CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
IN MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION
AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

by
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Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................................. 4

Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of Problem ................................................................................................................................. 5
Research Question(s) ................................................................................................................................. 5
Definition of Terms ................................................................................................................................... 6

Chapter II: Review of Literature ........................................................................................................... 9

Parental Involvement

Effects on academic performance ............................................................................................................. 9
Effects on behavioral and social performance ......................................................................................... 11

Unique Characteristics of middle school students

Chemical changes ...................................................................................................................................... 15
Brain changes .......................................................................................................................................... 16
Emotional changes .................................................................................................................................... 17

Methods of Increasing Parental Involvement

Transdisciplinary Service Model ................................................................................................................ 18
Increasing Homework Completion ............................................................................................................ 19
Improving Reading ................................................................................................................................. 20

Chapter III: Results and Analysis Relative to the Problem ................................................................. 22

Parental Involvement ............................................................................................................................... 22
Unique Characteristics of Middle School Students ............................................................................... 23
Methods of Increasing Parental Involvement ......................................................................................... 24

Chapter IV: Recommendations and Conclusion .................................................................................. 25
Abstract

The purpose of this education research paper was to examine the components of effective parental involvement and to develop ways in which a middle school could increase levels of parental involvement. This paper reviews the need for an increase in parental involvement, the uniqueness of middle level students, and the different types of parental involvement models found in middle schools. Research from all three topics shows compelling data that parental involvement is an integral part in the successful education of a middle school student.
Chapter I: Introduction

Many educators see parental involvement as the key to student success. In my experience, far too many parents don’t feel the same. I have seen extremely intelligent middle school students flounder and fail because there is no one at home who cares about their school performance. I have also seen students that struggle immensely, yet succeed because their mother is calling me weekly for updates and asking ways that they can help. In my opinion, parental involvement is an important key to the success of all students.

Statement of Problem

“Early adolescence represents the most critical period in the education of students” (Fenwick, 1987, p. 65). Because of this, parental involvement should increase during the middle school years. In fact, parental involvement decreases during this pivotal point in an adolescent’s life. On average in the United States, around 60% of parents are considered highly involved in an elementary student’s education. That number drops to near 40% being highly involved during the middle school. Parent involvement in children’s education is important for student success (Nord, 1998). It is so important to increase the amount of parental involvement at the middle school level. Teachers and other school officials need to find effective means of increasing parental involvement in order to increase student success.

Research Question(s)

1. What are the characteristics of effective parental involvement at the middle school level?

2. How can school personnel stimulate effective parental involvement at the middle school level?
**Definition of Terms**

*Parental Involvement*

Conflicting definitions exist for parental involvement. One suggested definition refers to parental involvement as participation in one or more school-related activities. For example: volunteering at school, participating in parent-teacher conferences, homework assistance, etc. (Balli, Wedman, & Demo, 1997). This definition seems inadequate, suggesting that parents aren’t involved in their children in more ways than school.

Reynolds (1992, p. 1121) defined parental involvement as “any interaction between a parent and child that may contribute to the child’s development or direct parent participation with a child’s school in the interest of the child.” This definition suggests that an overall involvement will lead the child to a better future. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) defined parental involvement as the dedication of resources by the parent to the child within a given domain. They described three areas in which parents are involved: behavioral, cognitive, and personal. Parents need to be involved in every area of their child’s life, so this sounds like a pretty accurate definition of parental involvement.

Epstein (1987) furthered this definition by saying that there are five main types of parent involvement: (1) parents fulfilling their obligations towards their children by providing food, clothing, and shelter, (2) schools informing parents about basic school programs, (3) parents participating in activities at school, (4) parents mediating home-based learning activities, and (5) PI in governance and advocacy at the school, district and state levels.

Most literature has centered on the effects of Epstein’s fourth type of parental involvement, the home-based learning activities, yet has left out so many other important forms
of parental involvement. Most people think of parental involvement, from a school view, that a parent is helping out with homework and doing other home-based learning activities. A more complete definition of parental involvement would include all five aspects of Epstein’s definition of parental involvement.

**Middle Level Education**

Middle School. Junior High. Intermediate School. There are many names for the time between elementary and high school. In some countries, middle school is synonymous for secondary school. In America, middle level education can be viewed as the time between elementary and high school. Middle schools are typically sixth through eighth grade. Junior high is usually seventh and eighth grades. Occasionally you will see a middle level school that may include 5th grade or possibly 9th grade. This research paper will include research from grades five up to grade nine as to incorporate all possible definitions of middle level education.

**Student Achievement**

Student Achievement will be defined using Webster’s Dictionary’s first definition of the word achievement: “something accomplished, especially by superior ability, special effort, great courage, etc.” (Merriam-Webster, 2010). In a school setting, these accomplishments should be centered on mastery of the grade level content expectations. Student achievement is based on students successfully learning and mastering a certain concept, or group of concepts.

**Effective Parental Involvement**

We have defined parental involvement above, but unless the parental involvement is doing some benefit to the students, it is less significant. Effective parental involvement, in this paper, will be defined as any time a parent is involved with the student leading to a positive outcome on the student’s achievement or ability to achieve. This does not have to be in just the
curricular areas. Effective parental involvement could range from parents directly helping with school work to setting aside an environment conducive to learning at home to help encourage quality learning.
Chapter II: Review of Literature

Parental Involvement

Effects on Academic Performance

As a teacher, I often see struggling students succeed because their parents are actively involved. I am also often see students struggle more because there is no one involved or concerned enough to intervene on their behalf at home. DeAngelo (1997) examined this trend in a study of 20 of the lowest readers in each grade at a middle school consisting of 520 students in rural Illinois. Students that were chosen were considered “at-risk” based on their score on the test given. The Gates-MacGinitie reading test measured reading fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. The reading test served as a pre-test and post-test for the 10-week study. The families of these students were then asked to participate in a parental involvement study. They were brought in to meet with the researchers, participate in trainings, complete surveys and even participate in field trips specific only to the study group. There were nightly and weekly reading logs and assignments to complete together over the course of the study that centered on “paired reading”. Students were able to read books of their own choosing (DeAngelo, 1997).

At the completion of the ten-week study, students retook the Gates-MacGinitie reading assessment. The researchers took numerical data in comparing the pre- and post- test scores. After analyzing their results the researchers were able to see an increase in reading comprehension and fluency but were surprised to see a slight decrease in vocabulary. This slight decrease, the researchers concluded, was due to students choosing their own readings. They may have not ventured for texts with varied vocabulary levels.

This study showed a significant increase over the course of a mere 10 weeks due to family involvement. However, a single test being used to measure performance increase or
decrease is not completely accurate. There are many factors that could alter the outcome of the test: student attitude, student effort and even hunger at the time of the test, etc. Nonetheless, this study suggests the need of parental involvement in at-risk students. Within 10 weeks, reading achievement began to increase. One can only imagine what a lifetime would do.

In a study of gifted and talented students Clemons (2008) found a strong correlation between parental involvement and attitudes toward school, socioeconomic status, and self perceptions. Three hundred forty-two middle school students in Arkansas, Utah and Virginia, already identified as gifted and talented by their local district, were chosen to participate in this study. (Students that were also identified as learning disabled were not included.) The study began with surveys being sent to the appropriate gifted and talented resource teachers to allow students to complete. Other data were compiled on these same students in order to gain information on socio-economic status and parental attitudes and styles by means of state records and surveys to parents.

The researchers found a direct correlation between parental involvement and parenting styles to student attitude towards school and perceptions of self. An r-value of 0.44 and p-value of 0.483 suggests that parenting styles directly affects a student’s attitude toward school. The researcher tested in excess of 25 different student relationships to various factors; five of them directly correlated with parental involvement and this research project. It was clear that parental involvement, and the attitudes associated with it, clearly affect students and their achievement in academics (Clemons, 2008).

Effects on Behavioral and Social Performance

Parental involvement can have a direct effect on how adolescents behave both in a school setting and in a social atmosphere. In a survey-study of 140 Algebra 1 students, Hoang (2007)
Parental Involvement

discovered that students with actively involved parents were more apt to have higher levels of intrinsic motivation. One hundred forty students were given a series of 7-point Likert surveys asking them questions about things such as perceived parenting styles, parental involvement, goal orientations and relative autonomy (Hoang, 2007).

Among the perceived parenting styles were authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. An authoritarian parent stresses on order, obedience and above all, respect for authority. A permissive parent will have little enforcement of any rules and accepts behavior whether positive or negative. An authoritative parent style falls in between these two. Authoritative parents stress communication between parent and child, nurture individuality and rely on learning as a key to the child as well as the parent (Hoang, 2007).

Hoang made some interesting conclusions after the analysis of his study. First, students that have actively involved parents were able to be more self-motivated and start projects more independently. Second, those with authoritative parents were more apt to work toward mastery of a topic as opposed to those with authoritarian parents who work toward an acceptable grade. Finally, students that perceived their parents as more authoritative were more likely to be independent, exploratory, and self-reliant (Hoang, 2007).

One can make the conclusion from this study that individuals who have authoritative parents have the engrained ability to be self starters and work towards mastery at whatever they try. Whether it is in social relationships, careers, or parents themselves, they will be wired to give it their all (Hoang, 2007).

Hoang (2007) surveyed students in Algebra 1, a fairly difficult academic course, but what about students who struggle not only academically but socially? Shulmire (1996) presented to the American Psychological Association a comparative study on gang-involved adolescent girls
to non-gang-involved girls. Shulmire (1996) identified adolescents from three different sub-populations: 1) adolescent females that were previously identified as gang-affiliated by the local juvenile justice department, 2) adolescent females that were identified as at-risk by local community agencies, and 3) adolescent females with no known gang affiliations from the local metropolitan school district. An undisclosed number of subjects were then chosen from the lists provided by the above agencies and then the adolescent selected whether or not to participate in the study. Structured interviews were performed with each test subject. The interviews gained insight as to the familial background of the student, the student’s self-esteem, and a test of the students perceived sense of efficacy. This information was then analyzed with other collateral information such as standardized test scores, attendance, grade point averages and Special Education records. Due to the very personal nature of the information gaining stage of this study, debriefings were conducted to ensure students understood the results.

At the conclusion of the study, Shulmire (1996) had some clear numerical evidence that led her to some important conclusions. First, adolescents whose parents had higher education levels were less likely to be considered at-risk or gang-involved. Second, the family relationships among non-gang involved adolescents were a lot more positive then the other two sub groups. The gang-involved adolescent women were more likely to feel mistreated at home and had poor or non-existent relationships with their fathers. Finally, the adolescents studied were less likely to have behavior referrals and have higher grade point averages if they were in the non-at-risk, non-gang related subgroup.

These results ended with the author creating six risk factors for students at risk for joining gang related activities. They are:

1. *The mother had less than high school education.*
2. *The adolescent women has poor relationship with father or father is absent.*

3. *The adolescent woman feels mistreated at home.*

4. *The adolescent woman lacks sense of self efficacy as measured by score of 12 or lower on Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External Control scale.*

5. *Adolescent woman has low self esteem as measured by a score of 17 or higher on Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale.*

6. *Adolescent has friends who are gang involved. (Shulmire, 1996 p. 25)*

These results indicate that students from a more stable, safe and loving environment in which both parents are involved and educated will be more academically and socially successful. One can make the conclusion from both of these studies that students that come from educationally rich and involved parents will be more likely to succeed academically and socially.

**Unique Characteristics of Middle School Students**

**Chemical Changes**

The 1980’s was a time when a lot of research was done on the chemical changes of humans during adolescence. Multiple research studies were performed to figure out what made puberty such a remarkable period in an individuals life. Many teenagers don’t often know why they behave or feel the way that they do; and most likely, many parents and teachers associated with these adolescents would like to figure it out as well.

Nottleman (1987) collected data on the correlation between psychological functioning and status of puberty. Puberty was identified by the amount of hormone levels in the blood and physical stage of puberty of each test subject. A total of 108 boys and girls were studied, 56 were boys and 52 were girls. All five stages of pubertal development were represented in the study based on the Tanner criteria which was developed by Marshall and Tanner (1970).
Subjects were tested once every six months for a total of three tests. They were measured on physical stature, physical characteristics and hormone levels in the blood. Psychological assessments were also completed on these individuals. During each assessment interval moderate to strong correlations between hormone level and physical development were seen. Psychologically, behavioral problems went down and self-esteem went up as reported by the subject, the parents, and the examiner during observational periods (Nottleman, 1987).

These findings suggest that as hormone levels even out, behavioral and psychological issues lessen. The test subjects expressed higher self image and parents expressed less behavior issues the higher the pubertal stage. This was an important finding thirty years ago when little was known about the special differences inside adolescent bodies.

**Brain Changes**

It is very common for a middle school teacher to hear from members of society how crazy they must be to teach adolescents. A lot of parents dread the time that their child becomes a teenager. Though both of these comments are said in jest, there is usually some truth behind them. In fact, there is a rather large and persuasive body of brain research that proves what society has thought for a long time: teenagers are not the same as adults in a multitude of areas including, but not limited to, the ability to make good judgment calls, control impulses, and plan effectively (Elvevag et al., 2005).

As explained by Elvevag, Weinberger and Giedd (2005), the frontal lobe of the human brain is an area that helps control behavioral areas such as: impulsive behaviors, the initiation and inhibition of inappropriate behaviors, organization, decision making, empathy and insight. This area of the brain changes dramatically during adolescence. All brains have what is called “gray matter”. This gray matter contains cell bodies and dendrites which control the amount and
speed of the connections in the brain. There are more of these connections in the human brain than there are internet connections in the entire world. MRI studies show that human brains are in a different state before, during, and after adolescence.

In a study of 243 brain development MRI scans of 145 subjects, aged 4 to 22, the volume of frontal gray matter differed remarkably. The subjects showed notable thickening of the frontal lobe during the pre-pubescent/pubescent ages. The amount of gray matter in the frontal lobes did not stabilize until the early to mid 20’s in each test subject. During the adolescent years, humans are less able to make as many connections due to the large amount of brain growth and development (Elvevag et al., 2005).

With this information one can relate why adolescents need more parental involvement and understanding than the average student. Brain changes during adolescence matters, according to Elvevag, Weinberger and Giedd (2005) because: “Impulse control, planning and decision-making are largely prefrontal cortex functions that are still maturing during adolescence…The ability for the brain to plan, adapt to the social environment and to imagine possible future consequences of action or to appropriately gauge their emotional significance is still developing throughout adolescence.” (Elvevag, et. al, 2005, p. 14)

**Emotional Changes**

Adolescents undergo immense changes, both physically and mentally. There is a third major area in human development that changes during puberty: emotional change. In order for adolescents to grow into emotionally full-functioning adults, they tend to exhibit some typical behaviors. Adolescents have the tendency to focus on themselves and how their peers view them. It is important for them to feel accepted by parents and society in general. An adolescent will typically feel self-conscious about all of the physical, social and emotional changes they are
going through. This, as well as the hormonal changes, will cause mood swings that they simply don’t understand. Finally, adolescents will begin to make decisions based on the need to fit in rather than what is right or wrong. All of these may frustrate not only the adolescent but the adults in their lives (Solomon, 2007).

Without parental involvement, relationships between the adolescent and virtually anyone will be more difficult. Parental involvement remains critical to the adolescent-parent relationship, because the level of involvement signals to youth their importance to the parents (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986). This therefore helps them connect with their parents and eventually build relationships outside the family environment. Sullivan (1953), who was noted as being the “most influential theorist to discuss the importance of adolescent friendships,” argued that emotional well-being is built upon stable attachments, contented friendships, acceptance among peers, affection, and intimate closeness (as cited in Santrock, 2004, p. 414). The majority of these necessary attachments begin with parental involvement.

Methods of Increasing Parental Involvement

Transdisciplinary Service Delivery Model

The idea that some aspects of a teacher’s job can be done by the parent or caregiver is the central focus of the Transdisciplinary Service Delivery Model of parental involvement (Cross, 2003). In a survey done of Michigan special education educators, as well as speech, occupational and recreation therapists, many of the tasks done at school were identified as able to be shared or transferred to the student’s caregiver.

Once these tasks were identified as transferrable to parents, 12 Michigan schools adopted the Transdisciplinary Model. The Transdisciplinary Service delivery model can be defined as a
way of sharing the required services for a student with the parent. Some tasks are not able to be
shared due to the need for certification or advanced training, but many others can be performed
by the parents.

Michigan special education student assessment data was collected to analyze the effect
the parental involvement had on the students assessment achievement. The 12 volunteer teachers
that participated in the study had varying results. One-third of the teachers reported zero change
in assessment achievement. Another one-third showed some level of improvement; whereas, the
last third saw either a decrease or mixed results. Cross (2008) suggested that further studying of
this topic needs to be completed in order to substantiate any conclusion of the Transdisciplinary
Service Model. The data showed equal results for all three possible results.

This study of the Transdisciplinary Service Model for increasing parental involvement
leaves a lot of unanswered questions. First of all, what kind of training on parental involvement
were the teachers given? If done again, this study should ensure some sort of workshop or
conference. Second, what kind of training were the parents given? Many parents are not naturally
capable of providing dependable and accurate service to their child. Lastly, how did the
researcher define achievement on the state assessment? The assessment should naturally show
growth from one year to the next. Did they see a larger than normal growth from year to year?

Despite the flaws and questions, this is one noticeable attempt to increase parental
involvement. For the students that had capable parents, success was most likely imminent.

**Increasing Homework Completion**

Many students dislike doing homework. Parental involvement may be the key to
increasing homework completion (Hass & Reiley, 2008). Haas and Reiley set out to find a way
to improve their homework completion and found even more compelling data. The two set up a
homework completion system that involved parents routinely checking their students work and signing off on their planners, as well as a reward system for the completion of both.

The test subjects were 34 different families in two different 6th grade classes. Data were collected over a course of 15 weeks in order to analyze the differences in pre- and post- study homework and planner completion. Fifty-three percent of the students answered in the pre-study survey that they receive no help at home on homework and have no quiet place to do homework at home (Haas & Reiley, 2008).

Haas and Reiley (2008) then applied their parental involvement method of checking their students’ assignments and then signing the planner. They took data on homework completion and the rate of planner signings. Students earned extrinsic rewards, such as candy, for completion of these tasks. After a length of 15 weeks they compared homework completion and completed planners to the beginning of their study. Both items rose, as expected.

However, there was an unexpected result as well. In the post survey, students noted that they received help more often from their parents on homework and had quieter places to study more frequently (Haas & Reiley, 2008). Grades went up for these individuals. The only required task that parents had to do was check and sign for homework completion and the academic achievement went up. If this study were to be repeated it would be interesting to note pre- and post-assessment grades as well as test higher levels of parent involvement.

**Improving Reading through Parental Involvement**

Another such study narrowed the type of parental involvement to assisting in reading. The process of Paired Reading, which dates back to the 1970’s was implemented with parent-child teams. Often this is used with student-student teams, but for the sake of gaining information about the effects of parent involvement, Topping (1987) chose parent-student teams.
According to Topping, paired reading helps progress reading accuracy up to three times the rate of normal progress and reading fluency up to five times the normal progress. He also reported feedback from parents that stated their child’s enjoyment, comprehension, confidence and enthusiasm towards reading increased with a paired reading program. The main components of a paired reading program are that the student and parent read at least five times a week for 15 minutes each day and the student is allowed to pick at least some of the books.

Fifteen student-parent sets were selected in this study to participate based on the student’s reading levels as tested on a local reading assessment. Parents and students that had been selected then needed to consent to participate as well as attend trainings and functions involving the study. The study was 10 weeks long and required the participants to attend two trainings, a field trip, fill out reading logs and occasionally do an assignment on their reading.

In order to assess the effectiveness of this reading project, students were given the same reading test before and after the ten week period utilizing parental involvement. The test subjects were tested on reading comprehension, vocabulary, and speed and accuracy. Over the course of the study, the average increase in reading speed was almost half a year of academic progress, whereas reading comprehension was a quarter of year of growth (DeAngelo, 1997). Students and parents also reported gains in reading enjoyment and enthusiasm, as noted in parent/tutor checklists. In fact, 68% of the tutors felt that their child enjoyed reading more than before the reading program began. It is obvious to see that this type of parental involvement is destined to have some type of positive effect on student success.

The studies reviewed above contain examples of the effects that parental involvement can have on students. Academic achievement is one area that parental involvement affects. Based on
these studies, areas such as enjoyment of academic skills and therapy-related tasks also improve.

Parental involvement is a necessary tool for teachers to use in order to aid in student success.
Chapter III: Results and Analysis Relative to the Problem

Effects of Parental Involvement

After careful analysis of just a handful of the myriad of research on parental involvement, it is plain to see that involvement of parental units is extremely important to the success and achievement of students. Parents seem to agree with this when their child is younger and just starting out in school. As students achieve higher grade levels, parents back off and mistakenly allow the student to figure it out on their own (Nord, 1998). This act of lessening involvement is decreasing the success of many students, as well as creating negative attitudes toward school and learning.

An interesting conclusion can be drawn from this body of research: The parent’s attitude towards parental involvement is just as important as the parental involvement itself. A negative attitude during parental involvement may be absorbed by the adolescent and manifest itself in many different areas of life. A student may have a parent involved in their education, but may not think too highly of it. This could in turn create a negative attitude in the student towards education. In another example, a parent may seem involved in education but not in other areas of the adolescents life and therefore create social or emotional distress in the child (Clemons, 2008; Hoang, 2007).

Parental Involvement, to be effective, should be a positive experience for both the parent and the student. Although parents need to be in some-what of an authority role, they should also enjoy the interaction with their child. If negative experiences occur too often, the parent will not want to pursue that avenue of parental involvement. In this case a new mode of parental involvement should ensue. Both parties, the parent and child, should be open for two-way participation. It is also important that parental involvement is a consistent routine to build solid
emotional and academic foundations in the adolescent. A student that has an actively participating parent in a positive manner will succeed not only academically, but socially and emotionally. They will be able to handle changes, make better choices, and most likely be happier adults one day (Hoang, 2007)

Unique Characteristics of Middle School Students

Middle school students are a unique group of human beings. The stereotype of an adolescent is one of which has a squeaky voice and acne. On the surface it seems as though physical changes are the only malady effecting middle schoolers. Research has proven that much more than the eye can see is happening within a pre-teenage body.

What we see and experience on the outside is actually caused by numerous interactions within the human pubescent body. Hormone levels are constantly changing creating what will one day become an adult body. These hormones, as well as physical changes, aid in an adolescent to feel insecure about who they are as a person. Their need to fit in or associate with peers increases due to this flood of hormones.

Along with the increase in hormone levels, adolescents have billions of new brain connections developing during this time. It is now known that the brain does not fully develop until well into the 20’s. The neurons in an adolescent’s brain are forming new connections and rerouting other connections. They lose the ability to control impulses and make sound decisions (Elvevag et. al, 2005; Nottleman, 1987).

Combine the brain changes with a flood of hormones and you have a very unique situation: You have a middle school student. Middle schoolers need more guidance, more affirmations, and more parental involvement than most people.
**Methods of Increasing Parental Involvement**

Since the term parental involvement can have so many meanings, it is hard to pinpoint one successful way to identify what could increase it. A school’s goal should be to increase the number of positive academic and emotional interactions between students and their parents. Sometimes these interactions need to be more specific, based on the needs of the student.

Students come in all shapes and sizes, as do their intelligence and ability levels. Despite these differences, research has shown one universal need when it comes to the effective increasing of parental involvement: routine. Whether it is aiding in specific therapy or enjoying reading together, if it is consist the student will show marked increases in achievement. Students will complete homework, advance in reading fluency, or refine their fine motor skills if actively involved in a positive parental involvement relationship (Cross, 2003; DeAngelo, 1997; Haas, 2008).
Chapter IV: Conclusion

Recommendation

Parental involvement can be characterized in many different ways. Typically schools identify parental involvement as ways that aid in the education of students. But in reality, parental involvement can be any form of involvement of a parent with their child. Schools benefit from parental involvement by having happy, ready-to-learn students. Some times schools can reap even more benefits when the parental involvement is in a needed area, such as reading.

The key is for the school to identify the area in which needs increased parental involvement. This may be universal for the school, or it may be specific to the individual student. Often times a school may need to teach the parents effective ways to be involved, again, depending on the need. For example, a school on a Native American reservation may struggle with any and all types of parental involvement. It might have a history of removal and placement of children in other communities. This could have bred anti-education feelings as well as take away the knowledge of how to be a parent. Parental involvement would not have been a priority. The school needed to teach what it was to be an actively involved parent and why that was important. They would not have to focus on a specific subject or topic, they could focus on simply being involved. This may be as simple as sending in a box of Kleenex. Parental involvement does not have to be a profound task, just positive and consistent.

Another example would be if a student was having difficulty completing their homework. Often parents don’t know how to get their child to sit down and do their homework. The teacher could have a meeting with the parents and give them some ideas to help them. It might work best if the ideas also involve the teacher so that the parent is accountable for their new-found
knowledge. One such idea could be daily parent-teacher communication on homework completion which results in earned extra-curricular activities.

Schools should do anything possible to increase positive interactions between student and parent. As a result of the literature review, it is obvious to see that parental involvement, in any academic context, will help students succeed. Suggestions for this could be as simple as the signing of planners or as comprehensive as the school-wide adoption of parent involvement programs such as “I Care” (Solomon & Dean, 2007).

I would also suggest the educating of parents about the unique changes happening within their middle level student and how to effectively parent during this challenging time. This would be most effective as a periodic parent night that may address the challenges of parenting an adolescent. Other topics during these parent nights could include, but not be limited to: ways of being involved in an adolescent’s life, ways to help with homework or components of the school their child attends. Offering child care and possibly meals or other hand outs may help increase attendance to events like this.

In order for parents to accept a change in their parenting style, they need to understand the importance of being an active parent. Having teachers that are passionate about this heightened involvement will help. The passion for an increase in parent involvement will rub off on the parents during typical school functions such as parent-teacher functions and back to school nights. These teachers will also be able to brainstorm better ideas for involving the specific parents in their community. Each community is different and has unique needs in which individual teachers and schools need to accommodate.

A school is the future of each community. Because of this, schools need to embrace the community members and involve them. Bring in community members to teach their specific
skills or traits. Everyone in the community has something to offer, something to share. Activate student interest, and parent interest, by bringing in guest speakers. This will solidify the knowledge on the topic being studied, and involve community members. Community members to choose from may be parents, family, friends, or any one else in the community. Find topics that relate to the content expectation being taught, then ask for involvement.

My final recommendation is to start early. Begin involving next year’s families, at a minimum, the summer before school starts. Have the parents write a short letter describing their child to the teacher. Have them include topics in their letter that include what they see as their child’s strengths, weaknesses, and ways in which the teacher can help their specific student. This will open a line of communication from the beginning of the school year. With this line created, the school year will have a positive path to follow.

Any way to increase parental involvement should be considered a success. Society unfortunately is moving away from being very involved in a child’s education. It is the job of the school and the teacher to attempt to re-educate society on the importance of being an actively involved parent.

**Areas for Further Research**

This paper had the intention of divulging tested models for increasing parental involvement at the middle school level. Although there was a myriad of research on the need for parental involvement, there was not a wealth of knowledge to be found on tested parental involvement models. Research needs to be done on comprehensive, school-wide parental involvement programs. A study could be set up with assessments for pre- and post- levels of parental involvement as well as pre- and post- assessment data for academic areas. Ideas to assess levels of parental involvement might include: using questionnaires that calculate the
percentage of parents attending conferences or having daily conversations with their adolescent. The use of MEAP scores in Michigan might be helpful academic data.

Test subjects would be all students within a school, yet the scope of this study would include elementary, middle, and high schools. This way data can be compared from one age group to the next to not only compare comprehensive programs but analyze which ones are more effective for a particular grade level and demographic. The researcher would need to compare the pre- and post- data collected in both areas, looking specifically for areas in which parental involvement seemed to increase. If a school knows what works for the fourth grade, it can build upon that for other grades. However, if a certain parental involvement program does not help in middle school, you will have the data to back that up as well. To build upon what is successful will only help increase even faster the amounts of parental involvement in the school.

**Conclusion**

Parental involvement is a necessary part of every childhood. For children to be successful in school, and in life, they need parents that are actively and positively involved in their life. This will produce a happy and confident adult that will find success in the adventures of their life. Research has shown that students with actively involved parents make greater gains in academic areas than those without involved parents. Although parental involvement is not the only marker for academic success, the evidence to support the effect of parental involvement is compelling. Other factors such as socio-economic status and parental education levels are also indicators for academic achievement. With a higher socio-economic status comes more time, resources and know-how to help assist their child. Students that have highly involved parents tend to have more
motivation and purpose for achieving in school. This is the same for elementary students all the way through high school students and beyond.

It has been shown that middle level students have a set of different circumstances that require an increase in parental involvement. The chemical and neurological changes that are affecting almost all areas of an adolescent’s life signify that parents need to be more involved, as opposed to the typical decrease in levels of parental involvement at this level. Middle schools have a difficult job to attempt in increasing the amounts of parental involvement.

Research on the effectiveness of parental involvement suggests that essentially any attempt of involving parents more will prove successful. It is a matter of teaching and training the parents to do simple tasks like checking homework, signing planners, and reading with their child. Too often parents take an easier route in parenting and skip these needed tasks, or others just simply don’t have the parenting knowledge to do these things. As a result of the research done for this project, I have new found evidence that supports what I though all along: Parents are the key to the success of my students. Unfortunately not all parents, or educators, know that yet.
References


Why does it make a difference? *Teachers College Record, 97* (2), 310-331.


