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Achievement Paper

Step 1

Parental involvement in a child's education has a strong positive influence on their academic success. The opposite is also true, studies show that a lack of parental involvement has a strong negative influence on academic success and performance. Cornell Law created a definition of parental involvement, stating that the term means, "...the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities." This definition can be applied in order to create a general understanding of parental involvement and parental engagement for the purpose of this research on academic achievement. The argument that parental involvement is beneficial to student success has been proved true by numerous studies, one of which came from Chicago's Consortium on School Research, referenced by the Chicago Sun Times. This study stated that, "...schools were four times more likely to improve in reading, and 10 times more likely to improve in mathematics, when parent engagement was strong..." It also stated that when engagement was weak, there was no improvement from any school in the study in mathematics. This newspaper article was sparked by the sharp decline in student performance as a result of covid-19, however the effort to increase parental involvement is intended to have long term positive effects on student performance post-pandemic as well.

Public School 298 in Brooklyn, New York was described in a New York Times article as underperforming, citing weak parental involvement as a driving force behind the achievement

gaps. The principal from P.S. 298 stated that attempts to invite parents to visit classrooms yielded less than 10 percent attendance. The de Blasio mayoral administration was particularly firm in their belief that parental involvement is a key component to improving poor performance in public schools. Millions of dollars were spent by his administration to train parents to organize techniques, and even to hire a team tasked to reach 35,000 parents by going door to door to encourage them to increase their participation in their child's academic success. The school chancellor of de Blasio's administration Carmen Fariña was quoted for the article, "Bringing families into their child's education is essential. Study after study shows that family engagement improves student performance and attendance." The efforts of the de Blasio campaign differ strongly from the Bloomberg administration, which focused on identifying and replacing weak employees of school systems. This shift in focus to parental involvement demonstrates the current understanding of the major factors that impact student achievement.

The Virginia Department of Education (VDE) was reported to have similar goals in mind for their school systems as reported by Virginia CBS 19 news. An article reported that the VDE has a set of resources created by the Virginia Parent Teachers Association aimed at assisting schools in creating events and support for families. A press release from the VDE stated, "...Research has shown that two-way communication and collaboration between schools and families result in more positive attitudes towards school, higher student achievement, better attendance, improved graduation rate, and greater enrollment in post-secondary education." It is clearly evident that improving parental involvement is a strategy that has garnered nationwide support due to the current understanding that this variable can create favorable or unfavorable outcomes for student achievement.

Step 2

Through reviewing a number of studies on parental involvement on children's achievement, there is clear and sufficient evidence to support a strong correlation between these two variables. Parental involvement will increase a student's academic performance. By coding a number of studies on this topic, we were able to identify a few forms of involvement that consistently benefited students. The first is "at home assisting and monitoring learning," and the second is, "engaging children about their experiences and plans." The first identified trend applied more to younger students in primary and middle school, and the second applied more to students in middle school and secondary school.

"At home assisting and monitoring," was first identified in a study that focused on Parental Involvement in Developing reading skill. This was a five year longitudinal study that found, "...story book exposure at home predicts children's receptive language skills..." (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). This finding supports the importance of parental involvement with younger children who can gain a head start from increased exposure to reading at home. In another study, involving parents with take-home mathematics activities was consistently and positively related to improvements in student proficiency test scores (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). The results of these studies illustrate the use of parental home assistance as a form of involvement. Generally, getting parents involved with the child's learning aids in academic achievement, particularly in younger students. Immigrant families were chosen as the subjects of another study that identified how student perception of parental involvement related to achievement. Unsurprisingly this study found that adolescents' reports of monitoring by mothers and fathers was indirectly related to better grades (Plunkett et. Al, 2009). In this case the relationship was described as indirect because this study stated that perceived parental involvement had an outcome of higher student engagement, which in turn resulted in increased performance in the classroom. The analysis of

these three studies revealed how assisting and monitoring school work in a collaborative way contributed to increased student achievement among younger students.

The second identified method of parental involvement was “engaging children about their school experiences and plans.” Wang et. Al 2014, outlined five types of parental involvement that correlated to staving off GPA declines in middle and high school students. Part of the study was tracking the trajectories of these five types of involvement, and identifying which ones tapered off as the child progressed through years of education. The two types of involvement that increased were, “Linking education with future success,” and “scaffolding independence.” The three other types of involvement all declined while GPA’s continued to increase. For this reason, it is reasonable to assess that “linking education with future success,” and “scaffolding independence,” were two of the main contributors to academic success in older students. These two types of involvement included helping to create plans for the future, and engaging with students about their opinions on what they are learning. Similar findings occurred in a study of Mexican American youth, about the kind of parental involvement that most correlated with educational success. In that study, findings showed that the positive impact in academics occurred through home-based parental involvement (Altschul, 2011), particularly discussing school related issues, and plans for future schooling. The trend identified between these two studies displays how parental involvement changes over the course of a students education, but that despite taking on a new form, it is equally as important to increase educational achievement.

Many studies discuss the correlation between parental involvement and children’s achievement but only a few discuss the barriers that prevent parents from getting involved. A study conducted in 2018 identified four barriers to parental involvement in schools. The four

barriers are as follows, parent/family factors, parent/teacher factors, societal factors, and practical barriers (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

Parent and family factors were described as “parent’s own negative experiences of school can decrease their parental involvement, as well as parent’s own issues”. Age was also a factor that was discussed, younger parents were assumed to have fewer barriers than older parents. Some examples of these factors include; parents being embarrassed by their own literacy levels and parents tending to assume their child’s experience of school will be the same as theirs. Parent-teacher factors were described as many different difficulties such as teachers not having enough time or experience to assist parents, parents worried they will be criticized or judged if their child is having a problem with something, and parents tend to expect from the school but it is more of a relationship now instead of one-sided.

Societal factors discussed in this study included race, income, and family status. Many interviewed said working parents have more difficulty being involved due to their lack of free time. If parents are not working they can attend more events and other things beneficial which can be seen as an advantage. Schools are taught to respect and embrace diversity but at home, it can be different. Parents have reported a lack of want to get involved due to racism taught at home to other students or parents' reactions to the inclusion of diversity.

Lastly, practical barriers to parental involvement include lack of free time, parents unsure how to approach school staff, school operating hours, and internet access. Lack of free time for parents is a big factor in parents' involvement, once parents are home from work getting involved in their kid's school can get put on the back burner when put next to all of their other responsibilities. Parents also tend to be unaware of how to approach school staff when needing assistance with something or oftentimes school office staff can be offputting which results in less

involvement from parents. Lack of internet access is also an important barrier due to how virtual the education system is today. Although parental involvement is strongly connected to student achievement it is important to highlight the barriers parents face in order to get involved with their kids to promote their achievement.

District Examples:

Van Dyke Public Schools (VDPS) in Warren, Michigan have a page on their district website entirely devoted to addressing parental involvement as a means of supporting academic achievement. Their website states, "...every student will have a parent or primary caregiver who is empowered to participated actively in all aspects of his or her education." VDPS addresses six ways to accomplish this mission, "Parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community." This school district clearly understands the necessity of parental involvement as it relates to the success of their students. This district even has a position titled, "District Parent Involvement Coordinator," which is filled by Melissa Pluszczynski. Creating a leadership role devoted to this issue further demonstrates VDPS' commitment to integrating parents within their schools and community. Their webpage advertised a program that ran from July 12th to August 16th, 2022 called, "Prime Time Family Reading Time." This program gave families with children aged six to 10 an opportunity to hear and discuss children's stories, as well as receive free books, dinner, door prizes, and more. "Prime Time Family Reading Time" encourages active participation from parents in their children's early learning and reading. The event was completely free, while providing materials and dinner as a means of navigating the barrier of socioeconomic status to parental involvement. There are five goals listed on the website that VDPS hopes to accomplish with "Prime Time

Reading Time.” The fifth goal is “To improve student academic achievement.” VDPS recognizes the correlation between parental involvement and student success, and utilized this program as a tool to create positive outcomes for their students.

Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS) in Henrico, Virginia also has a page on their district website devoted to addressing family and community involvement. HCPS describes this as their “FACE Department” which stands for Family and Community Engagement. HCPS website states that they are “committed to building resource-rich school communities, bridging high impact collaborations and partnerships, and boosting transformative family engagement.” They update this monthly with information for families and the community to help promote engagement with their students. They are advertising the month of November as Family Engagement month in order to encourage engagement with families and students across the district. This specific section of the district's website shows that HCPS recognizes that there is a positive correlation between parental involvement and student achievement which is why they are trying so hard to embrace it and spread how other engage with their students.

Step 3

Similar to the direct examples above, a program should be developed in order to assist parents and families in learning how to correctly be involved in their child's achievement. It could be called FACE (Family and Community Engagement) or something similar to it that involves parents and family involvement. The goal of this program would be to educate and assist parents and families in the best ways to support their children in order to promote academic achievement. The two main ways of involvement proven to benefit students were “at home assisting and monitoring learning” and “engaging children about their experiences and plans”. The program would teach parents and families techniques to get involved with their

children that correlated to both “at home assisting and monitoring learning” and “engaging children about their experiences and plans”.

In order to achieve the goal of the program, schools would host sessions similar to “Back to School Night” or “PTA Meetings” that would be open to all parents of students at the school. These sessions would provide techniques and tips on what parents can do to help their student's achievement instead of parents learning what the teachers are doing. Teachers and other volunteers will train parents on how to assist with their children's learning through take-home activities and a better understanding of how they can assist from home. Parents can implement these techniques into the home on a day-to-day basis and report back on what helped their children and what did not so new things can be implemented or a routine can be adapted. To counter the many barriers to parental involvement these sessions can be held at multiple different times and days of the week to accommodate all parent's work schedules. Oftentimes, socioeconomic status can prevent parents from getting involved, so upon a parent's request, these programs will have free childcare in the form of high school students or other volunteers so that parents have the best opportunity of attending these sessions. This specific program and plan was picked because it is a low stress way of having parents gain knowledge to benefit their children in their success as well as be involved with them through their school age years.

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