

The Importance of Parental Involvement and Support  
in a Child's Education

by Hayley Western

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Education – Special Education

May 2020

Graduate Program in Education  
Goucher College

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to determine the importance of parental involvement and support in a child's education. There were two groups of middle school students that participated in the study. Each group received a letter requesting parents complete the activity presented. One group (n=18) received the task of completing 10-15 minutes of academic time with their child. The other group (n=16) received the task of completing a 10-15 minute discussion about their child's educational goals. Student's ILA (Integrated Language Arts) and math grades prior to the study were compared to their grades in those classes after the study. A qualitative review of the data did not indicate there was a difference in academic achievement between children whose parents spent academic time with their child and spent the time holding a goal setting discussion. With only four total students participating in the activity requested, the study began to focus more on parent participation, or lack thereof, and the implications of that. And even further, these types of activities may not be happening in homes without the guidance of a teacher or school system. Observational data showed multiple reasons for the lack of participation, including that the study relied on students bringing the form home to parents. Further research should focus on providing families executable strategies for home that will benefit the student.

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Parent involvement and support plays an essential role in a student's academic achievement. While operational definitions of parental involvement are inconsistent it is notable that "the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement was positive, regardless of a definition of parental involvement or measure of achievement" (Wilder, 2014, p.377).

With that, there are many factors that affect a parent's involvement and support in their student's education. One factor is the parent's educational level, which may affect the expectations and goal setting they have for their child. A second factor is a parent's attitude toward their child's education overall and how that presents itself. Although parents hold themselves responsible, there may also be misunderstandings between home and school about what their involvement to encourage academic achievement should look like (Montalbano, 2014). Lastly, generational involvement and success can be a factor. Generational education and involvement becomes cyclical and it is often difficult to overcome these patterns.

Various researchers have demonstrated that parental involvement and support can affect different students in different ways. For example, the types of parent involvement which affected students were found to be impacted by gender. Parent expectations and support of goal setting were different depending on the student's gender. Another surprising effect was related to homework help. It was found that homework help by a parent generally is not helpful unless the parent is trained on how to do so. The only increase was on student homework completion, not an academic achievement due to that homework completion (Kaplan Toren 2013).

As a middle school teacher, the researcher has noticed that more frequently a student is successful when parental involvement and support is present. The researcher also finds that most students in her class who are not doing well do not have visible parental involvement or support.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact different types of parental involvement and support have on academic achievement among middle school students participating in an after school academic enrichment program.

### **Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis was that student's grades will not differ significantly between students who completed academic time with their parent and students who discussed their achievements and goals with their parent.

### **Operational Definitions**

**Parental involvement and support:** There are two main focuses on relations between schools and parents—that is, school-based parental involvement and home-based involvement. School-based would be considered actions such as checking their student's grades, communication between teacher and parent, participating in school activities, etc. Home-based involvement includes checking homework completion, having conversations about goal setting with their student, etc.

**Academic time:** Families were not given many parameters to follow when participating in academic time with their student. The intent was to leave it broad which allows for more freedom for parents to pick the academic focus. Parents were asked to spend 10-15 minutes working on something academic with their child. Examples such as reading aloud and working

on math homework/studying were provided. An empty box was provided on the form for parents to note what time of academic time was spent.

**Discussion of achievement and goals:** Families were asked to spend 10-15 minutes discussing their child's achievements/goals with them. Prompting questions were provided to guide the conversation if needed. Questions like "What is one goal you achieved this year?" were given as examples.

**After school program:** The after school program is a grant funded program created to target middle school students 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade who scored high in level 3 of PARCC for both math and ILA (Integrated Language Arts) or in one of the two. The purpose of the program was to help those students move to level 4.

**Academic achievement:** This is the level of academic performance as demonstrated by quality and quantity of work. For this study, academic performance was defined by online county-mandated grade updates. The county these students go to school in requires online updates to a teacher's gradebook every 2.5 weeks. These grade updates also align with progress reports (official grades halfway through the quarter) and report cards (final grades for the quarter). Specifically, grades are being looked at from a progress report (pre-intervention) to the county-mandated update 2.5 weeks later (post-intervention).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This literature review will discuss research regarding the importance of parental involvement and support in a child's education. Parent involvement continues to affect academic achievement in students. There has been much research dedicated to defining the types and effectiveness of parent involvement for supporting student success. Section one will break down the topics being discussed; measuring student achievement and parent involvement. The definition of parent involvement cannot be left to interpretation. Section two will clarify ways to collect this sort of data and common places for error. Section three addresses parents' influence on students' academic achievement with regard to their own education and attitude toward education and self-evaluation, as well as the intergenerational implications of these variables. Section four addresses different effects on certain subgroups, as well as the effect of specific strategies for encouraging parent involvement in their students' education. Finally, section five will address teachers' and school systems' roles in fostering parental support and involvement.

#### **Understanding Parental Support and Academic Achievement**

##### **Academic Achievement**

The two connected topics of this study, parental support and academic achievement, are terms commonly discussed in education circles. It is important for the benefit of the information being shared that they are first properly defined. According to Merriam-Webster (2019), achievement is defined



as “a result gained by effort” and “the quality and quantity of a student’s work”. To apply that definition with academics, academic achievement can be defined as an educational result in student’s work gained by effort shown in quality and quantity.

## **Parental Support**

The construct of parental support and involvement does not have such a clear definition. Many articles referenced in this review offer different interpretations of parent involvement because “operational use of parental involvement has not been clear and consistent” (Wilder, 2014, p.378). One of the most appropriate definitions entails using multiple strategies in an effort to promote educational success (Vellymalay, 2011). Those many strategies can be divided into two categories or types of involvement. These types “focused mainly on relations between schools and parents—that is, school-based parental involvement and...home-based involvement” (Kaplan Toren, 2013, p. 636). School-based involvement categorizes actions such as communication between teacher and parent, participation in school activities, and monitoring their child’s attendance. Home-based involvement categorizes expectations held at home such as checking for homework completion and discussing educational expectations with students, as well as aspirations parents may have for their child (Wilder, 2014). While operational definitions of parental involvement are inconsistent it is notable that “the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement was positive, regardless of a definition of parental involvement or measure of achievement” (p.377).

It is important to have a clear understanding of what parent involvement looks and sounds like, as well as how we can define academic achievement. The purpose of this review is to develop a clear understanding of the impact certain parenting strategies have on their child’s

educational performance. In order to measure that properly it is important to understand ways to collect that information.

### **Properly Collecting Data**

#### **Achievement Data**

In order to get a full picture of the effects of parental involvement the ways in which achievement is measured need to be broad. Wilder (2014), suggests that achievement data is best measured using overall grades (grade point average), test scores, and grade promotion versus retention. Other studies suggest using data from report cards, standardized tests, and enrollment in advanced courses as well, which again are more broad measuring tools than just focusing on a specific content area (Montalbano, 2014). There are, of course, a few considerations when using this information to assess student achievement. When using these variables it is important to remember that will and motivation are in play just as much as achievement. A student may have certain skills, but for different reasons may or may not show those skills on a standardized test or other measuring tool used. It is also important to note that studies show students lose motivation for certain assessments as they get older. In other words they tend to not care as much about the results as they did in previous grade levels. With that being said it is important to use motivational tactics while administering assessments (Sundre & Moore, 2003).

#### **Parental Data**

Similar to achievement data, there are different methods to collecting data about parent involvement in their student's school affairs. All of the reviewed research included in this paper utilized a survey of some sort to accumulate that information. The way in which the surveys were dispersed, collected, and to whom they were given varied. In some cases the data was

found to be more accurate when students were surveyed about their parent's involvement and support. Information was collected digitally as well as through paper surveys (Hill, Liang, Price, Polk, Perella, & Romer, 2018). Other research performed interviews with parents to get a better understanding of their involvement (Thomas, Keogh, & Hay, 2015). Each study shared their concerns with ways of collecting data pertaining to involvement. While it is crucial to the study to have accurate information, and yet it may be difficult for parents recognize or acknowledge their potential faults in educational involvement. There are also many reasons why a parent may not want to participate in such a survey. Parents always want what is best for their child, but do not always have the means to provide it. This could vary from monetary shortcomings to expectation shortcomings. It is important to understand the influence a parent can have on their child and the reasons why it can be positive or negative.

## **Parental Influence**

### **Parent Education**

A parent's education can certainly affect the factors involved with their demonstration of support and therefore, their student's achievement. It was found that well-educated mothers had more knowledge of their children's schooling and, monitored their progress, contacted the school, and supported the idea of continuing their child's education after high school more often than less-educated mothers. On the other hand, parents with a low level of education may not have high expectations of their child. That same study found that all less-educated participating parents were involved in their child's education, but did not know how to utilize strategies to help in their child's academic growth (Vellymalay, 2011). "Parents with at least a college degree have greater knowledge of supporting their child in envisioning their future/academic achievement" (Hill, et al., 2018, p.598). This proves to be a disadvantage of children whose

parents have a low education level. As stated earlier, a big part of parental involvement in order to support academic achievement is home-based involvement, which studies suggest less-educated parents may be unsure how to execute. Overall, students whose parents did not have a college degree reported lower levels in each type of parental support, both school- and home-based.

### **Parent Attitude**

After being surveyed through multiple reviews, findings indicate that parents hold themselves responsible for their child's educational success (Thomas, et al., 2015). With that come many facets of whether or not the proper expectations and encouragement are being put in place to foster that success. Although parents hold themselves responsible, there may also be misunderstandings between home and school about what their involvement to encourage academic achievement should look like (Montalbano, 2014). The most overwhelmingly important parent involvement tactic throughout the research was academic socialization. Academic socialization pertains to parents fostering long term goals and aspirations in their student. Strategies, like planning for their child's future, are found to be of large significance in predicting a child's academic success (Wilder, 2014). The attitude in which parents bring to their child's education has a large impact on their goals, and furthermore their overall academic achievement. Educational achievement is directly related to parental expectations (Kaplan Toren, 2013).

In connection to the subject of parent education, goal setting and encouraging high aspirations can be affected by the how educated a parent is. "The failure of these students to have high educational aspirations was caused by the absence of motivation from their parents..."

(Vellymalay, 2011, p.49). It is important to analyze why this breakdown is happening. Students

with parents of a higher education level are more likely to receive educational advice from their parents; thus a parents' attitudes, or lack of participation in these conversations, can have an extreme effect on their child's achievements, or lack of achievements (Hill, et al., 2018).

Parents of the working class also may feel inferior due to their inexperience or poor experience working with professionals at the school. When feeling this way parents make a choice to take a hands-off approach to their child's learning and fail to encourage them the way that is proven necessary for academic achievement (Vellymalay, 2011).

### **Generational Involvement and Success**

There is also research identifying generational education gaps and effects on children's educational outcomes. Generational education and involvement becomes cyclical and is often difficult to overcome these patterns. Poorly educated individuals' children show more adjustment problems, do more poorly in school, and are less likely to complete all of their initial schooling. Teaching methods and participation to help parents in involving themselves in their child's education may serve as a way for those habits to transfer generationally (Pettit, Yu, Dodge, & Bates, 2009). The issues seems to interact and compound starting at a young age for the student. Results show poorer academics in elementary school and consequently less parent involvement during early adolescents. Research also connected low attainment for any mother and her child with a single-parent home and ethnic-minority status, as well as with a child with a low IQ.

### **Different Effects**

Not every child is the same and results in the research reflect that. There were however, certain patterns discovered. Below, two ideas that came from the information as far as certain effects on academic achievement are considered. There were certain aspects of gender that were

affected. Also, there was an overwhelming amount of information collected on parent homework help. The results regarding these variables were unexpected.

### **Gender Differences**

Research shows that self-worth can play a role in all aspects of a child's life, including their education and academic achievement. The types of parent involvement which effected students were found to be impacted by gender. Female student's self-worth was found to be affected by home-based involvement from parents. This includes parent expectations and support of goal setting. Male student's self-worth however was affected by parent volunteering. Kaplan Toren (2013) found that this was caused by different expectations at home. Their student found that there are, overall, harsher expectations for girls at home than for boys. In turn, those expectations play a role in girls self-worth. One other finding that is glaring is school based involvement having a direct negative effect on boys. More communication between home and school affected male students and their academic achievement in a negative way.

### **Homework Help**

There is an outstanding amount of research on parent involvement with homework help. It would be easy to assume that any homework help is beneficial and encourages parent support and academic conversations between students and their parents. The results, however, are more complex than that. Parent homework help was only found to benefit certain students in specific conditions. The quality of the homework help is much more significant than the quantity. We can connect this back to parental expectations and style. A parent who is controlling and gives direct help with homework will not foster academic growth. Quality aid that fosters independence and avoids interfering with the learning is much more helpful. Also, parents who emphasize mastery of the material over social comparison and holding stock in performance saw

positive results. These results however were affected by age and grade level (Gonida & Cortina, 2014).

Some research explored training parents on how to aid in homework help. The hope was better quality help would foster more significant results. The research overall indicated that the effects of these strategies are stronger in earlier grade levels. Training in which parents learn to teach their children to read is effective compared to training regarding parents' listening to their children read. However, positive results were found in both trainings. When it comes to true homework, not just reading, there was not a significant effect on student achievement, whether that was measured by subject area, measure of achievement, or type of training given to parents. Results were more significant in the lower grades as mentioned above. It should be noted that training parents to help with homework did increase homework completion, but unfortunately also worsened student attitudes toward homework. And with not much of a significant result in achievement, one wonders if the benefits outweigh the drawbacks (Wilder, 2014).

When gaps are bridged between home and school, more success is attainable. When parents receive training in how to help their child, they feel empowered. They feel like part of the conversation. Teachers and the school system at large have an obligation to empower parents to be more involved with their child's education in the right ways. Everyone plays a role in a child's education and the more the education system can support and foster the proper parenting relationships the better off each individual child will be.

### **Role of Teacher & School System**

Teachers and the school system obviously play an extremely important role in not only academic achievement but fostering positive parent involvement in whatever ways possible. Due to findings that support the importance of parental support in a child's education has

become recognized by teachers, administrations, and policymakers alike as a vital part of new initiatives and reforms of education. These sorts of reforms can be seen in legislature such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top. “The idea that parents can change their children’s education trajectories by engaging with their children’s schooling has inspired a generation of school reform policies” (Wilder, 2014, p.377). It is important to note that a considerable amount of policy discourse puts responsibility for educational success on individual parents and teachers. In doing this it seems to relinquish that responsibility from the school system as a whole (Thomas, et al., 2015).

Due to these policies, teachers and families must come together for the best of each individual child. Teacher’s communication with parents, whether it be a parent-teacher conference or by phone/email, should hold the parent accountable for their parenting (Thomas, et al., 2015). Once lines of communication are open between the school and the home, more of the strategies of parent involvement can be encouraged and utilized. Families and schools must work together to encourage long-term goals in their students so students see the relevance in their education and visualize reaching their dreams (Hill. et al., 2018). Teachers, schools, and districts should offer parent workshops and programs to promote academic success through parent support. Research shows that the findings of the impact such programs were significant across all grades (Wilder, 2014). Other research suggests employing a full-time Family Coordinator to serve as a liaison between parents, the community, and the school (Montalbano, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

All research points to the conclusion that parent involvement has at least some effect on academic achievement. Where one might think the most help needs to be focused on homework,



that does not always yield entirely satisfactory results. The findings reviewed suggest that the most significant piece of parent involvement is manifested in parental ability to encourage long term goals and aspirations in children. Motivation and attitude of parents can have a long-lasting effect on their student's achievement. This in turn can become cyclical and affect generations. Future studies should build on these results to continue to develop understanding about how to increase the effectiveness and positive reception of parental involvement by teachers, parents, and, of course, students.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

The purpose of this study was to examine parent involvement and support, parent and student performing an academic task or discussing educational goals together, on the academic achievement of sixth through eighth grade students involved in an after-school program.

#### **Design**

This study was a quasi-experimental design and a variant of nonequivalent control group design. The researcher used a convenience sample of sixth through eighth grade students participating in an after-school program. All students were a part of the program before the letter was sent home asking them to participate in the family involvement activity. The roster, listed in order of sign up, of students in the program was split down the middle to form the two groups. The independent variable in this study was whether or not parents and students completed ten to fifteen minutes of academic or goal setting time. The dependent variable was performance on a county mandated grade update.

The study had a pretest posttest component. The pre-intervention grades came from student progress reports before the independent variable was introduced. The post-intervention grades came from the next county-mandated update, which came 2.5 weeks after the pre-intervention data. The parent involvement letter was sent home two days before the progress reports, but none of the forms were returned before the progress reports, so presumably the parent involvement occurred after the progress reports.

In the original design, the pre-intervention grades were to be compared to assess whether the groups differed in grades prior to intervention. The post-intervention grades were to be compared to determine the impact of the intervention. However, due to very few forms being

returned prior to an unexpected closure of the school, pre-intervention and post-intervention grades were just reviewed qualitatively.

The parent involvement paper was sent home with students the week progress reports were sent home to parents. Students and parents had a week and a half to complete 10-15 minutes of either academic time or have a discussion about the student's educational goals. Parents performing the discussion on educational goals were given talking points to start the conversation. The hypothesis was tested only with posttest scores.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were sixth through eighth graders participating in an after-school program in a Title I feeder school, which is indicated by a large concentration of low income students, in the mid-Atlantic region. The researcher was the co-coordinator of the program. Students were invited to participate in the after-school program if they received a high level 3, described as approached expectations, on both their math and ILA PARCC scores from the previous year. The purpose of the program was to help those students move to level 4, described as met expectations. An initial set of invitations to participate in the program were sent out to all 82 students who met the requirements. After not receiving all invitation forms back approximately a week after the due date, a second group of 20 students was invited to the program based on teacher recommendation. These students were chosen from a group of 71 students who received a level 3 on one of the two focus content areas, math or ILA. No other content areas were taken into consideration. The roster was split down the middle by order of who signed up to form the academic time, using the first half, and goal discussion, using the second half, groups.

There were a total of 34 subjects in the study; 18 in the academic group and 16 in the goal setting discussion group. Originally there were more than 35 students in the program and the two groups were even in number; however, some students stopped attending the program and were no longer included in the study. Students in both groups ranged from sixth to eighth grade. The academic group consisted of 8 males and 10 females. Among them were five sixth graders, six seventh graders, and seven eighth graders. The discussion group consisted of nine males and seven females. Among them were two sixth graders, seven seventh graders, and seven eighth graders. Approximately five of the students in the goal setting group came from the second set of invitations. Students varied in race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

### **Instrument**

Student's letter grades in both math and ILA were used as measurement tools. Grades for each student are broken down into 3 weighted categories: practice (20%), process (30%), and product (50%). Although there are no definitive assignments that fit in each category, the county has suggestions that help determine which category to use. Practice is for completion and participation, process is for providing feedback on a specific learning goal, and product measures how well a student achieved a specific learning goal. Letter grades are determined using the following breakdown: A (89.5% & up), B (79.5%-89.49%), C (69.5%-79.49%), D (59.5%-69.49%), and E (59.49% & below). There is no reliability or validity data from the accuracy of scores placed in the grading system; however, this is the traditional method used by the school system.

### **Procedure**

The researcher and another teacher at the school were co-coordinators of an after-school program held Monday through Thursday, 2:55pm-5:00pm starting January 27<sup>th</sup>. The program

was put on a hiatus that started March 12<sup>th</sup> due to school closures caused by COVID-19. In the program, students are given homework help by staff members for 30 minutes before breaking off into Math and mentor groups (Monday and Wednesday) and ILA and mentor groups (Tuesday and Thursday). The academic and mentor sessions are divided equally each day, each being allotted 45 minutes. Academic mentors work on academic goal setting and how to properly communicate with teachers, while social/emotional mentors work on team building and vision boards. Students are then provided transportation home by school bus. Children participated in the same program activities regardless of whether they were in the academic time or academic goals group.

The researcher collected progress report grades for all students in math and ILA. These grades were recorded for January 27<sup>th</sup> to the last week of February for a total of five weeks. These weeks served as the baseline period. Students were then sent home with an academic time letter (Appendix A) or an achievement and goal setting discussion letter (Appendix B) on February 24<sup>th</sup>. The two letters had similar introductions, but the parent request was different. 18 students were sent home with the academic letter and 16 students were sent home with an achievement and goal setting discussion letter. One was asked to complete 10-15 minutes of academic time with their child. Suggestions of what that could look like were provided, such as math homework help or reading a book together. The parents were asked to write a brief description of the type of academic time that was completed on the form before returning it. The other group of parents were asked to have a conversation with their student about their goals and achievement. Guiding questions were provided such as “What is one goal you’ve achieved this year” and “What do you think your life will be like in the future?” Parents were asked to sign, date, and return the letter by Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup>. The parent request letter included a space to

check off that the requested time was not completed. This was a way to check if parents were receiving the letter even if they did not choose to participate. After only one letter had been returned, students were spoken to individually on March 9<sup>th</sup> and given another letter upon request. Students were also told they would be given a free sandwich card from Chic-fil-a for returning the paper signed as a way to incentivize returning the letter after little participation. Students were told the deadline had been extended to Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup>. Four additional letters were returned under the extended deadline. All six students who returned the form received the sandwich card.

Student's grades on the next county-required grade update were collected on the required online update for teachers on Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup>. All grades must be up to date continuing from progress reports.

The original design worked under the assumption that there would be a high participation rate. The plan was that if any student did not return the letter indicating that parental involvement had taken place, the student would not be included in the study. The intent was to use an independent samples t-test to compare the grade percentages in math and ILA between the two groups of students. However, due to the very low participation rate, it was not possible to make this comparison statistically. Instead, grades were compared qualitatively and much of the discussion of the study is about the lack of participation in the study and the implications for parent involvement.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of different types of parental involvement and support in academic achievement among middle school students participating in an after school academic enrichment program.

Due to a lack of initial participation in the study and the inability to extend study recruitment due to the school closure, the researcher focused more on returned permission slips and what caused the lack of participation rather than on the differential impact of the two types of intervention. The the researcher will not be reporting any specific grade information, because there were too few student participants. This decision is to respect the privacy of the participants.

A total of 34 families were invited to participate in the study. Six (18%) of the students returned their questionnaire. The academic time questionnaire had a total return rate of 22% (n=4), where as the goal setting questionnaire had a return rate of 13% (n=2).

Out of the 34 families invited to participate, 12% (n=4) participated in the activity assigned. However, of the returned forms there was a 67% participation rate. For the academic time, 11% (n=2) of the 18 invited participated. There was a 50% completion rate out of families that returned the form, meaning that of the students who returned the form acknowledging the receipt of the letter, only half of the families actually performed the intervention. For the goal setting time, 13% (n=2) of the invited 16 returned the form. Of those that returned the goal setting questionnaire, 100% participated in the goal setting activity.

When looking at grade level the researcher found that of the 2 eighth grade participants who returned the questionnaire, both of them opted out of completing the activity. All surveys returned with a completed activity were participants in sixth or seventh grade.

Of the two children who completed the academic time condition, two went up a letter grade in ILA and one went up a letter grade in math. Of the two children who completed the goal setting condition, two remained the same letter grade in ILA and two went up a letter grade in math.

The null hypothesis of this study that student's grades will not differ significantly between students who completed academic time with their parent and students who discussed their achievements and goals with their parent could not be tested statistically due to the small number of subjects.

Table 1

*Number of Questionnaires, Returned forms, and Participants for Academic Time group and Goal Setting Time group*

	Academic Time	Goal Setting
Sent questionnaires	18	16
Returned signed questionnaires indicating yes or no whether they were participating	4	2
Participated in activity	2	2



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact different types of parental involvement and support in academic achievement among middle school students participating in an after school academic enrichment program. The researcher tracked this information using letter grades from a progress report and teacher required update two and a half weeks later. The null hypothesis of this study that student's grades will not differ significantly between students who completed academic time with their parent and students who discussed their achievements and goals with their parent could not be tested due to the low amount of participation and the inability to extend the recruitment period due to the unexpected school closure.

#### **Implications of the Study**

With such a low participation it is difficult to determine the true impact of different types of parental involvement and support in academic achievement. A qualitative review of the data did not indicate there was a difference in academic achievement between children whose parents spent academic time with their child and spent the time holding a goal setting discussion. Overall, grades stayed the same or improved for all of the students that participated; and all of the students who participated had an increase in at least one grade. It is likely that both types of intervention are helpful, but additional research with more subjects would be necessary to provide enough evidence to make specific suggestions about the value of each of the interventions.

Through the researcher's observations, it can be noted that there could be a variety of reasons the questionnaires were not returned or returned with an opt-out. These will be

discussed under Threats to Validity. The researcher did not observe that either activity seemed more or less fun for the student. It should be noted however that parents were not asked to write notes about goal setting, but chose to anyway. Parents wrote positive messages they shared with their child. Students did ask why they had to do something like this, indicating to the researcher that the students did not have much interest in participating or did not understand why they had to document it.

A larger implication of the study is that parents may not be doing these activities without guidance from a teacher or school system. It is clear that these sorts of discussions and academic time with parents need to be encouraged by educators more. The school system should encourage parents to get to a place where these times are built into their week. Thomas et al (2015) found that “teacher’s communication with parents, whether it be a parent-teacher conference or by phone/email, should hold the parent accountable for their parenting” (p.455). Educators need to encourage these activities, but also hold parents accountable for those actions and explain the reason behind it.

### **Theoretical Consequences**

Even with little participation it can be noted that parent involvement in a student’s academics certainly will not help their achievement. All participants’ grades remained the same or went up in both ILA and math except one student, who went up in one of them instead of both. Educational achievement is directly related to parental expectations (Kaplan Toren, 2013, p.635). The more involved a parent is and the more a parent is willing to have open conversations with their child about their education, the more likely they are to be successful.

## **Threats to the Validity**

There are quite a few threats to validity worth noting. The first threat being that only students in the small after school program were invited to participate in this study and these students had unique academic characteristics. This threatens the external validity because the results do not necessarily reflect the potential findings if all of the students in the school were included in the study. With that, the roster of students was split in half. The roster was created in order of students signing up for the after-school program. This means that all students who were first to sign up were assigned to academic time, whereas students who joined in the second round of invites were all in the goal setting group. The groups may have had pre-existing differences.

A large concern to internal validity is it is unclear if the parents received the letter. Students were given the letter at the end of the program and told to bring it home to their parents. Students were spoken to individually about bringing it home for their parent to read and were given a second letter if requested. It is possible parents read it, did not want to participate, but did not return the form signing to opt-out. It is also possible that parents were never given the form by their student.

Another internal threat to validity is parent's willingness to participate in the activity. The intent of the letter was not to intimidate the parents, but the researcher realizes it could have. Parents may have thought this was a way to judge their parenting or parents may not have felt capable to have these discussions or academic time with their child.

Furthermore, it is impossible to know the quality of the intervention that was given by the parent. The letter asked for parents to write what their academic time was spent doing. The

parents were brief, writing things like “reading time”. Parents who had a goal discussion were given talking points, but again, there is no way of knowing how that conversation went. It is also impossible to tell whether or not these academic and discussion times were completed at all.

A large concern to external validity was the closing of all Maryland Public Schools due to COVID-19 and the weeks leading up to it. As the threat of COVID-19 became more real and apparent, family concerns and priorities shifted. This very well could have distracted parents from completing and returning the letter. This could have impacted the return rate and subsequently the results of the study.

Another concern is the grades that were used to collect data for the study and the impact in internal validity. Again, COVID-19 may have affected the grades, because the required update day was also the last day of school before the closure. Also, it is important to consider the different categories that compile a student’s grade. Due to curriculum restraints and timing it is possible that students did not have a product grade until after progress reports. This category allots for 50% of their grade. Therefore, when a product grade is put in it can significantly affect a child’s grade, sometimes by a letter grade or more.

### **Connection to Previous Studies and Existing Literature**

Many of the findings in this study align with previously found results of related studies. For instance, it was found in this study that no matter the type of parent involvement, a student was motivated to increase their academic achievement, which is evident in the results that were collected. This is the same result Wilder (2014) found, “the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement was positive, regardless of a definition of parental involvement or measure of achievement” (p.377). This is supported by the idea that educators

and schools need to encourage more of this from parents given by Hill et al in 2018, which stated “Families and schools must work together to encourage long-term goals in their students so students see the relevance in their education and visualize reaching their dreams” (p.603).

Numerous studies have also examined reasons why parents are not as involved as educators think they should be. These relate to some of the researchers listed threats of validity. Vellymalay (2011) shared results “that all less-educated participating parents were involved in their child’s education, but did not know how to utilize strategies to help in their child’s academic growth” (p.61). Parents may want to be involved but feel intimidated to do so. Vellymalay also found when feeling this way parents make a choice to take a hands-off approach to their child’s learning and fail to encourage them the way that is proven necessary for academic achievement.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Future research certainly needs to be conducted on the impact different types of parental involvement and support have on academic achievement. It is recommended for future research to determine from parents the best way to reach them. It is possible that an online form may have resulted in more participation. This would avoid any issues of knowing whether students brought the form home to their parents. It is also recommended to use a larger sample size of a larger variety of participants from the school. This may also widen the amount of participants who complete the survey. Random group assignment is also recommended.

An addition component to consider is offering parents training on how to deliver the academic time or goal setting discussion effectively. Having a workshop where parents learn tools to have certain conversations or are shown how to work through some math or science with

their child may result in more participation. Parents may feel more comfortable with the material and more willing to participate.

The true impact of parent involvement on academic achievement should be measured with a longer time frame. Perhaps a yearlong study following progress reports and report cards for each quarter would be more beneficial.

### **Conclusion**

The study did not have enough data to examine statistically whether grades differed significantly between students who completed academic time with their parent and students who discussed their achievements and goals with their parent. However, a much larger issue of parent participation came to light. The study raises questions of getting accurate feedback from homes, as well as how to get parents more involved in their child's schooling in general. Future research should be completed on strategies to get parents more involved in their child's education, before the true impact of that participation can be determined. The school system needs to get the message out more that parents have an impact on their child's education, and parents need to see that impact with simple, executable strategies that they are willing to utilize.

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## Appendix A

### Viking's Improvement Program

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Your child has been working diligently after school with us for a few weeks now! Thank you for your continued support in your child's education. We are tracking ways parents are engaging in their child's learning and would love your input. In the next two weeks, we would like you to complete 15 minutes of academic time with your student. This could be having your student read aloud to you or working on math homework/studying for 10-15 minutes.

Please fill out the below information and have your child return it to Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ or Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ by **Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup>**. Thank you so much for your continued support and feedback.

#### 1. Parent Input

**What are ways that you engage in your middle school child's learning?**

**Please check ALL that apply...**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Informal conversation about school with child | <input type="checkbox"/> Attending school-based events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communicating with child's teacher/staff      | <input type="checkbox"/> Parent-teacher conferences    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring grades and assignments on HAC      | <input type="checkbox"/> School-based social media     |

#### 2. Student Academic Learn with Me

**Check one of the following and sign below.**

- ☐ Yes, I completed 15 minutes of academic time with my child.

Academic Activity (brief description):

- ☐ No, I did not complete 15 minutes of academic time with my child.

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Viking's Improvement Program

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Your child has been working diligently after school with us for a few weeks now! Thank you for your continued support in your child's education. We are tracking ways parents are engaging in their child's learning and would love your input. In the next two weeks, we would like you to have a 10-15 minute discussion with your child about their goals/achievements. You may use the questions below as suggestions/guidance for the conversation.

Please fill out the below information and have your child return it to Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ or Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ by **Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup>**. Thank you so much for your continued support and feedback.

#### 1. Parent Input

**What are ways that you engage in your middle school child's learning?**

**Please check ALL that apply...**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Informal conversation about school with child | <input type="checkbox"/> Attending school-based events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communicating with child's teacher/staff      | <input type="checkbox"/> Parent-teacher conferences    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring grades and assignments on HAC      | <input type="checkbox"/> School-based social media     |

#### 2. Got Goals? Discussion

**Question to Guide Conversation...**

- Of all the things you are learning, what do you think will be the most useful when you are an adult?
- What do you know how to do that you can teach others?
- What is one goal you've achieved this year?
- What is one goal you still have for this year?
- What do you think your life will be like in the future?

☐ Yes, I spoke with my student about achievement and their goals.

☐ No, I did not speak with my student about achievement and their goals.

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_