



2008

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Recommended Citation

Hall, Christa L. (2008) "Do Students Who Have Greater Parental Involvement Perform Better Academically Than Students With Less Parental Involvement?," *The Corinthian*: Vol. 9 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://kb.gcsu.edu/thecorinthian/vol9/iss1/12>

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Do Students Who Have Greater Parental Involvement Perform Better Academically Than Students With Less Parental Involvement?

Christa L. Hall

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ABSTRACT

Parental involvement is a significant factor in increasing student achievement. The participants were twenty-one first grade students during the 2006-2007 school term at a Title I school located in middle Georgia. A parent survey using a Likert-type scale was used to measure parental involvement within the home setting. Student performance was measured by using the scores from graded homework as well as the results of reading, math, and sight word pretests and post tests. There was a moderate positive correlation between the results of the parent survey and the student performance scores. One hundred percent of the parents responded that they were involved with their children at home on the survey. This study found that increased involvement indeed makes a difference in a child's academic performance.

INTRODUCTION

Involving parents in the educational process is one of the greatest strategies that any successful school can implement. In order for children to reach their maximum scholastic potential, a rapport between parents and the school system needs to be developed as soon as a student enters institutions of education. Parents are the first educational support systems that are introduced to a child. Therefore, this system must be continuously and cohesively merged with the school system when the student embarks upon the initial stages of formal education. According to Machen, Wilson & Notar (2005), "Parental involvement is highly important for pushing the system for higher standards and engaging parents in an active role in the school curriculum. It

can open alternative opportunities for children” (p.15). Involving families and encouraging them to have a positive influence on their children’s learning is not limited to those who have obtained higher levels of education. Investigations by Philip Vassallo (2000) concluded that the level at which a parent is involved in a child’s education is a great predictor of how well the student will perform.

Research suggest that supportive parents are an asset to any student’s performance, so the purpose of this study was to investigate whether the students whose parents were more involved in their learning performed better academically than the students who parents were less involved in their child’s learning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hoover-Dempsey et. al. (2005) gave numerous strategies for increasing the school’s capacities for inviting parental involvement. For example, first create an inviting, welcoming school climate. Also create visual displays in school entry areas and hallways reflective of all families in the school. Focus on creating a strong sense that this is *our* school and *we* belong here. In addition, empower teachers for parental involvement by developing routine school practices focused on discussion and the development of positive, trusting parent-school relationships, and the culture of all students. Provide dynamic in-service programs that support teacher efficacy for involving parents (p.120).

Comer (2005) introduced a tri-level participation goals plan for parents. At the first level, parents provide general support by attending parent-teacher conferences, monitoring their children’s homework, and supporting fund-raising activities. They participate in calendar events, such as school concerts and awards ceremonies. This level attracts the largest number of parents. At the second level, parents serve as volunteers daily in school affairs (i.e. providing office support, going along on field trips, or working as library assistants). It is important to give these parent volunteers meaningful tasks that they are capable of accomplishing and to place them with compatible staff members. Third level parents participate in school decision-making by serving on the School Planning and Management Team or on other school committees. Parent representation in the governance and management of the school should be as broadly based as possible [School Development Program

(2001, adapted for use by Comer), p. 40].

Parents can also communicate to their child their expected goals for achievement. Spera's (2005) article discussed that parents should emphasize to their children the aspirations and values they want the child to have intrinsically. Further research by Spera (2005) revealed that "parental aspirations, goals, and values are related to their children's setting of academic goals, persistence in school, course enrollment, intellectual accomplishments and attendance of college" (p.131). According to Cotton & Wiklund (2006), there is strong evidence that the parental involvement strategies that prove to yield the greatest benefits are those that involve the parents actively working with their child within the home setting. Some ideas for these activities include parents working with children at night on homework, reading to and with the child at night, or reviewing with them what the teacher has taught in class. These strategies have shown extraordinary results.

Many studies show the importance of parental involvement within the school and community. Numerous parents, however, do not know what they can do to assist their children and the school system. Therefore, it is important to educate parents with ways they can help their children at home starting with homework. Parents and teachers often disagree on issues of homework. According to a survey completed by *Reading Today* (2000), seven out of the eight surveyed teachers said that parents need to either work with their child on completing the homework or make sure that a parent checks the homework if the child does it alone. Parents, however, sometimes see homework as a problem.

Reading Today (2000) reported the following statistics on how parents felt about homework: Two out of three parents (68%) say their child is self-motivated and does work independently, and half report that they have had serious arguments with the child where there was yelling or crying over schoolwork. Nearly half have walked away and let the child deal with the consequences of not doing their schoolwork rather than dealing with the child's constant stalling. One in five (22 %) parents reports completing part of the child's homework on occasion because the assignment was too difficult or the child was too tired (p. 7).

Involving Minority and Low Income Families

Low-income and minority parents are more apt to be less involved in school-centered activities and meet with their child's teacher because they may feel a sense of intimidation. There is also the probability that these parents have had a negative experience with the school system at some point. With this in mind, the system could focus on building collaborative, trusting relationships among teachers, families, and community members.

Parental involvement is even more effective when it has a strong community support system. This relationship is spearheaded by parents and community members and is based at a location outside of the school, such as a local church. These community-based programs are designed to provide various means to help build the academic and political skills of these families. The programs also instill a sense of power within the low-income and minority families when they enter the school to have conferences or to participate in school activities.

Fields (2005) noted that often schools and teachers view African-American parents as being lazy and uninvolved in their child's education process. This negative perception (also known as a deficit view) is a direct contrast to the portrayals of African-American parents in history prior to integration. Fields (2005) pointed out that research has demonstrated how involved African-American parents were in the education process. This involvement was particularly accurate during the times of segregation, especially during slavery when African-American parents fervently pursued an education for their children. "The slaves risked severe punishment, and sometimes their lives, to learn to read because they equated freedom with literacy" (Fields, 2005, p. 130).

Minorities also often feel a sense of distrust and the need to go beyond the efforts of white parents. According to Fields (2005), the levels of trust toward the teachers varied with a majority of the parents feeling that is was necessary to keep a close watch over the teacher-child relationship/interactions. These feelings are the opposite of how parents felt prior to integration. Historically, parents put all of their trust in the teachers and principals of the schools. They felt that their children were safe and were being treated fairly. Fields (2005) reported that African-American parents feel that they must constantly be an activist for not only their children, but also for other African-American children. These same ideals hold true for other minority and low-

income children. There is a need for schools need to learn to recognize that all parents, regardless of income, education or cultural background are involved in their children's learning and want their children to do well. Furthermore, it benefits schools to design programs that will support families in order to guide their children's learning. It is also important to include families in all strategies to reduce the achievement gap between white students, low-income students, and students of color.

Benefits of Parental Involvement

Everyone benefits when parents, schools and communities collaborate to improve student learning. It is not only important for everyone to be involved during the early years, but it is also imperative that this collaboration continue throughout high school. Jeynes' (2005) meta-analysis research presented several possible benefits of parental involvement. These benefits can be broken down into each of the following categories: (a) higher grades and test scores, (b) better attendance and more homework done, (c) fewer placements in special education, (d) more positive attitudes and behavior, (e) higher graduation rates, and (f) greater enrollment in postsecondary education. The benefits for parents are (a) more confidence in the schools, (b) teachers will have higher opinions of parents and higher expectations of their children, (c) greater confidence in themselves as parents and in their ability to help their children learn at home, and (d) greater likelihood that the parents will enroll in continuing education to advance their own schooling. The benefits for the schools and communities are (a) improved teacher morale, (b) higher ratings of teachers by parents, (c) more support from families, (d) higher student achievement, and (e) better reputations in the community (Jeynes, 2005, ¶23).

This study investigated the role of parental involvement in a first grade classroom in a Title-I school and was done during the first five weeks of the fall semester. The parents' level of involvement was measured by using a questionnaire. The students' academic progress was measured by comparing data from the reading pre-test, math pre-test and Dolch sight word pre-test to the data on the reading post-test, math post-test and Dolch sight word post-test. I also used data from signed homework. A rubric was used to assess parental involvement with homework.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS IN SETTING

This Title 1 elementary school is located about 50 miles south of Macon, Georgia in the middle of the state. The school's population of about 1,000 students consists of children from several small towns and other surrounding counties. Of those students, 73% are Caucasian, 23% are Black, and 4% other minorities. All of the students receive free breakfast and lunch. In 2005, the school was awarded the Bronze Award for outstanding academic achievement. The scores reflected that 95% of the student population either met or exceeded the objectives for their grade level.

The participants were 21 first grade students in one class during the 2006-2007 school term and their parents. There were three African-American boys, six Caucasian boys, one Bi-racial boy, three African-American girls, six Caucasian girls, one Bi-racial girl and one Hispanic girl.

INSTRUMENTATION AND PROCEDURES

Each child's parents received a questionnaire at the beginning of the year to obtain an idea of their current involvement with their child. The instrument also allowed the parent(s) to describe what they perceived to be their child's weaknesses and strengths and provided an opportunity to express what the school could do to help them improve the quality of their child's learning process. (See Appendix) There were four *yes* or *no* questions that were assigned a score according to the scale (2 = yes, 1 = no). The two multiple choice questions were scored (parents = 2, siblings, boys and girls club or other = 1). There were also questions in the survey that were not scored for this study; however, they provided insight on how to better involve the parents in their child's education. Copies of the questionnaire, parental consent form, and scoring rubrics are in the Appendixes (A-D).

The rest of the data was collected by scoring signed homework assignments, Dolch sight words, and reading and math assignments. The Dolch sight word list is a list of 220 words, prepared by E.W. Dolch in 1936. These words are the common framework for 50 to 75 percent of the reading material encountered by students. The students were given the Dolch sight word

test at the beginning of the study (pre-test) and again at the end of the study (post-test). Parents were given a copy of the Dolch word list at the beginning of the study. The reading pre-and post-test were animal habitat stories that test early reading and comprehension skills (Wingate, 1995, 42-43) . Each test had six comprehension questions. The math pre-and post-tests consisted of 16 simple double digit subtraction problems without re-grouping.

Permission to conduct the study within the school system was obtained from the school principal and the university institutional review board. Parental consent was obtained from the parents through a letter sent home with the students. The students were given a pretest and post test in reading, Dolch sight words and math during the first five weeks of school. The data from the parent survey was scored and correlated with the various student outcomes in order to ascertain whether parental involvement has an affect on student achievement.

DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

A correlational, descriptive study was designed to identify the effects of parental involvement on student achievement. All student data and parent surveys were scored, and both the mean and standard deviation were calculated. A scale was used to divide the results from the parent surveys into two groups. The results of the parents' surveys were correlated to the students' homework, morning work, reading, sight words, and math post-test and pre-tests results. T-tests were used to compare the pre-tests and post-tests in reading, Dolch sight words and math.

RESULTS

The hypothesis of this study was that the parental involvement total score from questions 1,2,4,6,7, and 8 would be positively correlated with the amount and quality of homework done as well as test scores on reading, math and sight words. The results of the parent survey yielded a 100% response rate. All of the parents documented that they were involved at home with their child's learning process.

The mean for the reading pretest was 69.0 while the mean for the reading posttest was 84.4. The mean for the math pretest was 59.1 while the mean

for the math posttest was 93.1. The mean for the sight words pretest was 56.8 and the means for the sight words posttest was 96.0. The students made significant gains in all areas.

The correlation results were in the expected direction, the parental questionnaire score correlated with both the homework score and the reading posttest score. The results are displayed in Table 2. This confirmed that there was a direct correlation between parental involvement and student achievement where homework is involved. Table 1 shows the comparisons for the reading, math, and sight word pretests and post tests.

DISCUSSION

The major purpose of this survey was to determine whether children who have greater parental involvement perform better academically than the children of less involved parents. The questionnaire revealed that almost all the parents self-reported a high level of involvement in this particular first grade classroom in a low socioeconomic rural area. A survey completed by *Reading Today* (2000) revealed that seven out of the eight teachers surveyed said that parents need to either work with their child on completing the homework or make sure that a parent checks the homework if the child is completing the work alone (p. 7). The parent survey results, however, only roughly matched their actual involvement in the child's daily homework. The correlation was only $r = .47$. Although this is positive, it only has an effect size of $R^2 = 22\%$. This means that only 22% of the variance in homework completion scores was accounted for by the self-reported questionnaire score. *Reading Today's* survey (2000) further revealed that half of the parents that participated in a parent survey disclosed that they have serious confrontations with their children when trying to coerce them to do their homework. The report further stated that nearly half of the parents gave up arguing and decided to let the child suffer the consequences of not having his/her homework completed for the next day (p.7)

This study was carefully planned to reduce the chance of internal and external threats to validity. The positive results of this small study will provide a baseline for implementing a new grade-level focus on parental involvement. In addition to homework related questions in the survey, there were also questions geared toward building a teacher-parent-student bond.

Questions 12 and 13 of the survey gave parents an opportunity to discuss their children's weakness and strengths. Other questions such as numbers 5, 9, and 14-16 focus on the personalities and hobbies of the child. Questions 10 and 11 provided the parents an opportunity to confirm whether their children had playtime and a snack before settling down to do homework assignments. Hopefully these questions were also instructive in how to support the child for optimal homework completion. The last question of the survey, number 17, was simply for the parents to provide contact information.

The survey responses will also be used to develop a grade level plan aimed at teaching parents how to become more involved in their child's learning process at school and at home. As we begin to develop a parental involvement plan, according to Machen, Wilson & Notar, (2005), it is imperative to keep in mind that we as teachers should (a) create a friendly environment with more frequent opportunities for positive communication among the school, parents, and community; (b) reduce the barriers that prevent parents from becoming involved (provide babysitters or childcare to allow parents the ability to attend school related activities); (c) schedule requested parent-teacher conferences during times that are favorable to the parent's schedule; and (d) provide formal educational workshops for parents that will serve to increase the parent's ability to be more aware of their children's academic potential and aspirations (p.16).

This study demonstrated that increased involvement indeed makes a difference in a child's academic performance. If schools embrace the concept of encouraging and including parents, there is a great possibility that there could be positive gains in areas other than academics. When we increase the amount of adults that are involved in educating our children, perhaps the number of children previously left behind will begin to diminish.

TABLE 1

Results of Pretests and Post tests

		M	N	S.D.
Reading	Pretest	69.0	21	35.80
	Post test	84.4	21	18.68
Math	Pretest	59.1	21	35.73
	Post test	93.1	21	15.07
Sight Words	Pretest	56.8	21	25.89
	Post test	96.0	21	9.44

TABLE 2

Correlations between Parental Involvement and Academic Achievement on Posttests

		Parent Survey	Graded Homework	Reading	Math	Sightwords
Parent Survey	Pearson Correlation	1.00	.47*	.54**	.30	.25
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.01	.01	.09	.14
	N	21.00	21.00	21.00	21.00	21.00
Graded Homework	Pearson Correlation	.47*	1.00	.23	.49*	.39*
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.01	.	.16	.01	.04
	N	21.00	21.00	21.00	21.00	21.00
Reading	Pearson Correlation	.54**	.23	1.00	.21	.18
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.01	.16	.	.18	.22
	N	21.00	21.00	21.00	21.00	21.00
Math	Pearson Correlation	.30	.49*	.21	1.00	.34
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.09	.01	.18	.	.06
	N	21.00	21.00	21.00	21.00	21.00
Sightwords	Pearson Correlation	.25	.39*	.18	.34	1.00
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.14	.04	.22	.06	.
	N	21.00	21.00	21.00	21.00	21.00

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

**-. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

APPENDIX A

Homework Rubric

Students' Name _____

Score _____

5 = excellent 4 = good 3 = needs improvement 2 or less = poor

The student is eligible to earn a total of 5 points per day or 20 points per week.

Question number 1 is worth 2 points.

Question number 2 is worth 1 point.

Question number 3 is worth 1 point.

Question number 4 is worth 1 point.

1. Did the student return the assignment the next day?

yes

no

2. Did the student complete the entire assignment?

yes

no

3. Did the student have a parent to sign the homework?

yes

no

4. Was the homework assignment done correctly?

yes

no

APPENDIX B

Individual Homework Scoring Chart

Name _____

There will be no homework given over the weekends.

Week _____ Date _____

	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.
assignment returned the next day				
was the assignment done completely				
the assignment had a parent signature				
accurateness of the assignment				
Score				

Total Weekly Score _____

APPENDIX C

August 14, 2005

Dear Parent(s):

In order to better serve you and your child, I have compiled a list of questions that I would like for you to fill out and return with your child by Wednesday, August 16th. Please fill this questionnaire out to the best of your ability. If a question do not apply to you or your child, please put "n/a" in the space. Please feel free to call me at 478-676-3475 if you have any questions.

1. Does your child have a special place in the house to study? yes no
If yes, where is this special place? (Ex. desk in the child's room, kitchen table, etc.) _____

2. Does your child have an regular time to study? yes no

3. How long does your child usually study/do homework per night?
_____ less than 15 min. _____ 16 -30 min

4. Do you read with your child most nights? yes no
If yes, approximately how many minutes do you read with your child each night? _____

5. Does your child usually do homework/reading while watching t.v.?
yes no

6. Who mostly helps your child with reading? _____ mom and dad
_____ mom _____ dad _____ siblings
_____ after-school program _____ other

7. Who will mostly help your child with reading/homework this year?
_____ mom and dad _____ mom _____ dad _____ siblings
_____ after-school program _____ other

8. If your child has someone other than you—boys and girls club, babysitter, etc.—help him/her with homework, will you re-check and review the homework with your child before returning it to school?

yes no

9. Does your child prefer to play in a group to play alone? group alone

10. Does your child have play time before doing homework? yes no

11. Does your child eat a snack before homework, after homework or neither? before after neither

12. In what subject area(s) (if any) do you feel that your child may have a weakness?

13. What subject area(s) do you feel are your child's strongest?

14. What does your child like to do for fun?

15. What is something special about your child that you would like to share? (Ex. personality, behaviors, special talents, etc.)

16. Does your child have medical problems that I should be aware of ?

yes no

If yes, please explain: _____



17. If I need to reach you, please check which method(s) of contact you would prefer? Please check as many as you wish.

_____ note sent home

_____ phone call phone no(s): _____

contact name _____

relationship _____

additional phone info: _____

_____ e-mail

e-mail address: _____

other _____

_____, child's name

_____, parent(s) signature

Thanks for your time and information. We're going to have a wonderful year!!

C.Hall, 1st grade

APPENDIX D

Parent Survey Rubric

Parent (s)' Name(s): _____

Total Score: _____

Date: _____

Questions 1, 2, 4, 5, and 8 are “yes” and “no” questions.

yes = 2 points

no = 1 point

Questions 6 and 7 are multiple-choice questions and will be scored as follows:

Answer choices: ____mom ____dad ____mom and dad = 2 points

Answer choices: ____after-school ____siblings ____other = 1 point

Questions 3 and 9-17 are not scored.

After the scores have been totaled, the parents will be divided into two groups. The groups are described as follows:

A. Parents receiving scores of 11 – 14 will be categorized in group A. This group is considered to be the most actively involved parents.

B. Parents receiving scores of 7-10 will be categorized in group B. This group is considered to be the less actively involved parents.

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