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# **Parent Involvement Shifts from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Grade to Focus on College Attendance**

THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION CLEARLY SHIFTS FROM A FOCUS ON MONITORING A CHILD'S INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR IN EIGHTH GRADE TO A FOCUS ON ENDORSING THE CHILD'S LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IN TWELFTH GRADE. AND BY THE TWELFTH GRADE, THERE ARE CLEAR AND CONSISTENT DIFFERENCES OF RACE AND ETHNICITY IN PARENT INVOLVEMENT WITH THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND IN THE ACTIONS THEY TAKE TO SECURE FUNDS FOR COLLEGE.

CRESPAR researchers Sophia Catsambis and Janet E. Garland, of Queens College and CUNY, analyzed over 13,000 parent surveys and interviews from the National Educational Longitudinal Studies (NELS) of 1988 and 1992 to compare the overall continuity and change in parent involvement between years and across the categories of Asian American, Latino American, African American, and White. They examined measures of parent involvement such as parents' installation of rules at home for behavior and study, parents' participation in course selection, children's enrollment in classes outside of school, content of school communication, expectations of how parents would pay for college, and many others.

Catsambis and Garland find that when their child is in the eighth grade, 90% of parents have aspirations for more than a high school education. This increases to 97% by the twelfth grade, reflecting the fact that these students have made it almost through high school. More dramatically, the expectation for children to receive post-baccalaureate degrees increases from 22% to 41%, almost doubling. By the twelfth grade, Asian American and African American parents have the highest educational expectations for their children, with 56% and 53% expecting post-baccalaureate education respectively. The greatest increase in expectations is among African Americans, from 23% in the eighth grade to 53% in the twelfth grade. "Surprisingly," note Catsambis and Garland, "White parents tend to have the least expectations for post-baccalaureate degrees for their teens" with only 33% expecting their child to attain an M.A. or above.

As students near high school graduation, "parents become increasingly concerned about their teen's further education and about the effects of high school programs on post-secondary opportunities," say Catsambis and Garland. Thus, rules on homework and maintenance of grade average decrease as much as twenty percent between the two data sets while parents' participation in course selection more than doubles by the 12th grade. Both parents and schools tend to place more emphasis on academic programs and parental involvement in school in the twelfth grade and less emphasis on students' individual behaviors.

## **Financing the Future**

Half of all parents have begun saving money for college by their child's eighth grade, mostly in savings accounts. In other means of savings, more African Americans bought insurance policies and more Asian Americans made investments in stocks and real estate. By the eighth grade, 42% of Asian Americans already had over \$10,000 set aside, compared to 23% of Whites, 11% of Latinos, and 8% of African Americans.

By the twelfth-grade, most expected to finance their teen's further education through grants and scholarships, but only about one-half had applied for such programs by the spring of the student's senior year and about one-fourth had talked to representatives about financial aid. Overall, a higher percentage of African American, Latino, and Asian American parents than White parents report that they have limited information about ways to finance their children's college education.

### **Racial and Ethnic Differences**

While there are general trends in parent involvement, Catsambis and Garland indicate that parents of different racial/ethnic backgrounds approach issues of parental involvement and financing post-secondary education differently.

As noted, *Asian Americans* have very high educational expectations for their children. Communication with schools, however, is notably low. Between the eighth and twelfth grades, Asian American initiation of contacts with the school concerning school academic programs drops from 76% to 40%. Catsambis and Garland suggest, "Perhaps Asian American parents are involved in the children's academic opportunities in a different way, such as, by exercising school choice and selecting private education." In fact, 36% of Asian American students were enrolled in academic-related private lessons or in private schools by twelfth grade, the highest percent of all other ethnic groups. These Asian American parents also take actions to secure funds for their teen's college education earlier than other parents and expect to finance their child's college education primarily through savings.

*Latino* parents report the highest degree of at-home supervision throughout the years. In an interesting shift, they have relatively low levels of involvement regarding parent/school contacts in the eighth grade, but by the twelfth grade, they report the highest educational contacts with school despite difficulties in communication with school personnel. Latino parents spent more time than any other group in common activities with their children.

*African American* families have as high educational expectations for their children as do Asian Americans. They concentrate on improving teen's opportunities beyond high school by seeking information and encouraging graduation and college. African Americans tend to maintain strict supervision at home until twelfth grade, when they loosen their levels of teen supervision. African American parents experience the sharpest between-grades drop in school-initiated contacts regarding student progress. This may be, Catsambis and Garland say, "due to a drop in problematic behaviors of these students during high school." African American parents have more knowledge about sources of financial aid than Asian American and Latino parents and about the same amount of knowledge as White parents (except for private education loans).

*White* parents have high levels of interaction with both the school and the larger community during their teen's eighth and twelfth grades. However, they are the least likely to seek information about higher education, to encourage their children to complete high school and attend college, or to help their children learn about post-secondary opportunities. Catsambis and Garland note that these parents may seek to enhance their children's future opportunities through other means, such as maintaining high levels of parent/teen communication and closely supervising academic progress in high school. These findings may also indicate that White parents are simply more secure in assuming that higher education opportunities will be available to their children if they desire them.

Catsambis and Garland note that, overall, their findings indicate that parents would greatly benefit from programs that inform and direct their efforts to finance their child's post-secondary education. Such information and guidance would be especially helpful for minority parents, many of whom may not be adequately informed about financing possibilities and resort to either taking on an additional job or asking assistance of family members. Given the enthusiasm and expectations of parents to continue their children's education, and the rising costs of post-secondary education, information and guidance "could become critical in enhancing the future opportunities of many students, especially those from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds."