



The Impact of Parental Involvement on Student Achievement





Parental involvement is defined as having an awareness of and involvement in the school community, an understanding of the interaction between parenting skills and academic success, and a commitment to support the learning process both in and out of the classroom.”

What the Research Says:



Thirty years of research confirms that parental involvement is a powerful influence on student achievement. When parents are involved in education, children earn higher grades, attend school more regularly, complete more homework, demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviors, and graduate from high school at higher rates.”

--Office of Educational Research and Improvement, US Dept. of Ed.

As the dialogue about educational reform continues, this may be the least controversial statements regarding American education:

Parental involvement impacts student achievement.

Scores of education research indicates that there is a distinct correlation between students with high academic achievement and parents who are meaningfully involved in their education. This includes being active supporters of learning at home and at school. At a time when the educational landscape is being surveyed with intense scrutiny, and educators are faced with critical demands on achievement with benchmarks and consequences for not reaching them, everyone is looking for the “secret to success.” Engaging parents and facilitating an effective home-school partnership is one of the most attainable, cost-effective, and lasting ways to improve student achievement. It is not surprising, then, that many organizations are looking for ways to foster parental involvement.

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There are different types of involvement, ranging from helping with homework to volunteering at PTA events to attending the local board of education meetings. Joyce Epstein of the Johns Hopkins University, Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships, one of the nation's leading experts on parent involvement, has divided school parent involvement programs into six broad categories:

- **Parenting**, in which schools help families with their parenting skills by providing information on children's developmental stages and offering advice on learning-friendly home environments;
- **Communicating**, or working to educate families about their child's progress and school services and providing opportunities for parents to communicate with the school;
- **Volunteering**, which ranges from offering opportunities for parents to visit their child's school to finding ways to recruit and train them to work in the school or classroom;
- **Learning at home**, in which schools and educators share ideas to promote at-home learning through high expectations and strategies so parents can monitor and help with homework.
- **Decision-making**, in which schools include families as partners in school organizations, advisory panels, and similar committees.
- **Community collaboration**, a two-way outreach strategy in which community or business groups are involved in education and schools encourage family participation in the community.



For parent involvement to flourish, it must be meaningfully integrated into a school's programs and community.”

--National Network of Partnership Schools



Studies of individual families show that what the family does is more important to student success than family income or education. This is true whether the family is rich or poor, whether the parents finished high school or not, or whether the child is in preschool or the upper grades.”

--Strong Families, Strong Schools

In a national survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, data indicates that attending school functions is the leading form of parent participation, followed by school fundraising activities. (Herrold and O'Donnell, 2008) The results of that study included these conclusions from parents:

- 78 % attended a parent-teacher conference;
- 74 % attended a class or school event;
- 65 % participated in school fundraising;
- 86 % said they had received information about the parents' expected role from the school;
- 46 % served as a volunteer on a school committee; and
- 89 % of those surveyed said they had attended at least one school or PTO/PTA meeting since the start of the school year.

Additionally, results showed that participation was greater for parents with K-8 students than at the high school level. At the K-8 level, 92% of parents reported attending an informational or PTO/PTA meeting compared with 83% of parents at the 9-12 level. The gap was even more pronounced in volunteering, which was evident among 52% of parents of K-8 students but only 34% of parents with high school students.



90% of 4th graders were in schools where a school official reported that more than half of parents participated in parent-teacher conferences. Among 8th graders, though, that proportion dropped to 57 percent.”

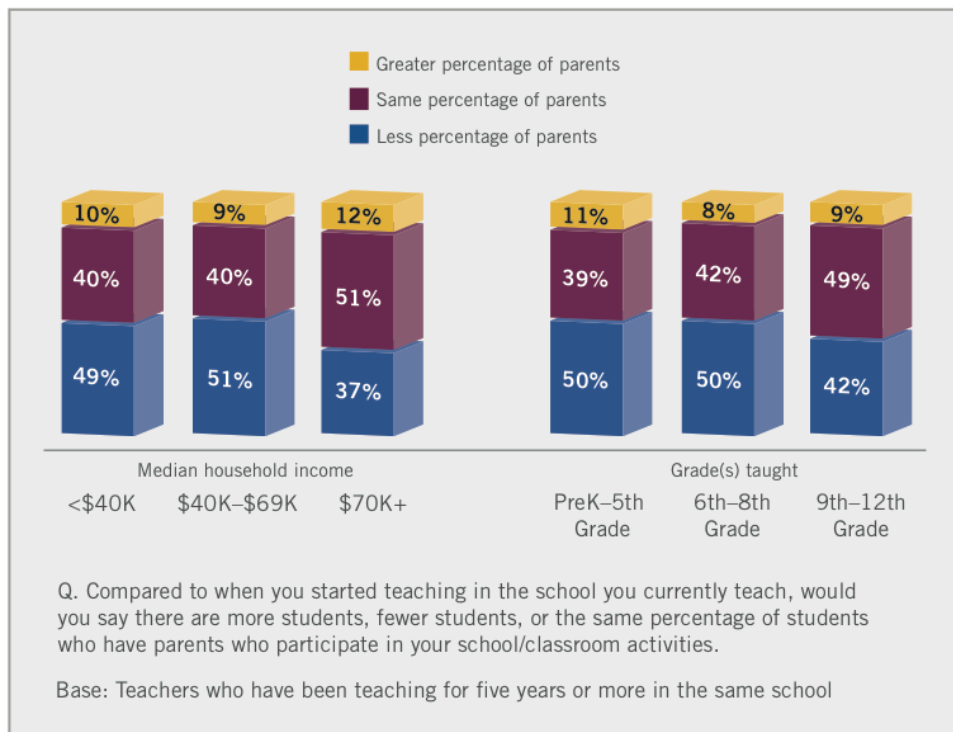
-National Assessment of Education Progress

When schools, families, and community groups work together to support education, research shows that children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and enjoy learning more. A synthesis of research on parent involvement compiled by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory maintains that regardless of family income or background, "students with involved parents are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs;
- Be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits;
- Attend school regularly;
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school; and
- Graduate and go on to postsecondary education

Engaging parents is particularly challenging as students progress through higher grade levels and in schools with higher percentages of poverty and minority students. Parental involvement at the middle school level drops dramatically. Parents of middle schoolers often feel that their children should be developing more academic independence regarding homework. Other parents feel that they are ill-equipped to help with more advanced subject matter. The structure of many middle schools can also be a deterrent. Middle schools are larger and may appear more impersonal than most elementary schools. Also, communication is more complex as middle school students most likely have several teachers, meaning parents no longer have one contact in the school who knows their child well.

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Teacher's Views on How the Percentage of Parents Who Participate in School/Classroom Activities Has Changed, by Community Median Household Income and Grade(s) Taught (Primary Sources, 2012)



84% of teachers polled indicate that family involvement and support is the most critical factor for student success.”

--Primary Sources, 2012

Despite the statistics and the studies, teachers across all subgroups identify parental involvement as not only the most critical factor for the academic success of their students, but also at a significant decline. 47% of teachers who have been teaching for five or more years in the same school report lower parental participation. Furthermore, teachers who teach in lower-income communities, middle-income communities, primary schools, and middle schools are more likely to say fewer parents participate in the educational process now than did when they began teaching in their current schools.

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In a Westat/PSA study, teachers at Title I elementary schools conducted extensive outreach to parents of low-achieving students by sending materials home, meeting face to face with parents and maintaining frequent telephone contact when their children had problems.

Researchers found that this **parent outreach led to improved student achievement in reading and math** and test scores increased at a 40% higher rate compared to schools with low levels of outreach.

In West Virginia, nine schools offered workshops to improve parents' skills. The adults received learning packets in reading and math and training on how to use them. In assessing the progress of 335 participating Title I students, researchers found **that students with more highly involved parents made stronger reading and math gains than less involved parents**. The finding demonstrated that family income had no effect on involvement, as low-income families were just as likely to attend the workshops as higher-income families.

The National Educational Longitudinal Study produced similar findings, analyzing data on 13,500 families as their children progressed through school. Researchers measured the six types of parent involvement and concluded that "learning at home" techniques had the strongest effect. For older students, these techniques largely focused on enabling parents to convey high expectations to their children, encouraging them to take and succeed in rigorous courses with an eye toward college. **When students' parents set high expectations to enroll in classes that would lead to higher education, students were more likely to enroll in a higher-level programs, and score higher on tests.** Regardless of family background, the issue of parent expectations had the strongest effect on older students.

-- How Parent Involvement Affects Student Achievement, Center for Public Education.

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	Teachers		Parents	
	2011	1987	2011	1987
Believe that 'most' or 'many' parents:				
Fail to discipline their children	44%	51%	58%	58%
Leave their children alone too much on their own after school	42%	62%	44%	59%
Fail to motivate their children so that they want to learn in school	35%	53%	42%	52%
Take too little interest in their children's education	35%	48%	47%	52%
Fail to show respect for teachers	26%	23%	30%	34%
Make so many demands of teachers and staff that it interferes with their children's education	20%	NA	20%	NA
Set too high or too strict a standard for their children to meet	6%	12%	17%	30%

Perceptions of Parent Behaviors (The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2012)



47% of parents feel that they do not take enough interest in the education of their children.”

--MetLife Survey, 2011

Despite the overwhelming research that frames the importance of parental involvement, a 2011 MetLife survey indicates that 47% of parents admit they they do not take enough interest in the education of their children. How, then, can schools and communities affect positive change and build the biggest ally we have to improve student achievement? As each school and community has unique needs, challenges, and resources, it is important to begin by addressing two basic questions:

Why do some parents participate and others do not?

What does parental engagement “look” like?

Three major factors influence the level to which parents get involved:

1. Personal motivation

2. Perceptions of expectations

3. Life

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All parents want to see their children succeed in school and in life. However, two significant factors impede the level at which many engage with the school community and participate in the educational process: personal motivation and self-efficacy. Personal motivation refers to parents' beliefs about what their role in education is. Every parent creates his or her own "job description" about what parental involvement looks like. For some it is reading to their children. For others, it is assisting with homework. And for yet others, it is attending school functions. When everyone in the school community understands the different types of involvement and the benefits each has on student achievement, parents are better able to engage effectively and teachers have a better understanding of the "behind the scenes" involvement.



Parental involvement is most effective when there is an *intentional* alignment between schools and families to support learning and nurture the whole child.”

Self-efficacy of parents refers to their beliefs about how equipped they are to have a positive influence on their children's education. Their own level of education or experiences with school help to shape their beliefs about how important their role is. Parents who understand how critical their participation is give their children a significant academic advantage. Teachers and administrators that reinforce the importance of the parents as partners build a solid foundation for that partnership to thrive. Parental involvement is most effective when there is an intentional alignment between schools and families to support learning and nurture the whole child.

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Parents' perceptions of the expectations that the school community has for their involvement also plays a huge role in the level and manner in which they participate. Does the school have a warm, welcoming culture? Are parents greeted warmly when they do visit? How are parents invited to school functions? Do parents associate "an invitation from school" with "bad news about my child?" All of these contextual factors create perceptions about parents' expected role.

Schools must be inviting places where teachers, students, and parents *want* to come, and where all groups feel that they belong. Education is a fundamental act of hope and every aspect of a school's culture should invite the shared vision of educational goals and success. This culture is defined by the people, the environment, the programs, the communication strategies. And it is this culture that sets the expectations for teachers, students, *and* parents.

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Life happens. Many times, despite the best of intentions, the obligations of life make it impossible for parents to be as involved as they would like. Before teachers judge parents who fail to attend school functions as “parents who just don’t care,” it is important to consider the variables of life that create constraints. Single-parent families, parents with two jobs or long work hours, varied family obligations, language barriers, and the lack of transportation or child care are just a few of the reasons why parents may be unable to attend.

Culture also plays a significant role in parents’ perceptions of the “right” way to support their children’s learning. For example, in some Latino populations it is considered disrespectful to raise questions to a teacher or a school official. Even in the most inviting schools, a family’s culture may supersede the culture of the school. Understanding these cultural norms is critical if the school is to overcome those kinds of misconceptions and address them with productive solutions.



Before we label parents as “absent” or “uninvolved,” it is essential to understand what is preventing them from participating and taking measures to accommodate their needs.”

Before we label parents as “absent” or “uninvolved,” it is important to understand what is preventing them from participating and taking measures to accommodate their needs. Likewise, parents have a responsibility to demonstrate the value they place on education to their children and an obligation to communicate their needs and/or obstacles to the school.

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In a world defined by rapid change in technology, global competition, and workforce skills, young people must be prepared to learn for a lifetime. This begins in the early years extending throughout their academic careers. As the educational landscape is shrouded in intense scrutiny and criticism regarding the effectiveness, or ineffectiveness, of our schools and teachers to prepare students for college and careers, assuring a quality education for all students is a shared responsibility.



Fundamentally, education is an act of hope for shared vision and attainment – the hope for our children to have a rewarding future, the hope that they will acquire skills that enable them to contribute to our communities, and the hope that they will advance our society.”

It is impossible to extrapolate the role of the student, the parent, the school, or the community as the most important to academic success. We all have a role to play. Fundamentally, education is an act of hope for shared vision and attainment – the hope for our children to have a rewarding future, the hope that they will acquire skills that enable them to contribute to our communities, and the hope that they will advance our society.

We depend on teachers, we have high expectations of our schools, and we have a responsibility to support the work that they do. However, it is the shared responsibility among schools, students, parents, and the community that may perhaps be the crucible for educational success.

Author: Melissa Hughes, Ph.D.



When one teaches,
two learn.



It is so rewarding for me to interact with teachers in the trenches, understand their needs and challenges, and help them improve teaching and learning. I'm always amazed at the level of dedication, creativity, and passion that I find in the teachers I meet. It is true that 'when one teaches, two learn.' Lifelong learning is inspired by the teacher in each of us."

Dr. Melissa Hughes spent the first decade of her education career teaching at both the elementary and university levels in Akron, Ohio. In 2002, she left the classroom, but she continued to pursue education from the publishing arena. After spending over 10 years developing instructional materials for students, parents, and teachers, she decided to return "back to the classroom." As the principal of the Andrick Group, she currently provides professional development experiences for schools and districts, as well as educational and social media marketing consulting services to a variety of organizations striving to engage their constituents. Melissa has masters degrees in Instructional Technology and Educational Administration, as well as a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Akron.

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