



Research Brief

**Linking Student Achievement
to School, Family, and
Community Involvement**

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Linking Student Achievement to School, Family, and Community Involvement

The widespread belief in the importance of school-family-community involvement is evidenced by national policies (e.g., No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) that require parent involvement in programs funded through the U.S. Department of Education. Non-regulatory guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Education (2004) to assist state-, district-, and school-level educators with the implementation of recent law

is based on four principles that provide a framework through which families, educators, and communities can work together to improve teaching and learning. These principles are accountability for results, local control and flexibility, expanded parental choice, and effective and successful programs that reflect scientifically based research. (p. 1)

Additionally, Department guidance *defines* parent involvement as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities. Thus, to fully comply with federal guidelines, many schools today must develop and implement school-family-community involvement programs. Now these schools are asking, “What kind of program is most likely to ensure success?”

What We Know From the Research

In 2002, Henderson and Mapp examined 31 studies that specifically addressed the connection between student achievement and various parent and community involvement activities. The findings of these studies offer schools valuable information about the kinds and levels of school-family-community connections that are more likely to produce higher levels of student achievement. The authors report four key findings from these studies; highlights of studies that support the finding are also provided.

Key finding #1: *Programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children’s learning at home are linked to higher student achievement (p. 25).*

Researcher(s)	Focus of Study	Finding
Jordan, Snow, and Porche, 2000	Project EASE (Early Access to Success in Education), Minnesota (focus: literacy). Home and school activities for	Over one year, students in the program showed significantly more improvement on language scores than children in a

	kindergartners and their families, including coaching mothers in developing literacy skills	control group.
Starkey and Klein, 2000	Two experimental studies of a 4-month intervention in two sites—one serving African American families and the other Latino. The program loaned math kits to families in the treatment groups and taught mothers how to use them with their children.	Children in both experimental groups developed greater math knowledge and skills than the control-group children.
Westat and Policy Studies Associates, 2001	The relationship between standards-based reform practices and student achievement (report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education)	Teacher outreach to parents of low-performing students was related to improved student achievement in both reading and math.
Epstein, Clark, Salinas, and Sanders, 1997	Comparison annual data on attendance and achievement with evaluations of schools' partnership programs.	Researchers found a relationship between schools with stronger partnership programs and small, but significant, gains in third-grade writing and math scores, as well as improved attendance.
Epstein, Simon, and Salinas, 1997	Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS), Baltimore (focus: writing and language arts). Pre-experimental study of 683 Baltimore middle-grade students' test scores and grades.	Improved test scores and grades were related to families' increased participation in TIPS learning activities at home.
Van Voorhis, 2001	Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS). Quasi-experimental study of TIPS for Science.	Students whose families participated in TIPS earned higher grades than did a control group.

Key finding #2: *The continuity of family involvement at home appears to have a positive influence on children as they progress through the complex education system. This suggests that 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 (p. 30).*

Researcher(s)	Focus of Study	Finding
Izzo et al., 1999	Three-year study of 1,200 urban students	Parent involvement at home and at school was related positively to student achievement.
Marcon, 1999	Comparison of the grades and skill ratings of 700 African American preschoolers to	Parents with high involvement tended to have children with higher grades and

	teachers' reports of parent involvement	scores.
Meidel and Reynolds, 1999	Comparison of data from interviews with 700 parents of eighth-grade students to student performance	Students whose parents had been involved in a greater number of activities, both at home and at school, did consistently better in school.
Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Sanders & Herting, 2000; Shumow & Lomax, 2001; Trusty, 1999	Four studies of the combined support of families and school	The combined support of families and school is generally associated with better student performance.
Shumow and Lomax, 2001	The association between the level of parents' feelings of efficacy and their children reporting doing better in school and feeling happy, safe, and stable.	Higher levels of parent involvement were more strongly related to positive student outcomes and perceptions of well-being than were low levels.

Key finding #3. *Families of all cultural backgrounds, education, and income levels encourage their children, talk with them about school, help them plan for higher education, and keep them focused on learning and homework. In other words, all types of families can, and often do, have a positive influence on their children's learning (p. 34).*

Researcher(s)	Focus of Study	Finding
Clark, 1993	Correlated the ways children spend their out-of-school time with grades, family background, and other factors	The way children spent their time at home was a better predictor of school success than the family's income or education level.
Ho Sui-Chu and Willms, 1996	Compared involvement at home with merely volunteering and attending school activities.	Involvement at home—parents talking with their children about school and planning their education programs—had the greatest effect on student achievement when compared to merely volunteering and attending school activities.
Catsambis, 1998	Retaining students through Grade 12	Enhancing learning at home had the strongest relationship to staying in school through Grade 12.
Shumow and Miller, 2001	Parent involvement, attitudes toward school, and grades	Parent involvement at home led to positive attitudes toward school; parent involvement at school contributed to higher grades.
Williams, 1998	Parents expectations and out-of-school	Parents' expectations for their children's

	activities	education, as well as their students' out-of-school activities, are positively linked to all aspects of their children's achievement.
Catsambis, 1998; Ho Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Keith & Keith, 1993; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Sanders & Herting, 2000	Study of parents' activity in their middle and high school children's education (using the NELS:88 database)	Researchers found that Asian, Hispanic, and African American parents were as active in their middle and high school children's education as White parents. However, the minority groups reported higher levels of home involvement and supervision than did Whites.
Shumow and Miller, 2001	Study of 60 families	Parent involvement in education at home and at school was positively related to young adolescents' academic outcomes.*
Lareau and Horvat, 1999	Case study: family education and income	Families with more education and income are more comfortable with school staff because they can relate to each other better.

*The researchers report: "The relation found between the young adolescents' past school adjustment (success in school) and school orientation (attitudes toward school) indicates that successful children might have been socialized to the importance of education by families that have made a consistent long-term commitment to education" (p. 86). Given that at-home and at-school involvement may have different effects on students, the researchers underscore the importance of specifying the form of parent involvement being studied or targeted in program development.

Key finding #4: *Parent and community involvement that is linked to student learning has a stronger association with achievement than more general forms of involvement. This suggests that parent involvement should be focused on improving achievement and be designed to engage families and students in developing specific knowledge and skills (p. 38).*

Researcher(s)	Focus of Study	Finding
Shaver & Walls, 1998	Workshops that inform parents about what their children are learning and how to help	Workshops that inform parents about what their children are learning and how to help

	their children at home	their children at home are connected to gains in achievement.
Westat/Policy Studies Associates, 2001	Isolation of the effects of parent involvement from other program elements (for the U.S. Department of Education)	Using advanced statistical methods, researchers found that students made greater and more consistent gains when teachers were “especially active” in outreach to parents.
Moore, 1998	Local School Councils in Chicago (parents, teachers, community members, and administrators involved in the school)	Cooperative adult effort on the part of local councils is strongly related to improved student achievement.
Invernizzi and colleagues, 1997	Tutoring by community volunteers	Students who received tutoring from community volunteers made substantial gains in reading, and students who attended more than 40 sessions made greater gains than those who attended fewer.
Dryfoos, 2000	Review of evaluations of community schools (e.g., before- and after-school learning programs)	Although the evaluations were not rigorous, students in programs that focused on learning made gains of 2-3 years in reading and math test scores.

Summary

Collectively, recent studies and earlier research indicate a strong relationship between family involvement and improved academic performance. Family involvement is also associated with other key outcomes such as attendance and behavior, which are also related to achievement. The relationship between family involvement and performance holds for families of all backgrounds. The ways parents are involved matters, too. Improved performance is most strongly connected to involvement that is focused on learning, developing students’ skills in specific subjects, and steering students toward more challenging classes. Close working relationships between teachers and families are also related to improved performance. Finally, the studies identified several ways that schools can assist families in developing their capacity to support their children’s education:

- Adopt a family-school partnership policy. The philosophy behind it should see the total school community as committed to making sure that every single student succeeds at a high level and to working together to make that happen.
 - Identify target areas of low achievement. Work with families to design workshops and other activities to give them information about how to help their children. Lend families learning materials to use at home. Get their ideas for how to help their children learn.
 - Offer professional development for school staff on working productively with families. Invite families to attend.
 - Look at your current parent involvement program. How is it linked to learning? Work with families and teachers to add a learning component to every activity and communication for families. Think about new and different activities that will create a learning community.
- (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 74)

As Henderson and Mapp (2002) conclude, although engaging families can help improve student achievement, it is not enough to overcome the deficits of low-quality schools. Parent involvement programs need to be paired with high-quality initiatives to improve teaching and learning. Such initiatives will be more effective if they engage families.

Based on a Literature Review by Patricia E. Ceperley, December 2005, Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) at Edvantia

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