



Buffalo Public Schools

Putting children and families first to ensure high academic achievement for all

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RESEARCH CAPSULE

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

AT A GLANCE

Parental involvement has been defined in many capacities. Overall, it refers to activities that parents engage in to further their child's academic success. Research has proven that increased parental involvement is associated with greater academic achievement. Recent findings suggest that the type of parental involvement practiced may be dependent on culture, socio-economic status, and education level of the parent. This research capsule summarizes recent findings regarding both parental involvement impact and barriers of implementation. While the parental involvement literature continues to expand, continued research is needed to further assess long-term impact of parental involvement on student achievement and to obtain a better understanding of how various cultures define parent involvement.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement has been defined in varying capacities throughout the academic literature focused on education-based issues. Overall, it refers to activities that parents engage in to promote their child's academic success. These activities may include school interaction (Cebello, 2014), home-based strategies such as monitoring schoolwork and progress (Dotterer and Wehrspann, 2016; Wang, 2014), and more indirectly as how parents position themselves as an authority figure in their child's education (Gustavo, 2011).

An ongoing conversation exists in the literature addressing the difference between parental involvement and parental engagement. Janet Goodall and Caroline Montgomery (2014) stated that involvement may be defined as "the act of taking part in an activity or event, or situation" (Macmillan Dictionary 2009–2012b) while engagement may be defined as "the feeling of being involved in a particular activity" or "a formal arrangement to meet someone or to do something, especially as part of your public duties" (Macmillan Dictionary 2009–2012a). Given these definitions, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) postulated that parental engagement involves a greater commitment, a greater ownership of action, than parental involvement with

schools. Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) described parental engagement as learning at-home assistance, communication with schools, and active parental decision-making. Naqvia et al. (2015) used the term “engagement” to mean an emotional involvement or commitment and argued that participation and involvement, while important, merely set the stage for effective engagement. Additionally, Berkule et al. (2016) defined parent engagement as behaviors related to learning and education in which parents engage with their children. Given the various definitions of parental engagement and involvement, one may conclude that parental engagement is thus a multi-faceted concept.

Additionally, regardless of the term of preference, scholars agree in the importance of parental involvement and/or engagement has on student achievement. It has been identified as a key factor in children’s achievement and their attainment of educational outcomes (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003; Siraj-Blatchford 2010). Research has also established a relationship between early parental engagement and children’s long-term positive commitment to learning (Sacker, Schoon, and Bartley 2002). Additionally, the importance of parents’ attitudes and behaviors (Sacker, Schoon, and Bartley 2002) in relation to children’s attendance, better behavior (Harris and Goodall 2008), academic results, (Sylva et al. 2008) and children’s overall satisfaction with school has been established. Research on the impact of parental engagement on children’s achievement and development remains, however, complex, due to the many factors that influence children’s educational outcomes and well-being.

More recent research has pushed the definitional boundaries of parent involvement by exploring additional concepts such as parental social capital and academic socialization. Social capital refers to an individual’s economic and cultural resources (Wang, 2014). Academic socialization refers to the communication of parental expectations about schoolwork and the importance of education, encouragement of educational and career goals, and making plans and preparations with adolescents that support their future goals (Wang, 2014). A summary of recent research findings is provided in this research capsule.

Parent Involvement Impact

Existing research has also demonstrated the importance of parental engagement for student achievement (e.g. Carreón, Drake & Barton, 2005; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Pelletier & Brent, 2002; Zellman & Waterman, 1998, Fite, 2014, Domina, 2005; Englund et al., 2004). Most studies examined the impact of different levels of involvement on students’ academic performance (Goodall, 2012; Overstreet, Devine, Bevans & Efreom, 2005). Researchers have indicated that parental school involvement conveys a message of the importance of academics, which is effective in promoting successful academic outcomes for youth (Stewart, 2008). Further, studies have shown that parental school involvement establishes relationships with the school to help provide additional comfort in the school environment and supportive resources.

Given that researchers have established a relationship between parent involvement and student success, and that most current research continues to support the relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement, academics have expanded their focus to examine other potential impacts. Several of the most recent studies have focused on the psychological and emotional impacts that parental-school involvement can have on students. These may be considered mediators of academic success. For example, multiple studies have found a relationship between parental involvement and children’s self-esteem. Increased self-esteem leads to better academic performance. Additionally, recent studies have shown that student’s overall emotional wellbeing tends to be better when parents are more involved. A sampling of research studies pertaining to these findings are presented below.

- Fite’s et al. (2014) research suggests that parental school involvement can protect youth from the negative impact of various risk factors and stressors on their academic performance. Additionally, findings indicated that parental school involvement may mitigate the link between peer victimization

and academic performance. Thus, the effects of relational victimization may not be as impactful on academic performance when the parents are more involved.

- Dotterer and Wehrspann (2016) found that higher parental involvement was associated with increased school self-esteem and in turn was related to higher grades and greater academic competence.
- Krauss and Zelden (2017) indicated that when parents are actively aware of and involved in their children's lives, their children are more likely to be both cognitively and emotionally engaged in school and that parents who are highly involved in their children's lives are also more likely to push their children to be academically successful.
- Goodall and Montgomery (2014) discovered that parent engagement can boost children's self-esteem, increase motivation and engagement with learning, and can lead to increased learning outcomes. Results also indicated that to be most effective, parental engagement needs to be rooted in the home with an attitude that fosters learning.
- Wang et al. (2014) found that parental involvement in 10th grade improved not only academics but also emotional functioning among adolescents in 11th grade. However, the effects of parental involvement on achievement and depression varied by the type of involvement in which parents engaged. For instance, among the types of parental involvement, academic socialization had the strongest positive relation with achievement and strongest negative relation with depression.

Current research has also focused on how parental engagement may be influenced by socio-economic factors such as race/ethnicity and income. Findings suggest the importance placed by parents on academic involvement does not seem to differ by these factors. Rather, the implementation or type of parental involvement may be impacted. The definition of parental involvement is different based upon culture and comfort level with schools. Additionally, consistent differences in parental engagement have been identified in relation to the immigrant population.

- Cabello et al. (2014) concluded that immigrant and low-income parents may call on a number of nontraditional activities in support of their children's education. Given such a range of parental involvement activities exist, they caution educators against relying on a narrowly defined construct of involvement, such as school-based involvement, as it would impede our understanding of parental involvement.
- Wang's et al. (2014) findings were consistent with prior studies (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hill & Chao, 2009), in that they found some evidence of ethnic differences in home-based and school-based involvement. While European American parents reported more frequent school involvement than African American parents, African American parents tended to be more involved in their children's education from home than European American parents. The finding that African American parents in their study reported relatively low involvement within the school setting seems to support the argument that cultural beliefs and negative historical experiences with the public school system may deter African American parents from being involved in school.
- Goodall and Montgomery (2014) argued that parental engagement with children's learning may not equate to – and should not be judged on the basis of – engagement with the school. They found that many parents, particularly those from ethnic minorities or those facing economic challenge, find

engagement with schools difficult, but still have a strong desire to be involved in their children's learning and educations.

- Naqvi's et al. (2015) findings were consistent with existing argumenta that parents from low-income marginalized communities will engage with the school only to the extent that such engagement is identify-affirming.
- Cebello's et al. (2014) results suggested that parents' stories about struggles with poverty and immigration are an important component of parental involvement, contributing to adolescents' desire to succeed academically and "give back" to parents. Additionally, their findings indicated that the positive relations between parental involvement and academic outcomes were stronger for immigrant youth and for those with higher endorsements of the Latino cultural value of *respeto* (respect).
- Cabello's et al. (2014) research provided further evidence of the "immigrant paradox" among their mostly Dominican Latino sample. Specifically, they found that the positive relation between parental involvement (e.g., School Involvement and Gift/Sacrifice) and academic outcomes was stronger for immigrant, compared with nonimmigrant, youth. They concluded that perhaps parental support for education carries greater weight among immigrant teenagers who have experienced the hardships of moving to a new country and are motivated to make the most of new opportunities.
- Wang et al.(2014) determined that academic socialization was found to be more strongly related to emotional engagement among lower SES students than among higher SES students. Adolescents growing up in disadvantaged communities may have less exposure to information about college or positive educational role models, making it especially important for their parents to convey the value of education and discuss plans to fulfill future goals.

Barriers of Parental Involvement

A substantial portion of the recent research conducted on parental involvement identifies common barriers or impediments related to actualizing parental involvement. Several studies identified the lack of resources, English language unfamiliarity, ineffective school relationships, and class status examples of such obstacles.

- Cabello et al. (2014) reported that a number of barriers prevent poor, Latino parents from engaging in these more traditional, school-based forms of parental involvement, including but not limited to demanding job schedules, inaccessible transportation, a lack of English language fluency, and unfamiliarity with the American educational system
- In Berkule's et al. (2016) recent study on Hispanic mothers' perceptions of their roles in their first grade children's education, they found that the main barrier to parental confidence in helping their children learn appeared to be mothers' lack of English proficiency. This is consistent with previous research demonstrating that Hispanic parents maintain the perception of a lack of proficiency in English as a significant barrier to parental involvement in their children's education in the United States.
- Sime and Sheridan (2014) reported that a growing body of literature on home-school relations shows that the parents who find it most difficult to be involved in their children's education are white working class and ethnic minority parents (Crozier and Reay 2005; Kim 2009; Dotson-Blake, 2010). Factors linked to poverty, such as crowded housing, unemployment, limited access to transport and

cultural resources, illness and isolation, make parenting far harder and more stressful and affect considerably the parent-child interactions (Ghate and Hazel 2002).

- Naqvia et al. (2015) concluded, on the basis of interviews and group discussions with parents, that parental engagement is productive in supporting student achievement only when their relationships with educators in the school are identity-affirming. Similarly, parents will refuse to participate in a relationship that locates them in an inferior status.
- Wang and Hill's (2014) research found that although trajectories for communication declined overall, when parents did communicate with the school, it had a positive influence on adolescents' behaviors. While further research may identify the underlying mechanism of these relations, it is plausible that preventive communication with school personnel provides the essential monitoring that teens need to stay on track

Additional factors impacting parental engagement were also commonly referenced in recent studies. These included parental expectations, social/cultural capital, education level, and sense of agency. Parental agency refers to a parent's sense of their own ability to help influence their child's academic achievement. Typically, lower levels of agency are associated with lack of parental education and unfavorable school experiences.

- Gustavo and Nakamoto (2011) highlighted that parental involvement in reading practices at home have much to do with parent agency or their belief that they are capable of accessing literacy resources for their children to read at home.
- Sime and Sheridan (2014) discussed that In relation to education, cultural capital is particularly valuable, as parents' ways of thinking about education, values and attitudes, as well as their own academic qualifications and experiences, will be given a certain recognition by schools. This will also influence the degree to which parents feel comfortable with the schools' interventions and confident to challenge or influence provision.
- Gonida and Corina (2014) found that the lower the beliefs parent hold for their child the more controlling and interfering style is adopted during homework and, in turn, the less efficacious children believe they are in the academic domain. On the contrary, parent interference and control are less likely to occur when parents hold positive academic efficacy beliefs for their child, while at the same time, parents are more likely to encourage cognitive engagement as supplementary to homework and, in turn, high efficacy beliefs to their children.
- Sime and Sheridan's work (2014) concluded that while middle class parents will make considerable investments in their children's future, such as paying for private education or additional after-school activities, parents with little resources might be more careful about their aspirations. Investing time and resources in children's education is likely to be too costly and too risky, with high uncertainty in terms of returns, with no guarantees whether the child will be successful. In working-class families, this uncertainty is also reinforced, as there are likely to be no prior experiences of high achievement within the family.

Future Directions for Research on Parent Involvement

Future research is needed to further assess long-term impact of parental involvement on student achievement (Krauss, 2017; Gonida, 2014; Deterer, 2016; Wang, 2014; Gonida, 2014) Longitudinal studies would provide greater insight into the direction of association between youth-adult partnership and school engagement (Deterer, 2016). Additionally, to fully understand the effects of parental involvement, it is

necessary to examine a much longer time period so that the changing nature of involvement can be examined. Such studies involving parents and children would allow researchers to begin drawing conclusions clarifying whether parent types change over time as their children get older and in what direction and with what cost or benefit. Finally, long-term studies may help examine the underlying mechanisms that are associated with student achievement.

Supplemental research regarding the definition of parental engagement, including additional data sources to measure parent participation and parent/teacher parental role perception would also be beneficial (Badello, 2014; Gonida, 2014). Future research should incorporate comprehensive assessments of parental involvement from multiple informants (Gonida, 2014). Online observational methods would further enable researchers to see whether and how parents change their style of homework involvement across subjects as a function of their own interests, knowledge, and skills, as well as a function of the child's interests, knowledge, and skills. Thus, future research is needed that identifies both traditional and non-traditional ways in which parents of varying, races, ethnicities, and social classes are involved in their children's school (Fite, 2014; Berkule, 2016). Although there is a link between parental engagement and children's formal educational achievement, there has been limited study of parents' own perceptions of their roles in their children's education among sub populations such as mothers who are low income and who are Hispanic immigrants and parents of students learning strictly through an online environment (Bourp, 2016). There has been even more limited study among parents of young children, such as those just beginning elementary school, a group whom it is critically important to study if behaviors are to be influenced early (Berkule, 2016).

On a Local Note

Buffalo Public School's (BPS) recently implemented New Education Bargain strengthens partnerships between the District and parents. As a result of this initiative, BPS is actively working with parents to provide resources and opportunities that address many of the barriers identified in the parental involvement literature. These efforts have been underway with the goal of increased parental involvement leading to more successful students throughout the District.

As previous research has sited, the level of parental agency, or the belief in their ability to assist in their child's education, is impacted by prior negative school experiences. As a result of this reality, BPS' administration has been working to provide better school experiences for all parents. Parent Centers have been created at four of the Community Schools to assist parents and families. The mission of the BPS Parent Center Model is to provide parents and families with education, resources, and support. Currently, BPS Parent Centers are located in East, Lafayette, South Park, and Bennett High Schools. They offer a range of parent programming and services, as well as increased hours within the school on weeknights and Saturdays.

In addition to the Parent Centers, positive school-based experiences have been offered through Saturday Academies and weeknight courses at all 13 Community Schools. Parents and children have been encouraged to attend a range of activities and courses that provide enriched academic experiences, wrap-around services for all family members, life-skills workshops, alternative activities, and the opportunity to spend quality time as a family. Courses such as Culturally Responsive Teaching in Classroom for parents were also offered through the Adult Education Department.

Parent-focused committees continue to operate and further expand positive and meaningful school experiences. The Parent Engagement Advisory Committee is a multi-perspective think tank of parents, BPS staff, and community members who collaborate to develop, monitor, and evaluate parent engagement in the District. Additionally, the Special Education Parent Advisory is a similar workgroup committed to ensuring effective implementation of Special Education laws and policies.

Although research has confirmed that parents' motivation for academic involvement does not vary by race or socio-economic status, findings suggest that minority families tend to have limited academic resources such as low exposure to information about college or positive educational role models. The BPS' administration has been working to ensure that quality information regarding the college enrollment process is provided to all parents in the Buffalo School District. Examples of such resources include: (1) college simulation courses and SAT prep courses were offered to all families during Saturday Academies, and (2) the Adult Education Department has offered workshops focusing on Say Yes Scholarships and college supports including FAFSA completion.

Various factors impacting level of parental involvement were also identified in the literature including limited English skills and restricted knowledge of navigating school systems. BPS has offered courses such as limited English proficiency classes and computers for limited English speakers during Saturday Academies. Additionally, members of the Office of Parent and Family Engagement have been in the community (i.e. a few churches, community meetings, festivals, conferences, etc.) to reach parents "where they are" and share resources to help them assist their children with their education. Information regarding the District has also been shared and received from parents via the BPS Parent Center Facebook page. Periodic messages are delivered by the School Connect system to parents informing them of District meetings and Parent Center activities. BPS also facilitate its' annual Parent Engagement Summit and encourages attendance at parent-related conferences. These learning opportunities provide parents with critical information that will ultimately help them feel more prepared to improve their child's education and better understand how to work with the school district.

In light of the research findings identifying ineffective school relationships as a barrier to parental involvement, each Buffalo Public School has the opportunity to hire a parent facilitator to ultimately assist the school with increasing parent engagement and help understand teacher, school, student, and parent relationships. School-based Family Support Specialists and some attendance teachers conduct home visits to further work with parents and students. Furthermore, parent leader representatives attend local and national Parent Engagement conferences with district staff and then turn-key critical information to other parents.

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