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**Joyce Pollard, Director,
Institutional Communications
(512) 476-6861
jpollard@sedl.org
www.sedl.org**

Parents Are Always Part of the Equation, Even at High School

August 4, 2003—Austin, Texas—As children get older, parents hear it more often, “I can do my homework on my own,” or “You don’t need to check my work.” Yet, as much as youngsters ask for their independence when completing schoolwork, recent research suggests parent involvement continues to be as important as it was during the earlier grades.

The expectations and types of family involvement in middle and secondary schools, however, are different from those of elementary school. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) describes how parents can continue to be involved in their children’s education, from early childhood to high school. This issue is discussed in SEDL’s publication, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, a synthesis of more than 50 studies on effective strategies to connect schools, families and community members.

“In the last 20 years, the amount of research conducted on parent involvement in middle and high school and on how parent involvement shifts as children grow older has increased,” says Catherine Jordan, director of SEDL’s National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools. “There is a growing body of research about effective practice at schools, including studies on how high-performing schools engage families in improving student achievement and in making schools better.”

A major finding is that parent involvement in high school not only differs from involvement in elementary schools, but it also depends much more on support provided by the school. For example, when school staff members contacted parents about these opportunities, parents were more likely to

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- attend planning workshops about college and employment opportunities for their children.
- volunteer at school activities.
- work more often with their teenagers on homework.
- talk more often with their teenagers about school.

Parents also influence their children's attendance, behavior, and desire to stay in school and pursue higher education. The research studies also identify several ways that schools can assist families in supporting their children's education:

- Engage families in what their children are learning.
- Give families a voice in what happens to their children.
- Assist families in helping their children at home, determining what they need to learn, and planning for college, postsecondary education and a career.
- Promote social connections among families and with teachers.
- Build families' understanding of the education system and ways to guide their children through it successfully.
- Offer access to social services and community agencies for families in need.

Although some parents assume their involvement matters less as children get older—and they may feel they get messages from their own children and their children's schools that underscore this belief—research suggests parental involvement continues to influence student achievement and attitudes through middle and high school.

SEDL is an Austin-based nonprofit corporation that operates research, development, and dissemination programs focused on improving school performance; strengthening reading, language, mathematics, and science education; integrating technology into teaching and learning; involving family and community in student learning; connecting disability research to practice; and supporting policy development through research.

