

**A'S OR F'S: THE IMPACTS AND EFFECTS OF PARENTAL AND TEACHER
INVOLVEMENT ON THE STRUGGLE OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND
ATTENDANCE IN MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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STRUGGLE OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND ATTENDANCE
IN MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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Abstract

Student's successes, achievements, and good attendance are as good as a parent's involvement in the child's education. Parent participation when harnessed at a child's early age can most likely lead to a higher level of achievement and success (Cotton, 2001). Improving parent-teacher perceptions regarding parental involvement and bettering communication between all parties can substantially affect positive student performance and growth. Parental involvement is like a pyramid the drive, motivation, and interest are the layers acquired and built at home so that at school the student and the teacher are then able to transcend and create a complete and fruitful work of art.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE.....i
ABSTRACT.....ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....iii

CHAPTER I: Introduction.....1

 Statement of the Problem.....2
 Purpose of the Study.....3
 Significance of the Study.....3
 Assumptions of the Study.....4
 Delimitations.....5
 Methods and Procedures.....5

CHAPTER II: Review of Related Literature.....6

 Parental Involvement Delineated by Parents and Teachers through Time.....6
 Parents Perceptions on Parental Involvement.....8
 The Perceptions of Teachers roles in Parental Involvement.....10
 Communication between Parents, Teachers, and Success is Key.....11
 Effects of Parental and Teacher Involvement on Student Performance and Attendance.....13

CHAPTER III: Conclusions and Recommendations.....15

REFERENCES.....18

Chapter 1: Introduction

The state of Wisconsin and the rest of the nation seem to be focused on not only student proficiency, but also student performance and attendance. Teachers have always been the main focus of student success or failure, but parents are also becoming more involved in their children's education. There is a dispute among many researchers that expresses a concern regarding parental involvement and how it influences student achievement. According to the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Henderson and Mapp, 2002) one of their key findings in research shows that families that engage in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement.

Research done in the last two decades substantiates that parents who are involved in their children's lives promote not only higher performance scores, but better attendance, grades, attitude towards school, and most notably a higher impact in parent and teacher communication (Epstein, 2001; Hiatt-Michael, 2001). All of these factors have opened up new doors for more research into improving both teacher and parent communication and has brought parent involvement to the forefront in many schools and school districts (U.S. Department of Education, 1994), such as the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).

The National Education Goals and Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) has required that school districts that receive more than \$5000,000 per year must allocate 1% of those funds for parent involvement activity. These funds are then used to

encourage parental involvement and the social-emotional academic growth of children in public schools (Hiatt-Michael, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Many parents in MPS do not know how to be actively involved in their children's education, nor do they know how to communicate their concerns with teachers. They understand that education is important, but have not been informed how to further their support in this situation. Schools, society, and children have gone through many changes in the past 20 years and teachers cannot do it alone. Classroom sizes have increased, funding in public schools have decreased, and societal issues have worsened, therefore it is essential that parents be actively involved in their children's education as well as maintain open lines of communication with their children's teachers in order to further help their child succeed (Epstein, 1985; Simich-Dudgeon, 1986; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Hiatt-Michael, 2001).

Many of the problems stated can be addressed by first teaching parents how to become engaged in their children's lives through different methods and activities provided by both teachers and other staff in the schools. Another key element in this formula is teacher training. Training for teachers needs to be enhanced and include courses in parental involvement, family issues, and multiculturalism in order to reach different parents/guardians and the problems they face. Finally, maintaining good and open communication between both parents/guardians and teachers is vital in assessing future student performance and attendance.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to improve both student academics and attendance by increasing parental and teacher involvement. This goal will be met through parents becoming more aware of the methods and activities they can perform in order to assist their children both at home and in school. Teachers will be trained in multiple areas in order to increase parental involvement and student success. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To establish the present activities being used for parental involvement in MPS.
2. To determine what methods teachers are currently using to inform parents/guardians of student performance and progress.
3. To decide if there are any changes in parental involvement after offering a variety of workshops and enhancing parent/guardian skills.
4. To ascertain if increased parental involvement is improving both performance scores and attendance of students.
5. To find out if training teachers and other MPS staff, in more effective communication with parents, improves student achievement and attendance.

Significance of the Study

MPS is a very large urban school district that not only suffers from many monetary yearly cuts, but also provides education for a tremendous amount of impoverished families. Many of these families do not have the time to think about student performance and/or attendance because of their social-economic situation. If they were to be presented with several opportunities where they can be more engaged in

their child's education through workshops and teacher involvement, they would most likely take advantage.

The benefits of this study not only include parents, but students, teachers, and MPS as a whole. Each group will benefit differently, but the outcome is that of unity, hard work, and pride. All of the parents/guardians in MPS will learn new skills through the workshops offered; in turn helping their own children succeed in reaching better performance and attendance. Faculty and other MPS staff will receive extra training in family issues and multiculturalism, which in turn will make them better communicators with parents/guardians regarding student performance. Students will also be gaining the two strongest forces, which are parents/guardians and teachers. These two forces are willing to help students succeed both academically and personally in order to impact them both now and in the future. Finally, MPS will benefit from the strength and teamwork of everyone involved in this study, which will make MPS a stronger and better learning environment.

Assumptions of the Study

There are several assumptions being made, first off that parents/guardians do not know of all of the activities they can participate in, in order to be involved in their children's academics. The second assumption is that all teachers are using the same methods of parental contact. Lastly, is that those students have similar needs regarding their performance and attendance.

Delimitations

The research performed was exclusively made for improvements in Milwaukee Public Schools. Generalizations should be made with caution even though the results have implications of being able to be applied to other institutions.

Methods and Procedures

This study's goals were to investigate how to improve both student academics and attendance by increasing parental and teacher involvement. The information needed for this project was gathered by completing careful literature research as well as employing the combined experience of the writer and spouses 25 years at Milwaukee Public Schools as educators. These educators did strengthen the study based on their knowledge, understanding, and expertise concerning all grade levels ranging from K-4 to 12th grade. Their capabilities and knowhow can be tapped into in order to find out their perceptions of different problems, matters, and solutions surrounding the topics of student achievement and parental teacher involvement. Each person also has children attending MPS and as parents they gave their view points of what parental involvement is; how they are engaged and how do they communicate their issues with teachers. The teachers were also capable of self-assessing how they as teachers communicate students failures or successes to parents/guardians, and what do they believe parental involvement brings to student performance and attendance.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Parental Involvement Delineated by Parents and Teachers through Time

In order to understand how parental involvement can positively affect student achievement and attendance, we must first delve into very important questions which surround this sometimes perplexing topic. For instance, what is parental involvement? How do parents and teachers perceive the role of a parent in a student's life? How can they (parents) become involved and stay involved? And how is communication between teachers and parents attained regarding the students and their achievements and/or failures?

Historically parental involvement has always been part of society and at the forefront of a child's education. In colonial schools, parental involvement was expected in many areas such as governance, teacher selection, supporting of curriculum, and even the backing of religious teachings (Hiatt, 1994; Barge, K. and Loges, W, 2003) unfortunately during the 1800s and early 1900s this type of involvement diminished due to bureaucratization of schools and the rise of professionalism of school personnel (Barge and Loges, 2003). When viewing parental involvement today it is definitely seen as two separate and distinct entities. Parents are seen as supporting their children at home as coaches whom provide homework assistance in the educational process and experiences as well as motivating positive academic progress (Barge and Loges, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Henderson and Mapp, 2002).

Most educators will state that parental involvement in school activities and in the student's schoolwork is an integral part to student success as well as their academic performance (Griffith, 2001). As an educator, student achievement and growth is

extremely imperative and parental support and encouragement is an essential part of the formula. As parents being involved in our childrens education it is more than just coaching, but also being present and active at sports activities, school functions, parent-teacher conferences and awards ceremonies. Although parental involvement, by definition, sounds attainable and even “story like” it carries with it both conceptual and operational definitions depending on the meaning of the study itself. For instance, Dwyer and Hecht (1992) found very low levels of parental involvement in school programs. They suggested that parental involvement and student school performance may be inversely related or unrelated. White, Taylor, and Moss (1992) concluded that there was no convincing evidence that parental involvement in early intervention strategies resulted in more effective student performance outcomes (Griffith, 2001). Yet according to Hara and Burke, Hill and Craft, Marcon, and Stevenson and Baker all specifically state that children whose parents are more involved in their education have higher levels of academic performance than children whose parents are involved to a lesser degree (Torpor, Keane, Shelton, and Calkins, 2010). Policy makers and school districts also believe in the positive connection between parental involvement and student success. Effectively engaging parent and families in the education of their children has the potential to be far more transformational than any other type of education reform (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Consolidated Improvement Plan for Milwaukee, 2009-10).

Decision-making is another important part of parental involvement in schools such as being a school board member, partaking in the PTSO (Parent, Teacher, and Student Organization) and/or advising a local school improvement council (Cotton,

2001). These roles provide parents a sense of belonging and partnership, instead of alienation from teachers and the schools. Even though parents honestly want to contribute to the schools by serving in more active decision making roles, many school administrators and teachers state their reluctance in this type of partnership (Cotton, 2001). According to Cotton (2001), schools do not approve of parents making decisions regarding principal selection, setting school budgets, selection of texts and/or teaching materials because of the parents lack of training. Although parents feel that they could serve a great purpose in these roles there is not much research that supports or links this kind of involvement with increased student achievement or attendance.

Parents Perceptions on Parental Involvement

Understanding ones role as a parent in our children's academic performance is crucial, but finding a clear and concise explanation of what that role may be is uncertain to say the least. In today's society there are many different perceptions regarding parental involvement. Some parents believe that cultivating personal relationships with teachers, monitoring student academic progress, utilizing extracurricular school programs as well as developing community support systems are the many ways a parent can partake in their student's academic success (Barge and Loges, 2003). However, another set of parents struggle to assert their beliefs and ideas because they feel that the educational system not only blocks them from being part of the decision making, but marginalizes them making them feel isolated and alienated (Lawson, M., 2003). There is an absolute dissonance between these two parent groups due to economic backgrounds, social settings, as well as educational backgrounds nevertheless; both groups want the same results for their children success.

It seems that in today's society (including both of the formerly mentioned groups) it is much more challenging to partake in children's education thanks to the barriers that parents face such as lack of time, flexibility in work schedules, numerous two-parent working families, family dissolution rates, and of lack money, and or resources (Lareau and Shumar, 1996; McWayne, 2004; Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Nero, and Ryalls, 2010). However, just because parents are not "seen" at schools does not mean that they are not interested. In many cases, such as this writer and researchers spouse Manuel Badillo (both Milwaukee Public School Educators), parents want to be involved but professional demands do not allow leaving work in order to be part of children's activities or awards ceremonies. This too is misinterpreted as disinterest, therefore possibly leading many to conclude that childrens education is not important. Therefore it is not surprising that parents are honestly not sure of what role they play or how to make an impact because they are not sure who should talk to whom, about what, where they would talk, or when (Barge and Loges, 2003). Maybe schools should reevaluate when activities take place during the day and what times they offer such activities so as to make it more accessible for parents and families.

Taking part in parent teacher conferences, school functions, and field trips enables parents to understand more of the schools' structure therefore increasing their credibility with the school staff; this in turn would empower parents to take the first steps in becoming further involved (Cotton, 2001).

The Perceptions of Teachers roles in Parental Involvement

When looking at this aspect of parental involvement it is found that teacher-initiated contact with parents was associated with greater parent-initiated contact with schools and better academic performance of students (Ryan, Casas, et al.). Do teachers characterize or describe parental involvement as do parents? Teachers, in several studies, define parental involvement as a means for parents and families to cooperate and acquiesce to the need of the school (Lawson, 2003). Parents that cultivate contact with teachers and open the lines of communication or ask about their child generally shows the teacher that they are interested in both the child and the school (Barges and Loges, 2003).

Encompassing parental involvement as a teacher for the past thirteen years in MPS has not always been easy, but our school does have a higher rate of parental involvement in the district. As an educator, parental involvement includes both school-based and home based engagement. School based parent involvement in this researchers opinion, is the most difficult aspect to attain. The parent is seen as volunteering their time to participating at the school itself such as helping in the library, playground, cafeteria, chaperoning field trips, as well as assisting the teacher as an aide for the day (Lawson, 2003). These activities, although great in theory, are very difficult to attain as previously mentioned. While a child is at home the parent has the opportunity to engage that child and reinforce the school's mission (Lawson, 2003). Lawson stated that parent involvement is essential in order for teachers to do their job effectively, because after all, parents are the first teachers. Parents can help provide

positive attitudes toward learning and also can influence student achievement (Zdzinski, 1996)

According to Salinas, perceptions have a lot to do with success. Teachers perceive that families do not want to be involved when in fact; families do not know *how* to be involved. All in all, 65% of teachers say their students would do better in school if their parent were more involved (Johnson and Duffett, 2003).

Communication between Parents, Teachers, and Success is Key.

Communication has a huge impact on student success as well as with parents and teacher relationships. One communicative strategy parents use for establishing a personal relationship with the teacher is contacting them early during the semester letting teachers know that parents are willing to help them as educators (Barge and Loges, 2003). Another form of communication, according to Barge and Loges, are parent-teacher conferences, this provides both parties the ability to speak for an uninterrupted amount of time regarding the student and his/her progress, but sometimes parents who need family-school networks support are often the least likely to have such access (Ream and Palardy, 2008). Families have also expressed a desire for teachers to contact them when the student's performance was excellent or when they did something well (Barge and Loges, 2003). Even though the last two statements are true, this writer has the advantage of seeing both sides of this issue. Although it is fact that teachers should communicate more with parents regarding students positive accomplishments, and not only be in touch with the negative aspects of student behavior, it is easier for a parent to contact one out of seven teachers than it is for a

teacher to contact 150 plus parents due to lack of time. This statement does not mean that teachers are not willing to call, just overwhelmed.

There are many other ways that parents and teachers can communicate with each other- for instance MPS is assisting families in becoming more informed on schools support systems and services. Learning Teams and School Governance Councils, which seek input from the local school community, are assessing current school climate surveys in order to ensure family and community needs are met (Consolidated Improvement Plan for Milwaukee, 2009-2010). MPS is also collaborating with the Milwaukee Partnership Academy on a tutoring program and family literacy project which focuses on improving achievement in literacy and mathematics (Consolidated Improvement, 2009-2010). When parents and families see these types of programs available they tend to feel more welcomed by their school community.

Effective communication requires a two-way flow of information. While most schools develop efficient structures for getting information out-such as newsletters, Web sites, and press releases-far fewer develop structures for solicited parental input (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2005). In order for parents to feel a part of the school and its structure they must have the ability to give feedback through some type of venue or system. Milwaukee Public Schools offer the PTSO (Parent, Teacher, and Student Organization) which encompasses all bodies in order for effective open communication regarding school policy, budget, as well as any school issues. Most schools also offer a phone service with information regarding individual school activities and times. Bottom line, schools and teachers must strategize

in conveying what is important to parents in a way that can be heard and at the same time invites them to respond (The Center et. 2005).

Effects of Parental and Teacher Involvement on Student Performance and Attendance

According to Juan M. Badillo, an educator in MPS for the past twelve years, parental involvement does impact student performance. When a parent is actively involved in their child's education and high standards are established in the home children tend to perform at a higher rate because they know it is valued. Badillo also notes that parent consistency in their child's education and activities have a propensity to motivate the student to not only actively perform well in school, but to want to be there and perform at the highest level possible.

Many different types of studies have been completed in order to actually prove and confirm that there is a correlation between parent-teacher involvement and student performance and attendance. After all of the countless literature reviews, meta, regression, and mediational analysis is completed the conclusion tends to be the same, that when a parent participates in school events and activities, helps in the classroom, attends school programs, assists with homework, and partakes in parent groups the fact remains that parental involvement consistently and significantly is related and correlated with increased academic performance (Griffith, 2001; Topor, Keane, et al, 2010). Fan and Chen state in their research that the average correlation coefficient between parental involvement and student's academic achievement is .25 based on 92 correlation coefficients collected from 25 empirical studies with a cumulative sample of about 133,577. What does this mean? This scientifically based meta-analysis typically

represents a noticeable and apparent effect (Stevens, 1990) that generally should not be regarded as trivial, but measurable. In today's society parental involvement is extremely salient. Despite differences in how parent involvement is defined and operationalized in research and practice, school centric parent involvement garner high expectations for not only academic achievement, but higher grades, test scores, good behavior, improved teacher efficacy, and regular attendance (Lawson, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Henderson and Berla, 1994). The research also proves that the sooner a parent becomes involved in their child's education the more powerful the effects will be (Cotton, 2001)

The writer has the advantage of having two view points, that of a parent and fifteen years as an educator. Yes, society has changed and is becoming more saturated with people, but that also means that education must change with it. Adjustments have to be made on both sides of the fence between parents and teachers in order to meet and even exceed student's needs, accomplishments, and successes. This can only be attained through open communication; understanding of each other's needs and by all groups being better advocates for students, their learning environment and hopeful academic future.

Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

After No Child Left Behind was passed many school districts were forced to make many changes and Milwaukee Public Schools were no different. Since 2004, MPS has been promoting the use of the National Parent/Teacher Association's Standards for community involvement (Consolidated Improvement Plan for Milwaukee, 2009-2010). This plan was initiated in the hopes to promote meaningful parent, family, and community involvement in education by raising awareness of how to assist schools towards improvement (Consolidated Improvement Plan for Milwaukee, 2009-2010). Parental support, although very crucial, is still a big problem for MPS schools as seen in both the District Report Card (2003- 2009) and the Parent Climate Survey (2008–2011). MPS has a total of 85,000 students in attendance today, but yet only 8,861 parents/guardians filled out the climate survey. Lack of access to computers or technology could be argued for the low number, but MPS, during parent/teacher conferences, gives parents the opportunity to fill out the Parent Climate Surveys in their buildings. This is a perfect example of how the district suffers from the deficiency of parental involvement. Another matter that affects parental involvement is the lack of teacher training. Many teachers feel unprepared to effectively involve parents in their child's education (The Center et. al., 2005). Teachers do not receive training regarding parental involvement and how to actively engage them throughout the year, as a matter of fact teachers are told keep them involved, but are never helped in how to attain such goal. Right now MPS is enhancing and promoting partnerships between parent organizations, the district and school in order to support the implementation of district narratives as well as developing school leadership that emphasizes positive and

supportive school environments. The message that needs to be heard is that those who are involved do make a difference, which is why MPS and its teachers are continuing its efforts to increase parental involvement at all levels.

When it comes to involving parents communication is extremely important, not only between the parents and teachers, but the student as well. In 2003 a public survey was conducted by Public Agenda and it found that 65 percent of teachers say their students would do better in school if their parents were more involved, and 72 percent of parents feel that children whose parents are not involved “fall through the cracks” (Johnson and Duffett, 2003). Note that both groups of parents and teachers are saying the same exact thing; that parents need to partake in their child’s life in order for them to flourish and be successful. If communication is utilized and everyone sees themselves on the same page then parents and teachers can build a relationship and become partners in the learning process of students.

It is a fact that parental involvement has been a thorn in many peoples. It does not help that there is a lot of confusion with parent and teacher perceptions, that both parties lack time for involvement, that communication is far from actually happening, and that the disagreement of the role everyone plays in this complex subject is not easily defined. Even though all of these issues are occurring improvements are being made. Researchers describe successful strategies with the goals that are directed toward forming mutually beneficial partnerships and two-way communication while reducing practices that too often represent a power imbalance that favors the school or the teacher (Risko and Walker-Dalhouse, 2009; Moore and Lasky, 2001). Programs are now being created that invite the parents into the schools and makes them feel welcome.

Parents can be volunteers, tutors or even mentors in schools today, and The Caring Communities program can make these things come true. This program has increased school attendance, reduced suspensions, improved academic performance, as well as increased parent-teacher participation (Risko and Walker-Dalhause, 2009).

Parental involvement is still a key predictor of a student's academic success and attendance (Barge and Loges, 2003). Students whose parents stay connected and highly involved with their children's academics and schools are likely to have higher school engagement, better performance as well as student attendance (Mo and Singh, 2008).

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