



RESEARCH IN FOCUS:

Value of Parental Involvement

INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement in public education has been a major concern since the 1965 federal Head Start legislation, which created the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and birthed thousands of research projects and subsequent policy measures. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act (the 1994 reauthorization of the ESEA) encouraged districts to reexamine and rejuvenate parent involvement initiatives as a means to federal funding, inspiring another wave of research on parental impact (Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000). Modern research focuses on measuring the value of parental involvement on students of different levels of education and experience and with different cultural backgrounds. This brief seeks to condense the plethora of research on parental involvement and to summarize the research-proven value of parental involvement.

DEFINING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Research informing such measures as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 divides parental involvement into two categories: home-based and school-based (Hill and Tyson, 2009; Epstein, 2011; Epstein & Sanders, 2000). School-based involvement has been identified by researchers as attending school meetings, events, conferences, and membership in school-based parent organizations (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Home-based involvement, on the other hand, refers to any activity directly or indirectly relating to the child's education, which could be something as obvious as helping a child with homework or something as abstract as taking a child to the zoo. Since both of these rely heavily on schools' and parents' individual resources, researchers Hill and Tyson posit a third type of possible parental involvement called academic socialization. When engaging in academic socialization, parents help their children connect the value of their current educational activities with more abstract ideas, such as future goals and world events.

encourage children to find the right conclusions themselves with appropriate guidance. The Gonida and Corina (2014) study also found that parental interaction in an autonomy-supportive style correlates with increased child academic achievement and personal belief in self-efficacy. Conversely, if parental engagement was controlling or interfering (giving students the answers), student achievement was either unaffected or negatively impacted.

b) Other than homework help, parents can also engage their children in fun, educational activities, such as visiting museums, science shows, or local library events for kids. These kinds of parental interactions with children have been shown to heighten children's awareness of the importance of education, enhance academic performance, and (due to the child's heightened interest) even increase the amount of time and effort an individual teacher might spend with a child (Epstein & Becker, 1982; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jaynes, 2012).

Involvement in Middle School

Research on parental involvement in middle school has only begun to emerge within the past decade, but findings clearly indicate that parental involvement must adjust from the highly-involved elementary-aged strategy to one that accommodates middle school students' increased autonomy. Where help with homework is greatly beneficial to the elementary student, Hill and Tyson (2009) found that it actually negatively impacted the middle school student's studies. For middle school students, parents should continue academic socialization through educational visits. They should also help students to understand the concept of academic performance, provide concrete and realistic expectations, and set a good example of social interaction and decision making for their student to follow.

a) Hill and Tyson (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 50 empirical studies and concluded that home-based parental involvement at the middle school level, and especially parental involvement in homework, sometimes had a negative relationship with academic achievement. The researchers attributed this negative relationship to several possible factors. They speculated that the negative relationship between home-based parental involvement and student academic achievement may be a result of parental interference with students' autonomy, excessive parental pressure, or the fact that more parents tend to help with homework when students are already struggling to perform. However, they also discovered that not all home-based interventions share a negative relationship with student academic achievement at the middle school level. In fact, like elementary-aged students, activities such as visits to the zoo, the library, or a museum have been shown to be significantly and positively correlated with academic achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

“*Academic socialization refers to parents' ability to scaffold student decision-making abilities, problem solving abilities, and goal setting abilities.*”

(Hill & Tyson, 2009)

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT STAGES OF INVOLVEMENT AND IMPACT

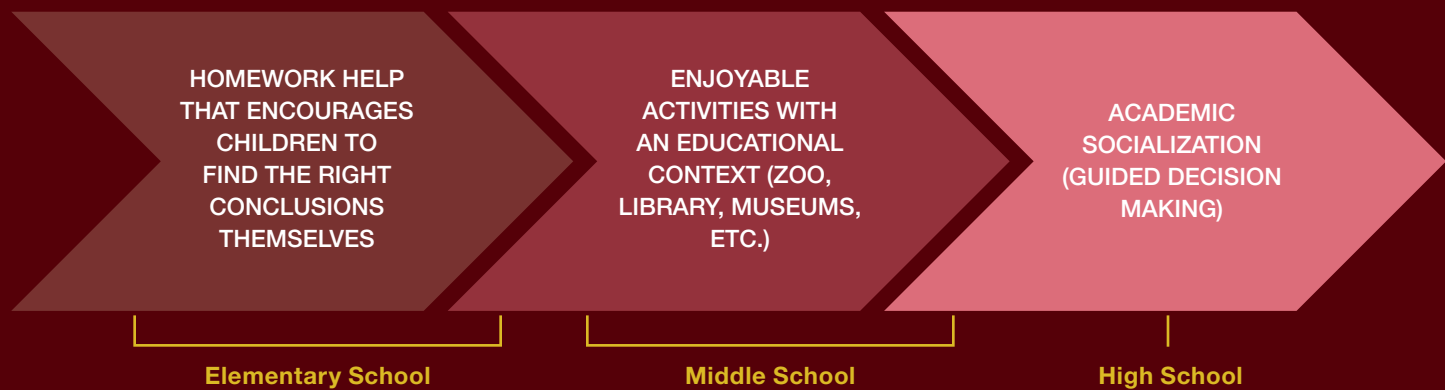
Involvement in Elementary School

Recent research indicates that the benefit of parental school-based involvement depends on the student's developmental age group, whether the child is in elementary, middle, or high school (Seginer, 2006; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jaynes, 2012). Parental involvement in the education of elementary students is the most closely studied, and most forms of parental involvement have been shown to improve these students' school performance.

Among the strongest research-supported parental interventions for elementary students are activities like helping with homework, museum or library visits, and reading together.

a) In a recent study, Gonida and Cortina (2014) found that if parents both believe that their child is capable of being successful in academia and place an emphasis on goal mastery, they are more likely to engage with their children in an autonomy-supportive interaction. Autonomy-supportive parental interaction helps to promote child mastery and motivation, as parents

STAGES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND TIME OF GREATEST IMPACT



b) The most effective middle-school parental involvement activities utilize strategies which reflect academic socialization (Hill & Tyson 2009). That is to say, parents of middle school students are more likely to help their students to improve academically by helping students to understand ideas of academic performance, provide concrete and realistic expectations for student involvement, and provide modeling for social interaction and decision making. It is likely that parental engagement in academic socialization helps middle school adolescents to grow and develop autonomous skills, such as goal setting and problem solving, that will benefit them for the rest of their lives.

Involvement in High School

Though research on parental involvement is comparatively scarce, Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) found that two types of parental involvement in education continue to be effective with students at the high school level: parental academic socialization and home involvement. Their study reflected a positive relationship between these two parent behaviors and high school students' GPAs. However, it is important to note that in their study, school-based involvement had little to no impact on academic performance (Wang and Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

The reality for parents with high school students is that there are fewer ways for parents to have direct, effective impact on child academic achievement. This is not to say that there is no longer value in parental involvement; it simply means that parental involvement strategies must be indirect and have different implications for students than simply improving academic achievement. Parents can positively impact their high school student's school performance and experience by guiding student decision-making in a way that encourages autonomy.

“Parental involvement has been associated with positive attitudes towards education in general and towards teachers in particular, increased satisfaction with school environment, decreased disciplinary difficulties, increased student self-esteem, decreased reports of depression in adolescents, and increased parental aspirations for both children and themselves.”

(Lewis, 1993; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Peña, 2001; Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014)

Value Beyond Academic Achievement

Even with little research available, it is indisputable that parental involvement has far-reaching benefits.

The benefits of parental involvement do not cease after high school. In fact, in a 2012 study, Brueck, Mazza, and Tousignant found that higher levels of parental involvement in high school were correlated with collegiate academic mastery. These findings suggest that parental involvement in a child's secondary education continues to raise academic achievement and success even as the child reaches adult years.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR SCHOOLS

Parental involvement is incredibly important to student academic achievement, social development, and life planning. Schools can benefit greatly from increased awareness and attention to this component of student education. Educators who are aware of the impact of parental involvement can learn and develop strategies that will help them to foster this important student resource. One such strategy might be encouraging teachers to increase parent outreach and to strengthen parent-teacher relationships. This type of outreach has been found to be effective in increasing parental involvement in inner-city settings (Lewis, Kim, & Ashby Bey 2011). Several studies suggest that establishing clear expectations of parental involvement is likely to increase parental involvement in any setting (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Robbins & Searby, 2013) For more information, educators can also look to *Strategies for Parental Involvement (2014)* and *Parental Involvement for Latino and African American Families (2014)*, two Research in Focus briefs published by the K20 Center, University of Oklahoma.

CONCLUSION

While research exists that shows and delineates the importance of parental involvement, much is left to be discovered. Unfortunately, the majority of research has been conducted using homogenous population samples. This means that the study results have limited generalizability. Future research must examine the impact and availability of parental involvement on ethnic/racial minority populations as well as families from low income backgrounds. Future research must also seek to develop and establish the validity of programs that help parents understand and become involved in their children's education.

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