Families, Schools, and the Adolescent: Connecting Research, Policy and Practice

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The information contained in the following pages is based on the work of Nancy E. Hill (among others), which can be found in the book Families, Schools, and the Adolescent: Connecting Research, Policy and Practice.

Families and schools share a desire for students to succeed but they are often perplexed about how to collaborate and support this achievement, especially through the transition into middle and high school. This book will help educators and policymakers identify and implement the most effective strategies to help parents remain involved in their teens’ education.

The research in this book looks at diverse families and adolescents from a wide range of backgrounds while considering cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Bringing together multidisciplinary perspectives—including prominent researchers from the fields of teacher education, psychology, and sociology—this book:

- Presents new research on family-school partnerships in the unique developmental period of adolescence.
- Outlines the challenges teachers experience in maintaining communication with families.
- Offers strategies that reflect academic socialization among African American, Asian-American, Latino, and European American families as key factors that promote achievement.
- Describes how technology can bridge the gap between families and schools in a way that fits with the developmental needs of adolescents.
- Examines the roles of policymakers, communities, and school districts to highlight developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive policy solutions.

Editors:

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Engaging Parents in Middle and High School

For middle and high schoolers, academic socialization has the biggest impact!
Overall, there is a positive relation between general parental involvement and achievement. Academic socialization was more strongly related to achievement than was home-based involvement. The relationship between school-based involvement and achievement was stronger than home-based strategies. Of the home-based strategies, homework help had a negative relationship on achievement. The negative relation may be due to parental interference with students’ autonomy, excessive parental pressure, or differences between parents and school in how they present the material. Other types of home-based involvement – such as providing educationally enriching activities at home, making books and other educational materials available, and taking children/youth to museums, libraries, the zoo, and other educational outlets—have been shown to have a more consistent positive relation with achievement.

Outcomes
- Internalized value of education
- Motivation for learning
- Work ethic
- Academic engagement
- Self regulation
- Self efficacy for help seeking
- Academic self concept


Why Different for Adolescents?
- Adolescent development: Enables adolescents to play a more active role in their education and educational decisions. These changes increase their sense of efficacy, ability to make decisions about course selection, and ability to understand how courses and extra-curricular activities are related to goals and aspirations in the immediate time frame and for the future and thereby decrease their need for direct parental involvement.
  - Cognitive development – can consider multiple dimensions of problems simultaneously when making decisions; increased ability to anticipate the results and consequences of their actions and decisions, learn from successes and failures and apply that knowledge to future problem solving, and strategically coordinate the pursuit of multiple goals
  - Social development – peers more important than parents
  - Biological development – time for greater independence; an increased need among young people to develop a sense of self that is separate from their families; conceptualization of self as an autonomous, efficacious individual
- Changes in parent-adolescent relationships and parenting goals: Relationships are characterized by increased bidirectional communication. Adolescents question their parents’ authority, while parents set boundaries and communicate expectations while
promoting healthy independence. Parental influence becomes more indirect. Parents’ beliefs about adolescents’ abilities, skills, and potential shape adolescents’ own beliefs—which influences their performance.

- **Changes in school structure**
  - Larger school buildings located farther from home
  - More complicated schedules and more complex structures
  - More diverse student body—more peers
  - More teachers with departmental instruction/specialization by academic subject
    - Teaching more students—making it difficult for teachers to develop and maintain productive relationships with parents of each student.

**Adolescents and teens want their families around…but on their own terms!**

“My Kids Don’t Want Me Around”

Students at all grade levels expressed interest in having their families involved in their education.

- **Elementary school students** wanted their parents directly involved with them in the classroom, school, or at school-sanctioned activities.
- **Middle school students** were the “fuzzy, in-between group” with some wanting direct involvement while others were searching for independence.
- **High school students** said they wanted parents involved and realized that their schools would be greatly lacking if not for parent support and participation, but the youth wanted their parents involved apart from their daily activities.

Being embarrassed by parents was a main issue for all age levels, and students were embarrassed by similar things.

- **Boys** especially did not want to be called by pet names or kissed in front of their peers.
- **Girls** were extremely sensitive if their mothers came to school in unacceptable fashions or with inappropriate hair or makeup.

All groups said they did not want their parents sharing the student’s funny baby stories with their teachers or peers.


**Research**

- Longitudinal Study across Middle and High School
  - Parent involvement from college educated parents was more effective in enhancing school behavior, achievement, and aspirations.
  - For parents without a college degree, involvement instilled goals for upward mobility, but not the preparation.


Teen say...”Be Involved”

- **African American Students**
  - African Americans were strongest in their quest for independence and lack of parental involvement in the school realm
  - African Americans were less convinced that they were really the group of kids doing well
  - African Americans wanted…
    - Help with selecting classes
    - To be pushed in subjects that they were having trouble in
    - To have parents involved in social and extracurricular activities

- **Latino Students**
  - Latinos were also less convinced that they were doing well
  - Latinos wanted independence, but really wanted their parents to see them as responsible
  - Latinos wanted…
    - Help to find resources to do their homework
    - To be reminded of deadlines for projects
    - To have parents support them emotionally
    - To have parents help them make decisions
    - To have parents spend more time with them

- **White Students**
  - White students were confident that they were doing well and seemed to be a more cohesive group
  - White girls were especially concerned about and against parental visitations to school or “meddling” in their lives (compared to white boys)
  - Euro-Americans wanted…
    - To be questioned about their interests
    - To have help in subjects in which they were not doing well in.

Teens say...”Be Involved, but please DON’T”

- Double check my homework
- Lecture me about my future
- Check/go through my book bag
- Come on field trips

Strategies for Engaging/Involving Parents

- Remember goals – develop your strategies based on what you want to get from your parent involvement activities
- Think outside the “traditional activities” –
  - Do you need to first start meeting families where they are?
- Do you need to reach out to them in a different manner?
- Who is needed for this activity/goal? Adjust for different audiences.

**Build Relationships**
- Share positives about their children and show you care

**Help parents understand the benefits of education – its value to their child’s future**
- Help parents be able to share that vision with their kids
- Learn their “currency” (what is important to both parents and kids) – help parents discover ways to show their kids how they will get what they want with a good education
- Help parents link their youth’s career aspirations with their education
- Help students (and their families) to be able to link their schoolwork to current events/real world
- Help students (and their families) identify and strengthen learning strategies
  - Scaffolding independence around school work
  - Providing additional school work
- Help parents actively make preparations and plans for their child’s future/post high school

**Resources/Works Cited:**
[http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/127](http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/127)

