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Parents and Education:  
Their Role in Influencing  
Educational Outcomes in Children

by Calista Maas

*Educational outcomes for children have recently decreased nationwide, in part because of a decline in teachers' efforts to sufficiently educate students. Additionally, research indicates a decline in parents' contributions to their children's learning. As a result, more students are failing to graduate from high school, and suggestions implemented to improve the situation do not appear to be effective. Parents are allotting less time to help their children with schoolwork, which contributes in hindering the creation of a positive learning atmosphere at home. In addition, parents are becoming less involved in school activities, which may prompt social and intellectual distress in children. Parents should provide a positive home environment, create and maintain boundaries for their children, and strive to participate in their children's academics to improve their children's learning experience. This review will evaluate the current state of education and ascertain ways parents can assist in advancing their children's learning.*

*Keywords:* children, education, parent, involvement, school

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**T**here can be little doubt that in the last ten years there has been a general decline in the educational outcomes for kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in the United States. A national survey taken in 2009 by the Council on Foreign Relations found that more than 25 percent of students fail to graduate from high school in four years. Additionally, after taking the ACT, only 22 percent of students meet “college ready” standards (Klein, Rice, & Levy, 2012). The deterioration of quality education is impacting students nationwide as they are expected to do less in class by their teachers, while at the same time parental involvement in academia is diminishing. As Chawla (2012) declared, “there is a lot of importance of the home environment or family on pupil's/student's academic performance” (p. 1). Parents and the family in general can significantly alter the academic outcomes of their children.

Factors other than lack of parental involvement have also added to the general decline in education quality. The achievement of a student is not solely dependent on what takes place in the classroom; it is also affected by what takes place before and after school. The influence of a parent has been identified as a key factor in their student's future achievement (Halawah, 2006). Child development specialist Honig commented, “Family is the first school for young children, and parents are powerful models” (Collins, Jordan, & Coleman, 1999, p.140). Psychologist Balter (1988) added to this idea when he remarked, “As a parent, you will often serve as an inadvertent example to your child” (p. 30). A parent's attitude towards education is extremely influential for their children for their future achievement or failure in academia.

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When parents become preoccupied with their own careers and motivations, this may contribute to the neglect of their children and their children's educational potential. In order to address this problem, one must remember that the home is the place where the most good can be accomplished. As professed by Chawla (2012), the family is essential to the overall development, protection, and well-being of its members, which includes the education of their children. Therefore, parents need to provide their children with a supportive and nurturing environment in which they can successfully learn. As this review will explain, to improve and perpetuate the academic success of children today, parents must create a positive atmosphere in the home, establish necessary boundaries, and be actively involved in their children's education.

#### **Being Actively Involved in a Child's Education**

The involvement of parents in their children's education is something that has occurred across cultures and has been viewed as being beneficial for a child's education and overall well-being. Chen and Ho (2012) commented that the "quality of the parent-child relationship and the...children's assumptions of their parents' educational values" (p. 315) increased the child's educational outcome and resulted in the child continuing on to receive higher education at a college or university. As parents care about their child's success, the child has a desire to meet the educational values held by their parents. Correspondingly, studies have found a correlation between parents' participation in their children's education and different positive educational outcomes for children and adolescents as students (Gutman & Midgley, 2000). Despite this evidence sup-

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porting that parent involvement is important, some parents are becoming less and less interested and engrossed in their children's schooling.

### Parents Helping with Homework

Research has shown that individuals who bond through common goals grow closer. Estlund (2003) stressed that "the process of 'working together' both depends on and helps to produce...constructive intergroup relations" (p. 5). In the case of parents and children, if parents assist with their children's homework, they are working towards the child's understanding while strengthening their relationship with one another. Clark (1993) asserted that a parent's behavior towards their children can greatly influence how a child studies at home as well as his or her achievement at school, which is why parents need to be involved in their children's academics. Another important point regarding how parents can assist in increasing their children's academic potential is by motivating them to engage in their studies. One way to accomplish this aim is to help them with their homework.

The involvement of parents in their children's homework has been studied by different researchers with different emphases over the years. For instance, Cooper, Lindsay, and Nye (2000) measured four ways parents can be involved in their children's homework: autonomy support, direct involvement, elimination of distractions, and parental interference. The students in higher grades were given more autonomy, or independence; elementary school children were given more positive involvement, especially if they were struggling; and "parents in poorer families reported less support for

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autonomy and more interference" (p. 464), or constant unnecessary involvement, when their children did their homework. These researchers found that "more parental support for autonomy was associated with higher standardized test scores, higher class grades, and more homework completed" (p. 464). Evidently, if parents show support and help their children when needed, their students will do better academically.

In reality, parents often do not display positive or encouraging attitudes towards homework because they may instead be caught up in meeting their financial obligations, succeeding in their work life, keeping their lives content, and a number of other matters. Unfortunately, as a result they do not spend quality and sufficient time helping their children with schoolwork. In Sweden, the "parents report[ed] that they [did] not spend more than approximately five minutes a day on homework with their children" (Forsberg, 2007, p. 209). These children had lower academic performance even though they did complete their homework. In addition, research has found that children who are extrinsically motivated and who do worse in school have parents who are over-involved or under-involved in their children's lives, react negatively to grades, and give many material rewards to their children (Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993). Studies regarding how parents can benefit and improve their children's education are significant, yet the outcomes will not occur unless parents implement them into their personal lives with their children.

### Parental Involvement in a School Setting

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There are some parents who are so supportive of their children that they strive to find ways to be involved outside the home. This often means being involved in the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), volunteering in the classroom, and chaperoning for field trips. These examples are related to Epstein's six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010). These scholars described *communicating* as "designing and conducting effective forms of two-way communications about school programs and children's progress" with teachers (p. 2) and described *volunteering* as "recruiting and organizing help at school, home, or in other locations to support the school and students' activities" (p. 2). This information can help parents become involved directly in their children's school. However not every parent has the desire or feels they can be involved in this way.

For instance, parents of inner-city Black and Hispanic high school students believed that the school, consisting of the teachers and staff, did not want them to be involved in changing school policies to benefit their children and were, consequently, less likely to be involved. This lack of parental involvement resulted in their children facing more struggles socially and intellectually (Williams & Sánchez, 2012). Although the parents wanted to be involved, they felt like their efforts were not taken seriously and that they were not welcome, resulting in them becoming removed from their child's education and their child suffering academically for this distance. This outcome is supported by the longitudinal study done by Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, and Fendrich (1999), who concluded that par-

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ents declined in school participation after three years because as their children aged, there were fewer opportunities for the parents to assist in the classroom. In addition, there were fewer parent-teacher interactions because the parents assumed the teacher was successfully teaching and fulfilling their child's intellectual needs. The parents not only stopped participating in school and communicating with teachers, but they stepped away from their children's academic development and gave the responsibility to the teachers. Clearly, many parents are complacent as their children's educational standing declines, and no longer become directly involved in the learning process taking place at school.

### **Supportive and Nurturing Environment**

Parents, in general, wish the best for their children and want them to succeed in everything they encounter in life. There are some parents who are actively involved in helping their children with homework and participating in school functions, yet others dedicate a minimal amount of time to help their children with schoolwork. Whether the parents are actively involved in their children's academics or not, the opinions of parents regarding coursework can greatly influence their children's achievement in academics and in life because what they think matters to their children. Gniewosz and Noack (2012) affirmed that "parental behaviors and communications of their beliefs...[can] affect the child's academic outcomes" (p. 810), for better or worse. In order to counteract the current decrease in quality education, parents need to dedicate more time and energy to their children's education to improve their

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Children's learning and increase their chances of success throughout their lives.

### Positive Home Environment

Possibly one of the simplest ways to promote academic achievement for students would be to make sure they come home to a positive environment. In some instances, children find they are not receiving the assistance and validation they need from their teachers in order to succeed in school. They come home with the expectation they will receive this support from their parents; that where the teachers fail, their parents will make up the difference. If parents wish to see their children achieve academic excellence, they must show their children the encouragement and acceptance they need, not just in terms of their academics, but in all facets of their children's lives. Children then know they can rely on and turn to their parents in times of difficulty.

Another way parents may ensure a positive atmosphere at home is to spend meaningful time with their children. This can occur through working together, playing together, and simply talking together. One of the best ways for parents to grow closer to their children is through open, honest, sincere communication. Ginott (2003) asserted that "when children feel understood, their loneliness and hurt diminish. When children are understood, their love for the parent is deepened" (p. 8). Ultimately, the majority of parents want to be loved and appreciated by their children and children want to depend on their parents. This relationship can occur through communication which then perpetuates a positive home environment that can assist in academic achievement for the chil-

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dren. As expressed by Foster, Lambert, Abbott-Shim, McCarty, and Franze (2005), "the quality of the home environment is widely recognized as a strong contributor to young children's emergent literacy and social competence and to their subsequent educational success" (p. 13).

### Need for Boundaries and Rules

To promote success and stability in a child's life, parents need to establish necessary boundaries and rules for their children in many different areas. For instance, many children benefit from curfews set by their parents regarding how late they can stay out at night (Adams, 2003). This rule protects the child and eliminates many negative experiences that could possibly occur without the rule in place. Another rule some parents implement is that fun activities—such as watching television, playing games, and hanging out with friends—cannot occur until homework for the next day is completed. Although children may not always appreciate these rules and boundaries set for them, these rules express that their parents care and are concerned about their children's well-being. Without these limitations, children might become involved in many activities that may be severely detrimental to their futures, including teenage pregnancy, drug addiction, and serving out a jail sentence. In addition, by having these rules in place, they help maintain consistency throughout childhood. This consistency significantly benefits children in all aspects of their life, but it can specifically affect their schooling. They know what is normal and what to expect when they come home, making them feel comfortable and secure in the

place where they spend most of their time and creating a positive learning environment.

#### Assist in Children's Learning

For children to succeed in gaining a quality education throughout their childhood years, one of the best things parents can do is be actively involved in helping their children learn academically. Rackensperger (2012) discovered that students who viewed homework as a challenge felt that with family—specifically parental involvement—completing their homework was easier to manage with this extra assistance. To achieve this result, parents need to dedicate a specific time every day when they are available to help with homework. The time spent helping could consist of them physically sitting next to their children and going through homework assignments with them, or merely being in the immediate area where they can be called upon if assistance is required. If students know they can ask their parents, who are ready and willing to help, for assistance with homework, it can significantly increase their performance in school.

In addition, parents can contribute to their children's education by creating a learning atmosphere at home. Gottfried, Fleming, and Gottfried (1998) emphasized that by encouraging academic learning at home and having "a greater emphasis on learning opportunities and activities [children] were more academically intrinsically motivated" (p. 1448). Parents can provide these learning opportunities by going to museums as a family or even starting a family book club that relates to what the child is currently learning in school. It is important for parents to maintain and continue to share their opin-

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ions about gaining a good education so their children constantly understand and remember why they are striving to gain a quality education.

In conclusion, if parents provide a positive home environment, create and maintain boundaries for their children, and strive to participate in their children's academics, not only can their children receive a valuable education, but they can have the opportunity to discover what their education can do for them and others in the future.

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