

**Predictors of Parent Involvement and their Impact on Access of Postsecondary
Education Facilitators among White and American Indian Parents**

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Abstract

This study examined demographic factors as predictors of parent involvement (engagement with school, support of learning, support of child) among parents of children that attended a school implementing a college access program. The authors also examined whether involvement predicted access of postsecondary education facilitators in parents, when accounting for demographic factors. Results from multiple regression analyses indicated that parent race/ethnicity and income predicted involvement, while education level predicted access of postsecondary education facilitators. However, when including demographic factors, parent involvement was not predictive of access of postsecondary education facilitators.

Keywords: American Indian parents, parental involvement, post-secondary education access

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Counselors and school professionals have long recognized that students benefit from the involvement of parents in their lives. Scholars have written extensively about the relationship between the extent of parent involvement and student success at all levels (Cole-Henderson, 2000; Epstein 2008; Holloway, Yamamoto, Suzuki, & Mindnich, 2008; Jeynes, 2011; Jeynes, 2005). Although data support the positive relationship between parent involvement and school success (Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007; Woolley & Bowen, 2007), parent involvement alone is also an important component of the career exploration process. Trusty (1999) highlighted a positive relationship between parent involvement and postsecondary educational aspirations in 8th graders, with parental involvement levels influencing students' expectations of finishing college six years later. Especially in high school, where strengthening opportunities to learn can impact access to college (Watt, Powell, & Mendiola, 2004), parent involvement becomes essential in facilitating postsecondary education access (King, 2009).

School vs. Home Involvement

Parent involvement was recently conceptualized by Hayes (2011) as parent support that is demonstrated to positively influence the child's academic achievement and school adjustment. This involvement can take many forms. Shumow and Miller (2001) described parental home involvement as those conversations between parent and child that focused on school experiences, while school involvement was conceptualized as parents' availability for contact with the school. Epstein and Sanders (2002) looked at both direct behaviors, such as attending parent teacher conferences,

and indirect behaviors, such as sharing educational expectations with the child.

Research indicates that home involvement had greater impact on academic achievement (VanVoorhis, 2003), while regular parent-child discussions about school and expectations had the greatest impact on educational outcomes of adolescents, including truancy and dropping out (McNeal, 1999). For the purposes of our study, we defined parent involvement as encompassing both home and school involvement, and included both direct and indirect behaviors.

Parent Involvement and Minority Students

While all students benefit from a positive level of parent involvement, minority and low income students appear to show significant gains in college going rates when their parents understand and support their efforts (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). There is general agreement that marginalized students often lack the resources needed to explore and make the transition to college, linking disparities in achievement to an apparent opportunity gap (Berger, 2000; Holzman, 2008; Jalomo, 2000; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). In order to address this disparity, federal initiatives, such as the College Access Challenge Grant Program, provide schools with funds to specifically increase the number of low-income students that access postsecondary education. However, in addition to financial assistance to schools, parent involvement is imperative in addressing the achievement gaps between affluent and white students and their less affluent and minority peers (Slavin & Madden, 2013).

Some research suggests that parental involvement in minority populations is tied to demographic factors. Epstein and Dauber (1993) studied predictors of school and home involvement amongst parents with children in inner-city elementary schools and

found that education level was related to school and home involvement with parents with higher education levels reporting higher involvement in both settings. Home involvement was found to be more predictive of educational expectations from homes with lower SES, but school involvement was more positively predictive in homes with high SES (Trusty, 1998).

Such findings seem to support Lareau's (1989) assertion that parental involvement effects are magnified by the cultural capital of parents, with parental involvement by members of the upper class magnifying effects for white and more affluent students. While there has been some awareness of the importance of research on parent involvement with minority and disadvantaged students, much of the research has focused on underprivileged African American students (Jeynes, 2005). There is a marked paucity of research on American Indian parents, or studies evaluating postsecondary readiness in schools with high percentages of American Indian students (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

Minority and low-income parents have not always felt welcomed in schools, which has hindered their ability to support their children's school experience (Lott, 2001). Specifically, American Indian families may carry long-held distrust of schools related to a traumatic history of forced boarding school experiences. Reyhner and Eder state that "schools...are alien institutions as far as Indian cultures are concerned" (2004, p. 167), highlighting the cultural dissonance of a European-centric model of education. Indeed, feeling unwelcomed or intimidated at their children's' school, along with negative experiences with education have been identified as a factors that discourage American Indian parent involvement (Mackety & Linder-VanBerschot, 2008). Negative

educational experiences are especially impactful given that American Indian students graduate high school at a much lower rate (65%) compared to their White counterparts (84%), resulting in a sizable gap in educational attainment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

College Access Factors in American Indian Students

Not only do American Indian students represent less than 1% of all enrolled students at the postsecondary level, Ross et al. (2012) report college going rates for American Indian students are declining (24% in 2010 vs. 33% in 1980). Poor academic preparation and skills prior to college, an overwhelming sense of isolation, unrealistic or unplanned career goals and lack of counseling (or counseling from the dominant Euro-centric perspective) have all been identified as barriers for American Indian students who pursue postsecondary education (Guillory, 2009). On the other hand, precollege academic preparation, family support, financial support, exposure to colleges and vocations, and responsive, culturally-sensitive student-support services have been noted as facilitators to college access (Barnhardt, 1994; Brown & Robinson Kurpius, 1997; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003).

One essential person in bridging opportunity and cultural gaps in schools, and providing culturally-competent services is the professional school counselor (Erford, 2014). School counselors are expected to address the academic, career, and personal-social needs of all students, while also advocating for minority student needs (American School Counselor Association, 2012). Unfortunately, a recent survey indicates that only 29% of American Indian 9th graders have access to a school counselor providing

postsecondary education services, as compared to the national average of 48% (Ross et al., 2012).

The researchers sought to examine parent demographic factors (race, gender, education level, and income) as predictors of parent involvement among parents of children that attended a school with a college access program. We also explored the relationship between parent involvement and access to postsecondary education facilitators. We hypothesized that demographic factors would predict levels of parental involvement, with increases in income positively predicting school involvement. We also predicted that parental involvement would predict access to postsecondary education facilitators.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The authors contacted all 44 schools in a Midwestern state that were implementing a college access program. School counselors in those schools were directed to forward an online survey to parents of students that were in the postsecondary education-planning phase. Parents completed the survey regarding their engagement in their child's schooling, the extent to which they supported their child at home, and their access of postsecondary education facilitators. Although 598 parents completed the survey, list-wise deletion due to missing data reduced the number to 482 respondents (sample sizes for the specific tests may vary as a function of missing data for individual variables). Responses represented 37 of the 44 schools implementing a college access program. Among the 482 respondents to the survey, 77% were female and 21% were male (2% did not indicate gender). Slightly over half (50.2%) identified as

Caucasian. American Indian was the next largest race/ethnicity category, with 37.3% identifying as American Indian. The remaining participants identified as multiple race (2.7%), Asian/Pacific Islander (1.6%), Hispanic (1.04%), and African American (0.6%).

Nearly 25% of the responding parents (24.9%) had graduated from college with 27% having attained one to three years of postsecondary education, 8% a graduate degree, and 6% some graduate education. Almost 20% (19.7%) had a high school diploma and 6% had attained less than a high school degree. Combined family income ranges for participants were distributed with 18% making \$24,999 per year or less, 33% reporting earning \$25,000-\$49,999 per year, 17% earning \$50,000 to \$74,999 per year, 10% earning \$75,000-\$99,000 per year, and 9% earning \$100,000 or more per year.

Measures

In order to measure parental involvement, we utilized survey questions from the Harvard Graduate School of Education PreK-12 Parent Survey, distributed through SurveyMonkey. Although the survey is composed of a set of seven subscales to assess family–school relationships, for the purpose of this study we only utilized items from the parental support (how much help students are getting at home) and parental engagement (how engaged parents are in their child’s schooling at school and at home) subscales. Questions for the Harvard Graduate School of Education PreK-12 Parent Survey were developed through an extensive process that included a review of the literature and focus group interviews of diverse parent groups regarding their relationship with their children’s schools in order to identify key aspects of the constructs. Items selected for each subscale were composed through incorporating literature findings and focus group data. Following wording of survey items, the

developers employed an expert review procedure with scholars and practitioners and cognitive pretesting with parents to garner additional feedback for further fine-tuning (Schueler, 2013; Schueler, Capotosto, Bahena, McIntyle, & Gehlbach, 2014).

In our study, questions pertaining to various forms of parental involvement were measured with 10 items. Principal components analysis was conducted to reduce the number of involvement items to a smaller number of composite variables, components. A promax (oblique) rotation was used because it was likely that the resulting components would be related. Three components met the Kaiser criterion, and accounted for 61.02% of the total variance (see Table 1). The three components comprised three types of involvement: Parent Engagement with School (e.g., “How often do you meet in person with teachers at your child’s school?”), Parent Support of Child at Home (e.g., “How often do you and your child talk when he or she is having a problem with others?”), and Parent Support of Learning at Home (e.g., “How often do you help your child understand the content he or she is learning in school?”). Component scores were created by averaging responses across items. One item loaded on both Parent Engagement with School and Support of Learning. It was retained in both component scores. Correlations among all variables are reported in Table 2.

Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators was measured with 4 questions that were derived from a review of literature pertaining to the most common facilitators of postsecondary education preparation. These included parental knowledge of financial aid options, scholarships, high school classes, and FAFSA completion, (Table 1). The questions were averaged to create a single Access of Postsecondary Education

Table 1*Loading Matrix (Factor Structure) From Principal Components Analyses*

Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators	1-component Solution	2-component Solution	
	Readiness	1	2
Do you know if financial aid is available to your child?	0.78	0.62	0.65
Do you know if scholarships are available to your child?	0.79	0.77	0.47
Do you know what classes your child needs to take in high school to prepare for postsecondary education?	0.59	0.79	
Have you completed the FAFSA?	0.57		0.88

Parent Involvement	3-component Solution		
	Parent Engagement with School	Parent Support of Child	Parents Support of Learning
Discuss school with other parents	0.65		
Communicate with school about learning at home	0.68		0.53
Help at school	0.78		
Meet in person with teachers	0.80		
Visit school	0.84		
Talk with child when problems with others		0.70	
Know how child is doing socially		0.76	
Ability to make sure school meets child's needs		0.75	
Help child learn for self			0.82
Help child understand content			0.83
Coefficient Alpha	0.81	0.59	0.64

Note. All loadings of .40 or greater are reported; $N = 401$.

Facilitators component, supported with a principal components analysis using promax rotation (see Table 1). One component met the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1), was supported by the scree plot, consisted of factor loadings all greater than .50, and accounted for almost 50% of the variance (47.9%). In contrast a 2-

component solution accounted for 68.6% of the total variance, but two of the four items loaded on both components. For reliability, parsimony and interpretation, one component was selected (Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators coefficient alpha = .63).

Table 2
Correlations Among Variables in Mediation Model

Parental						
	Income	Education	Engagement with School	Support of Child	Support of Learning	Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators
Mean	2.64	15.38	2.87	3.80	3.23	1.40
(SD)	(1.52)	(2.35)	(0.93)	(0.69)	(0.83)	(0.50)
Means (SDs) by Parent Race						
American Indian (N = 167)	2.14 (1.38)	15.14 (2.32)	2.98 (0.95)	3.81 (0.74)	3.56 (0.78)	1.35 (0.51)
White (N = 214)	3.03 (1.52)	15.57 (2.36)	2.78 (0.90)	3.80 (0.65)	2.98 (0.77)	1.45 (0.48)
Correlations						
Parent Race ^a	0.29***	0.09	-0.11*	-0.01	-0.35***	0.10
Parent Sex ^b	0.18***	0.08	0.02	-0.09	0.034	-0.02
Child Sex ^b	0.002	0.08	0.10*	-0.11*	0.002	-0.04
Income		0.23***	0.09	-0.04	-0.12*	0.10*
Education			0.10*	-0.04	-0.04	0.18***
Parental Engagement with School				0.21***	0.61***	0.12*
Support of Child					0.31***	0.11*
Support of Learning						0.03

Note. Correlations with race/ethnicity and sex variables were point-biserial correlations.

^aAmerican Indian coded 0, White coded 1; ^bmale coded 1. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, $N = 381$.

Analyses

Data were imported from SurveyMonkey to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18 and examined prior to analysis. We predicted a model in which parent and family characteristics indirectly predicted access of postsecondary education facilitators for students to pursue higher education through parent involvement (see Figure 1). This mediation model was tested following the guidelines of Baron and Kenny (1986).

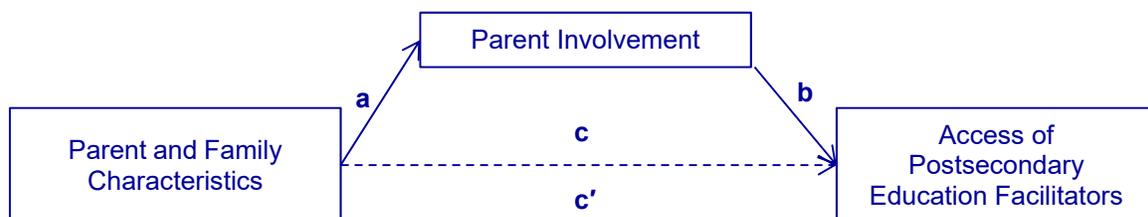


Figure 1. Proposed mediation model of family readiness for teenage children to pursue higher education. Path c is predicted to be significant without controlling for the mediator (Parental Involvement), but non-significant (c') when taking the mediator into account.

Categorical variables (parent and child sex and race/ethnicity) were dummy coded with female and American Indian as reference categories. Because parent and child race/ethnicity were so highly related, only parent race was included in analyses. Due to the small numbers of participants of Black, Asian, Hispanic and multiple races/ethnicities, these categories were not included in analyses.

Results

Path c

The first step in the mediation analysis was to determine if parent and family characteristics actually predict Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators (path c). Parent and family characteristics included race/ethnicity of the parent, parent and child

sex, parental education and income. Results of a multiple regression analysis confirmed that parent and family characteristics (parent race, parent sex, child sex, income, parent education) significantly predicted Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators, $R^2 = .04$ $F(5, 375) = 3.41$, $MSE = 0.24$, $p = .005$. However, the only significant unique predictor of Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators was parent education level (Table 3).

Path a

The next step was to confirm that characteristics of parents and families would predict parent involvement (path a in Figure 1). An omnibus multivariate linear model with parent and family characteristics predicting all three parent involvement components was conducted. This was followed by three multiple regressions, one for

Table 3

Tests of Paths c, c' and b: Results of Regression Analysis of Parent and Family Characteristics on Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators With and Without the Mediator

Path c	β	p
Parent Race ^a	0.06	0.24
Parent Sex ^b	-0.04	0.41
Child Sex ^b	-0.04	0.44
Income	0.06	0.30
Education	0.16	0.002

Paths b and c': Including the Mediator of Parent Involvement		
Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators	β	p
Engagement with School	0.12	0.08
Support of Child	0.10	0.06
Support of Learning	-0.04	0.58
Parent Race	0.07	0.24
Parent Sex	-0.03	0.55

Paths b and c': Including the Mediator of Parent Involvement

Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators	β	p
Child Sex	-0.04	0.44
Income	0.04	0.43
Education	0.16	0.003

Note. $N = 381$.

^aAmerican Indian coded 0, White coded 1; ^bmale coded 1.

each of the three parent involvement components. Overall, parent race/ethnicity, child sex, and income significantly predicted parent involvement, in the multivariate model (see Table 4). Of these, parent race/ethnicity represented the strongest effect.

Table 4

Tests for Path a: Results of Multivariate Analysis and Multiple Regressions Predicting Parent Involvement From Family Characteristics

Multivariate Analysis

Predictor	Wilks' λ	$F(3, 374)$	p	η^2
Parent Race (compared to American Indian)	0.87	18.60	<0.001	0.13
Parent Sex	0.98	2.16	0.09	0.02
Child Sex	0.97	3.70	0.01	0.03
Income	0.97	3.74	0.01	0.03
Education	0.99	1.35	0.26	0.01

Regression Analyses

Engagement With School, $R^2 = .04$, $F(5, 376) = 3.24$, $MSE = .84$, $p = .007$	β	p
Parent Race ^a	-0.15	0.006
Parent Sex ^b	-0.02	0.72
Child Sex ^b	0.08	0.12
Income	0.12	0.03
Education	0.07	0.16

Support of Child, R2 = .02, F(5, 376) = 1.68, MSE = .47, p = .14		
	β	p
Parent Race	-0.01	0.79
Parent Sex	-0.08	0.15
Child Sex	-0.11	0.04
Income	-0.02	0.74
Education	-0.02	0.64
Support of Learning, R2 = .13, F(5, 376) = 11.99, MSE = .61, p < .001		
	β	p
Parent Race	-0.35	<0.001
Parent Sex	0.05	0.29
Child Sex	-0.04	0.47
Support of Learning, R2 = .13, F(5, 376) = 11.99, MSE = .61, p < .001		
	β	p
Income	-0.03	0.56
Education	-0.008	0.88

Note. N = 382.

^aAmerican Indian coded 0, White coded 1; ^bmale coded 1.

The multivariate analysis was followed by three multiple regressions – one for each parent involvement component (see Table 4) – to illuminate how parent and family characteristics differentially predicted each type of involvement. The overall models predicting Parent Engagement with School and Support of Learning, but not Parent Support of Child, were statistically significant. Parent race and income predicted Parent Engagement with school. Specifically, American Indian parents reported more involvement than White parents. As income increased, so did Engagement with School. With regard to Parent Support of Learning, American Indian parents reported more involvement than White parents.

Path b

The third step was to confirm that parent involvement predicted Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators, when accounting for parent and family

characteristics. To address the research question, we conducted a multiple regression with the three parental involvement components (Engagement with School, Support of Child, and Learning) predicting Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators, controlling for parent and family characteristics (parent race, parent sex, child sex, income, and parent education). Overall, the model was significant, $R^2 = .06$, $F(8, 372) = 3.23$, $MSE = 0.24$, $p = .001$. However, examination of beta weights revealed that parent involvement was not significantly predictive of Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators, when parent and family characteristics were included in the model (see Table 3).

Path c'

Furthermore, Baron and Kenny (1986) include a fourth step – that the relationship between parent and family characteristics and Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators be non-significant when the mediator (parent involvement) is accounted for. Beta weights in Table 3 revealed that parent education is still a significant predictor. In fact, the beta weights for parent and family variables do not noticeably change in magnitude when controlling for involvement.

Taken together, the tests of paths b and c do not support a mediation model. These results suggest that parent and family characteristics are predictive of both Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators and Parent Involvement. Parent educational level predicts Access of Postsecondary Facilitators. In bivariate correlations Engagement with School significantly correlated with Access of Postsecondary Education Facilitators, but not when parent and family characteristics were taken into account in a multiple regression (see beta weights in Table 3). Parents with more

education are accessing postsecondary education facilitators to assist their children in attending higher education.

Parent involvement also seems to be a function of parent and family characteristics. Specifically, American Indian parents reported higher Engagement with School than White parents. Parents with higher incomes also reported greater school involvement. Parent race/ethnicity was also important for involvement with learning. American Indian parents reported more involvement in their child's learning than other parents. Parents of male children reported lower involvement with their child than parents of female children.

Discussion

Parent involvement is critical in preparing students to be career ready upon graduation (Gysbers, 2013). Hoover-Dempsey and Saunders (1997) emphasized that there must be the sense by parents of being "invited" into the educational process from both the child and the school in order to facilitate engagement. It would appear from our findings that parents of lower socioeconomic status may need to feel this invitation even more explicitly. Schools may need to find ways to allow all parents to be involved while also recognizing that certain logistical barriers may inhibit some individuals' ability to participate through more traditional methods. Scheduling events at times that allow for the greatest participation, providing childcare during meetings, holding parent-child centered conferences, and other creative ideas may need to be utilized. School counselors play an important role in educating parents on how to provide support to their students, and being sensitive to contextual factors when communicating and

developing informational materials for parents is key (Raque-Bogdan, Klingaman, Martin, & Lucas, 2013).

Our results indicated that parents with more education are better accessing the postsecondary education facilitators to assist their children in attending postsecondary education. Juang and Vondracek (2001) found that children were more likely to go on to some type of postsecondary education when their parents held higher educational expectations for them, while Schmidt-Wilson (2013) reported that parents of higher SES also held higher expectations for their children's educational attainment. Parents need knowledge of the postsecondary planning process in order to best guide their child, and not having had access to those postsecondary experiences themselves may be a significant barrier. Involving parents who lack personal college experiences in the student's postsecondary decision-making, or inviting them to participate in a supportive role in goal-setting, may provide them with concrete activities of how to facilitate interactions that overcome existing barriers (Raque-Bogdan et al., 2013).

Implications for School Counselors

Esptein and Van Voorhis (2010) content that school counselors should be spending one fifth of their time in strengthening family and community engagement. High school counselors especially, given their emphasis on career education, advocacy, developing relationships, and cultural competency, are in a key position to lead school efforts to facilitate parent involvement and college access for underrepresented students. Sharing information about financial aid is especially important for lower SES families, as the rising costs of college attendance can be perceived as a roadblock by many families (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). Our findings suggest that

regardless of the level of parental involvement, parent characteristics such as education still accounted for the degree parents were accessing postsecondary education facilitators. This highlights the necessity for school counselors to be sensitive to parent and family characteristics when providing academic planning and career counseling services to students and parents. Schools could benefit from exploring multiple avenues to engage parental involvement and may need to further encourage students to communicate with their parents about the process.

Although very few studies have assessed levels of parental involvement among American Indian parents, there is some research that suggests educators working in schools with 25% or greater enrollment of American Indian students identify lack of parental involvement as a serious problem (Freeman & Fox, 2005). Our results, however, indicated that American Indian parents themselves reported higher involvement (parental support of learning) when compared to that reported by White parents, as well as higher engagement with their children's school. Despite barriers American Indian parents may be facing, this finding has implications for counselors and other professionals working in schools with American Indian student populations. Approaching all parents with the invitation to be involved without preconceived notions of their involvement capacity or interest, in whatever manner best fits their individual circumstances, can benefit the school community as a whole and individual students as well. Indeed, research suggests that American Indian parents identify supportive and communicative school staff, as well as the presence of an advocate, as factors that encourage parent involvement (Mackety & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2008). Viewing parent involvement in the context of school-family-community partnerships may better

encompass the multidimensional nature of parent involvement (Epstein, 2001), especially given the unique and rich cultural identities of American Indian parents.

Limitations and Conclusion

One of the main limitations of this study was the use of a convenience volunteer sample. We asked school counselors who were implementing a college access program in a specific state, to forward our survey to parents, causing unknown selection biases and limiting generalizability. Given the Internet survey nature of the research, it was impossible to determine if there were any differences between parents who accepted the request for completing the survey and those that did not. It is also important to note that this study used exclusively self-report measures and that social desirability may have influenced responses.

Although sample sizes for the specific tests reported varied as a function of missing data for individual variables, utilizing listwise deletion avoided the inherent bias with mean substitution and regression imputation techniques for missing data. However, losing the data from the deleted cases poses limitations of its own. Although the number of the resultant sample was adequate to derive statistical power for the methods utilized, removal of participants could have implications for the generalizability of the results as the remaining cases may not be representative of the population.

Another limitation includes instrumentation. Although the development of items for the Harvard Graduate School of Education PreK-12 Parent Survey included a rigorous process (Schueler, 2013; Schueler, Capotosto, Bahena, McIntyle, & Gehlbach, 2014), this is a new instrument that lacks published psychometric data. Although internal consistency and overall reliability results from our sample suggest adequate to

strong reliability to measure different components of parental involvement, the survey would benefit from further replication and examination.

These limitations notwithstanding, the present study indicated that family characteristics may be important factors in understanding both parent involvement and access of postsecondary education facilitators. Given that our sample had a large number of American Indian parents, our findings provide support that American Indian parents perceive themselves as active participants in their children's education, while potentially highlighting the role that demographic factors (e.g. education) play in the access of postsecondary education facilitators, regardless of involvement levels. Future research that illuminates successful school strategies for overcoming barriers that may impede parent involvement and access of postsecondary education facilitators can add important findings to the literature. Qualitative studies that explore the approaches of American Indian parents accessing postsecondary education facilitators, as well as school counselors providing culturally and family-focused postsecondary education planning services, can be useful resources for schools that want to tap into the power parents can have in their children's success.

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