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**The Impact of Parental Involvement on Adolescent Academic Achievement, Moral Judgment
and Emotional Development and Ways to Apply that to a Middle School Classroom**

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Introduction

The importance of parental involvement in a child's life cannot be understated. Indeed, parental involvement is a "crucial force" in a child's development, learning, and success at school, and in life (Patrikakou, 2008). The topic of this research is to take a brief, but concerted, look into the impact of parental involvement on an adolescent's academic achievement, the development of their moral judgment, and their emotional development, particularly in regard to their mental health. Throughout school districts in North Carolina, and even throughout the United States, there are educators wondering how to make deeper connections with their students, and how to improve their entire educational experience. More telling than this is that there are schools throughout the country actively trying to get these students' parents more involved in their child's education. As the educational system, and our schools, look at how to best address the growing developmental needs of their adolescents, this research will look into the vital role parental involvement has on a few of these aspects.

Looking specifically at my school, I have become intrigued by the various and often stratified amounts of parental involvement I see among my students' parents. A small portion of students that perform well academically seem to have parents that are involved in various facets of the educational system, either through PTSO, chaperoning or volunteering for various school events, etc. However, a larger portion of those high-performing students has involved parents that take a stake in their child's education and classes through constant communication with the teacher, being available for parent-teacher conferences, awards days, athletic banquets, curriculum nights and open houses. In contrast, many of the students that could be identified as low-performing often have parents that are, to some degree, less involved in their child's educational experience. It is admitted that these are simply observational norms, and it has absolutely occurred where a highly involved parent's student performed lower and an uninvolved parent's child performed highly. Numerous studies have shown that higher levels of parental involvement are important in facilitating positive development in adolescents' academic success, and mental health (Wand & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

The purpose of this research is two-fold: to create a deeper understanding of the importance of parental involvement in the classroom, and to purposefully apply the information gained through this resource towards my own future classes. To do this, the research is based around finding out the implications of parental involvement in student academic achievement, the development of adolescent moral judgment as it relates to behavioral issues such as truancy and dropping out, and the development of adolescent emotional development as it relates specifically to their mental health. Throughout the course of this research, the following questions were used to guide research into the vital impact of parental involvement on the various facets of adolescent academic life and overall development:

1. **What impact does parental involvement have on student academic achievement?**
2. **How does parental involvement impact the development of adolescent moral judgment in adolescents, with specific emphasis on negative behavioral issues such as truancy and dropping out?**
3. **What role does parental involvement have on adolescent emotional development, with particular emphasis on adolescent mental health?**

Literature Review

Studies show that environmental interactions with parents influence the development of a child in all psychological areas, and play a vital role in emotional, moral, and the social development of their

child (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2002). Additional research has shown that parents play a critical role in not only their child's socio-emotional development but also on their academic achievement (Eccles & Harold, 1993). The primary areas of development addressed in the following sections are academic success, moral development, and emotional development.

What impact does parental involvement have on student academic achievement?

The largest portion of this research is centered around the impact that parental involvement has on adolescent student academic achievement. The vitalness of parental involvement in all areas of a student's life cannot be understated, particularly the possibility of student academic success, where parental involvement in schools is a crucial factor in a child's educational success (Eccles & Harold, 1993). Based upon an analysis of several studies that looked at the impact of Parent and Community Involvement on Student Achievement, they found a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and the positive academic benefits for students, which holds true across all racial/ethnic, economic, and educational backgrounds of all age of students (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). These benefits include higher grade point average, higher enrollment in challenging academic programs, more classes passed, better attendance, improved behavior and better social skills, both at home and at school.

When looking specifically at middle grades academic achievement, researchers Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) identified four basic kinds of parental involvement, two based in the home and two based at school:

1. Discussing school activities with their child
2. Monitoring out-of-school activities
3. Contacts with school staff
4. Volunteering at the school, and attending school events such as parent-teacher conferences (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Furthermore, this involvement was further broken down into styles of parenting, divided into the categories of Parent Effort (contact with the school, expectations of their child, and discussion with their child), Instructional Support (how much time their child spent learning outside of the school setting), and Environmental Support (knowing their child's friends and out-of-school activities, learning at home, and the parent rating and opinion of the quality of the school setting) (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Furthermore, studies suggest that parents will shift their parenting styles and their amount of engagement with the school when they are shown information and given an opportunity to see how their involvement affects their children (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Research shows that parenting style has the largest impact on overall student performance, with an authoritative style (with high expectations and high student responsiveness) having the greatest amount of effect. However, parenting styles fall directly in-line with socioeconomic status, with higher-income families being much more likely to have an authoritative parenting style and (therefore) more likely to have students that experience traditional academic success.

Large factors play a part in how involved a parent is in their student's academic life – none of which is more impactful than student age. Parent involvement in their child's educational setting drops off as they move to middle school and up to high school, more than likely from the stereotypical belief that parents should disengage from their adolescent child as they value their independence, and parents feel as though their input is not as needed (Eccles & Harold, 1993). However, if parent involvement is continued, on average, adolescent educational outcomes are better when those parents are highly involved (Myers & Myers, 2014). Most striking is the importance of academic

socialization, which speaks to indirect messages about school that communicates an adolescent's parents' educational expectations for their child and their views on the importance of education (including discussions on future educational and career plans based upon academic success), which is "most strongly related" to student academic achievement (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016).

Studies have shown that additional parental involvement further increases the likelihood of academic success, especially when parents are engaged in academic interventions. Specifically for traditionally disadvantaged or academically struggling adolescents, parent involvement in school-based activities and, quite simply, being a visual presence in the school and showing their child that they value the educational experience, proves to be large factors when influencing positive adolescent academic success (Benner, et. al., 2016). Part of this is due to the fact that minority parents (particularly African-Americans) place more stock on home-based interventions, rather than being a visual presence at their child's school (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). To further improve the effectiveness of parental involvement on academic success, a positive balance must be achieved between a parents' involvement at the school setting and at home, as to not be overbearing and intrusive, which can compromise student achievement. Working together with students, teachers, and administration, parents can find the right balance to better elicit parental educational involvement, as well as the most effective ways to promote their adolescent's academic success. (Benner, et. al., 2016).

How does parental involvement impact the development of adolescent moral judgment in adolescents, with specific emphasis on negative behavioral issues such as truancy and dropping out? Simply defined, moral development (a major part of the growth of an adolescent) is "acquiring standards about right and wrong, thinking more thoughtfully and abstractly about moral issues, and increasingly engaging in pro-social behaviors that reflect concerns for other people's rights and needs" (Strahan, L'Esperance, & Van Hoose, 2009). While adolescents find themselves in the throws of contention for independence and autonomy, it is vital that parents set limits, and responsibly enforce them. Studies show that parenting styles that are supportive and "simulate moral reasoning" have an incredible impact on establishing moral boundaries (Strahan, et. al., 2009).

However, less in-depth research has been done on the impact of parental involvement as it relates to the moral judgments of adolescents, especially on non-normative behaviors such as dropping out or truancy. Parent-child discussion and openness significantly reduces the chances of truancy and dropping out for white students, with results being inconclusive for other races. Initial cited research shows that social capital, in the form of parental involvement, is a positive factor in terms of academic achievement and (particularly) less deviant behavior such as truancy. But further research shows that this correlation quickly disappears once parental involvement is impacted by race, household structure, and socioeconomic status. Traditionally successful groups showed the positive benefits, while minority groups are shown to experience the educational norms far differently than their white, middle-class counterpart (McNeal, 1999).

What is shown is that similar levels of parental involvement have different effects if the parents are married, divorced, single, minority, or of lower socioeconomic status. This speaks to the inherent inequities present throughout various levels of society for minority groups, who are disproportionately represented (particularly African American students) in the areas of truancy and dropping out. As far as academic achievement, the social capital of parental involvement has a positive effect across racial and socioeconomic boundaries. However, its ability to reduce the possibility of truancy and dropping out are "predominantly race- and class-bound". While parental involvement can positively impact academic achievement and, admittedly, these factors indirectly impact behaviors and the moral judgments behind truancy and dropping out, more research is

needed specifically on parental involvements' impact on pure moral judgments and non-normative academic behaviors (McNeal, 1999).

What role does parental involvement have on adolescent emotional development, with particular emphasis on adolescent mental health? A number of studies have shown that parental involvement in an adolescent's education is a vital way to influence positive development. In addition to the aforementioned importance of academic success, this involvement is crucial for the development of an adolescent's mental health as well (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Parental involvement was found to improve emotional functioning among adolescents, and enhancing mental health through continued involvement in a student's academic and social life.

An increasing problem among youth today is adolescent depression, where students with these symptoms being identified as at-risk for lower academic functioning and educational attainment (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Particularly for older adolescent students, the transition from middle grades to secondary school has proven to be very emotionally demanding, particularly as it relates to an adolescent's want (and need) for autonomy and the support of adult figures, especially their parents (Eccles & Harold, 1993). However, parental involvement in the form of supportive communication at home has been shown to improve adolescent self-esteem, self-regulation of their emotions, and self-perception of intelligence, all of which could serve to protect one from depressive symptoms (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Furthermore, parental involvement promotes positive relationships at school and given the additional emotion development that parent's model and assist their children with, it is crucial that parents take a vital role in their child's life to mitigate any possibility of declining mental health (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Evidence suggests that parents involved in their adolescent's school promote positive mental health symptoms. This can occur simply providing support and understanding, and establishing a connection with their children in conjunction with their need for autonomy. Careful not to encroach, school-based involvement by the parents can establish emotional closeness, feelings of support and mutual understanding, and can help the adolescent build positive representations of themselves, and establish a better mental health status (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

But what do adolescent students candidly think and say about teachers, peers, and parents? Fires in the Middle School Bathroom, a text one could consider "from the mouth of babes" takes a deeper look at what students say about their educational experience in middle school, where Kathleen Cushman and Laura Rogers shows educators what the adolescents they teach candidly think about their teachers, parents, school, etc. While the need for parental involvement can be seen in terms of academic achievement, moral judgment, and student mental health, one can't help but ask the question: What do my middle school students *think* about their parents being involved? According to one young adolescent, the kind of parental involvement one sees in elementary school should change when you reach middle school. "Parents should change when you get to middle school. Because when someone starts bugging you in elementary school you go to your mom... But when you get to middle school and other kids bother you, your parents should find another way to help you instead of letting kids think you're un-independent and call you a baby." (Cushman, 151). The amount of autonomy needed for adolescents cannot be understated, and this is evident in their need for independence.

However, Cushman suggests that effective teachers collaborate with parents. When they get to know what matters to them, "they are often able to work with students more effectively." (Cushman, 157). And students often look to the school, and their teachers, "to help them keep their families involved in their school lives", particularly if the teacher can accommodate for the family's circumstances (Cushman, 159). It is important to take into account the issues of parental

involvement, such as parent-child dynamics, limited community resources, and your own personal time. However, successfully incorporating and involving parents is another support system students need, and can highly influence their desire for success in high school and beyond. (Cushman, 169). Students really do recognize the need for parental involvement (even if they don't fully understand the research behind its importance, particularly with respect to their academic achievement, moral judgment, and mental health), and want their support, even if they want their support and involvement in new ways.

Personal Classroom Application

Many sources of research point to the importance of parental involvement in various facets of student development, as well as student academic achievement. Not only do active parents bring the possibility of higher student academic performance, it also has positive benefits in terms of student mental health, it also positively impacts student behaviors such as attendance. Knowing this, it is imperative that a successful educator (and a successful school) should not only know the importance of parental involvement but should actively look for ways to increase it in their classroom or setting. Many of the students I teach come from an economically disadvantaged background, but a sizeable portion is of the middle class or higher. Research shows that any involvement of the parents, regardless of socioeconomic status, has a positive impact on a child's academic achievement, and various forms of adolescent development. By involving the parents early on, the chance of reaping these benefits increases exponentially. And if the school setting can involve them in, say, 6th grade, then the positive benefits that could be seen at the end of the 8th grade year has the possibility of being quite sizeable in a variety of areas.

To better take advantage of the vitalness of parental involvement in an adolescent's middle grades experience, and the growing importance of technology, a form of social media can easily be incorporated into classrooms is through the use of the Remind App. This App is a way to remain in contact with parents through their computer or cell phone. Via the Remind Website, "Remind is a communication tool that helps teachers connect instantly with students and parents." (Remind Features, 2016). This is a system where parents and students can either sign up for text reminders or download the app onto their smartphone or computer. In this way, teachers can stay in contact with parents and students by sending reminders for assignments, tests, field trips, etc. This does not provide teachers with student phone numbers but allows them to stay in contact with both parents and their children for free.

Past this, policy changes will have to occur at a systemic level in my classroom to not only encourage more parental involvement but to also encourage more students to want their parents involved – and I think this is key. If an educator could not only have parents involved in their student's school life but have the students *want* their parents involved, this creates an openness that can facilitate a meaningful relationship that the teacher (and school) can use to better the experience of the family involved.

To better encourage a relationship with parents, our school implements Community Nights – actually going out into the neighborhoods of our students in an informal way, to learn more about them and to create relationships that transcend the school walls. This is done throughout the year in a socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhood, but I believe that students (and parents) from various levels of the socioeconomic spectrum could benefit from this. By going out and meeting these families "where they are," creating these relationships could encourage a higher level of parental involvement in the school setting that could benefit the school, my classroom and (most importantly) the students' middle grades experience.

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