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Effect of Title I Parent Involvement on Student Reading and Mathematics Achievement

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Summary: This is a study of the effect of parent involvement on 335 Title I students, in second through eighth grade, in a West Virginia district. It found that students whose parents regularly attended school-based parent workshops made greater gains in reading and math than students with less-involved parents.

These “results help to dispel the myth that poorer parents are less willing (and unable) to involve themselves in their child’s education.”

This study examined the effects of parent involvement on reading and math achievement.

- Does parent involvement increase reading and/or math scores for low-achieving students?
- Does this effect hold true in middle school, as well as elementary school?

The authors looked at achievement data and family information for 335 Title I (federal program for low-income children) students receiving help in reading and math. The students were enrolled in grades 2-8 in nine schools in Marion County, West Virginia. Most of the students were white.

The school district developed a series of workshops for parents that involved information, training, and discussion. Each Title I teacher scheduled at least four of these three-hour sessions (called “parent group meetings”) a year. These meetings promoted five types of involvement:

1. Parenting.
2. Teacher-parent communication.
3. Parent involvement at school.
4. Parent involvement at home.
5. Program decision making.

At each meeting, parents received updates on their children’s progress and took part in training designed for their interests. Topics included “Supporting Children through Crisis,” “Discipline Strategies,” and “Increasing Your Child’s Vocabulary.” Parents also got learning packets in reading and math, as well as training in how to use them. Because children attended the sessions, there were opportunities for parents and children to practice together.

Information about student achievement data was drawn from the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS/4) results for reading and math. Students were pretested in August 1994 and tested again in May 1995. Their gains were measured against a national average (did they make as much progress during this time as the national

average would predict?). Parent involvement in the workshops and activities was graded as high or low, depending on how many activities the families attended (more or less than half).

First, the researchers looked at the effect of grade level and parent involvement on reading and math scores. Then they looked at the impact of family income—are families with higher income and education levels more likely to participate, and do their children tend to have higher scores?

Findings

- Students whose parents were more highly involved were more likely to make gains in both reading and math than children of less-involved parents. This was true for children from all income and education levels.
- Younger students (grades 2–4) made greater gains in both subjects than older students (grades 5–8).
- Parents are more likely to be involved when their children are in elementary school (grades 2–4) than in middle or junior high school.
- Title I students in the upper grades (5–8) are more likely to be from low-income families.
- Students from lower-income families made fewer gains in both reading and math than students from higher-income families, no matter how involved their families were. However, low-income students made greater gains if their parents were regularly involved.
- A family’s income level did not affect their level of involvement. Low-income families were as likely to attend the workshops regularly as higher-income families.

Table 20. Effects of Title I Parent Involvement on Math and Reading Comprehension

NORMAL CURVE EQUIVALENT GAINS IN SKILL AREA	HIGH-PARENT INVOLVEMENT CHILDREN	LOW-PARENT INVOLVEMENT CHILDREN
Total math	18.3	10.6
Math application	12.9	9.3
Total reading	13.3	4.4
Reading comprehension	10.9	4.7

Conclusions

These results suggest that parent involvement, no matter what the family background, is a dynamic force influencing students’ academic success. “It is imperative for Title I programs to place a special effort in involving low income parents and parents of older . . . children in school. Title I programs that employ social workers and support

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personnel to assist in addressing special needs of these children and families (as in the case of this school district) are likely to promote parent involvement from this particular group” (p. 95).

These “results help to dispel the myth that poorer parents are less willing (and unable) to involve themselves in their child’s education” (p. 95). Instead, the authors suggest that Title I programs can increase the potential for student achievement by developing well-designed parent-teacher group experiences.

Long-term learning problems result in failed adult dreams and expectations, a loss of true potential. Title I remedial education programs cannot change the fact of poverty and family breakdown in America. As indicated by this research, however, school districts can improve the likelihood for success in our children by recognizing and nurturing a crucial resource for improved academic achievement—the parent-school connection. (p. 95)