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## Children's Perceptions of Parental Involvement

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CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

BY

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A Directed Research Project

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### Abstract

Parental involvement has been found to be a strong predictor of child academic success (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005). However, little research has explored the relationship between children's perceptions of parental involvement and academic achievement. The studies that have focused on this particular topic have found that children's perceptions are strong predictors of their academic success (e.g., Barge & Loges, 2003; Griffith, 1997). The purpose of this study was to examine children's perceptions of three types of parental involvement (learning at home, communicating and parental aspirations and expectations) and its relation to academic achievement. Participants were 41 second graders (17 boys, 24 girls) and 51 third graders (26 boys, 25 girls). The students viewed a series of drawings depicting high, medium, and low levels of involvement of each type of parental involvement and were read a script explaining what each drawing was about. Students were then required to choose the drawing that was most representative of their situation at home. The students were then given a multiple-choice parent questionnaire to take home to their parents/guardians who were asked to fill out the questionnaire and then return them by mail. The materials were the same pictures that the children had seen and the accompanying script. The parents or guardians were required to choose one of three pictures that they believed best represented their levels of parental involvement for each of the three types of involvement. It was hypothesized that GPA would be predicted by perceptions of parental involvement. It was expected that there would be some correlation between both informants (parent and child) in terms of perceived levels of involvement. It was also expected that those children whose parents return the

questionnaires would have higher perceptions of parental involvement. Analyses indicated that children's perceptions of parental involvement did not predict academic achievement. Furthermore, there was a relationship between children and parent responses with regard to the parental involvement variable communicating. There was also no difference in GPA between those children whose parents returned the completed materials and those children whose parents did not return the completed materials.

Children's views on parental involvement within the academic realm are important factors to study because research has shown that high levels of parental involvement, especially within the elementary school years, enhance children's academic performance (e.g., Epstein, 1988; Reynolds, 1992). Specific types of parental involvement have been reviewed and it appears that various forms of involvement result in beneficial outcomes for children's later academic success (e.g., Fan & Chen, 2001, Jeynes, 2005).

#### *Types of Parental Involvement*

Parent involvement has multiple meanings (Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan & Ochoa, 2002). However, no matter how parental involvement is defined, it seems to enhance child academic success (e.g., Jeynes, 2005; Marchant, Paulson & Rothlisberg, 2001; Reynolds, 1992). A popular definition of parental involvement is based on Epstein's (1994, 1995) widely recognized six categories of parental involvement: Type 1 involves *parenting*, which includes having a supportive home environment for the child that will, in turn, facilitate academic performance. Type 2 involves *communicating*, which includes effective communication practices between the parents and the school. Type 3 involves *volunteering*, which includes the parents becoming active members of the child's school. Type 4 involves *learning at home*, which includes parents helping their children with homework and other school-related activities. Type 5 involves *decision making*, which includes parents becoming active decision makers within their child's school. They can do this by becoming school representatives on school boards and committees. Type 6 involves *collaborating with the community*, which includes community groups as well as agencies. Parents can become involved with school programs to foster the academic

growth of children. Fan and Chen (2001) discussed another type of parental involvement, which for the purposes of this review can be called Type 7, *parental aspirations and expectations*.

#### *Effects of Parental Involvement*

*Type 1.* Parenting seems to have a great influence on child academic success. Having a supportive home environment fosters positive academic growth and learning for children. Flouri and Buchanan (2004) examined mothers' and fathers' involvement at age seven and children's educational outcomes at age 20. They operationalized involvement in terms of reading to the child, showing interest in the child's education, and taking the child on outings. Father and mother involvement at age 7 independently predicted educational attainment by age 20. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) discussed one type of parental involvement, cognitive/intellectual involvement, which may be categorized under *parenting*. Parents who are involved in this way expose their children to academically and intellectually stimulating materials such as books and current events as well as taking them to the library. Cognitive/intellectual involvement seems to have an indirect effect on student academic achievement through children's perceived levels of competence and control understanding. Control understanding refers to the children's perceptions of the sources of control related to their academic performance. The children's motivational resources appear to act as mediators between parent involvement and student academic performance. Parental involvement may indirectly affect achievement via other mechanisms such as the child's attitudes and motivations regarding the levels of perceived parental involvement.

Jeynes (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement



to student academic achievement in urban elementary-school children. Parental style, specifically, parents demonstrating a supportive and helpful parenting approach as well as having a supportive home environment for the child, had a significant positive effect on student academic achievement regardless of the child's ethnic background. Likewise, Miliotis, Sesma and Masten (1999) examined the relationship between parental involvement and parenting style on student academic achievement and school behavior in a group of 59 African American children from homeless families. These children lived in a residential shelter in Minneapolis along with other families. They found that a good parenting approach and high levels of parental involvement (i.e., parent interest in and awareness of child's education, parent connectedness to child's school, and parent involvement within the family setting) were positively related to better academic outcomes as well as decreased levels of maladaptive behaviors.

*Type 2. Communicating enhances child academic performance.* The continuous interchange of effective communication practices between parents and their children's school is important for fostering positive academic outcomes in children. This type of parental involvement should be enhanced when the child's school promotes the involvement of parents (Fan, 2001). When parents and teachers collaborate effectively regarding a child's school performance, that child is more likely both to behave and to perform better in school (Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, & Fendrich, 1999).

Barge and Loges (2003) examined student, parent, and teacher perceptions regarding parental involvement and the communication activities it entails. They found that helpful forms of communication that parents and teachers frequently mentioned were attending parent-teacher conferences, visiting the school, and calling on the phone. The

parents and teachers also mentioned that parents asking their children how the school day went and showing a general interest in the child's academic success was another important aspect of communication. Parents' encouragement of their children to work hard in school was also mentioned as a helpful form of communication.

Griffith (1996) examined parental empowerment, which was defined as the extent to which parents perceived that their child's school accommodated their participation in school activities by frequently informing them about special school meetings and making sure to arrange school meetings so that the parents could attend. Communication flow emanating from the school to the parents had a strong positive influence on student academic performance. Likewise, Marcon (1999) found that communication, defined as conversing with families about the child's academic progress through parent-teacher conferences and home visits, had a strong positive effect on student academic achievement in a group of predominantly low-income children attending either a public preschool or Head Start program.

Parental satisfaction regarding the school climate depends on the school's output of information regarding their children's educational progress. Schools should also make frequent attempts to use parents as resources by integrating them into the school environment through inviting them to attend school activities and helping within the classrooms. This continuous effort of communication flow between the school and the parents leads to higher levels of parental satisfaction and may influence the levels of parental involvement within the schools (Griffith, 1997).

Fantuzzo, Davis and Ginsburg (1995) examined the effects of parent involvement of academically at-risk African American students on mathematics achievement. The

students participated in one of three experimental conditions: a practice control condition, a parent involvement condition in which they received a home-based parent intervention program, and a parent involvement condition combined with peer tutoring. In the parent involvement intervention, the school and parents kept a constant communication flow regarding student academic achievement and parents rewarded their children's academic effort. The parent involvement condition led to higher mathematics achievement than the control condition, and the parent involvement intervention combined with peer tutoring was even more effective.

*Type 3.* Volunteering has been shown to have a positive effect on child academic achievement. Fan and Chen (2001) performed a meta-analysis examining the influence of parental involvement on educational outcomes in the general student population. They called attention to parental involvement in school-related activities, which can be categorized under Type 3 level of parental involvement. When parents become active members within their child's school community, opportunities for positive academic outcomes arise. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) described three types of parental involvement: behavior, cognitive-intellectual, and personal. Behavioral involvement entails the parents becoming involved in their children's school lives via participating in home and school activities, which can include attending parent-teacher conferences and school-related activities as well as helping their children with homework and frequently questioning them on their academic performance. By attending and participating in school activities, the parent demonstrates the importance of school. The behavioral category of parental involvement may pertain to the third type of parental involvement, volunteering. This factor of parental involvement had a strong positive relationship with

student academic achievement (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994).

Griffith (1996) examined one aspect of parent involvement in terms of volunteering in school functions as well as attending school activities such as open houses and back-to-school meetings. These aspects of parental involvement had a strong positive relationship with student academic outcomes. Marcon (1999) examined two of Epstein's (1995) categories of parental involvement, volunteering and communicating, on student academic achievement in a group of predominantly low-income children attending a public preschool or Head Start program. Academic performance was determined through the preschoolers' Early Childhood Progress Report. Parents volunteered by helping with class activities and through extended class visits. Both of these factors had a strong positive effect on student academic performance.

Likewise, Miedel and Reynolds (1999) conducted a longitudinal study in order to determine whether volunteering and attending school activities resulted in children's later school achievement. The parents participated in the Chicago Longitudinal Study. Miedel and Reynolds found that early intervention in preschool and kindergarten had a significant and positive effect on later school competence. Children's kindergarten and eighth grade reading achievement were influenced by the levels of parental involvement they had experienced as young children. Specifically, the frequency and number of parenting activities was associated with children's higher academic outcomes.

*Type 4.* Fan and Chen (2001) examined learning at home in terms of parental home supervision and communication with children regarding school-related matters. They studied such factors as rules for watching television and doing homework. There was a positive, although weak, relationship between parental involvement and student

academic achievement. Similarly, when Jeynes (2005) examined one aspect of parental involvement, parents checking their children's homework, he found that the relationship between this parental involvement variable and student academic outcomes was nonsignificant. He suggested that the reason for this may be that the students whose parents check their homework are the ones who most need it, such as children who experience more difficulties.

Jeynes (2005) also examined learning at home in terms of the parents reading regularly with their children at home. He found a significant positive relationship between parental reading and student academic achievement. His meta-analysis concluded that parental reading was an important predictor of child academic outcomes. Likewise, Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) examined learning at home in terms of parents discussing school-related matters with their children. They found that home discussion of school activities was a strong predictor of eighth-grade student academic achievement.

*Type 5.* Decision making seems to have positive outcomes for child academic achievement. Griffith (1996) operationalized this variable as parents being active members within the school through their membership in parent-teacher associations. This factor had a positive effect on student academic performance, which was determined by students' scores on the state's criterion-referenced test.

In a study of second and fifth grade children, Zellman and Waterman (1998) examined decision making in terms of parental participation on a school council board or advisory committee and parent-teacher association meetings. They found that, although parent involvement contributed to positive academic outcomes, it may be the manifestation of a positive parenting style. A positive parenting style may supersede

parental involvement as exhibited through the various means discussed.

*Type 6.* Epstein (1994, 1995) claims that collaborating with the community should enhance positive academic growth in children because the community and its agencies become involved with school-related issues. Thus far, there does not seem to be research available on this type of involvement.

*Type 7.* Parental aspirations and expectations regarding child academic success seem to greatly enhance child academic achievement. Through parents' expectations for success, they establish an environment conducive to high academic achievement and success for their children (Jeynes, 2005). Fan and Chen (2001) found a strong relationship between parental aspirations and student academic achievement in terms of the children's grades and test scores.

Parental expectations regarding children's academic attainment also has been shown to have a great influence on child academic achievement (Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004). Englund et al. examined the relations between parental involvement, as determined by parental expectations and behaviors and child academic achievement in a group of 187 low-income children and their mothers. They found that parental involvement in third grade had a significant positive effect on student academic performance in the third grade. Similar results were obtained from a study using parental involvement in early childhood to predict reading achievement in kindergarten and eighth grades. Miedel and Reynolds (1999) also found that parental involvement in the early years had a significant positive impact on reading achievement in kindergarten and eighth grade.

Likewise, Keith et al. (1993) examined the relationship between parental

involvement and student academic achievement in a group of eighth grade students.

Parental involvement, as defined by communication and parental aspirations, as measured in a group of eighth grade students had a significant effect on student academic achievement, as defined by grade point average, for those same students in the tenth grade. Fan (2001) also found that parental aspirations for their children's educational attainment had a significant impact on student academic achievement. Jeynes (2005) found that out of all the parental variables examined in relation to student academic achievement, parental aspirations and expectations yielded the strongest positive relationship between a specific aspect of parental involvement and student academic achievement. Fan and Chen (2001) proposed that the effects of parental involvement on student academic achievement are long-lasting.

#### *Factors that Limit Parental Involvement*

Some factors may inhibit parents from becoming involved with their child's school. These may include their child's academic performance, their family background, their socioeconomic status, their ethnicity, their own level of education, their own past school experiences, and their family structure.

*Student academic performance.* According to Crosnoe (2001), parental involvement may vary depending on student academic performance. Parental involvement seems to be lower for high-achieving students than for low-achieving students. This follows the logic that parents may tend to become more involved in their child's education when the child does not seem to be performing well academically. If the child performs well in school and earns high grades, then the parents may not be as involved as when a child is having some form of trouble in school. It appears that parents

of children who are successful in school are more likely to disengage themselves their children's school lives than parents of children who are not performing well in school.

*Family background.* Family background (Kim, 2002) also affects a child's success in school. Family background can be separated into three different components: financial capital, which is related to family income; human capital, which is related to the educational status of the parents; and social capital, which is the relationship between those two components. According to Kim, there is a strong relationship between financial and human capital and child academic success.

*Socioeconomic status.* Fan and Chen (2001) found that socioeconomic status and parental involvement are positively related. Dodd (1996) found that low-income parents want to be just as involved as other parents in their child's schooling, but the reason they may not be as involved as other parents is because of their own sense of inefficacy. They felt unable to help because of the lack of communication between themselves and the school. Low-income parents also face risk factors in their daily lives including health, safety, and housing. Because of these factors, there are fewer opportunities for the parents to be involved in their child's school life. Their environmental circumstances keep them from being as involved in their child's school life as they would probably like (Desimone, 1999). Ritblatt et al. (2002) also found that the socioeconomic status of the parents impacts the way the school personnel perceive and accept parental involvement. Because of this, there is a barrier that prevents these parents from becoming as involved as they would like. Research demonstrates that many of the barriers to parental involvement come from the teachers themselves (Ramirez, 2003). Many teachers felt that these parents were not able to work professionally on a school committee with



other professionals. They also felt that the parents needed to stay at home and take care of their children rather than trying to get involved at school. It is important to note that when trying to determine the effects of parental involvement on student academic achievement, socioeconomic status may be one of the factors that may be mediating the effects of parental involvement on student academic achievement (Ramirez).

*Ethnicity.* The majority of research has focused on the parental involvement of White students, although there have been some studies regarding the parental involvement of ethnic minority students. Fan (2001) examined the effects of parental involvement, as defined by parental expectations, on student academic achievement across various ethnic groups, including White, Asian American, African American, and Hispanics. There was a strong positive relationship between parental expectations and student academic achievement regardless of ethnic background. Thus, the positive effect of parental involvement was found to be consistent across ethnic groups. Many studies have found positive influences of parent involvement on student academic achievement from different ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Griffith, 1996; Jeynes, 2005; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). However, other studies have found ethnic differences. Minority status parents are generally not as involved as White parents in their child's educational experience. The reason may be that minority parents may feel threatened and intimidated by the school's authority. These parents may feel that they are not being perceived as equals by the school personnel, and this, in turn, affects their level of involvement with the school (Ritblatt et al., 2002).

One factor that influences parental involvement in a child's life is the beliefs that parents have regarding their role in school involvement. Many studies have found that

minority parents view their roles differently than those parents of the majority culture (e.g., Desimone, 1999). Hong and Ho (2005) compared the effects of parental involvement on student academic achievement in a group of White Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans and Hispanics. Ethnic differences mediated the effects of parental involvement on student academic achievement. For White students, the parental factors of communication and parental aspirations had significant immediate and long-lasting effects on student academic achievement. For Asian American students, the parental factor of involvement within the home and school appeared to have significant immediate and long-lasting effects on student academic achievement. For African American students, parental expectations seemed to have immediate effects on student academic achievement while parental supervision appeared to have long-lasting effects. For Hispanic students, the parental factor of communication appeared to have a significant effect on student academic achievement. For all of these ethnic groups, though, there was a variable that appeared to mediate the effects of parental involvement on student academic achievement. Student educational aspirations appeared to have a mediating effect on student academic achievement. Specifically, the two types of parental involvement, communicating and parental aspirations, influenced student educational aspirations, which in turn, influenced student academic achievement.

#### *Children's Views on Parental Involvement*

The literature is extensive on the effects of parental involvement on student academic achievement, especially for the elementary school years. However, there is less known about child perceptions of how parental involvement affects student academic performance. Desimone (1999) states that parent involvement programs that utilize

parent and student self-reports to determine perceived levels of parental involvement should acknowledge that student perceptions of parental involvement are better predictors of student outcomes. According to Grolnick, Ryan and Deci (1991), students have stated that parental involvement is crucial to their academic success. Students' achievement and motivation also seems to be related to the way they perceive that their parents are involved with their school. Students seem to perform better academically when they perceive that their parents are interested and greatly involved with their academic lives. This factor seems to be important because if children believe that their parents are involved with their school life, they will feel more competent and this will affect their success in school. Likewise, Reynolds (1992) collected data regarding perceptions of parental involvement from students, parents, and teachers to determine whether individual perceptions of parental involvement would influence student academic achievement in a group of low-income second grade students. Academic achievement was measured using standardized reading and mathematics achievement test scores. Regardless of the source, perceptions of parental involvement significantly predicted student academic achievement, with teacher ratings of perceived levels of parental involvement showing the greatest relationship to student academic achievement. Barge and Loges (2003) also found that students, teachers, and parents perceive that certain aspects of parental involvement, such as having a positive relationship with teachers and continual monitoring of children's academic progress, are necessary for student academic growth. Monitoring student progress may involve helping with homework, reading with the child, as well as monitoring through progress reports, report cards and personal contact with teachers. Communication was seen as an important activity by parents,

teachers and students. Parent-teacher conferences, school visits, phone calls, parents asking their children about their school day and parents encouraging their children's participation in school were all communication activities that parents, teachers, and students agreed were important for academic growth.

Parental involvement may affect causal attributions about academic achievement. The more parents are involved in their child's academic life, the greater the tendency for the child to internalize their academic behavior or achievement in school and the less likely for the child to attribute their academic achievement to external causes. Epstein (1988) highlighted the importance that perceptions of parent involvement can have on student academic performance. Parental involvement may convey to the child the importance of education, which may lead to greater responsibility and independence in school. The child may also perceive himself or herself as more competent in completing schoolwork. Student perception of parental involvement is also important because it can be helpful for intervention planning. If students have negative perceptions about their parent's involvement in their academic life, then this factor needs to be taken into account to find possible ways of improving the situation (Marchant et al., 2001).

Grolnick et al. (1991) suggested that parent involvement has a mediating effect on student academic performance through its impact on children's attitudes and motivations related to school. Greater levels of parent involvement seem to influence the child's attitudes and motivations to succeed in school. By involving themselves in their child's academic lives, parents are demonstrating the importance of education and academic success. This modeling of behavior allows children to see just how important education is. Parents can model this behavior through various means, such as going to school

events, asking their children about school, and speaking with the teacher. Parental involvement enhances the opportunities that children will perform well in school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

As explained previously, parental expectations regarding their children's academic achievement also seem to influence child academic performance. Additionally, the more involved parents are, the higher are the children's academic self-concept (Gonzalez-Pienda et al., 2002). Overall, it appears that if students perceive their parents to be involved in their academic life, their academic self-concept is affected, and this in turn affects their academic achievement. Thus, parental involvement in children's lives is important for their academic success. The findings reported by Gonzalez-Pienda et al. regarding levels of parental involvement were reported by the students themselves and not by the parents. The students reported the way they thought their parents were involved in their school lives. Thus, there may be an actual difference between perceived parental involvement and real levels of parental involvement.

Research has generally focused on students in the elementary school years and not those in high schools. Marchant et al. (2001) examined the relationship between early adolescents' perceptions of parental involvement related to their school achievement. Parental involvement in that study encompassed parental values regarding achievement and involvement in school-related activities. Parental values were measured by assessing students' perceptions of their parents' involvement in school-related functions. The students' motivations and perceptions of their academic self-competence were also examined. It was found that if students perceived that they were receiving support from their parents within the learning environment, this was predictive of academic success.

Apparently, a strong family structure, guidance, supportiveness and environments that promote parental involvement tend to foster positive academic outcomes. The findings of that study provided evidence as to the role of parental involvement on student academic achievement.

Likewise, Barwegen, Falciani, Putnam, Reamer and Stair (2004) examined whether high school students' perceptions of parental involvement would have an influence on their academic achievement, as measured by scores on the standardized national ACT exam. They found that those students who had high levels of perceived parental involvement also had higher scores on their ACT exam. Those students who had high levels of perceived parental involvement performed significantly better than those students who had low levels of perceived parental involvement.

Overall, parental involvement seems to have a positive effect on student academic achievement. Child perceptions of what constitutes effective parental involvement are important because children seem to perform better academically when they know that their parents are effectively involved in their school lives (e.g., Epstein, 1988; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

*Academic achievement.* Academic achievement or performance can be defined in a variety of different ways. It has been defined using global indicators, such as post-secondary attainment and school grade-point average (GPA), and it has also been defined using specific indicators, such as standardized test scores in a specific academic subject, or a combination of scores on different academic subjects.

Academic achievement has even been defined using students' academic aspiration and students' academic self-concept. Generally, children's school grades or standardized

test scores are the factors that are looked at when measuring academic achievement. The effect of parental involvement on student academic achievement may differ depending on how academic achievement is operationally defined. Because different researchers have operationally defined academic achievement differently, there has been inconsistency in the literature regarding the possible effects of parental involvement on student academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001). According to Fan and Chen, general school achievement, which is represented by school GPA, may be a better indicator of student academic achievement than a specific indicator such as scores on a specific academic subject.

#### The Current Study

The current study examined young children's perceptions of parental involvement and the relation of those perceptions to student academic achievement. Research has found that older children perform better academically when they perceive that their parents are involved in their academic lives (e.g., Epstein, 1988; Grolnick et al., 1991; Reynolds, 1992). This study focused on the perceptions of parental involvement and academic performance of second and third graders because the positive effects of actual parental involvement appear to be more consistent in the elementary school years (Stevenson & Baker, 1987). This study also encompassed the perceptions of these second and third graders' parents or guardians. Academic achievement was measured using a global indicator of academic performance, GPA, because this is one commonly used variable to measure student academic achievement. It was hypothesized that GPA would be predicted by perceptions of parental involvement. It was expected that there would be some correlation between both informants (parent and child) in terms of perceived levels

of involvement. It was also expected that those children whose parents return the questionnaires would have higher perceptions of parental involvement.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 41 second graders (17 boys, 24 girls) and 51 third graders (26 boys, 25 girls) from two public elementary schools. School records indicated their ethnicity to be 16 Caucasian, 68 Hispanic and 8 African American. Parents/guardians of the students were also asked to respond to similar questions. Fifty-seven parents returned questionnaires.

### *Materials*

Participants in the second and third grade and their parents or guardians viewed a series of drawings representing three types of parental involvement that were used for the purposes of this study: *learning at home*, (Epstein, 1994, 1995), *communicating*, (Epstein, 1994, 1995) and *parental aspirations and expectations* (Fan & Chen, 2001). Each type of parental involvement was represented by three pictures and accompanying script that depicted either high, medium, or low levels of involvement.

In a pilot study, 15 undergraduate students were initially asked to sort each set of materials (drawings and accompanying script) into the differing levels of parental involvement as high, medium, or low. They were all in perfect agreement for the first two items (*learning at home* and *communicating*). The group was evenly split on how the third set (*parental aspirations and expectations*) should be sequenced from high to low involvement. Using the same pictures, but altering the script for the third item, an entire set was given to 16 more undergraduate students to sort into high, medium and low



involvement categories. This time, the students were in perfect agreement on the first two items and 15 out of 16 were in perfect agreement with the third item. This final set of materials is in Appendix A.

### *Procedure*

The examiner showed second and third grade students the series of drawings depicting high, medium, and low levels of involvement and read the script to them explaining what each drawing was about. The examiner stated: "I am going to show you a series of pictures. I want you to choose the picture that best describes what the important grown-up or grown-ups that you live with are like." The children were given information regarding what was taking place within each picture. For example, for the picture representing *learning at home*, a high level of involvement would be described as "In this picture, you have just come home from school and had a snack. The important grown-up you live with is sitting down next to you helping you with your homework and making sure you finish everything. During this time, you are not allowed to do anything until you finish your homework."

The children were then given a multiple-choice parent questionnaire to take home to their parents/guardians who were asked to fill out the questionnaire and then return them by mail. The materials were the same pictures that the children had seen and the accompanying script. The parents or guardians were required to choose one of three pictures that they believed best represented their levels of parental involvement for each of the three types of involvement. For example, for one set of pictures, parents or guardians chose "a", "b" or "c", to the question, "Which of the following best represents your relationship with your child's teacher?" The parents or guardians of the students

viewed those same drawings that the children they care for viewed, although the script was provided in print along with each set of drawings.

School officials provided ethnic information and grades for each of the children. From these grades, GPA's were calculated. The subjects that were used to calculate GPA were Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies.

### Results

A multiple regression analysis was computed to predict GPA from the three child indicators of parental involvement, adjusted  $R^2 = .033$ ,  $p = .13$ . See Table 1 for analysis summary.

Table 1

*Regression Analysis Summary for Child Variables Predicting GPA*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>B</i>
Learning at Home	.06	.12	.05
Communicating	.24	.12	.23
Parental Aspirations and Expectations	-.07	.13	-.06

*Note.* Adjusted  $R^2 = .033$  ( $N = 83$ ,  $p = .13$ ).

Although the multiple regression analysis was nonsignificant, there was a power of .80 to be able to detect a medium effect with alpha at .05 given the sample size (Cohen, 1992). Thus, the parental involvement variables may not actually have any effect on GPA.

A second multiple regression analysis was computed to predict GPA from the three parental indicators of parental involvement, adjusted  $R^2 = -.015$ ,  $p = .52$ . There was

not sufficient power in this second analysis (power of .57 to detect a medium effect), because some parents/guardians did not return the completed materials. See Table 2 for analysis summary.

Table 2

*Regression Analysis Summary for Parent/Guardian Variables Predicting GPA*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>B</i>
Learning at Home	.23	.19	.18
Communicating	.03	.18	.03
Parental Aspirations and Expectations	-.23	.23	-.15

*Note.* Adjusted  $R^2 = .015$  ( $N = 49$ ,  $p = .52$ ).

Correlations were computed for each involvement type between child and parent perceptions of parental involvement and GPA to determine whether children's responses on the parental involvement types were related to their parent/guardians' responses on the parental involvement types and to GPA. See Table 3 for analysis summary. A significant correlation was found between child perceptions that parents and teachers talk all the time and GPA,  $r = .25$ ,  $p = .05$ . There was also a strong correlation between children's reports of their parents helping them at home with their homework and their reports of their parents and teachers talking on a frequent basis,  $r = .22$ ,  $p = .05$ . Child perceptions of parents helping them with their homework was significantly correlated with parents own perceptions of helping their children with their homework,  $r = .27$ ,  $p = .05$ . Children's reports of their parents and teachers talking on a frequent basis was significantly correlated with parent's reports of themselves and their children's teachers talking on a

frequent basis,  $r = .46$ ,  $p = .01$ . Those parents who perceived themselves talking on a frequent basis with their children's teachers also had high expectations and aspirations for their children in terms of their academic achievement,  $r = .28$ ,  $p = .05$ .

Table 3

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for Children's GPA and Children's and Parents' Ratings of Parental Involvement*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
GPA	3.13	.74	.12	.25*	-.09	.16	.03	-.11
1. Ch-Learning at Home	1.61	.68	--	.22*	-.14	.27*	-.03	-.11
2. Ch-Communicating	2.10	.69		--	-.10	.19	.46**	.21
3. Ch-Par. Aspir. & Expectations	1.55	.63			--	-.10	.13	-.10
4. Par-Learning at Home	1.43	.58				--	.02	.12
5. Par-Communicating	1.90	.62					--	.28*
6. Par-Par. Aspir. and Expectations	1.20	.50						--

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Independent sample two-tailed  $t$  tests showed that children whose parents returned the completed materials ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = .74$ ) did not score significantly different than children whose parents did not return the completed materials ( $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = .74$ ),  $t(81) = .80$ ,  $p = .42$ .

## Discussion

This study examined children's perceptions of parental involvement and its

relation to academic achievement. Various studies have found that parental involvement has a consistent and positive effect on students' academic performance (e.g., Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005). Parental involvement can be conceptualized as a variable with many specific components. Two specific aspects of parental involvement (learning at home, communicating) that were measured in this study were obtained from Epstein's (1994, 1995) widely recognized six categories of parental involvement and the third aspect of parental involvement (parental aspirations and expectations) was obtained from Fan and Chen's (2001) study concerning parental involvement and student academic achievement.

Although in previous research (e.g., Grolnick et al., 1991; Reynolds, 1992) children's perceptions of parental involvement appeared to be important predictors of student academic success, in the current study they were not. This may be due to various factors. The responses in this study were based on a three-point scale. A more sensitive scale such as one with more response options might have been preferable. For example, some children appeared to have difficulty choosing between the first two items in the *learning at home* item. Children were asked to choose whether their parents are sitting down right next to them helping them with their homework, whether their parents are doing something else important around the house while the children are doing their homework, or whether the parents are doing something else important around the house and are letting their children do their homework whenever they want. Some children responded that they would sit down and do their homework while their parents are doing something else important around the house, but that their parents would come sit down next to them when they asked for their help. Others might have felt that parents would

not help, even if asked. This item did not differentiate those two cases.

Another difficulty with the measure was that the parental involvement scale also focused on only three specific areas of parental involvement. There are various aspects of parental involvement that each may affect academic achievement differently. Parental involvement has multiple definitions and meanings. For example, Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) noted that parental involvement domains include behavior at home and at school, cognitive-intellectual involvement and personal involvement (each defined by various activities). Thus, a scale measuring other aspects of parental involvement may also have been preferable because some dimensions of parental involvement may have more noticeable effects on students' academic achievement than others. However, given the power in this analysis in the current study, it must be acknowledged that these three aspects of parental involvement may not actually affect GPA. Parental involvement as defined in the current study may not be important in determining the academic success of children as defined by their GPA's.

Additionally, each aspect of parental involvement was measured by a single item. For example, the parental involvement variable *learning at home* was measured by parents helping their children with homework. This parental involvement variable includes a wide array of different dimensions that would all fall under the category of *learning at home* other than parents helping their children with homework, such as children having discussions with their parents about school-related issues (e.g., discussing school activities and topics studied in class with parents), discussing high school plans with the child, and talking with the child about post-high school plans (Desimone, 1999). Including other aspects of learning at home (other than parents

helping their children with their homework) may have yielded different results. Given the power of the analysis, however, it can be stated that the current findings are accurate in that these aspects of parental involvement do not actually affect children's academic achievement. Children's academic achievement may be influenced by other factors than parental involvement that are not presently known.

The findings partially supported the hypothesis that children's perceived levels of parental involvement would be related to their parents' own perceived levels of parental involvement. Children and parents appeared to have similar perceptions with regard to the variable *communicating* which involved parent-teacher communication. Children may be aware enough to know how often their parents speak to their teachers and parents may let their children know when they actually speak to their teachers. Although children's perceptions of the parental involvement variable *communicating*, did not predict GPA, the correlation between these two factors, though significant, was modest. Those children who reported high levels of this parental involvement variable had higher GPA's than those children who reported lower levels of this parental involvement variable.

Barge and Loges (2003) determined that different communication activities are helpful and important for the child. Parents, teachers and students all perceived the importance of this form of parental involvement, such as asking the child how his or her day went, encouraging hard work and participation in school, and visiting teachers on a regular basis. Thus, it seems clear that parents, teachers and students have similar perceptions regarding the importance of communication to support the child's academic growth. Children seem to be aware of the communication that takes place between their parents and teachers. This might be a motivating factor for making children more aware

of the degree of communication involved between their parents and teachers and its importance on their academic outcomes. Children may be more motivated to perform well within the academic setting if they know that their parents speak with their teachers on a frequent basis. Children may perceive their parents speaking with their teachers to mean that they are checking up on them to see how they are performing within the academic setting, and this in turn, may push them to achieve at higher levels.

Children and parents also appeared to have similar perceptions with regard to the variable *learning at home*. Children seem to have accurate perceptions concerning what takes place at home with regard to their parents and homework. However, as stated above, this particular parental involvement variable was difficult for some children to respond to because of the nature of the response options. Parents may have also had difficulty choosing between these two options. One parent actually returned the materials and marked both "a" and "b" to this particular item, with a note stating sometimes "a" and sometimes "b". Even though there may have been some confusion with this item, children and parents appeared to have similar perceptions.

The findings also did not reveal a difference in academic achievement between those children whose parents returned the completed materials and those children whose parents did not return the completed materials. This may be due in part to the simple fact that some parents may have forgotten to return the materials or may have not wanted to fill out the questionnaire. Naturally, those children whose parents gave consent for their children and themselves to participate in this research study may have been more involved in their children's academic lives than those who declined. In fact, parental involvement as a willingness to participate in the study was implied in the third



hypothesis stating that those children whose parents or guardians returned the completed materials will have higher GPAs than those children whose parents or guardians did not return the completed materials. It would have been more interesting to see results of those children whose parents did not provide consent to see whether there would be an actual difference between those children and those whose parents gave consent. Thus, there really was not too much flexibility in looking at those children who participated in the study because of the implicit understanding that they all had somewhat high levels of parental involvement. However, because there was enough power to detect a medium effect, there is reason to trust that outcome.

In conclusion, parental involvement should continue to be an area of focus because of the various findings that have resulted in its importance related to student academic growth and success. Parental involvement should be conceptualized as a variable consisting of many different aspects and all aspects should be taken into account when focusing on this variable and academic achievement. Taken together, the findings point to a possibility of reaching a more fine-tuned understanding of the various aspects involved in parental involvement and student academic achievement. The importance of parental involvement in their children's academic success has been recognized for many years by various individuals (e.g., Epstein, 1988; Fan, 2001; Reynolds, 1992). Jeynes's (2005) meta-analysis which examined the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement found a consistent and significant relationship between these two factors.

Educators, parents and other professionals should consider all of the aspects involved in improving children academic success through parental involvement. There

are various forms of parental involvement that each may have an impact on children's success in school. Since communication between teachers and parents was seen as an important variable in its relation to student academic achievement in the current study, educators and parents should both work together in promoting the development of structures that would bridge the gap between the school and the home. The frequent home-school collaboration between parents and teachers may allow children to perceive the integral role that school plays within their lives. When parents are in constant communication with the school regarding their children's academic success, children may come to realize that their parents really care and want them to achieve to the best of their potential. Christenson (2003) points out that there should be a partnership between families and educators to improve the social, academic and emotional learning of all children.

Parents have the ability to support the growth of their children's learning as well as to make education a top priority in their lives. They are responsible for promoting educational success. Thus, it is important to engage parents and make them more aware of the responsibility involved in improving the education of their children. It is imperative for school psychologists to connect with parents regarding their children's learning and address any barriers that may interfere with their ability to be fully involved. (Christenson, 2003).

The importance of this home-school collaboration is relevant to school psychologists, in particular. School psychologists help children and youth succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. They collaborate with educators, parents and other professionals to create safe and supportive learning environments that strengthen

connections between home and school. There should be a strong family-school connection that allows all individuals involved within the child's life to support the growth of the child (Pelco, Jacobson, Ries & Melka, 2000). The purpose of this family-school connection for a child's education is to promote the continual success of all children. There is a great push towards family-school partnerships and its importance in the success of children. Thus, the efforts made to enhance positive learning should be placed on all of those involved in the child's life. In order to improve educational outcomes for students, a strong partnership between many individuals is necessary and all must work as a team (Christenson, 2003).

School psychologists work to find the best and most feasible solution for each child and his or her situation and use different strategies to address each child's needs and improve his or her support systems, which include parents and teachers. School psychologists should make a great effort to reach out to parents at all times and not just when a child is behaving badly. Thus, involving parents and teaching them to become a constant role model and support system to their children is a key factor in the educational process (Pelco et al., 2000).

Parental involvement in school may motivate children to perform well academically via the modeling and reinforcement that they receive from their parents. Parents model and reinforce the importance of education through their involvement and these factors may support the development of attitudes, understanding, and behaviors in their children that are associated with positive academic performance. Parents are essential partners in that they serve as important role models in all aspects of their children's lives, including school achievement. School psychologists can serve as liaisons

in this process by pointing out the important role that parents play in their children's academic success. School psychologists can work with parents and teachers to develop ways that reinforce and promote the continuous academic success of children.

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# Appendix A

### **General Introduction to Drawings (Children)**

“I am going to show you a series of drawings that may describe the way the important grown-up you live with is involved with your school. I want you to pick out the drawing that best describes what the important grown-up you live with is like in your school.”

#### **Script for Type 1 Involvement-*Learning at Home***

**High-** “In this picture, you have just come home from school and had a snack. The important grown-up you live with is sitting down next to you helping you with your homework and making sure you finish everything. During this time, you are not allowed to do anything until you finish your homework.”

**Medium-** “In this picture, you have just come home from school and had a snack. You are sitting down doing your homework and the important grown-up that you live with is doing something else important around the house. During this time, you are not allowed to do anything until you finish your homework.”

**Low-** “In this picture, you have just come home from school and had a snack. During this time, you are sitting down at home watching television. The important grown-up that you live with is doing something else important around the house and is allowing you to do your homework whenever you want.”

#### **Script for Type 2 Involvement-*Communicating***

**High-** “In this picture, the important grownup that you live with and the teacher talk all the time.”

**Medium-** “In this picture, the important grownup that you live with and the teacher talk sometimes.”

**Low-** “In this picture, the important grownup that you live with and the teacher talk hardly ever.”

#### **Script for Type 3 Involvement-*Parental Aspirations and Expectations***

**High-** “Here, you are talking to an important grownup that you live with. In this picture, the important grownup is saying to you: ‘I want you to try your best in school and I’m always here to help you whenever you need it.’”

**Medium-** “Here, you are talking to an important grownup that you live with. In this picture, the important grownup is saying to you: ‘I want you to do well in school. Just as long as you try, that’s all that really matters.’”

**Low-** “Here, you are talking to an important grownup that you live with. In this picture, the important grownup is saying to you: “I want you to decide how well you want to do in school. You are responsible for doing your own work.”

**Questionnaire and Answer Sheet (Parents/Guardians)**

For the following questions, please use the pictures provided in order to answer the questions. Answer "A" "B" or "C" to the questions. Each letter describes what is going on in each of the pictures.

**Question 1- Which child is most like the child you care for?**

(Please answer "A" "B" or "C")

**A.** In this picture, the child you care for has just come home from school and had a snack. You are sitting down next to the child helping him or her with homework and making sure that the child finishes everything. During this time, the child you care for is not allowed to do anything until he or she is finished with the homework.

**B.** In this picture, the child you care for has just come home from school and had a snack. The child is sitting down doing homework and you are doing something else important around the house. During this time, the child you care for is not allowed to do anything until he or she is finished with homework.

**C.** In this picture, the child you care for has just come home from school and had a snack. During this time, the child is sitting down at home watching television. You are doing something else important around the house and are allowing the child you care for to do homework whenever he or she wants.

**Question 2-Which of the following best represents your relationship with your child's teacher?**

(Please answer "A" "B" or "C")

**A.** In this picture, you and the teacher talk all the time.

**B.** In this picture, you and the teacher talk sometimes.

**C.** In this picture, you and the teacher talk hardly ever.

**Question 3- Which child is most like the child you care for?**

(Please answer "A" "B" or "C")

**A.** Here, you are talking to the child you care for. In this picture, you are saying to the child: "I want you to try your best in school and I'm always here to help you whenever you need it."

**B.** Here, you are talking to the child you care for. In this picture, you are saying to the child: "I want you to do well in school. Just as long as you try, that's all that really matters."

**C.** Here, you are talking to the child you care for. In this picture, you are saying to the child: "I want you to decide how well you want to do in school. You are responsible for doing your own work."



















