Research Summary

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

In support of *This We Believe* characteristics:

- School-initiated family and community partnerships

What is parent involvement?

Parent involvement is important to the educational success of a young adolescent and yet generally declines when a child enters the middle grades (Epstein, 2005; Jackson & Andrews, 2004; Jackson & Davis, 2000; NMSA, 2003). Parent involvement is defined as having an awareness of and involvement in schoolwork, understanding of the interaction between parenting skills and student success in schooling, and a commitment to consistent communication with educators about student progress. The term "parents" refers to biological parents, adoptive and stepparents, and primary caregivers (e.g., grandmother, aunt, brother).

What is the research on parent involvement?

The research on parent involvement in the education of young adolescents addresses parents' activities in support of learning at home, in school, and in the community. Joyce Epstein, a leading researcher in the field of parent involvement, identified and studied multiple measures of parent involvement in the middle grades (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, & Van Voorhis, 2002). As a result of this research, Epstein and her colleagues developed a framework of six types of involvement with associated activities, challenges, and expected results. The following table illustrates the types of involvement with associated activities.(*Table 1* on page 2)

Similarly, Fan and Chen (2001) examined multiple measures of parent involvement. Using the methodology of meta-analysis (analyzing multiple research studies), the researchers identified three constructs of parent involvement: (1) communication, (2) supervision, and (3) parental expectations and parenting style. Communication refers to parents' frequent and systematic discussions with their children about schoolwork. Supervision includes monitoring when students return home from school and what they do after school, overseeing time spent on homework and the extent to which children watch television. Parental expectations and parenting style were found to be the most critical of the three. These include the manner and extent to which parents communicate their academic aspirations to their children. Fan and Chen found that high expectations of parents and student perceptions of those expectations are associated with enhanced achievement.

As Fan and Chen (2001) found in their research, parenting styles, as a critical measure of parent involvement, have been linked to student performance. Authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative are three styles of parenting (Baumrind, 1991). Authoritative, identified as the preferred style, includes parental warmth, inductive discipline, nonpunitive punishment practices, consistency in child rearing, and a clear communication of interest in the day-to-day lives of children (Rosenau, 1998). According to Rosenau, the authoritative parenting style has a strong correlation with student behavior and classroom management. Van Voorhis (2003) examined the effects of involving parents in interactive homework assignments (family homework assignments rather than student-in-isolation homework assignments) using the Interactive Homework program, a spin-off of the Teachers Involving Parents in School (TIPS) program developed at Johns Hopkins University. TIPS offers parents guidelines for collaborating with their children on homework activities, as well as information about school curricula (Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997). In the evaluation study, in comparison to students engaged in traditional homework assignments, students who participated in the TIPS Interactive Homework program received better scores on homework and on report cards, and parents were more involved with homework.

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Table 1
Six Types of Parent Involvement

Type 1	Parenting	Activities are designed to help families understand young adolescent development, acquire developmentally appropriate parenting skills, set home conditions to support learning at each grade level, and help schools obtain information about students.
Type 2	Communicating	Activities focus on keeping parents informed through such things as notices, memos, report cards, conferences about student work, and school functions.
Type 3	Volunteering	Activities incorporate strategies to improve volunteer recruiting, training, and scheduling.
Type 4	Learning at home	Activities allow coordination of schoolwork with work at home (e.g., goal setting, interactive homework).
Type 5	Decision making	Activities are designed to solicit the voice of parents in decisions about school policies and practices.
Type 6	Collaborating with the community	Activities acknowledge and bring together all community entities (e.g., businesses, religious organizations) with a vested interest in the education of young adolescents.

What are the outcomes of parent involvement?

- Parent involvement leads to improved educational performance (Epstein et al., 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; NMSA, 2003; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002; Van Voorhis, 2003).
- Parent involvement fosters better student classroom behavior (Fan & Chen, 2001; NMSA, 2003).
- Parents who participate in decision making experience greater feelings of ownership and are more committed to supporting the school's mission (Jackson & Davis, 2000).
- Parent involvement increases support of schools (NMSA, 2003).
- Parent involvement improves school attendance (Epstein et al., 2002).
- Parent involvement creates a better understanding of roles and relationships between and among the parent-student-school triad (Epstein et al., 2002).
- Parent involvement improves student emotional well-being (Epstein, 2005).
- Types of parent involvement and quality of parent involvement affect results for students, parents, and teachers (Epstein, 1995).

What are the recommendations for increasing parent involvement?

1. Conduct a needs assessment identifying what the concerns and issues are surrounding parent involvement in the education of their children.
2. Develop, in collaboration with parents, shared goals and missions concerning young adolescents' learning and development (Ruebel, 2001).
3. Develop a long-range parent involvement plan. "Parental involvement may be implemented as a stand-alone program or as a component in comprehensive school-based programs" (Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, 2005, p. 37).
4. Engage in parent professional development (Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, 2005; Marzano, 2003). First, conduct a needs assessment to identify focus areas for parent professional development. Use this needs assessment to guide the development of a balanced, comprehensive program of partnership.For example, parent professional development might include one- to two-hour free, weekly sessions held at night, or as a series of minicourses. The professional development could discuss specific parent behaviors and be used as a vehicle to involve parents in other aspects of the school (Marzano, 2003).
5. Identify a family-school liaison who actively works to engage parents (Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, 2005).

6. Create a resource inventory to identify strengths, skills, and cultural and contextual knowledge of both parents and faculty members.
7. Develop a repertoire of strategies (e.g., interactive homework, student-led conferences) designed to increase parent involvement at school and at home.
8. Establish and maintain respectful and productive relationships with families (Jackson & Andrews, 2004; McEwin & Smith, 2005) "to support the interaction of ideas and experiences centered on the learning of young people" (Nesin & Brazee, 2005, p. 42).
9. Establish open and two-way lines of communication (Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, 2005; Epstein et al., 2002; Jackson & Andrews,2004; NMSA, 2003) for thoughtful and reflective conversation.
10. Use a variety of meeting spaces (NMSA, 2003) for equitable access and non-threatening environments.

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ANNOTATED REFERENCES

Jackson, A. & Andrews, P. (with Holland, H., & Pardini, P.). (2003). *Making the most of middle school: A field guide for parents and others.* New York: Teachers College Press.

This book, a companion piece to Turning Points 2000 (Jackson & Davis, 2000), is designed to offer advice to parents and other stakeholders in the education of young adolescents about how best to support student learning. It offers strategies to parents for choosing the right middle school and working with teachers and principals. Based on a survey of over 2,000 young adolescents from across the country, the book describes what students think about a range of issues, including everything from parent-child relationships to teacher quality and school safety. The authors describe effective partnerships between parents and middle grades schools, including interviews with participants. Overall, the book synthesizes, in parent-friendly language, the essential wisdom from two landmark books on middle grades education, *Turning Points: Preparing Adolescents for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) and *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century* (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

ANNOTATED REFERENCES *(Continued)*

Ruebel, K. (2001). Coming together to raise our children: Community and the reinvented middle school. In T. S. Dickinson (Ed.), *Reinventing the middle school* (pp. 269–287). New York: Routledge Palmer.

This chapter discusses the impact of national, state, and local imperatives on family/school/community partnerships; defines major aspects of partnerships, reviews questions and answers stemming from partnership research, and shares practices and programs that have worked well for schools.

Thompson, K. F., Homestead, E. R., & Pate, P. E. (Ed.). (2004). Middle school students and parents through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. [Special section]. *Middle School Journal, 35*(4), 56–61.

This article presents a historical overview of parental involvement during the first 30 years of the middle school movement. The article specifically addresses the changing roles of parents and their involvement in their child's middle grades education throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

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National Middle School Association (NMSA) produces research summaries as a service to middle level educators, families and communities, and policymakers. The concepts covered in each research summary reflect one or more of the characteristics of successful middle schools as detailed in the NMSA position paper, *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents.* Further research on each topic is available in the book *Research and Resources in Support of This We Believe.* Both books are available at the NMSA online store at www.nmsa.org