In other words, parents of students in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 tended to underreport the size of the school that their child attended, and to either overstate or understate the minority concentration in their child's school.

The inaccurate data provided by parents may affect the findings of the report, particularly the school-parent comparison according to school size and percent minority enrollment. For example, the school-parent discrepancies found in small or large schools might be diminished or disappear if more accurate data on school size were obtained. Unfortunately, this theory cannot be explained empirically in this study because it is impossible to identify the types of parents who gave inaccurate information in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996.

In addition, the discrepancies between the reports of schools and parents may be caused by different sampling procedures used in the two surveys. For example, the sampling frame of the FRSS was a list of public K–8 schools from the 1993–94 CCD Public School Universe File.

Thus, the schools in the FRSS were sampled directly from this universe school file. However, the sample of children (therefore parents) in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 was not selected directly from the population of targeted children. The PFI/CI–NHES:1996 sampled households first via telephone numbers. Interviewers asked to speak with a household member at least 18 years old, who responded to the Screener questions. Once the interviewer determined through the Screener that a child in the household was eligible for the survey, the interviewer asked to speak with the parent or guardian who knew the most about the sampled child's care and education. For sampling purposes, children residing in the household were grouped into younger children (age 3 through grade 5) and older children (grades 6 through 12). One younger child and one older child from each household could have been sampled for the PFI/CI–NHES:1996. These sampling procedures may introduce potential sources of coverage bias. For example, the sample excluded households without telephones. For those households that had one young child and one older child selected into the survey, their parents would respond twice to the survey questions about their children's schools. Thus, the differences in the sampling frame and coverage between the two surveys may contribute to the school/parent discrepancies, although it is impossible to determine how these differences may have affected the results presented in this report.

Data Reliability

The statistics in this report are estimates derived from sample surveys. Two broad categories of error occur in such estimates: nonsampling and sampling errors. Nonsampling errors occur not only in sample surveys but also in complete censuses of entire populations. Nonsampling errors can be attributed to a number of sources: inability to obtain complete information about all students in all institutions in the sample (some students or institutions refused to participate, or students participated but answered only certain items); ambiguous definitions; differences in interpreting questions; inability or unwillingness to give correct information (e.g., parents in the PFI/CI–NHES:1996 over-reported their child's school size); mistakes in recording or coding data; and other errors of collecting, processing, sampling, and imputing missing data. Although nonsampling errors due to questionnaire and item nonresponse can be reduced somewhat by the adjustment of sample weights and imputation procedures, correcting nonsampling errors or gauging the effects of these errors is usually difficult.

Sampling errors occur because observations are made only on samples of students, not on entire populations. Surveys of population universes are not subject to sampling errors. Estimates based on a sample will differ somewhat from those that would have been obtained by a complete census of the relevant population using the same survey instruments, instructions, and procedures. The standard error of a statistic is a measure of the variability due to sampling when esti-

mating a statistic. Standard errors can be used as a measure of the precision expected from a particular sample. If all possible samples were surveyed under similar conditions, intervals of 1.96 standard errors below to 1.96 standard errors above a particular statistic would include the true population parameter being estimated in about 95 percent of the samples. In addition, the standard errors for two sample statistics can be used to estimate the precision of the difference between the two statistics and to help determine whether the difference based on the sample is large enough so that it represents the population difference.

Because both FRSS and PFI/CI–NHES:1996 data were collected using a complex sampling design, the sampling errors of the estimates from these two surveys are typically larger than would be expected if the sample was a simple random sample and the observations were independent and identically distributed random variables. In this study, jackknife replication method was used to estimate standard errors of all statistics in this report.[21] These standard errors reflected the actual sample design used in the both FRSS and PFI/CI–NHES:1996.

Statistical Procedures

School-parent comparisons made in the text have been tested for statistical significance to ensure that the differences are larger than might be expected due to sampling variation. The Student's *t* statistic was used for such a test. The formula used to compute the *t* statistic is as follows:

$$t = \frac{E_1 - E_2}{\sqrt{(se_1)^2 + (se_2)^2}}$$

where E_1 and E_2 are the estimates to be compared and se_1 and se_2 are their corresponding standard errors. This formula is valid only for independent estimates. When the estimates are not independent (for example, when comparing any estimates that are parts of a percentage distribution), a covariance term must be added to the denominator of the *t*-test formula. Because the actual covariances were not known, it was assumed that the estimates were perfectly negatively correlated. Consequently, $2*(se_1*se_2)$ was added to the denominator of the *t*-test formula for dependent estimates.

In addition, the discrepancies between schools' and parents' reports were tested to see whether they varied with school level, size, and minority concentration. To conduct such tests (i.e., test a difference of differences), the following formula was used:

$$t = (E_{11}-E_{21})-(E_{12}-E_{22}) \,/\, sqrt\{(se_{11}^2+se_{21}^2)+(se_{12}^2+se_{22}^2)\}$$

[21]For more information about the jackknife replication method, see Wolter (1985).

where E_{11} and E_{21} are the estimates to be compared within a particular type of school (e.g., large schools) E_{12} and E_{22} are the estimates to be compared within another type of school (e.g., small schools), and se_{11}, se_{21}, se_{12}, and se_{22} are their corresponding standard errors.

Generally, whether a difference is considered statistically significant is determined by calculating a *t* value for the difference between a pair of proportions or means, and comparing this value to published tables of values at certain critical levels, called *alpha* levels. The *alpha* level is an *a priori* statement of the probability of inferring that a difference exists when, in fact, it does not. The *alpha* level used in this report is .05; differences discussed in the text have been tested and found significant at this level.

In order to make proper inferences and interpretations from the statistics, several points must be kept in mind. First, comparisons resulting in large *t* statistics may appear to merit special note. However, this is not always the case, because the size of the *t* statistic depends not only on the observed differences in the two estimates being compared, but also on the standard error of the difference. Thus, a small difference between two groups with a much smaller standard error could result in a large *t* statistic, but this small difference is not necessarily noteworthy.

Second, when multiple statistical comparisons are made, it becomes increasingly likely that a finding of a statistically significant difference is erroneous. Even when there is no difference in the population, at an *alpha* level of .05, there is still a 5 percent chance of concluding that an observed *t* value representing one comparison in the sample is large enough to be statistically significant. As the number of comparisons increases, so does the risk of making such an error in inference.

To guard against errors of inference based upon multiple comparisons, the Bonferroni procedure to correct significance tests for multiple contrasts was used in this report. This method corrects the significance (or *alpha*) level for the total number of contrasts made with a particular classification variable. For each classification variable, there are K possible contrasts (or nonredundant pairwise comparisons), where K=(N*(N–1)/2) and N is the number of categories in the variable. For example, because school size has 3 categories, N=3 and there are (3*2)/2=3 possible comparisons among the categories. The Bonferroni procedure divides the *alpha* level for a single *t* test (for example, .05) by the number of possible pairwise comparisons in order to provide a new *alpha* that adjusts for all possible multiple comparisons.