

## Parent Involvement and Student Achievement

### What Does Research Tell Us About the Influence of Parental Involvement on Student Achievement?

#### The evidence is now beyond dispute:

When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life. In fact, the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's family is able to:

1. Create a home environment that encourages learning;
  2. Express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers;
  3. Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community (1:1).
- Henderson (1:23-152) reviewed 66 studies involving parent involvement and student achievement and found that, when parents are involved in their children's education at home they do better in school. When parents are involved at school, their children go farther in school and the schools they go to are better.
  - Using data from a nationally representative sample of 21,814 students and their parents participating in the National Education Longitudinal Study (2), Keith, et. al., concluded that "parental involvement has a powerful effect on eighth graders' achievement" and that although its effect was slightly stronger in math and social studies, it was a powerful influence on student success in all subject areas (3:490).

#### Student achievement improves in a home environment which encourages learning.

- Walberg (4:399) concluded from an analysis of over 2,500 studies on learning that an academically stimulating home environment is one of the chief determinants of learning. From these studies, Walberg selected 29 which were conducted during the last decade. He found commonalities which he called a "curriculum of the home" (4:400) which has an average effect on achievement that is twice as large as family socioeconomic status (SES). This curriculum includes informed parent-child conversations about everyday events, encouragement and discussion of leisure reading, monitoring and joint analysis of televiewing, deferral of immediate gratification to achieve long-range goals, expressions of affection, and interest in children's academic and personal growth.
- Sattes (5:2), from a review of 30 studies on the connection between family background and school achievement, concluded that parent involvement factors such as reading to children, having books available, taking trips, guiding TV watching, and providing stimulating experiences contribute to school achievement. "The fact that family SES is related to school achievement doesn't mean that rich kids are born smarter. It means that, in more affluent families, children are more likely to be exposed to experiences that stimulate intellectual development."

#### Student achievement improves when parents express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers.

- Reynolds, et. al., (6) found that the most consistent predictors of children's academic achievement and social adjustment were parent expectations of their child's educational attainment and satisfaction with their child's education at school. Data for this finding were collected from the sixth year evaluation of the "Longitudinal Study of Children at Risk," an ongoing study of low-income, minority children in the Chicago public schools.
- Clark (7:85-105) drew a sample of 1,141 high- and low-achieving third-graders from 71 Los Angeles elementary schools and analyzed parental data gathered through questionnaires. He found that parents of the high-achieving students set higher standards for their children's educational activities than parents of low-achieving students.

### **Student achievement improves when parents become involved in their children's education at school and in the community.**

Recent research has shown that, particularly for students who have reached high school, the type of parent involvement that has the most impact on student performance requires their direct participation in school activities (8).

- Steinberg's (8) three-year study of 12,000 students in nine high schools revealed that the following types of parent involvement draw parents into the schools physically and are most effective in improving academic achievement: attending school programs, extracurricular activities, conferences, and 'back to school' nights. It was concluded that "When parents come to school regularly, it reinforces the view in the child's mind that school and home are connected-and that school is an integral part of the whole family's life (8)."
- Eagle (9:12) analyzed data from a High School and Beyond national survey of 11,227 participants who were high school seniors in 1980 and participated in a follow-up survey in 1986. She studied the effects upon student achievement of a number of family background factors and concluded that, when SES is controlled, "parent involvement during high school" had the most significant positive impact upon student achievement of the factors studied.
- Snow (10) in her two-year study of home and school influences on literacy achievement among children from low-income families, found that the single variable most positively connected to all literacy skills was formal involvement in parent-school activities such as PTA participation, attending school activities, and serving as a volunteer.
- From their survey of 2,317 inner-city elementary- and middle-school parents, Dauber and Epstein (11:61) found that the strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at school and at home are the specific school programs and teacher practices that encourage parent involvement at school and guide parents in how to help their children at home.

### **Student achievement improves when parents are enabled to play four key roles in their children's learning.**

- As **teachers**, parents create a home environment that promotes learning, reinforces what is being taught at school, and develops the life skills children need to become responsible adults.
- As **supporters**, parents contribute their knowledge and skills to the school, enriching the curriculum, and providing extra services and support to students .
- As **advocates**, parents help children negotiate the system and receive fair treatment, and work to make the system more responsive to all families.
- As **decision-makers**, parents serve on advisory councils, curriculum committees, and management teams, participating in joint problem-solving at every level (1:15).

### **Characteristics of Families Whose Children Are Doing Well in School**

Henderson (1:9) observed from her 1994 review of current literature that families whose children are doing well in school exhibit the following seven characteristics:

#### **Establish a daily family routine**

Examples: Providing time and a quiet place to study, assigning responsibility for household chores, being firm about times to get up and go to bed, having dinner together (1:9).

- From her analysis of data collected through a large national survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics, Eagle (9:12 ) identified "providing a place to study" as one of three family

characteristics which were significantly related to student achievement.

### **Monitor out-of-school activities**

Examples: Setting limits on TV watching, checking up on children when parents are not home, arranging for after-school activities and supervised care (1:9).

- Data from The 27th (1995) Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools (12:54,55) indicates that parents may already be involved in monitoring some of their children's important out-of-school activities:

95% said that during the past school year they made sure that homework assigned to their children was completed;

94% said that they defined limits on the amount of TV any of their children could watch.

- Keith, et. al., (3:487) concluded that homework and time spent watching TV during the week are intervening or mediating variables which can be under the control of parents and are, therefore, means through which parental involvement may affect learning directly. They also found that students who spend more time on homework watch less TV during the week; this additional time spent on homework, in turn, increases student achievement (3:488).

### **Model the value of learning, self-discipline, and hard work**

Examples: Communicating through questioning and conversation, demonstrating that achievement comes from working hard, using reference materials and the library (1:9).

- Caplan, et. al., (13:39) studied the family characteristics of Vietnamese, Laotian, and Chinese-Vietnamese children who emigrated to the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The researchers identified several significant family practices that are both embedded in the Southeastern-Asian cultural heritage and related to high achievement:

"Love of learning" was rated most often by both parents and students as the factor accounting for academic success.

The families emphasized education as the key to social acceptance and economic success.

Relative equality between the sexes, both among parents and children, was one of the strongest predictors of high GPAs. In households where fathers and boys helped with family chores, grades were significantly higher.

The families believed strongly in their potential to master their own destiny, not that luck or fate determines success.

### **Express high but realistic expectations for achievement**

Examples: Setting goals and standards that are appropriate for children's age and maturity, recognizing and encouraging special talents, informing friends and family about successes (1:9). (See supporting research references on page 2.)

### **Encourage children's development and progress in school**

Examples: Maintaining a warm and supportive home, showing interest in children's progress at school, helping with homework, discussing the value of a good education and possible career options, staying in touch with teachers and school staff (1:9).

- Rumberger, et. al., (14:295), in a study of family influences on dropout behavior, found that parents of high school dropouts were less engaged in their children's schooling than were the parents of students who did not drop out prior to graduation. Variables studied included parent attendance at parental school activities

(e.g., PTA meetings and open house programs), attendance at student school activities (e.g., athletic events and drama and music productions) helping with homework, and total number of contacts with the school.

- Fehrmann, et. al., (15:337) concluded from their analysis of data collected from the High School and Beyond study cited above that "Parents might well help their high school children achieve higher grades through monitoring their daily activities, by keeping close track of how they are doing in school, and by working closely with their students concerning planning for post-high school pursuits.
- The same authors (15:335) observed that, "given the results indicating the important influence of homework on grades, a more focused parent involvement aimed at encouraging students to spend more time on homework might well lead indirectly to higher grades."

### **Encourage reading, writing, and discussions among family members**

Examples: Reading, listening to children read, and talking about what is being read; discussing the day over dinner; telling stories and sharing problems; writing letters, lists, and messages (1:9).

- The California English-Language Arts Framework (16:4) envisions ". . . a home environment where parents model effective listening, speaking, reading, and writing and offer appropriate help with their children's homework."
- Dornbusch, et. al., (17:1245 ff) tested a theory adapted from one originally formulated by Baumrind (1971) that adolescents' school performance is influenced by the parenting style of their parents. Three parenting styles were compared: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. Authoritarian parents provide advice and tell children that their parents are correct and should not be questioned; they discourage verbal give-and-take with their children. Permissive parents tend to be uninvolved with their child's education; they also seldom participate in give-and-take communication with their children. Authoritative parents encourage open, give-and-take communication and encourage the child's independence and individuality. Using a large (N=7,836) sample of high school students, Dornbusch found that authoritative parenting was positively correlated with good grades, while there was a strong negative correlation between both authoritarian and permissive parenting and good grades (significant at the .001 level of confidence). Parent involvement in their children's education appears to be enhanced by the open, give-and-take communication used by authoritative parents in such activities as family reading, writing, and discussions.
- Through her analysis of the previously referenced High School and Beyond national survey, Eagle (9:12 ) found "reading to the student in early childhood" to be one of the three characteristics of family backgrounds significantly related to student achievement.
- Previously cited research on recently emigrated Southeastern-Asian families Caplan, et. al., (13:39) found that in almost half of the random sample of 200 families studied, the parents read aloud to their children, either in English or their native language; students from those families earned significantly higher grades.

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