

# Selected Parent Involvement Research

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- Studies find that students with involved parents are more likely to:
  1. earn higher grades and test scores,
  2. pass their classes, earn credits and be promoted,
  3. attend school regularly,
  4. have better social skills, show good behavior and adapt well to school,
  5. graduate and go on to further education<sup>1</sup>
- In schools where teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents, test scores grew at a rate 40 percent higher than in schools where reported low levels of outreach to parents.<sup>2</sup>
- Studies that compared levels of parent involvement found that student achievement increased directly with the extent to which parents were engaged in the program.<sup>3</sup>
- Programs that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement.<sup>4</sup>
- Ongoing family involvement at home appears to protect children as they progress through school. The more families support their children's learning and educational progress, the more their children tend to do well in school and continue their education.<sup>5</sup>
- Families from all cultural backgrounds, education, and income levels can encourage their children, talk with them about school, help them plan for higher education, and keep them focused on learning and homework. All families can have a positive influence on their children's learning.<sup>6</sup>
- Parent involvement programs that are effective in engaging diverse families recognize, respect, and address cultural and class differences.<sup>7</sup>
- Parent and community involvement that is focused on student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement. To be effective, involvement should be focused on improving achievement and be designed to engage families and students in developing specific knowledge and skills.<sup>8</sup>
- Programs that are successful at involving families and the community are those that invite involvement, are welcoming, and address specific parent and community needs.<sup>9</sup>
- Effective programs to engage families and community embrace a philosophy of partnership. The responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise among parents, school staff, and community members.<sup>10</sup>

- Simple programs such as weekly homework assignments in which students engage their parents are linked to improved grades for elementary and middle school students.<sup>11</sup>
- Families with high achieving students reported more time engaged in home learning than families with low achievers.<sup>12</sup>
- The research 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.<sup>13</sup>
- Parent involvement research can now document:

**These benefits for students:**

1. Higher grades and test scores
2. Better attendance and more homework done
3. Fewer placements in special education
4. More positive attitudes and behavior
5. Higher graduation rates
6. Greater enrollment in postsecondary education

**These benefits for parents:**

1. More confidence in the school
2. Teachers have higher opinions of parents and higher expectations of their children, too
3. Greater confidence in themselves as parents and in their ability to help their children learn at home
4. Greater likelihood that the parents will enroll in continuing education to advance their own schooling.

**These benefits for schools and communities:**

1. Improved teacher morale
2. Higher ratings of teachers by parents
3. More support from families

4. Higher student achievement
  5. Better reputations in the community.<sup>14</sup>
- When parents are involved in their children's education at home, their children do better in school. When parents are involved at school, their children go farther in school, and the schools they go to are better.<sup>15</sup>
  - Here are seven key research facts we should know based on some of the most important research findings about parent involvement:
    1. **The family provides** the child's primary educational environment.
    2. **Involving parents** in their children's formal education improves student achievement.
    3. **Parent involvement** is most effective when it is comprehensive, long-lasting, and well-planned.
    4. **The benefits** are not confined to early childhood or the elementary level; there are strong effects from involving parents continuously throughout high school.
    5. **Involving parents** in their own children's education at home is not enough. To ensure the quality of schools as institutions serving the community, parents must be involved at all levels in the school.
    6. **Children from** low-income and minority families have the most to gain when schools involve parents. Parents do not have to be well-educated to help.
    7. **We cannot look** at the school and the home in isolation from one another; we must see how they interconnect with each other and with the world at large.<sup>16</sup>
  - School initiated activities to help parents change the home environment can have a strong influence on children's school performance<sup>17</sup>
  - School activities to develop and maintain partnerships with families decline with each grade level, and drop dramatically at the transition to the middle grades.<sup>18</sup>
  - When there is a strong component of parent involvement in school programs, students perform better than in programs with less parent involvement.<sup>19</sup>
  - Teachers report that their lives are made easier if they get help from parents, and involved parents tend to have more positive views of teachers.<sup>20</sup>
  - Parent involvement leads to feelings of ownership, resulting in increased support of schools and willingness to pay taxes to support schools.<sup>21</sup>
  - All kinds of parents are very interested in their children's education.<sup>22</sup>
  - The benefits of parent involvement for students include:
    1. More positive attitudes toward school
    2. Higher achievement in reading

3. High quality and more grade-appropriate work
  4. Completion of more homework on weekends
  5. Observing a closer relationship between family and school<sup>23</sup>
- Families have significant strengths that can be tapped by schools seeking to build effective home-school partnerships, including:
    1. Intimate knowledge of their children's needs and talents
    2. Keen interest in their children's schooling and future
    3. The desire to work with the schools for their children's benefit
    4. Being their children's first and most enduring teachers
  - Vast opportunities to teach, be models for and guide their children.<sup>24</sup>
  - Ninety-five percent (95%) of black and Hispanic parents said that they should be sure their elementary school children do their homework and that they want to spend time helping them get the best education.<sup>25</sup>
  - In a Maryland survey, 85% of elementary school parents said they spend a quarter hour or more an evening helping their children when teachers request it, and were willing to spend even more time if asked.<sup>26</sup>
  - In a survey in the U.S. southwest, low-income parents were as interested as higher income parents in being involved in evaluating their child's progress, selecting methods of classroom discipline, and deciding how much homework is assigned.<sup>27</sup>
  - Teachers often think that low-income and single parents will not, or cannot, spend as much time helping their children at home as do middle-class parents with more education and leisure time.<sup>28</sup> However, when teachers *help parents to help their children*, these parents can be as effective with their children as those parents with more education and leisure.<sup>29</sup>
  - Research finds that:
    1. Schools tend to see the parental role as traditional, passive and home-based, whereas many parents are interested in more active roles.
    2. Schools are often guilty of not taking the initiative to ask parents for help, and of not welcoming their participation.
    3. Schools often organize events for their own convenience and pay little attention to the needs of at-risk parents.<sup>30</sup>
  - Children need routines and consistency in their lives. In-depth surveys of achieving and under-achieving 12th-grade African American students in Chicago, and culturally diverse fourth-grade students in Los Angeles indicate that children who are academically successful tend to come from families who engage in a regular routine of activities.<sup>31</sup>

- Even after children are of school age, they still spend 70% of their waking hours (including weekends and vacations) outside the school setting. This time represents a tremendous learning opportunity which schools and families need to recognize.<sup>32</sup>
- Realistic or accurate parental expectations (i.e. close to the child's actual performance, rather than too high or low) are associated with high performance on cognitive tasks.<sup>33</sup>
- Parents who provide frequent verbal support, praising children's skills and efforts, telling them they love and care about them, and using endearing rather than derogatory nicknames, tend to have children with higher self-esteem, who consequently do better in school.<sup>34</sup>
- Home learning activities such as reading aloud, and frequent open family discussions are associated with improved student achievement.<sup>35</sup>
- A study of 1,900 elementary children in London found that when schools encouraged children to practice reading at home with parents, they made highly significant gains in reading achievement compared to children who practiced only at school with teachers.<sup>36</sup>
- When parents read to their children or listen to their children read on a regular basis (regardless of the home language in which the reading occurs), children's reading achievement improved. Moreover, small group instruction during the school day by highly competent specialists *did not produce* gains comparable to those obtained in parental involvement programs.<sup>37</sup>
- The more parents participate in schooling, in a sustained way, at every level—in advocacy, decision-making and oversight roles, as fund-raisers and boosters, as volunteers and paraprofessionals, and as home teachers—the better for student achievement.<sup>38</sup>
- The main reason parent involvement with the schools is so important for at-risk children is that their home and school worlds are so different. “The predictable consequence is that children usually embrace the familiar home culture and reject the unfamiliar school culture, including its academic components and goals.”<sup>39</sup> Other research suggests it may be important for teachers to develop communication with parents of at-risk children so that both understand the other's settings and expectations.<sup>40</sup>
- Individual teachers can positively impact student learning and behavior when they communicate regularly with parents, invite them to assist with children's learning at home, and involve them as volunteers in classroom activities at school.<sup>41</sup>
- A comprehensive school-wide approach to parent involvement and partnership building (as opposed to individual teachers' efforts) is likely to have the greatest impact on student learning.<sup>42</sup>
- School personnel tend to decide in advance that single and working parents cannot be relied on or approached about parent involvement<sup>43</sup>, yet single working parents as well as dual working parents are especially likely to want more contact and consultation with teachers, and they are as dissatisfied as the teachers about any loss of contact.<sup>44</sup>
- When parents' time for school involvement is limited, carrying out learning activities with children at home is one of the most efficient ways for parents to spend their time.<sup>45</sup> Traditionally, teachers tend to favor parents who come to school. That creates a cycle of

positive reinforcement that leads to achievement gains for those children whose parents come to school. But it shuts out parents (and their children) who are afraid or unable to do so. Home learning activities help break down this cycle and help those students who need help the most.<sup>46</sup>

- Parents with less than a high school education and very low incomes are likely to have low levels of contact with teachers and schools. but such parents are anxious to cooperate with teachers despite difficulties in doing so.<sup>47</sup>
- It is not possible to design a single method of communication that will reach all homes. A variety of strategies, adapted to the needs of particular families is needed. Personal contact, including conferences, home visits, telephone calls, and curriculum nights or “open houses,” seem to be most effective.<sup>48</sup>
- Appropriate communication with parents through conferences, phone calls, workshops, school meetings, notes or newsletters and home visits can:
  1. Increase parents’ ability to construct a healthy home learning environment for children<sup>49</sup>
  2. Help teachers develop better instructional strategies for use in classroom lessons
  3. Have a positive effect on students’ academic achievement.<sup>50</sup>
- Direct parent instruction of their own children at home positively affects school achievement.<sup>51</sup> But parents need specific information on how to help and what to do.<sup>52</sup>
- A study of promising parent involvement programs in the southwestern United States identified seven essential elements of strong parent involvement programs:
  1. A formal, written policy
  2. Administrative support (funding, materials, meeting space, equipment, staff)
  3. Training for staff, parents and community members
  4. A partnership approach (joint planning, goal setting, definition of roles)
  5. Two-way communication (frequent and regular)
  6. Networking (to share information, resources and technical expertise)
  7. Evaluation (to allow districts to make program revisions on a regular basis).<sup>53</sup>
- A study of successful federal, state, school district and school building parent involvement initiatives identified the following key themes:
  1. Parents and schools share common goals
  2. Parent involvement programs must continue beyond early childhood
  3. Programs must include all families

4. Parent involvement programs make teacher's jobs easier
  5. Program development is not quick
  6. Grants encourage participation
  7. Family/school coordinators are crucial
  8. Programs need rooms for parents
  9. Programs must reach out to parents without requiring parents to come to school
  10. Technology (radio, TV, audio- and videotapes, computers) can help improve parent involvement
  11. Programs need to be evaluated.<sup>54</sup>
- Research supports schools adopting the following new beliefs and premises:
    1. It is not any single person's or group's fault that a child or group of children is not learning. We are all responsible and dependent on each other.
    2. All families have strengths. Schools should emphasize them and let parents know these strengths are valued. It is not helpful to view at-risk families as deficient or as failures.
    3. Most parents really care about their children; some simply do not know how to help them with their education.
    4. Parents can learn new techniques.
    5. Cultural differences are both valid and valuable.
    6. Many family forms exist and are legitimate. Successful schools involve stepparents, grandparents and provide family support where family resources are limited.
    7. All individuals and families need to feel empowered, especially at-risk families who often feel powerless and out of control. Successful programs ask parents what they would be interested in doing and work with *their* agendas first.
    8. Partnership with at-risk families is impossible without collaboration with other community agencies. Schools cannot provide all the services at-risk families need. The school staff needs to function in a collaborative way with each other for real change to occur.<sup>55</sup>
  - Research shows that the number one predictor of students' academic achievement is their mother's educational level followed by the educational level of both parents.<sup>56</sup>
  - "Community support is often the key to coaxing good grades out of students. Efficiently run schools also provide steady interaction between teachers and parents through phone calls and even home visits. Private schools already excel in this area because they have to stay in touch with paying customers. If public schools imitated them, students would benefit almost immediately."<sup>57</sup>

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- <sup>4</sup> Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002) *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Austin, Texas, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: 25.
- <sup>5</sup> Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002) *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Austin, Texas, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: 30.
- <sup>6</sup> Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002) *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Austin, Texas, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: 34.
- <sup>7</sup> Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002) *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Austin, Texas, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: 48.
- <sup>8</sup> Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002) *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Austin, Texas, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: 38.
- <sup>9</sup> Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002) *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Austin, Texas, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: 43.
- <sup>10</sup> Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002) *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Austin, Texas, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: 51.
- <sup>11</sup> Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002) *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Austin, Texas, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: 29.
- <sup>12</sup> Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002) *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Austin, Texas, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: 34-35.
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