



**EPSSL** | EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES LABORATORY  
Education Policy Research Unit

## SCHOOL REFORM PROPOSALS: THE RESEARCH EVIDENCE

### PARENTAL AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

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#### *Research Quality*

Research on parental involvement in education covers parental interaction and involvement in the school and in the home. Much of it is correlational, producing questions about whether parental involvement or other factors such as genetics have the greatest effect on achievement.

#### *Research Findings*

**Parents and Teachers:** Associations have been found between teacher ratings of parental involvement in parent-teacher organizations and parent-teacher conferences and their ratings of student performance. Other studies report an inverse relationship, possibly because parental involvement rises when students experience behavior problems or poor grades.

**Intervention Programs:** Students' math performance rose when parents were involved as project leaders and classroom volunteers, compared with students lacking the intervention.

**School-Level Parental Involvement:** Very little variation in achievement test scores can be attributed to school-level differences in parental involvement. Intervention studies show little evidence that school-level parental involvement has an effect on students' school performance.

**Parents at Home:** How parents interact with their children at home matters more than parental involvement in schools. Differences in beginning literacy skills (due to variations in exposure to print) and findings that disadvantaged children lose ground during the summer reflect the parental role in shaping children's school-related skills.

**Parenting Style:** Children whose parents hope and expect them to do well in school are more likely to do so than those whose parents lack high educational expectations. A parenting style balancing expectations, warmth, and responsiveness promotes school success more consistently than permissive or authoritarian styles. Of four types of parental involvement, "home discussion" of school is the most strongly related to academic achievement. Children whose parents provide structured, supervised activities do better on cognitive tests and earn better grades. Parental linguistic styles are also related to children's success. Children whose

parents read to them during pre-school years enter kindergarten with higher pre-reading skills.

**Educational Opportunities and Homework:** There are associations between school performance and the presence at home of educational objects (books, periodicals, a computer, a place to study), and between performance and the amount of money parents save for future education. Many studies show that greater parental involvement in homework is associated with lower student performance in school, although most suspect that this association is a result of parents deciding to help a struggling child.

**Socioeconomic Status:** Socioeconomic status appears to be related to parenting style, how children learn to interact in the school setting, and how parents interact with teachers and school officials. Parental language styles differ across socioeconomic class; middle class styles match what teachers expect. Students possessing skills and habits (ranging from understanding that print reads left to right to non-cognitive skills such as demonstrating attentiveness and persistence) signal their affiliation with elite groups and receive academic rewards.

**An Intensive Intervention:** In the Chicago Child-Parent Center Program, children in half-day preschool were given reading lessons while parents were involved in various activities (e.g., workshops, reading groups). These children were more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to be arrested 15 years later than matched children.

**Policy Implications:** There may be some benefit in improving parent/teacher relations. Improving parent/child relations through public policy is more difficult, however, particularly if parenting style reflects social class. An alternative would be to increase the amount of time children are with teachers through after-school programs or year-round schooling. More schooling would benefit disadvantaged children, who lose ground over summer, the most.

### ***Recommendations***

The most effective programs are those designed to raise children out of the very worst environmental conditions. Programs that raise children's school performance through parental involvement do so by meeting the broad needs of parents.

- Programs designed to promote parent/teacher interaction should emphasize initiatives designed to improve the parent/child relationship.
- Programs should be promoted that increase the amount of time low-income children are exposed to school-based activities, whether through more after-school programs, summer activities, or year-round schooling.

The foregoing is a summary of a chapter in the book *School Reform Proposals: The Research Evidence* (Information Age Publishing, 2002), edited by Alex Molnar. The full chapter can be viewed at:

[http://www.asu.edu/educ/eps/EPRU/documents/EPRU\\_2002-101/Chapter\\_06-Downey-Final.pdf](http://www.asu.edu/educ/eps/EPRU/documents/EPRU_2002-101/Chapter_06-Downey-Final.pdf)