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## **Impacts of Parent Involvement on Student Success at the Secondary Grade Levels**

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Impacts of Parent Involvement on Student Success at the Secondary Grade Levels

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A Literature Review Presented

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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### Abstract

Parent involvement has been an important aspect of public education in the United States since the beginning of public education. Much research has been conducted over the years to show the importance of parent involvement, but the majority of these studies have focused on involvement at the elementary level. Recent studies have shown that even though the level of parent involvement at the high school level is equally as important as at any other grade level in terms of student success, the number of parents who stay involved in their child's educational journey once they reach the high school level drops dramatically. This literature review will analyze studies and information that support the need for various levels of parent involvement at the high school level. The review will look at the history and definition of parent involvement, some of the factors that impact parent involvement, the effects of the lack of involvement, and the benefits of involvement at the secondary level.

### Impacts of Parent Involvement on Student Success at the Secondary Grade Levels

A commonly occurring challenge for teachers and administrators across the United States high schools today is student apathy and lack of motivation (Benders, 2011). Teachers and administrators spend countless hours in professional development, researching on their own time, and implementing new instructional strategies and resources to make education more engaging for students. The problem, however, is that student motivation does not and cannot come solely from the time they spend in the classroom. It must also come from the students' life outside of the school. Parent involvement is a large key to unlocking student motivation and helping students to be as successful as possible by offering the support and guidance needed for their educational journey to be a successful one (Ohio Department of Education, 2016).

Parent involvement is a multi-tiered concept that can be implemented in a plethora of methods from grades K-12. Though much research has been done on the impact of parent involvement at the elementary and middle school levels, emerging research is also showing that students at the high school level also require that same support and involvement from parents and family members to continue to be successful in school (Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010). According to researcher Beth Simon (2001), research shows that parent involvement tends to decrease as students get older and more involved in academics and school-related activities, but the need for their involvement does not decrease. She mentions that parent involvement at the high school level has a deep impact on many aspects of a student's success, including behavior, attendance, standardized test scores, and more.

Through this literature review, research and data will be analyzed and synthesized to show the crucial benefits of continued parent involvement at the high school level, explain how that involvement can be fostered and supported by schools, and show the many ways parents can

be involved to fit their lifestyles and comfort levels. Parent involvement must be a partnership between the school and the parents, and there are several levels of involvement parents can take ownership of to be a more present and progressive part of their child's education and success. A parent's comfort level with being involved in their child's educational journey can be impacted by several elements, such as their own educational background and experience, their socioeconomic status, and their culture (Oswald, Zaidi, Cheatham, & Diggs Brody, 2017). This research will explain how schools can work to form partnerships with parents of high school students, while being aware of and accommodating to parents of these varying demographics.

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **History**

Parent involvement has truly been a factor in education since as early as 1642, when laws were passed by colonists stating parents were responsible for educating their children in the areas of reading, religion, and trade. Since then, the responsibility of educating America's youth has been passed back and forth between parents and education systems, and that responsibility has been written into government policies in different ways throughout history (Watson et. al., 2012). Historically, the parents were the ones primarily responsible for educating their children, but different historical and societal changes have altered those expectations. During the early 20th century, parents became increasingly involved in their child's education at the nursery school level. Several programs were developed to encourage and promote involvement at that nursery level, but these programs were aimed at parents in middle-class communities with stay-at-home mothers.

It was not until during the Great Depression and World War II that initiatives were taken to also reach out to parents of lower socioeconomic statuses and varying cultural and ethnic

backgrounds. Unfortunately, these initiatives were not strongly supported by educators, who viewed these parents as lacking the skills and education needed to be productive contributors to their child's education. A surge in immigration after World War II led to changes in the ways parents were involved with public schools, and the end result has been a decrease in the level and opportunity of parent involvement. These decreases are affected by the culture and socioeconomic statuses of the families (Tekin, 2011). The Great Depression required all able-bodied family members to work to help support their families. With the high poverty rate and lower education levels of this time period, parents did not have the ability to educate their children the way they had in the past.

The latest focus on increasing parent involvement in the educational journey of American students first came to light roughly thirty years ago. Researchers noted just how much of a shift had occurred in the responsibility of educating America's youth, and parents seemed to have taken a hands-off approach, thus putting full educational responsibilities in the laps of educators. Through researching the benefits of parent involvement, it was evident that parents needed to take a more active role in the lives of their children. The purpose of this initiative was to create a partnership between schools and parents that allowed opportunities for collaboration to improve the performances and abilities of students. It was meant to enhance the schools' abilities to understand the varying cultures and needs of students and families, and make those parent connections more meaningful and valued (Watson et. al., 2012).

Exploring the benefits of parent involvement at the high school level is a newer concept in the last couple decades. There has been much research done over the last nearly four decades on the importance of parent involvement at the elementary and middle school levels, but not nearly as much to show the value of parent involvement at the higher levels (Watson et. al.,

2012). The reasoning is that it is much easier for parents to be involved when children are younger, but the older children get, the harder time parents have connecting to their child's educational journey. They also have fewer opportunities to be involved than they do when their children are younger. At the younger levels, there are many opportunities to volunteer in the classroom, to chaperone field trips, and to help children with their academic skills (Watson et. al).

### **Apathy at High School Level in Relation to Parent Involvement**

Student apathy has been identified as a very serious and growing issue among students across the United States. When looking at the top 14 countries in the world in terms of education, the United States ranks at 11th place, and student apathy is partially to blame. Student apathy can be defined as a lack of interest and motivation from students to participate and perform well in their academic and extracurricular activities (Benders, 2011). Though there are many factors that inhibit a student from possessing the motivation to do well in school, apathy is the primary barrier that students and teachers face. Bender emphasizes that apathy tends to increase as children progress from elementary and middle school and into high school.

Apathy is relevant to the issue of parent involvement because apathy and lack of student motivation have been found to occur as a direct result of parent apathy and lack of parent involvement in the child's educational journey. When it comes to looking at apathy in parents and students, it is suggested that the apathetic mindset comes from the expectations that schools are being held to (Benders, 2011). According to a 2011 study conducted by David Benders, the common mindset of parents is that they believe their job is to send their child to school, and the education system will take over all education responsibilities from there. Parents are placing less importance on their student being successful, and less accountability on their student to work



hard in school. Instead, when a student is struggling to perform well, the finger is often pointed at the school system, and the student and parents are made out to be the victim.

As will be presented and explained throughout this literature review, there is a direct positive correlation between parent involvement in their high school child's education at any capacity and the performance and success of their student. There are multiple ways a parent can be involved in their child's education at the secondary level, regardless of their education level, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, or parental role. Parent involvement is a complex system with a variety of avenues to choose from that best fit the needs and comfort level of the parents. The bottom line is that the more aggressively parents takes an active role in their child's education, the lower the apathy level will be for both the parents and students, and the more successful the child will be as they work through their high school years of education and extracurricular activities (Oswald et. al, 2017).

### **Defining Parent Involvement**

Parent involvement is a term with a wide range of meanings and perceptions when referring to involvement in the educational realm of a child. In general terms, parent involvement is a partnership between parents and schools with a wide range of activities available to allow parents to be actively involved in their child's education (Simon, 2001). It is how parents interact with their child's school with the intention of benefitting their child and their academic successes (Oswald et. al, 2017). Parent involvement includes home-based activities, such as helping with homework, asking about the child's day, and reading at home with children, as well as school-based activities, such as volunteering at school and being present at extracurricular activities (Watson et. al., 2012).

### **Levels of Involvement**

There are many barriers to consider when determining levels of parental involvement. The way a parent chooses to be involved in their high school child's educational journey varies on a case by case basis and is impacted by the several demographics including the parent's education level, family structure, family size, parent gender, work outside the home, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, education level, and their expectations of the school. Studies have shown that undereducated and single parents are far less likely to be involved in certain types of parent involvement opportunities (Deslandes & Berstand, 2005). The choice to be involved or not also hinges on the perception parents have of the school and their ability to be involved, based on their own comfort levels and living situations.

According to Marschall (2006), over the course of the last 40 years, the United States has seen a large increase in immigration, specifically in the Latino population. Marschall suggests that this increase in the Latino population has had a great effect on the United States's public school system: as roughly 30 percent of students now enrolled in United States public schools are of the Latino population. Because of this demographic change, schools have had to work hard to adjust their perceptions and gain the knowledge and skills necessary to create meaningful partnerships with Latino families in order to promote parent involvement and give the students the most meaningful educational experience possible. Many of the challenges come from the families not being comfortable approaching the school system due to language barriers, immigration status, and poverty. These barriers contribute to Latino students in the United States public school system having the highest percentage of drop-out rates compared to all other minorities (Marschall).

When looking at parent involvement from a cultural aspect, specifically from the standpoint of the Hispanic and Latino cultures, there are different factors that influence the level

of parent involvement from these families. Research has shown that some of the factors that influence parent involvement in this cultural group include self-efficacy, school initiatives and invitations to be involved, parent education levels, immigration status, language barriers, and feelings of discrimination because of their culture (Reynolds et. al., 2014). A mixed-methods study reported that the psychology behind parent-involvement in Latino culture varies from one end of the spectrum to the other. Whereas some families place an exceptional amount of importance on performing well in school, others do not view education as having much merit in comparison to being able to work. While they view education as important, their expectations of their child's achievements can be much lower than the expectations from parents in other demographic groups (Park & Holloway, 2013). Those with the higher merit placed on education reported that they stay up late working on homework with their child and work to communicate with the school to stay up-to-date on what their child is doing in school.

Many families refrain from becoming involved due to feeling outcasted by the school system brought on by their cultural barriers. They do not feel seen or understood by schools, and therefore they do not participate in their child's education because they do not feel as though the schools respects them, or views them as being capable of being involved due to language and cultural differences (Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2012). Research shows that when schools build relationships, get to know their cultural and family dynamics, and work to include parent views and expectations, parent involvement and engagement increased and became more meaningful (Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2012). Not only did these partnerships and connections between schools and parents improve relations and involvement between the parties, they also increased the self-confidence and performance of the students (Marschall, 2006). Students and families thrive in school districts where their ethnicity is represented within the teaching staff, the administration

staff, the school board, and the community. Establishing those connections creates links between the families and the school systems that foster all levels of parent involvement (Marschall, 2006).

Socioeconomic status also plays a role in the level of involvement coming from parents. While involvement from white parents in a low socioeconomic group is generally more involved than Latino parents, coming from a lower socioeconomic status has many of the same effects on involvement as coming from minority ethnic groups does (Park & Holloway, 2013). There is a large disconnect between the parents and the school system due to parents feeling intimidated by teachers, administrators, and expectations. Some barriers that prevent parents from lower socioeconomic statuses from being more involved include work schedules, lower education levels, and low self-efficacy. There is less support from these parents to aid in their child establishing college or career goals beyond high school, and it is more of a survival mindset to successfully complete high school (Park & Holloway, 2013).

Parents of high socioeconomic status are proven to be the most involved in preparing their child for college and are more involved in their child's overall educational journey. Their education level, careers, and home lives allow them to be more present at extracurricular events, help their children with homework, and communicate more easily with teachers and administrators (Park & Holloway, 2013).

While most research will say that any level of parent involvement is wonderful, as long as there is some level of involvement, there is such a concept as being too involved or being involved in ways that do not promote positive partnerships (Keller, 2008). This type of involvement is often seen in districts with higher socioeconomic status families. In recent years,

there have been several incidents where schools are getting bad publicity from parents who have expectations and demands that are above what should be the school's responsibility (Keller).

Issues arise when the purpose of parent involvement is skewed, and parents only become involved in their child's education when they are making demands, rather than being involved to work with the district to best support their child (Keller, 2008). The partnership becomes one-sided, and instead of schools and parents working together, it seems parents are working against the school. According to Keller, this type of involvement comes from the generation of entitlement and a world where it is easy to fire off an email to a teacher or administrator complaining about what the parent sees as a problem, rather than communicating openly and productively to solve the problem together. The key to getting past this kind of parent involvement is for schools to reach out to these parents and personally invite them to meet and discuss ways they can be involved so they are getting what they want and expect out of the school by being a part of the bigger picture (Keller).

### **Effects of Parent Involvement at the High School Level**

It has been long supported through research that parents' involvement in their child's educational journey has a positive effect on their learning outcomes. As students grow and develop in the high school years, the more they depend on their peers for interaction and support, rather than being so family-centered (Simon, 2001). Their peers may seem to have a stronger influence on the decisions, behaviors, and academic performances of students, but Simon's data shows that when parents and teenagers spend time together, they discuss school activities and plans after high school, and parents were aware of what their child is doing in and out of school, the less apathetic, and more successful the students were with their schooling. In addition to better academic success, students with involved parents also have better attendance, higher

standardized test scores, and fewer behavior problems in school. The involvement must be interaction between the parent and child. If parents are going above the child's head and contacting the school rather than communicating with their child, the more likely the child will feel attacked, and no progress will be made (Simon, 2001).

Parent involvement improves academic achievement, increases engagement and motivation towards school work and the classroom, and lowers the average drop-out rate across all demographics (Park & Holloway, 2013). Not only does parent involvement have many academic benefits on the success of the student, it also helps improve student apathy. Again, apathy is a key component to low student performance and is influenced heavily by lack of parent involvement. When parents are involved in their child's schooling, whether it be through school-based, home-based, or academic socialization, the academic and emotional performance of high school students improves, as does mental health and behavior (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2013).

The benefits of parent involvement are not limited to any cultural or socioeconomic status. According to assistant professor of educational psychology Alyssa Gonzalez (2002), parenting practices continue to have an impact into students' high school years, regardless of ethnic or socioeconomic status. When parents were more involved in their child's education and extracurricular activities, the grade point average of the student increased. The types of involvement specified in her research include helping with homework, attending school events, keeping up on their child's grades and behaviors, and helping their child with course scheduling and college preparation. Gonzalez's study states the most beneficial type of involvement comes from involvement at home. When parents take an interest in how their child's day went, help

with homework, address any concerns, and provide acceptance and warmth to their child, the better the child felt about their own abilities to succeed academically.

### **Application**

#### **How Schools Can Increase Parent Involvement**

When it comes to implementing more opportunities for parents to be involved in their high school student's education and effectively reaching out to those parents, research shows that the first step almost always has to come from the school's side of the line. As previously stated, many parents resist involvement at the high school level out of intimidation and fear of judgement due to their socioeconomic status and family and cultural beliefs. There are some mixed views on this topic, as several educators believe parent involvement should start and center at home; they have the attitude that parents of high school children do not have an interest in being involved at this grade level (Ramirez, 2000). With new professional development and teacher education programs, the majority of studies on this point assert that parents want to be involved. However, they are not sure how to do so in a way that will be helpful to their child (Simon, 2001)

There is a plethora of avenues schools, teachers, and administrators can take to reach out to parents and begin building partnerships that encourage parent involvement at the high school level. It must start with communication. Studies have shown that there is a large percentage of parents of high school children who want to be involved in their child's education, but they do not hear from teachers or administrators until their child is struggling, and then do not know what they can do to help (Oswald et. al, 2017). Communication between school and parent must go beyond conversations at parent-teacher conferences (Simon, 2001). Parents may feel self-doubt that their involvement will have any impact on their child's academic success, but being

involved includes so much more than helping their child with chemistry or geometry homework (Sanders, 2019).

One way schools can implement opportunities for parental involvement is, first and foremost, to create a school environment that is accepting and inviting to all families. Communication from teachers needs to happen at the very start of the year and not be put off until there is a problem or concern with a student. A lot of the issues with grades, attendance, and motivation can be diminished if that line of communication is opened right away (Ohio Department of Education, 2016). Communication must be a mixture of positive and constructive conversations, and it can happen through conferences, emails, phone calls, newsletters, and even home visits. It is important that the first contact a teacher has with a parent is a positive one. Communication also needs to be straight-forward, be clearly understood, accommodate language and cultural barriers, and give parents a chance for their voice to be heard as well (Education World, 2017). School can also hold open houses for families to meet teachers and administrators, see the classrooms, meet other parents, and get a feel for the climate and culture of the school (Ohio Department of Education, 2016).

Another effective method of using communication to open up opportunities for involvement is to create workshop activities for parental participation. Involvement does not just have to be an academic contribution, and hosting workshops ranging anywhere from drug and alcohol abuse prevention to college readiness is a great way to show parents they can be involved in helping their child be successful without feeling intimidated by curriculum and content (Simon, 2001). In all honesty, parent involvement can be as simple as asking students how their day went and asking probing questions to get a better idea of what their child is doing at school and how they feel about what they are learning. By initiating these conversations, parents can get



a feel for what their child is doing. If they notice any concerns or frustrations from their child, they can take the step to reach out to teachers and help their child before they are really struggling beyond what parent involvement can solve (Sanders, 2019)

One of the most currently versatile and effective ways to implement and support parent involvement is through the use of technology. With technology being such a dominant piece of society today, it is important that schools take advantage of all the benefits technology has to offer, especially when it comes to communication. Using technology opens more lines of communication between parents and schools. It breaks down barriers that may hold parents back from being more involved by allowing them to check grades online, email teachers with questions, and view posted assignments and announcements. Ideally, all can be done when parents have time in their schedules to sit down at a computer or pull out their smartphone, and can avoid the obstacle of scheduling time to come into the school (Olmstead, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

The need for parent involvement does not stop the older the student gets. In fact, the need for parent involvement at the high school level is just as important as the need for parent involvement at the elementary and middle school levels. Parents often become intimidated by involvement the older the student becomes as the content and curriculum become more rigorous. It is vital that parents are made aware of the many levels of involvement they can partake in, and there is no level of involvement that is not important. Parents never have to open a textbook or look at a homework assignment to be involved. Involvement can be as simple as asking their student what they are learning.

While it is ultimately up to the parents to decide if and how they want to be involved in their high school student's educational journey, schools must be willing to extend a hand to open

the door of communication with parents. Teachers and administrators must practice transparency and communication to let parents know that their involvement, whatever it may look like, is important and respected. Districts need to work to provide parents with opportunities to be involved, and those opportunities must be diverse to allow parents of all backgrounds to be stakeholders in their child's education. If teachers truly have their students' best interest at heart, they will do their part to keep parents involved from kindergarten through high school graduation and beyond.

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