

Racial and Ethnic Variation in Parental Home Involvement: A Look at the Affect of School Characteristics on Home Literacy Involvement

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Preliminary Abstract:

Based on prior literature we know that minority parents are less likely than their non-Hispanic white counterparts to be involved in their children's schooling. However we know based on previous literature that parental involvement is a significant predictor of academic success. While a great deal of attention has been paid to predicting at school involvement there is gap in the literature when considering at home involvement. This paper seeks to thoroughly examine the predictors of at home involvement, paying close attention to the affect of school characteristics. Initial analysis using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999 indicate that there is some racial and ethnic variation in parental home involvement as well as change in home involvement over time. The final analysis for the paper will use multiple level models to examine the influence of family and school characteristics on parent's engagement in home literacy activities.

Background:

The issue of parental involvement and participation in children schooling has been in the political and policy forefront for some time. Two of the most highly discussed educational policy concerning parental school involvement are the 1965 Title I program of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Presidents Bush's 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. Both policies call for better focus on the connection between children's home and schools lives, using the parent as the conduit. This national notoriety has prompted numerous studies using various outcomes and predictors of children and adolescent well-being.

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Parental involvement has been found to be a significant component in predicting children's later academic and behavioral outcomes (Wachs, 2000; Desimone, 1999; Overstreet et al. 2005; Sheldon and Epstein, 2005; Sy and Schulenberg, 2005; Glick and Hohmann-Marriott, 2007; Epstein, 2007; Glick, Bates and Yabiku, in press). The research overwhelmingly suggests that children who have parents who are involved in their schooling experience have higher academic achievement, in particular higher reading and math scores, have fewer behavioral problems and greater school retention throughout the course of their schooling (Miedel and Reynolds, 1999; Senechal and LeFevre, 2002; Reynolds, 1992; Izzo et al. 1999). These findings point to the importance of understanding parents' motivations or deterrents to becoming involved in their children's schooling. There is a substantial amount of research examining the predictors of parental involvement at school often measured by looking at parental attendance at things such as PTA meetings and parent teacher conferences. There is a gap in the literature, however, in terms of our understanding of what predicts if parents will be involved in literacy activities outside of school.

Parental Home Involvement

There are more than enough studies that point to the importance of parental home involvement on children's outcomes (Wachs, 2000; Desimone, 1999; Overstreet et al. 2005; Sheldon and Epstein, 2005; Sy and Schulenberg, 2005; Glick and Hohmann-Marriott, 2007; Epstein, 2007; Glick, Bates and Yabiku, in press) but far fewer that examine the predictors of parental home involvement. Using a nationally representative sample of U.S. Asian American, African American, Latino American and European American five year olds Suizzo and Stapleton (2007) analyze predictors of parental home involvement focusing on the effect of maternal education across racial/ethnic groups. Suizzo and Stapleton (2007) found significant difference in parental home involvement across the racial/ethnic groups. Overall, Asian Americans reported the highest level of educational expectations (Suizzo and Stapleton, 2007). European American parents were the ones most likely to engage in verbal and nonverbal literacy activities. However, they were also the ones least likely to engage in family discussions (Suizzo and Stapleton, 2007). Once adding in a number of family characteristics, namely mother's education the authors find: maternal education is positively related to the frequency of all types of parental home involvement. Mothers with higher levels of education had higher frequency of engagement in verbal, nonverbal and outside of the home activities. Based on their findings the authors

conclude that mother's education is a much more important predictor of parental home involvement than race/ethnicity (Suizzo and Stapleton, 2007).

Studies have found that minority parents are the ones who are least likely to have high incidences of school involvement. However, they are also the ones who are more likely to have higher amounts of at home involvement (Eccles and Harold, 1996; Hill and Taylor, 2004; Sy and Schulenberg, 2005). Knowing the relationship between academic success and home involvement as well as the racial/ethnic differences in involvement it seems that this lack of research in this area is a crucial gap in the fields.

There are some mixed findings about which parental characteristics are predictive of higher levels of parental involvement. Dauber and Epstein (1989) find that parents with fewer children and higher educational levels are more likely to be involved in the home. Bradley et al. (2001a) find distinct differences in parental involvement (via home environment) across the schooling process by race/ethnicity and poverty status. The authors found that minority children were less likely than their majority counterparts to have come from homes with lots of learning stimulation (via number of books in the home and reading to children) (Bradley et al. 2001a).

School Characteristics

Next to the family, the school context is a very important predictor of children's academic outcomes. There are a number of school characteristics that have been said to be significant predictors of children's educational achievement. In a NCES report (Braun, Jenkins and Grigg, 2006) researchers reported that, in fourth grade children in private schools outperformed children in public schools on reading and math achievement by 14.7 and 7.8 points on average, respectively. The report also suggest that this gap widens over time, by eighth grade children in private school are scoring on average 18.1 points higher than public school students on reading and 12.3 points higher on math achievement. The report also indicated that once student characteristics were taken into account such as race/ethnicity the differences were considerably decreased, though still significant.

These achievement gaps between students in public and private schools are important once we consider the composition of the student body in both types of schools. The public school system overall has larger classes sizes and larger teacher to student ratios, as well as a higher proportion of students who are minority and receive free lunch (Alt and Peter, 2002). Naomi and Peter (2002) also reports that teachers who teach at private schools earn more on average and

feel more satisfied with their job than teachers in public schools. Schools, and children who attend those schools, tend to be homogenous (i.e. poor kids go to poor schools). The very nature of the private school system (i.e. acceptance or denial of students as well as tuition) ensures that they have a certain type of student body.

In a study conducted by Parcel and Dufur (2001) the authors find that both family and school capital significantly predict children's math and reading scores. They find that children who attend private schools and children who attend schools with higher levels of parental school involvement had better math and reading outcomes. Children who attended schools with higher district level instructional expenditures per pupil also had better math and reading outcomes (i.e. higher on the SES scale). The study also found a large significant effect of parental-school communication, in that children whose parents and schools communicated with one another had better reading and math achievement. Findings such as this suggest that when examining school affects researchers should also examine the interaction between family and school characteristics.

There still remains this issue of school characteristics for example school receptivity. Those parents who are the least likely to have high amounts of school involvement may be more inclined to increase their levels of school involvement if their children's schools were more receptive to parental school involvement. Several studies have suggested that once minority parents feel as though they are welcome and there is a parent-teacher partnership they are more likely to participate in their children's schooling (Dauber and Epstein, 1993; Overstreet et al., 2005; Epstein, 1994). Epstein (1994) points to things like active communication on the schools part; she uses the example of sending home a report card, the teacher maybe ineffective in getting the desired reaction from parents if they don't take the time to include information on how grades are calculated and what things the children have had a hard time with rather than just sending home grades. This type of outreach on the schools part may also enable parents to actively engage in at home involvement (Epstein, 1994). In their 1993 study of 2,317 poor parents Dauber and Epstein found that school practices that promoted parental involvement were the strongest predictor of parental involvement.

The number of published articles which exclusively examine the predictors of parental home involvement are sparse. The majority of the literature that examines predictors of parental involvement focuses on parental school involvement. This lack of literature makes it somewhat

difficult to formulate substantive directional hypothesis about the effect of various covariates on parental home involvement.

I propose two main hypotheses about the affect of family and school characteristics on parental home involvement.

H1.1: Parental education and income will be positively associated with higher levels of home involvement.

H1.2: School characteristics will be associated with parental home involvement in that schools with “more” receptive practices will be predictive of higher levels of home involvement.

Data and Planned Analyses:

The data for this study comes from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999 (ECLS-K). The ECLS-K is a nationally representative sample of children who entered kindergarten between 1998 and 1999. The data were collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), within the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences using a multistage probability sampling design. There are currently 6 waves of available data, fall and spring of kindergarten and 1st grade as well as spring of 3rd and 5th grade. The ECLS-K data was designed not only to examine children’s schooling experience but to also tap into all faucets of children’s environments which may contribute to lasting educational outcomes.

The preliminary analysis looks longitudinally at the descriptive statistics for several items which are found at all four waves of the data: parent’s educational expectations for their children, reading outside of school, number of children’s books in the home and trips to the library. The final paper will use multilevel regression analysis to examine the predictors of parental home involvement paying close attention to the affect of school characteristics on parent’s decisions to engage in literacy activities outside of school. The analysis will be conducted step models accounting for demographic, child, family and school characteristics.

Preliminary Results:

Panel A in Table 1 gives the racial/ethnic specific descriptive statistics for child characteristics. Children are overwhelming the same race/ethnicity as their parents. Parents who report their race as other are the ones most likely to report that they have a different racial/ethnic

background than their child, with about 34% of their children being of a different race/ethnicity. Children with minority parents in the sample are significantly younger than the children of non-Hispanic whites. The children of Non-Hispanic Black and other parents are significantly more likely than children of non-Hispanic whites to be female. With the exception of children of Asian and other parents, children with minority parents are significantly more likely than children of non-Hispanic white parents to be repeat kindergartners. Excluding children of Hispanics, children with minority parents are more likely than those with non-Hispanic white parents to have been born with low or moderately low birth weight.

From Panel B in Table 1 we see that Asian parents are significantly more educated than all other parents including their non-Hispanic white counterparts. Non-Hispanic Black parents are the least educated in the sample. With the exception of Asian parents minority parents are significantly more likely than their non-Hispanic white counterparts to be working part-time, unemployed or staying at home full-time.

Panel C in Table 1 lays out the familial demographic characteristics of the sample. All minority parents report living in significantly different family structures than their non-Hispanic white counterparts. Non-Hispanic Black parents are the minority mostly likely to be living in single-mother families. Asian parents are the most likely to be living in a two biological family household. In fact a higher percentage of Asian parents report living in a two biological family than all other groups including their non-Hispanic white counterparts. Asian families are also more likely than all other families to report having income of \$100,001 or more. All other minority groups report their income ranging from \$25,000-\$50,000.

Minority parents are more likely than their non-Hispanic white counterparts to be living in a multigenerational family. Other families report the highest percentage of at least one grandparent living in the household with 15% closely followed by Non-Hispanic Blacks with 14.55% while Hispanics report the lowest percentage among minorities with 9.2%. Minority parents overall are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to report that their home language is not English. Both Asian and Hispanics are the minority groups most likely to report their primary home language to be some non-English language. Overall minority parents report having more children, talking to fewer parents and perceive more barriers to parental school involvement than their non-Hispanic white counterparts.

In terms of school characteristics as we see in Panel D of Table 1 children of minority parents are significantly more likely than those with non-Hispanic white parents to attend public schools. Overall children of minority parents go to schools that report having more school outreach to parents than those with non-Hispanic white parents. Children with minority parents are also more likely to attend schools where the majority of both students and teachers are minorities compared to non-Hispanic whites. Minority parents are more likely to report that their child attends a school where 50% or more of the student body is LEP compared to their non-Hispanic white counterparts. Finally, the children of minority parents are disproportionately attending schools that receive Title I funding compared to their non-Hispanic white counterparts.

The key dependent variables used to tap parental home involvement are parent's educational expectations for their children, reading outside of school, number of books children's books in the home and trips to the library. Table 2 gives a detail breakdown for each of the dependent variables by both wave of data and parental race/ethnicity. Figure 1 corresponds with Table 2 and shows the change in parental home involvement at each grade level for each measure of parental home involvement over time. In each Panel we see that parental home involvement decreases as children get older for each measure (except number of books) across all groups. The flattening of the slope over time and particularly between third and fifth grade coincides with previous research.

Panel A in Figure 1 shows parental educational expectations for their children over time. Overall minority parents have the highest educational expectations for their children at each point in time. Asian parents however have the highest educational expectations for their children compared to all racial/ethnic groups, followed closely by Hispanics. Panel A also shows that over time the racial/ethnic differences in parental educational expectations decrease over time. Finally, overall parents experience a drop in parental expectations by the time their children are in fifth grader with the exception of Asian parents, whose expectations increase.

In Panel B we see that at kindergarten minority parents with the exception of Hispanic parents report higher frequencies of their children reading outside of school than non-Hispanic whites. By the time children are in first grade all minority parents report a decrease in reading outside of school while non-Hispanic white parents report an increase in reading outside of school. When children are in third grade all parents report about the same frequency of children reading outside of school with no significant differences with the exception of Asian and

Hispanic parents. At third grade both Asian and Hispanic parents report a significantly higher frequency of their children reading outside of school than their non-Hispanic white counterparts. When children reach fifth grade there is no significant difference in the frequencies of reading outside of school reported by non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic Black parents or non-Hispanic whites and Hispanic parents. However, Asian parents report significantly higher frequencies of their children reading outside of school than non-Hispanic whites

Parents were asked how many children's books they had in their home including library books. Panel C in Figure 1 shows the change in the number of children's books in the home. At each point in time non-Hispanic white parents have significantly more children's books in their home than all other groups. Non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic parents report having the lowest amount of children's books in their homes at each grade level compared to all other groups. All racial/ethnic groups with the exception of other experience a decrease in the number of children's books in their homes between third and fifth grade.

Finally, parents were asked if they or some other adult in the home had taken the child to the library in the last month. The final Panel in Figure 1 shows the percentage of parents who have taken their child to the library in the past month at each wave. At each point in time Asian parents are more likely than all other parents to have taken their child to the library. While, other parents are the least likely to have taken their child to the library. By the time children are in the fifth grade lower percentages of parents across are racial/ethnic groups report taking their child to the library.

Preliminary Discussion:

There is a massive literature on the affects of parental involvement on a number of childhood outcomes, in particular educational success and behavioral issues. The importance of the role that parental involvement plays in children's academic success has prompted researchers to examine predictors of parental involvement, however much of this research focuses on school involvement. Since we know that home involvement is just as important or even more important some would argue in predicting children's academic success some effort should be focused on understanding parental home involvement as well. This is particularly important from a policy standpoint, as one of the main objects in educational policy is to decrease the racial/ethnic and income gap in children's academic success. Starting in the homes with an already significant predictor of that academic success (i.e. parental home involvement) seems logical.

This paper seeks to fill this gap in the literature by thoroughly examining the predictors of parental home involvement. The variation in the descriptive statistics points to the importance of a multivariate analysis of the predictors of parental home involvement.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for all Independent and Control Variables in the Analysis by Parent's Race/Ethnicity						
	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other	
Panel A:						
Child's Characteristic						
Child's Race/Ethnicity						
Non-Hispanic White	92.84%	0.68% *	4.07% *	3.48% *	7.65% *	
Non-Hispanic Black	0.74%	95.81% *	0.98% *	0.51%	3.58% *	
Hispanic	3.90%	1.44% *	94.60% *	3.54%	22.19% *	
Asian	0.24%	0.24%	0.32%	88.44% *	0.91% *	
Other	2.28%	1.84%	0.02% *	4.03% *	65.68% *	
Child's age (52.47-159.94)	102.10	101.43 *	101.16 *	100.82 *	100.52 *	
Male	51.82%	49.41% *	50.96% *	52.20% *	48.93% *	
Child is a First Time Kindergartner	96.12%	94.41% *	95.22% *	96.18%	96.60%	
Child's Birth Weight						
Low birth weight	0.56%	1.78% *	0.44%	0.00% *	0.15% *	
Moderate birth weight	8.79%	16.54% *	8.98%	10.72% *	9.70%	
Normal birth weight	90.66%	81.69% *	90.58%	89.28%	90.16%	
Panel B:						
Parental Characteristics						
Parental Education						
Less than a High School Diploma	3.62%	12.79% *	24.47% *	7.09% *	7.18% *	
High School Diploma/Vocational/Technical School	27.00%	39.87% *	35.38% *	16.10% *	35.57% *	
Some College	29.25%	31.65% *	24.70% *	21.95% *	36.09% *	
Bachelors Degree and Higher	40.13%	15.69% *	15.45% *	54.86% *	21.16% *	
Parental Employment						
Unemployed	0.97%	4.33% *	1.85% *	1.01%	3.57% *	
Work more than 35 Hours per week	87.84%	75.94% *	83.35% *	89.05%	76.62% *	
Works less than 35 Hours per week	5.85%	8.22% *	6.95% *	5.38%	8.20% *	
Stay at Home	5.35%	11.51% *	7.85% *	4.55%	11.61% *	
Panel C:						
Family Characteristics						
Family Structure						
Two Biological Parent Household	69.54%	31.38% *	65.71% *	86.26% *	50.64% *	
Two Step-parent Household	11.31%	10.05% *	9.97% *	3.08% *	15.34% *	
Single Mother Household	14.29%	47.30% *	20.06% *	9.71% *	21.97% *	
Single Father Household	1.99%	1.52% *	1.54% *	0.59% *	2.36% *	
Adoptive Parent Household	1.51%	2.24% *	0.54% *	0.06% *	2.54% *	
None Parental Household	1.37%	7.51% *	2.18% *	0.31% *	7.16% *	
Family Income						
\$25,000 or less	15.78%	50.44% *	42.75% *	19.94% *	39.12% *	
\$25,001-50,000	31.71%	30.34% *	35.30% *	32.09% *	33.08%	
\$50,001-100,000	36.89%	15.80% *	17.51% *	29.76% *	20.68% *	
\$100,001 or more	15.62%	3.42% *	4.45% *	18.21% *	7.13% *	
Grandparents are Living in the Household	4.87%	14.55% *	9.20% *	13.85% *	15.00% *	
Home Language	98.73%	98.91%	48.13% *	50.40% *	95.83% *	
Number of Siblings (0-12)	1.45	1.65 *	1.65 *	1.64 *	1.90 *	
Number of Other Parents Talked to Regularly (0-99)	3.41	2.17 *	2.83 *	2.77 *	2.86 *	
Barriers to Parental School Involvement (0-8)	1.08	1.35 *	1.39 *	1.35 *	1.32 *	
Panel D:						
School Characteristics						
School Type						
Private Religious	15.22%	6.31% *	7.60% *	9.44% *	6.16% *	
Private	3.99%	2.38% *	1.43% *	6.28% *	7.46% *	
Public	80.79%	91.31% *	90.97% *	84.28% *	86.39% *	
School Outreach to Parents (0-5)	1.98	2.04 *	2.58 *	2.14 *	2.53 *	
50% or more of the Teachers are Minority	11.74%	75.98% *	72.76% *	50.76% *	65.37% *	
Schools composed of 50% or more Minority Students	2.59%	36.99% *	29.00% *	9.47% *	20.96% *	
50% of the Student Body is LEP	0.89%	0.84% *	24.08% *	6.74% *	12.64% *	
Receives Title I Funding	56.42%	80.53% *	75.07% *	53.36% *	73.35% *	
N	7,311	1,548	1,635	607	410	
Stacked Data	29,244	6,192	6,540	2,428	1,640	
Source: ECLS-K Spring of Kindergarten, First, Third and Fifth Grade. The data has been weighted using the base year longitudinal weights.						
*Denotes significance of p<.05.						

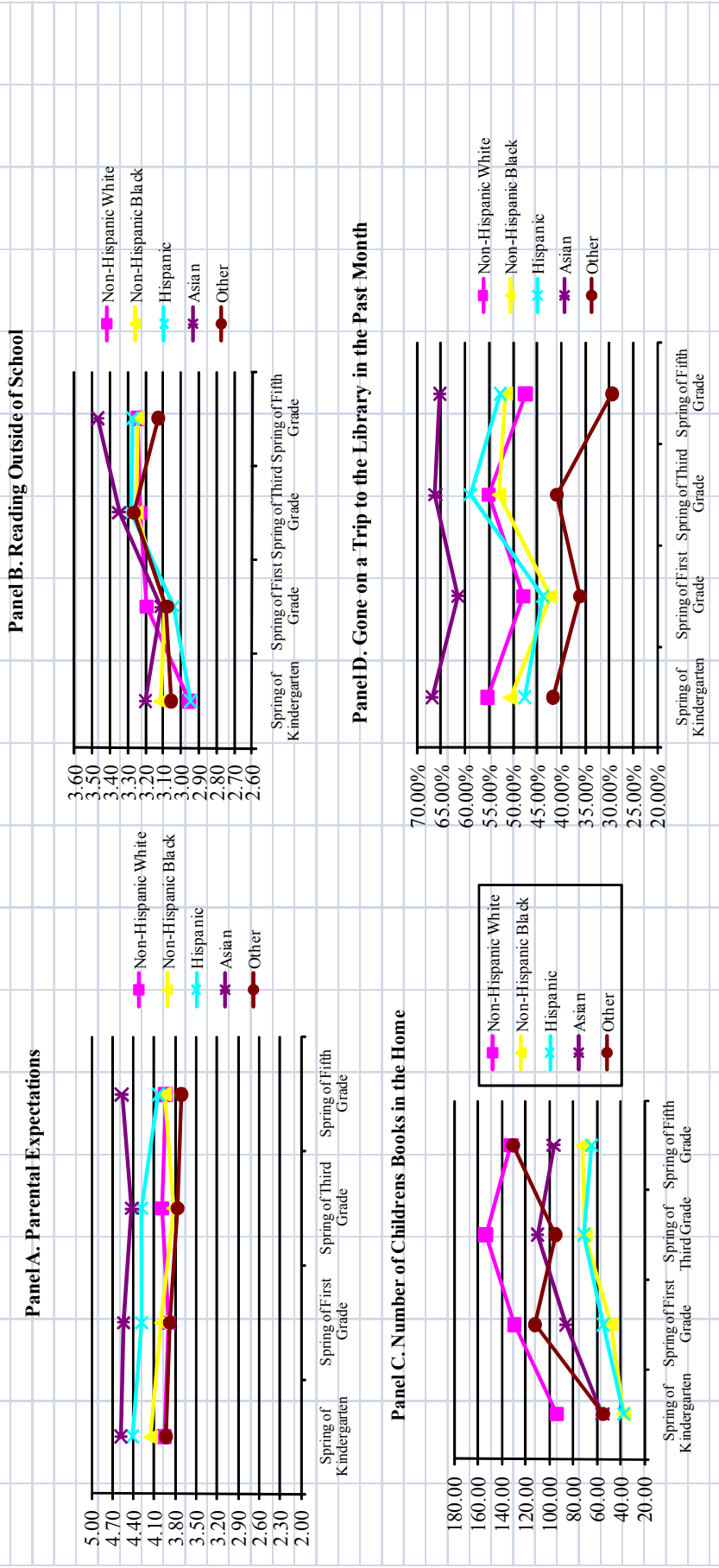
Table 2: Parental Home Involvement Across all Waves of Data by Parent's Race/Ethnicity

	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Parental Expectations (1-6)					
Spring of Kindergarten	3.96	4.15*	4.41*	4.58*	3.93
Spring of First Grade	3.89	4.00*	4.28*	4.54*	3.87
Spring of Third Grade	3.98	3.83*	4.28*	4.42*	3.76*
Spring of Fifth Grade	3.94	3.95	4.05*	4.56*	3.71*
Reading outside of school (1-4)					
Spring of Kindergarten	2.96	3.11*	2.95	3.20*	3.06*
Spring of First Grade	3.19	3.09*	3.04*	3.11*	3.08*
Spring of Third Grade	3.23	3.25	3.28*	3.35*	3.27
Spring of Fifth Grade	3.24	3.25	3.27	3.47*	3.13*
Number of children's books in the home (0-5,000)					
Spring of Kindergarten	93.62	37.81*	37.32*	55.25*	54.46*
Spring of First Grade	129.29	48.17*	54.94*	85.59*	111.88*
Spring of Third Grade	153.40	69.67*	70.85*	109.58*	94.28*
Spring of Fifth Grade	132.04	71.58*	64.11*	96.11*	130.38
Trips to the library					
Spring of Kindergarten	55.32%	50.67%*	47.58%*	66.94%*	41.73%*
Spring of First Grade	47.86%	42.27%*	43.85%*	61.60%*	36.08%*
Spring of Third Grade	55.07%	52.94%*	58.98%*	66.24%*	40.96%*
Spring of Fifth Grade	47.44%	51.54%*	52.77%*	65.21%*	29.32%*

Source: ECLS-K Spring of Kindergarten, First, Third and Fifth Grade. Each wave of data has been weighted using cross sections weights for the wave.

*Denotes significance of $p < .05$ from non-Hispanic whites.

Figure 1: Parental Home Involvement by Parental Race/Ethnicity



Source: ECLS-K Spring of Kindergarten, First, Third and Fifth Grade. Each wave of data has been weighted using cross sections weights for the wave.