

HOW DOES PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AFFECT  
MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTON

#### *Background*

The transition from elementary school to middle school can be an overwhelming and stressful experience for young adolescents. Developmentally, students are entering a period in their lives when their physical, cognitive, psychological, and social characteristics are beginning to evolve. Middle school students experience both a contextual change and a personal change during this transition. It is often a confusing time for students, their families, and the other adults in their lives who seek to support their healthy development and learning. The middle school learning environment is more complex than elementary school and academic achievement expectations increase. There are many factors that contribute to a child's ability to learn and succeed in middle school.

Research has shown that children are more likely to have higher academic achievement levels and improved behavior when families are involved in their education (Bryan, 2005). Learning begins at home through interaction with one's family. Parental involvement in a child's education along with environmental and economic factors can affect child development in areas such as cognition, language, and social skills. Numerous studies in this area have demonstrated the importance of family interaction and involvement in the years prior to entering school (Bergsten, 1998; Hill, 2001; Wynn, 2002). Research findings have also shown that a continued effort of parental involvement throughout the child's education can improve academic achievement (Driessen, Smit & Slegers, 2005; Fan, 2001; Hong & Ho, 2005). Academic failure has been linked with risk behaviors and negative outcomes such as; substance abuse,

delinquency, and emotional and behavioral problems (Annunziata, Houge, Faw, & Liddle, 2006).

Parental involvement in a child's education is recognized as essential by educators and policy makers alike. The United States Department of Education's Goals 2000 (U.S. Department of Education, 1994) states that "every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children." In 2001 President George W. Bush implemented the No Child Left Behind Act. The main goals of the Act were to make sure students enter school "ready to learn" and to hold teachers, schools, and students accountable for their education. One of the responsibilities outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act is that schools need to work jointly with families and communities to achieve an effective partnership policy (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Education is not only the responsibility of teachers, but also of students, parents, and the community. Schools alone cannot adequately succeed in helping students overcome the obstacles they face on a daily basis.

There is a variety of factors that can contribute to the level of parental involvement and academic achievement in middle school. Researchers have found that as children move from elementary school to middle school parental involvement decreases at home and at school. It is difficult to determine the exact reason for this decline, but there are many proposed theories which include; socio-economic status, parental occupation, parental level of education, living environment, time, and also school factors (Constantino, 2007). There is little research available on the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement of middle school students. A majority of the research in this area has been conducted solely with elementary school students (Baily, Silvern, Brabham, & Ross, 2004; Marjoribanks, 2005). This study

provides an in-depth look at one aspect of parental involvement, involvement in homework, and academic achievement of middle school students.

### *Statement of Problem*

Parental involvement in school has been linked with academic achievement. Although little research has been done in the area of parental involvement and middle school students, the literature review examines the many factors that can contribute to the level of parental involvement and academic achievement in middle school. This Master's Research Project sought to identify the different levels of parental involvement in homework and how parental involvement in homework affects academic achievement in middle school students.

### *Research Question*

This master's research project is based on the following research questions:

1. How does the level of parental involvement in homework affect academic achievement in middle school students?
2. How does the level of parental education affect parental involvement in a child's homework?

### *Purpose and Significance of Study*

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between parental involvement in homework and academic achievement in seventh and eighth grade middle school students. The information obtained by completing this study will be beneficial to parents, students, and educators. If parents are aware of how their involvement and learning activities with their children affects their child's learning ability and future, they may be more apt to actively

participate in their child's education. The findings of this research may also be beneficial to educational institutions. The results can be utilized to develop school programs associated with parental involvement in school activities, decisions and homework. Programs such as these can be implemented to bridge the gap between home and school while improving student's academic achievement.

### *Definition of Terms*

- Middle school: Middle level schools educate children ages 10-15 (grades five through eight). The schools organization, curriculum, pedagogy, and programs are based upon the developmental readiness, needs, and interests of young adolescents (This We Believe, 2003).
- Parental involvement: The participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including; assisting in their child's learning and being actively involved in their child's education at school (No Child Left Behind, 2001).
- Academic achievement: A student's grade from the previous school year in the four core subject areas (Math, Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts) measured by the numerical equivalent of the standard letter grades (A, B, C, D and F) converted into a 100-point scale. The scale is coded as follows: 90-100 A, 80-89 B, 70-79 C, 60-69 D, below 60 F.

### *Limitations*

There are many factors that can contribute to the level of parental involvement in homework and the academic achievement of middle school students. Due to the design of the current study and these contributing factors, there are limitations that may affect the research results. This study was conducted at a Junior High School in a suburban setting. The sample size consisted of 127 parents/guardians, and participants of this study were not selected at random. The purposive sample contained parents of students on a particular team of teachers within the school. Since there is another Junior High School within the district, the size and location of the sample school may not be representative of the population. Because the school is located in a suburban area, the parenting practices (which includes parental involvement) of the participants may not be the same as that of parents/guardians who live in rural or urban school districts, or those whose children attend private schools. Due to these factors the results of the study may lack validity and may not be generalizable across school districts. Another limiting factor of this study is the nature of the research itself. Parents who are involved in their student's education are more likely to complete a questionnaire on parental involvement. Parents who are not involved in their child's education and complete the questionnaire may provide false information to make themselves appear involved. This could skew the results and affect the overall conclusions and implications of the study.

### *Methodology*

This study was completed in one of two Junior High Schools located in a moderately large suburban school district, located just outside of the state capital. A questionnaire was sent home with students from the selected seventh and eighth grade classes for their parents/

guardians to complete. The participants in the study answered a questionnaire containing basic demographic information and information about their involvement in their child's learning development and school career [See Appendix A]. Parents are essentially a child's first teacher and their continued involvement in their child's education can have many benefits. It is hypothesized that parental involvement in a child's homework is directly correlated to his/her academic achievement throughout the middle grades (five through eight). The information obtained from the questionnaire was compared to the child's overall academic achievement in the core subject areas (Math, Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts) from the previous school year, which was obtained from the school administration. A correlation test was conducted between the data obtained in the questionnaire and the student's grades. The findings of this research will be analyzed and discussed.

### *Organization of Study*

Chapter One provided the background information on parental involvement and its relationship to academic achievement, as well as outlines the foundation of this Master's Research Project. Chapter Two is an in-depth literature review focused on parental involvement and academic achievement in middle school students. Chapter Three explains the methodology used to gather data to answer the proposed research questions. Chapter Four contains an analysis of the statistical findings of the research project. The fifth and final chapter includes a summary of the findings, conclusions and implications of the study, and recommendations for future studies.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many contributing factors that can determine an adolescent's ability to learn and succeed in middle school. Middle school students experience not only changes in their school environment, but also physical, cognitive, and social changes. During this confusing and challenging transitional period in their lives, adolescents need support from their schools, communities, and especially their families. Families provide the social, cultural, and emotional supports that adolescents need to function well in school (Depanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007). For decades researchers have investigated the effects of parental involvement on academic achievement. Studies have shown that parental involvement in a child's education can improve academic achievement and predict future success in and out of school (Depanty et al., 2007; Driessen et al., 2005; Fan & Chen, 2001). This chapter provides an in-depth review of the literature on parental involvement in regards to academic achievement in middle school students.

#### *Pre-School Development*

Parents are essentially a child's first teacher; this education begins from the time of birth. An infant is born with 100 billion nerve cells or neurons in his or her brain (Bergsten, 1998). Developmental psychologists believe that, few if any, brain cells are produced for the remainder of the child's life. Development begins when a child's neurons connect and form "wiring patterns", these patterns eventually become pathways for vision, hearing, language, emotions and movement (Bergsten, 1998). Neural connections are imperative for a child's growth and development. Brain development has also been associated with attachment and security. A positive home environment can foster healthy development in children, and inadequate family

interaction can cause behavioral problems and lacking social skills. Without certain connections a child can have mental and behavioral problems as they enter school which can continue for the remainder of their lives (Bergsten, 1998). These findings demonstrate the importance of family interaction and education involvement in the years prior to entering school. Researchers have linked academic success to early literacy practices in the home (Hong & Ho, 2005). Research findings demonstrate that a continued parental involvement throughout the child's education can improve academic achievement. This is especially true during the adolescent years (Depanty et al., 2007). Hill (2001) found that early school interaction can affect later school performance. The statistical analyses of Annunziata et al. (2006) suggest that parental involvement in school is related to school success as early as kindergarten. Because parents are a child's first and most important teachers, it is imperative that parents actively participate in their child's academic lives.

The lack of learning important mental and behavioral skills can hinder a child's ability to be "school ready". In 2001, President George W. Bush implemented the No Child Left Behind Act, which established goals to make sure students enter school "ready to learn" (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). School readiness is hard to define because of the differences in children entering school across culture, race, and socioeconomic status. School readiness involves children, families, home environments, schools, and communities. Researchers have defined school readiness as the stage of development in which a child can engage in, and benefit from, primary learning experiences (Reynolds, 1995). A young child is deemed school ready when he or she has reached certain levels of physical well-being and motor development, acquired social and emotional capabilities, and language and comprehension skills (Wynn, 2002). President George W. Bush stated, "If you expect your child to be well-educated, you

have the responsibility of making sure your child gets educated, starting at home, with some basic fundamentals” (as cited in Lehr & Osborn, 2002). Children’s skills and development are strongly influenced by their families and through their interactions with other people and environments before entering school.

### *Middle Schools*

Today there are 20 million rapidly changing 10 to 15 year-olds enrolled in our nation’s middle schools. Educational sociologists believe that adolescence is the most complex social period in the life of an individual (Deplanty et al., 2007). Middle school students experience more rapid personal and contextual changes during this period than during any other time in their lives. Although growth during infancy is comparable, adolescents are conscious witnesses to their development (National Middle School Association, 2003; Roeser et al., 2000). Because adolescents are not yet adults but are also no longer children, their unique needs must be met in order to assure their well being and school success (Hawes & Plourde, 2005). Adolescents experience developmental change on every level; cognitive, physical, social, emotional and moral (Akos & Martin, 2003; Roeser et al., 2000). These changes create important challenges for students during this transition.

During the middle school years, adolescents are forming the attitudes, values, and habits that will largely direct their behavior as adults (National Middle School Association, 2003). The transition from elementary school to middle school can be a stressful time for adolescents. Students are faced with navigating a new building, learning new rules, managing new expectations from several teachers, as well as adjusting to greater academic responsibilities at school (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000; Seyfried & Chung, 2002). In elementary school students

experience an environment that is very structured and often self contained in one classroom. They develop a solid connection with one teacher who directs the structure of the day. It is from this setting that young adolescents leave the safety and comfort of a familiar setting to make the move to middle school (Seyfried & Chung, 2002). The skills and experiences necessary to succeed academically and socially in middle school are acquired through many sources.

A student's family and peers play important roles in the transition to middle school. During this time, students are also adjusting to changes towards their family and their peer group. These students are beginning to strive for more control over their lives and a sense of identity that is separate from their families (Zimmerman, Copeland, Shope, & Dielman, 1997). "As students begin middle school, peers take on a more important role in the student's life. Both the importance and intimacy of peers increase as students begin to establish an identity outside of the family" (Akos & Martin, 2003, p.1). Typically students at this age seek approval from their peers rather than from adults, and value friendship and belonging as the most important aspects of school (Zimmerman et al., 1997; Annunziata et al., 2006). With this increased social focus some young adolescents may neglect the academic importance of school. The transition from elementary to middle/junior high school has been found to be associated with a variety of negative effects on adolescents including declines in achievement, decreased motivation, lowered self-esteem, and increased psychological distress (Akos & Martin, 2003; Annunziata et al., 2006). As children grow older, parental involvement decreases at home and at school. Hill (2001) and Jeynes (2007) found that parents feel as though they have a greater impact on their younger children than on their older children. Some parents believe that involvement in their child's education is not as important after elementary school. While other parents deduce that adolescents desire and need independence (Deplanty et al., 2007). Due to this new independence,

parents mistakenly become less involved in middle school, believing that children need less support at this level (National Middle School Association, 2003). However, students in the middle level grades need a large support system which can help them to rise above or eliminate risk factors they encounter during this period of significant change. Parents need to be involved at every level of their child's development and learning to ensure physical and mental well-being and educational success.

### *Parental Involvement*

The first research in the area of parental involvement and academic achievement dates back to the early 1900's. E.C. Brooks, in 1916, conducted the first known study of the effects of parental involvement on academic achievement (Cooper, Lindsay & Nye, 2000). After interviewing 268 fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students, Brooks concluded "where parents are capable of guiding the child and are inclined to supervise the home study, their children succeed in school. But where the parents are illiterate or for other reasons are unable to supervise the home study, their children as a rule either make slow progress or are failures" (as cited in Cooper et al., 2000). Since 1916, schools and society have both changed dramatically, but the underlying findings of this study are consistent with contemporary research. Numerous studies have concluded that parental involvement in school is directly related to academic achievement. Research has overwhelmingly shown that children are more likely to have higher academic achievement levels and improved behavior when families are involved in the child's education (Bryan, 2005).

Parental involvement encompasses a wide variety of parental behavior patterns and practices, and cannot be defined by one specific feature. Parental involvement is defined by the

United States Department of Education as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including; assisting in their child's learning and being actively involved in their child's education at school (No Child Left Behind, 2001). Parental involvement in school is multidimensional and can include parental aspirations, expectations, interests, and attitudes and beliefs regarding education, as well as parental participation in school activities at school and at home (Hong & Ho, 2005; Fan, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001). Parenting behaviors can directly influence children's educational achievement and cognitive development (Bakker, Denessen, & Brus-Laeven, 2007). There is an abundance of definitions of parental involvement, but for the purposes of the current study parental involvement will be divided into two main categories. The first category is parental involvement at home, which consists of learning activities that take place outside of school, such as assistance with homework and discussions about school. The second category is parental involvement at school, which encompasses parent teacher conferences, attending open houses, parent teacher communication, and involvement in school activities. Regardless of its form, parental involvement has consistently been shown to positively impact academic achievement (Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg, 2001). Parental involvement has been shown to have a significant effect on test scores, higher school performance in reading, spelling and mathematics, fewer learning problems, lower rates of grade retention, and fewer learning related behavior disorders (Bakker et al., 2007). Despite the known positive effects, parental involvement and family engagement greatly decrease as students move from elementary school to middle school (Constantino, 2007). The research literature has clearly shown that parental involvement has a positive effect on academic achievement. However, there are other factors that motivate students to succeed in school.

The implications of parental involvement go far beyond helping students with homework or being involved in school activities. Parental expectations and aspirations also have a positive effect on academic achievement and academic growth (Marchant et al., 2001; Attaway & Bry, 2004; Seyfried & Chung, 2002; Fan, 2001). Theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Dewey believe children learn through experiencing and being actively involved in their surrounding environment. Children learn and develop through experience. This experience comes from hands-on activities through interaction with the environment. The social aspect of learning, the interaction with other people in the environment, plays a major role in learning. Parents are socializing agents (Spera, 2006). Children are often influenced by the thoughts and beliefs of their parents. During their child's development parents transmit their educational values, goals, and aspirations to their child. These values are strong predictors of adolescent school achievement, motivation and interest in school (Hill, 2001; Spera, 2006; Gonzalez-Pienda, Nunez, Gonzalez-Pumariega, Alvarez, Roces, & Garcia, 2002). Overstreet, Devine, Bevans and Efreom (2005) explain that parents with high aspirations for their children are more likely to become involved in their child's education. Other research has shown that a student's perceptions of his or her parents' values about achievement contribute to increased motivation and competence (Seyfried & Chung, 2002). Parents who place a high value on education and exhibit high expectations for their children in grades, ability, and long term educational aspirations create a home environment conducive to learning and academic success.

Parenting styles and practices can also influence a child's school performance. Parental warmth has been associated with promoting a child's cognitive development, competence, and self esteem (Culp, Hubbs-Tait, Culp, & Starost, 2000). Research has also shown that an authoritative parenting style characterized by parental warmth and consistent parental monitoring

provide the optimal environment for school success in adolescents (Annunziata et al., 2006; Attaway & Bry, 2004; Marchant et al., 2001; Spera, 2006). Parental monitoring is defined as the extent to which parents structure their child's home, school and community environment and track their child's behaviors within those environments (Annunziata et al., 2006). When parental monitoring is high, or even moderate, adolescents are more engaged in school. A supportive home environment can function as a protective factor for at-risk adolescents. Annunziata et al. (2006) also found that a supportive family environment is identified as one of the attributes of resilient children. Educational resilience is defined as students who are engaged in school and perform well despite facing risk conditions associated with inadequate home and school factors. (Annunziata et al., 2006). These family variables have predicted student achievement, perceived competence, sense of relatedness to peers, and academic effort (Annunziata et al., 2006). The effects of parental involvement on student achievement can influence adolescents' social, cognitive, and emotional development.

### *Academic Achievement*

School success has typically been measured by academic achievement operationalized as students' grades or GPA. During middle childhood students are in the midst of a period of development characterized by conflicting needs for intimacy, autonomy, cognitive challenge, and feelings of competence (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). School success has been found to predict many positive outcomes including; higher education, better job possibilities, lower likelihood of future unemployment, less adult psychopathology, and more positive self-concept/self-esteem (Annunziata et al., 2006; Driessen et al., 2005; Overstreet et al., 2005). "Self esteem is generally regarded as the evaluation that a person makes about themselves that expresses a self-judgment of approval, disapproval, and personal worth" (Zimmerman et al.,

1997, p.117). Self esteem is often considered a large factor in the prediction of actions and behaviors that a person will engage in. Gonzalez-Pienda et al. (2002) found that academic self concept is positively affected by parental involvement which in turn has a positive effect on academic achievement. A person is less likely to partake in activities that are harmful or detrimental to his or her well-being if he or she has a positive view of self-worth. In the same vein, research has found that school failure is associated with risk-behaviors and negative outcomes, such as, substance abuse, delinquency, emotional/behavioral problems, and early sexual activity (Attaway & Bry, 2004; Roeser et al., 2000). In a study on high school dropouts, Seyfried and Chung (2002) found that children who have parents that are not involved in their education are at risk for dropping out of school. Despite the overwhelming statistical data providing evidence that parental involvement is directly connected to academic achievement, there are still many parents who do not actively participate in their child's education.

### *Lack of Parental Involvement*

*Poverty.* There is a variety of factors that can contribute to parental lack of involvement in school. Socio-economic status, parental educational level, available time, and parental occupation can all be barriers to parental involvement in school. According to research children raised in poverty are at an even greater risk in areas of cognitive development and academic achievement (Attaway & Bry, 2004). The environment of poverty aids in a child's inability to experience the necessary parental and social interactions which promote cognitive development, language development, and social skills. Researchers have found that children living in poverty are most likely to have below average cognitive performance, academic achievement, and social skills (Carpenter et al., 2006). Hill (2001) found that poverty and educational opportunities were most important in understanding parental involvement. A majority of families in poverty is

headed by a single working parent (Culp et al., 2000; Hill, 2001; Ricciuti, 2004). In an effort to provide for and meet the basic needs of their families many parents work two jobs and have little time to interact with their children and be involved in their schooling.

The physical and emotional stresses and frustrations that parents in low income families face can cause the stimulating and nurturing environment that they wish to provide for their children to be lost. Poverty can be a devastating situation for both parents and children alike. In order for parents to provide a child with his or her everyday physical needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter, their mental and emotional needs are ignored or unable to be met. The stress of having a low income and/or having multiple jobs can lead to problems in the parent-child relationship. Economic hardships have been found to cause hostile living environments including: increased negative parental behaviors, emotions, and relationships with all members of the family. This aggression can be transferred to the child and revealed in poor cognition development due to lack of positive parental interaction and involvement (Attaway & Bry, 2004). Research indicates that lower income families are less able to support their children's schooling through supervision and monitoring of their schoolwork, they are less likely to be involved in school activities, and have lower expectations regarding their children's school achievements (Ricciuti, 2004). The explanation for the lack of parental involvement in lower income families has been shown to be associated with economic hardships, time constraints, and parental occupation, but the education level of parents may be fundamental to understanding the lack of involvement in school.

*Parental Education Level.* Little research has been conducted in the area of parent education level and academic achievement. Because children are influenced by the thoughts and beliefs of their parents, the value placed on education is also transmitted to their children. Parents

with higher levels of education are more likely to have the same aspirations of continuing education for their children than parents with lower levels of education. Researchers have identified parent education level as a predictor of academic achievement (Constantino, 2007; Depleanty et al., 2007; Hawes & Plourde, 2005). Parent educational level has been positively correlated to parental involvement (Bergsten, 1998; Depleanty et al., 2007). Specifically the mother's education level, as compared to the father's, was found to be strongly related to the degree of parental involvement in school activities, as well as adolescents' educational aspirations, motivation, and achievement (Depleanty et al., 2007). Depleanty et al. (2007) found that parents with a higher degree of education are more likely to be active in school activities, PTA meetings and parent teacher conferences. Family income is related to parental education level, therefore lower income parents may have had negative experiences with schools and are unable to provide their children with the skills to negotiate the school system successfully, which can in turn negatively affect their school performance (Hill, 2001). Parents with a higher education level are better qualified than less educated parents to help children with homework (Depleanty et al., 2007). Parent involvement in homework may also decrease from elementary school to middle school and junior high school because some parents are less knowledgeable in subject areas in higher grade levels (Constantino, 2007; Depleanty et al., 2007). It is essential for educators to have an understanding of student's and parent's backgrounds. This information will assist teachers in adequately determining the best learning methods for students and how to include parents in their education.

*Cultural Differences and School Factors.* Other factors that have been found to impede parental involvement include cultural differences, school size and home-school communication. The educational, social, and family differences in adolescents entering middle school can

contribute to levels of parental involvement and academic achievement. Parents from diverse social and cultural backgrounds approach schools with different educational expectations for their children and different views on parental involvement in school and at home (Marjoribanks, 2005). Secondary schools are generally larger than elementary schools and house many more students. Because of the increased size, middle schools can be intimidating to parents, especially those who speak little English or who had negative experiences attending school (Constantino, 2007). There is also a lack of connection between the school and community which disengages parents (Constantino, 2007). Due to the size and complexity of middle schools, consistent communication with student families can be difficult. Families of students in secondary schools have fewer conversations about school, and parents and teachers communicate less than in elementary schools (Constantino, 2007). Schools must implicate programs that can bridge the gap between home and school by including parents in every aspect of learning. Homework is a learning tool that can be used to increase parental involvement at school and at home.

### *Homework*

The practice of assigning homework is not a new phenomenon. The history of homework has been marked by several eras. Holler and Lovelace (2001) define homework as any tasks that are assigned by teachers and meant to be carried out during nonschool hours. Originally, homework was assigned as a punishment to students and was based on recitation. In the 1950's, educators incorporated homework into the curriculum as a way of extending learning. But in the 1960's, educators decreased the amount of homework given to students in fear that too much homework would cause mental stress. The educational reform movement of the 1970's caused educators to reexamine student learning, and it was established that increased homework results in improved student achievement (Holler & Lovelace, 2001). In schools today, homework is

used to obtain three main goals: academic achievement, improved responsibility, and parental involvement (Holler & Lovelace, 2001).

The review of literature on homework has confounding results. Kohn (2006) believes that homework in its present application does more bad than good for students during elementary school, middle school and even high school. He argues there is no evidence to support the assumption that homework increases academic achievement, improves study skills, time management skills, or critical thinking. In fact, homework has negative effects that cause stress, frustration, family conflict, loss of time for other activities, and a possible decrease of interest in learning. Although studies have shown a correlation between homework and academic achievement, there is evidence that higher achievement is due to homework.

Still many educators believe that homework will improve achievement, enhance students' organizational and study skills, encourages students to become independent learners and critical thinkers, and involve parents more directly in their child's education (Holler & Lovelace, 2001). Despite these high expectations for homework, Holler and Lovelace (2001) found that 51% of all homework assigned is unfinished class work. This demonstrates that the school's identified goals are not always reflected in the homework assigned to many students, and that homework in its present form does not facilitate student learning or achievement.

The effects of parental involvement in homework in relation to academic achievement yield similar confounding results. Researchers have found that the most significant predictors of academic achievement are rooted in the home, specifically parental involvement with homework and home learning activities (Carpenter et al., 2006). Research has shown that parental interaction during the completion of homework is an important factor for improving parental

involvement. Parental involvement in homework is the leading factor for improving academic performance (Bailey et al., 2004; Marchant et al., 2001). By improving parental involvement the home-school connection improves and also student outcomes are improved (Bailey et al., 2004). Families differ in the resources of time, space and materials, as well as economic means (Cooper et al., 2000). Few parents of low academic achievers are involved in their children's homework (Bailey et al., 2004). The effective design of homework may increase the involvement of both parents and children, which may affect student outcomes. Assigning homework that attracts the interest of parents may serve to facilitate the completion of homework, which in turn may enhance academic performance (Bailey et al., 2004). Effective homework includes opportunities for children to interact meaningfully with parents such that parents are interested in the work and their children construct their own knowledge within a social and physical environment (Bailey et al., 2004). This definition aligns with the constructivist view of learning, that humans construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences. Homework should be designed and assigned based on the understanding of the diverse parent and student population (Bailey et al., 2004). Researchers found that regardless of socio-economic status, literacy can improve when parents were involved in homework. This was found to be true not only across SES but also across racial characteristics (Bailey et al., 2004; Jeynes, 2007). In order for homework to be effective, teachers need to develop lessons that incorporate aspects of parental involvement that encourage parents to actively participate in their child's learning.

Parental involvement in homework can be used to improve student achievement (Cooper et al., 2000). While parent involvement in homework can be used to accelerate children's learning, in some instances involvement in homework has interfered with learning. Cooper et al. (2000) found that parental involvement may cause improved student learning under some

conditions but may interfere with learning under other conditions. During the completion of homework, if parents were unable to take on the role of teacher (were undereducated or unfamiliar with topic) or if parents used different instructional techniques than the teacher students achievement decreased. Also direct parental involvement in homework led to excessive pressure on children to complete assignments and do well, which created expectations inconsistent with their abilities. Some overly involved parents have even simply given correct answers or completed assignments for their children (Cooper et al., 2000). Although parents who help their children normally have the best intentions, they must understand that by doing the work for their child they are not allowing their child to learn and grow. It is imperative for student success that parents be involved in school, but there is a balance that parents, teachers and students must work together to achieve.

Although researchers agree that increased parental involvement in homework is necessary, the fact remains that it is difficult to engage parents in their children's homework. If parents fail to emphasize the importance of homework, the child's ability to successfully complete and learn from homework assignments is hampered (Bailey et al., 2004). Research found that parental involvement can be good for students, but can cause tension for parents, especially when parents take an active teaching role and the different resources available across families (Driessen et al., 2005). The three main problems parents face when helping their children with home work include: helping their child develop consistent study times, finding time to supervise and assist with homework due to work commitments, and helping their child develop independent study habits (Bailey et al., 2004). Communication between parents and schools is the key to overcoming obstacles that can have negative effects on student learning.

## *Partnerships*

Schools cannot educate children alone. According to the National Middle School Association (2003) school-initiated family and community partnerships are an essential factor of successful schools. School, family, and community partnerships aid in decreasing the achievement gap. One of the responsibilities outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act is that schools need to work jointly with families and communities to achieve an effective partnership policy (Bryan, 2005). According to research done by Bryan (2005) family centered partnerships and extracurricular enrichment partnership programs are most beneficial in improving academic achievement and resiliency. Extracurricular enrichment partnership programs include: tutoring, mentoring, and after school programs (Bryan, 2005). Family-centered partnerships include; family centers, parent education programs and family outreach. Teacher outreach to parents has also shown increases in student performances. Effective outreach programs included meeting face-to-face, sending materials home, and keeping in touch about progress (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Parent education programs such as workshops for parents on helping their children at home were linked with higher reading and math scores (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Students and parents alike form ties to the community and feel more accepted, students have increased opportunities for participation in their schools and communities, and the child-parent interaction increases along with parents involvement in school (Bryan, 2005). By implementing programs into the school system and community that increase parental involvement, student's development and academic achievement can improve.

### *Summary*

Within the context of the findings and issues reviewed above, the following two research questions were investigated: How does the level of parental involvement in homework affect academic achievement in middle school students? How does the level of parental education affect parental involvement in a child's homework? In the present study, these questions were examined by using a bivariate correlation analysis, looking specifically at parental involvement in homework practices and parental education level in relation to academic achievement in the four core subject areas (Math, Social Studies, Science, and Language Arts) as measured by numerical grades. Parental involvement in homework and parental education level are hypothesized to predict academic achievement. This study was designed to advance the research on parental involvement and academic achievement by exploring parental involvement in homework and factors that help or hinder parents from assisting and monitoring student homework. The results of the present study can be utilized to develop school programs associated with parental involvement in school activities, decisions and homework. Programs such as these can be implemented to bridge the gap between home and school while improving student's academic achievement. In the following chapters, the results of the empirical study of the effects of parental involvement in homework and parental education level on academic achievement will be presented and discussed.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Research and Design*

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between parental involvement in homework, parental education level, and academic achievement in seventh and eighth grade middle school students. In order to collect the most accurate data this study used a parental questionnaire which included: demographic information, questions using a Likert scale, and open ended questions. The results of the questionnaire were compared to students' academic grades. The information obtained from this study will hopefully help educators and parents further their knowledge concerning the benefits of parental involvement in school and also strengthen the partnership between parents, schools, and communities.

#### *Participants*

The study was conducted at Franklin Junior High School, a school located in a large suburban city just outside the state capital. The participants of the study consisted of 48 parents/guardians of students attending the junior high school. All students were in the eighth grade. Their ages ranged from 12 to 14. Although the students did not directly participate in the study, their final grades from the four core subject areas from the previous year were obtained with parental permission. 77 percent of the respondents who answered the questionnaire were mothers, 15 percent were fathers, and the remaining 8 percent included other family members such as grandparents and step-parents. Other demographic information obtained from the homework questionnaire will be discussed later in the chapter. After obtaining permission from

the school district to carry out the proposed research, a meeting with the junior high school principal was arranged in preparation for administering the questionnaire to the parents.

A social studies teacher at Franklin Junior High School volunteered to oversee the project and assist with the research process. The participating parents/guardians were chosen based on the students in the cooperating teacher's classroom. A questionnaire was sent home with all students for their parents to complete. Out of 127 students, 48 surveys were returned, a 38 percent response rate. Parents had two weeks to complete and return the survey to the cooperating teacher. The cooperating teacher informed the researcher that a majority of parents who completed and returned the survey were the parents of her higher performing students. If the data obtained from the research includes mainly the educational attitudes, beliefs, and practices of parents with higher achieving students, then the results of the sample may not be representative of the population. Community and school factors may also have affected the validity of the research.

#### *Community and School Factors*

Franklin Junior High School is situated in a suburban community with a population of approximately 33,000, located near the state capital of a large Midwestern state. According to 2000 data of the United States Census Bureau the median household income in the community was \$34,110, compared to \$41,994 nationally. About 5.5% of the population was at or below the poverty level. The unemployment rate in the county in which the community is located was 3.7% compared to the national unemployment rate of 5.1%.

The community is surrounded on three sides by fertile, rolling farmland. It has experienced a phenomenal growth in recent years because of its quiet suburban location,

accessibility, and the progressive nature of its people and its city government. The major employers of the area were insurance, banking, research, healthcare, and a major university. The racial makeup of the city was as follows: 85.01% White, 10.44% African American, 1.07% Native American, 1.69% Asian, 0.05% Pacific Islander, and 0.74% from other races. Since the 2000 census, the community's ethnic make-up has changed to include; more African American and minority residents. This is also the general makeup of the community surrounding Franklin Junior High School.

Franklin Junior High School is a new two story building that is nestled on a quiet street on the outskirts of the community. It is set back far off the road and is surrounded by farm land. Franklin is one of two seventh and eighth grade facilities in the school district. According to the state report card, it employed 40 teachers and included 570 students. The school, similar to the city, was 58 percent White and 32 percent African American. 27 percent of its students were classified as economically disadvantaged on free or reduced lunches. Students with learning disabilities made up 14 percent of Franklin Junior High School. The total school expenditures per student were \$8,662 compared to the state average of \$9,052. After the 2007-2008 achievement test the school was classified as "Effective."

The school has only been in operation for two years, therefore previous year's scores and performance records do not exist. Six out of the eight state indicators were met. Seventh grade achievement in reading was 83.0 percent at Franklin Junior High compared to 77.3 percent statewide. The students in seventh grade had 91.5 percent achievement in writing compared to the statewide percentage of 85.7. The seventh grade students passed at a level of 78.9 percent in mathematics, compared to 68.8 percent statewide. Social Studies and Science are not considered in proficiency testing at the seventh grade level. The eighth grade students at Franklin Junior

High School had 84.8 percent achievement in reading compared to 79.4 percent nationwide. Eighth grade achievement in Mathematics was 79.4 percent, compared to 72.8 percent statewide. Science achievement was measured at 72.9 percent and students failed Social Studies at 57.9 percent. However, the scores in Science and Social Studies were both higher than the state's averages. Community and school factors are crucial in interpreting the results of this study.

### *Research Methods*

This study was initiated by meeting with the superintendent of the school district. After reviewing the research proposal and requesting some minor changes to the questionnaire, the superintendent signed the school district consent form (Appendix B). Once permission was obtained from the school district, the junior high school was chosen based on permission from the principal. Only one of the two junior high schools in the district granted permission to conduct the study. A list of students was obtained from the cooperating teacher. Students were identified solely by student identification number to ensure anonymity. A consent form (Appendix C) and questionnaire was then sent home with the students for their parents/guardians to complete. Once the questionnaires were returned, the students' identification numbers were used to obtain their grades from the central district office.

### *Instrument/Measures*

In order to better understand the findings of this study, it is important to first understand the research tool that provided the data. The homework questionnaire was developed explicitly for this study. The survey was based on the research questions. The questionnaire contained 12 questions pertaining to parental involvement in homework during the previous school year. The questionnaire had three different types of questions: demographic, Likert scale, and open ended.

The first four questions were basic demographic questions about the student, parent, and his or her family. The subsequent three questions specifically asked parents about their involvement in their child's homework, where parents rated their involvement as always, most of the time, sometimes, and never. The next question involved parents knowledge of what their child should be learning in school in each of the four core subject areas. The following two questions asked parents to identify their child's strengths and weaknesses in each of the four subject areas. The final two questions investigated parents' knowledge of student services the school provided and if they knew how to access those programs. The data collected from the homework questionnaire was organized and entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences [SPSS], a commonly used statistical analysis program.

Using the data obtained from the parental involvement surveys and the students' final grades in Mathematics, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies, correlation tests were conducted. The results obtained from the statistical analyses were examined to determine if there is a relationship between parental involvement in homework, parent education level, and academic achievement. The findings of the study will be reviewed in the following section.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### *Plan of Analysis*

This chapter presents the analysis of the parental involvement questionnaire in regards to students' academic achievement. Three types of analyses were performed to determine whether a relationship existed between variables;

- Frequency distribution
- Pearson Product-Moment Correlation
- Cross tabulation

A frequency test was performed to show the distribution of independent and dependent variables. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, a common measure to determine the strength of the linear dependence between two variables, was used to measure significant correlations. Finally, a cross tabulation was performed to measure the joint distribution of two or more variables. The following is a breakdown of the results obtained from these tests.

#### *Frequency Distribution*

In order to gain insight into the distribution of the different student and parental characteristics, a number of frequency distribution tests were conducted. The results of the first frequency distribution test provided information about the relationship between the parent/guardian and the student, the total number of children that lived in the home, and the education level of the participants. The data for this statistical test are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
Participants Level of Education, Relationship to Child, Number of Children in Household (n=48)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<b>Education</b>		
No High School	1	2.1 %
High School Grad	15	31.3 %
High School plus some college	10	20.8 %
Two Year Degree	7	14.6 %
Four Year Degree	11	22.9 %
Four Year Degree plus	4	8.3 %
<b>Relationship to Child</b>		
Mother	37	77.1 %
Father	7	14.6 %
Other	4	8.4 %
<b>Children in Household</b>		
1	7	14.6 %
2	17	35.4 %
3	13	27.1 %
4	10	20.8 %
5+	1	2.1 %

Three patterns emerge from the data in Table 1. First, mothers accounted for 77 percent of participants of this study. Second, 46 percent of the respondents had at least a two year college degree. Only one participant in the study did not graduate from high school. Due to the higher academic achievement levels of the students in the sample, these findings could imply that a mother's education level, as compared to the father's, is related to the degree of parental involvement in school activities, as well as adolescents' educational aspirations, motivation, and achievement. Higher levels of parental education can predict academic achievement in students. This is demonstrated further in Tables 4 and 5.

The third pattern identified by Table 1 is that half of the participants have three or more children living in their homes. According to the United States Census released in 2000 (U.S.

Census Bureau, 2000), the average number of children per household in the United States is 2.1. The average number of children per household in the study sample is 2.6, which is notably higher than the national average. Previous research has shown that as the number of children per household increases, parental involvement decreases (Cooper et al.,; Deplanty et al., 2007). Parents with more children have less time to spend with each child and may not be able to give them the attention or assistance they need. The findings of the current study could indicate that the number of children per household does not affect parental involvement in homework or academic achievement.

One of the main purposes of this study was to determine the level of parental involvement in homework and its relationship to academic achievement. The homework questions from the survey were developed based on three distinct parental involvement behaviors: homework environment, parental assistance with homework, and parental monitoring of homework. Each of the parental involvement questions will be referred to by a key word throughout the rest of Chapter 4. The key words are based on the parental involvement behaviors.

<i>Environment</i>	Question 1: <i>Last school year how often did you set aside a time and place in your home for your child to complete his/her homework?</i>
<i>Assistance</i>	Question 2: <i>Last school year how often did you help your child with his/her homework?</i>
<i>Monitoring</i>	Question 3: <i>Last school year how often did you check your child's homework agenda?</i>

Parents had the choice of answering *never*, *sometimes*, *most of the time* and *always* for each of the three parental involvement with homework questions. These results are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
Parental Involvement in Homework (n=48)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<b>Environment</b>		
Never	2	4.2 %
Sometimes	9	18.8 %
Most of the Time	15	31.3 %
Always	22	45.8 %
<b>Assistance</b>		
Never	1	2.1 %
Sometimes	18	37.5 %
Most of the Time	16	33.3 %
Always	13	27.1 %
<b>Monitoring</b>		
Never	4	8.3 %
Sometimes	13	27.1 %
Most of the Time	16	33.3 %
Always	15	31.3 %

The results of the frequency distribution analysis in Table 2 reveal inconsistencies between the three types of parental involvement in homework. Almost half of participants always provide a homework environment for their child to complete his or her homework. However, only one fourth of participants always assist their child with his or her homework, and only one third of participants always monitor their child's homework. Although participants provide a place and time for completion of homework, they are not helping with homework or making sure the homework is complete. A substantial two fifths of the study's participants claimed that they *sometimes* or *never* assist with homework and one third only *sometimes* or *never* monitor homework. One possible explanation for these findings is that parents believe middle school students should be capable of completing homework on their own, and that they

do not need to help their child with homework or make sure that homework is completed. There are many factors that can contribute to a parent's lack of involvement with their child's homework.

The remaining questions on the survey sought to determine parental knowledge of his or her child's school grade level standards, the child's strengths and weaknesses in school, and available student services. These results are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3  
Parental Knowledge of Core Subject Area Content, Student Strengths and Weaknesses, Availability of School Services (n=48)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Knowledge of Student's Strengths		
Yes	33	68.8 %
No	15	31.3 %
Knowledge of Student's Weaknesses		
Yes	28	58.3 %
No	20	41.7 %
Knowledge of Core Subject Area Content		
Yes	39	81.3 %
No	9	18.8 %
Knowledge of School Services		
Yes	39	81.3 %
No	9	18.8 %

Table 3 displays not only aspects of parental involvement with homework, but also parental involvement with school. Parental knowledge of a child's strengths and weaknesses is essential to providing assistance with and monitoring homework. A breakdown of this information by content area is illustrated in Tables 7, 8, 9 and 10 and will be discussed in depth

in the cross tabulation section. Four fifths of participants claimed they were knowledgeable of what their children should learn in Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts; whereas only one fifth said that they were not. More than two thirds of the participants claimed they knew their child's strengths in Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts. While nearly three fifths of the participants indicated they knew their child's weaknesses were, slightly less than two fifths said they did not. The data reveals that more than 30 percent of the participants did not know either their child's strengths or weaknesses. Thus, school provided services may not be used by parents to assist their child they are unaware of his or her weaknesses.

#### *Academic Achievement*

Students' final grades in Math, Science, Social Studies and Language Arts from the previous school year were obtained from the school's central district office. The distribution of students' academic achievement is presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4  
Student Academic Achievement (n=48)

<i>Letter Grade</i>	<i>Social Studies</i>		<i>Mathematics</i>		<i>Science</i>		<i>Language Arts</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>
A	26	54.2 %	21	43.0 %	23	47.9 %	14	29.2 %	84	43.8 %
B	16	33.3 %	19	39.6 %	12	25.0 %	25	52.1 %	72	37.5 %
C	5	10.4 %	5	10.4 %	10	20.8 %	6	12.5 %	26	13.5 %
D	1	2.1 %	3	6.3 %	3	6.3 %	3	6.3 %	10	5.2 %
<i>Total</i>	48	100 %	48	100 %	48	100 %	48	100 %	192	100 %

Academic achievement was measured by the numerical equivalent of standard letter grades (A, B, C, D and F) converted on a 100-point scale. The scale was coded as follows: 90-100 A, 80-89 B, 70-79 C, 60-69 D, below 60 F. The descriptive analysis of student academic achievement demonstrates that more than 80 percent of the students received either an A or B in all core subject areas. Less than 20 percent of the students received a C or D in all core subject areas except Science. Science had the highest percentage of C's and D's, as 27 percent of students received either a below B grade. Language Arts had lowest percentage of A's but also the highest percentage of B's. More than half of students received an A in Social Studies. The differences in distribution of grades across subject areas could be attributed to different teaching methods, different student learning styles or abilities, or the subject content itself.

The most surprising information obtained from the frequency distribution is that none of the 48 students received an F as a final grade in any of the subjects. The number of students that received D's is also significantly low. The findings show that participants of the study were mainly the parents of students with higher academic achievement. This may indicate that the sample does not represent parents with students who are lower achievers.

### *Pearson Product-Moment Correlation*

A Pearson Product-Moment Correlations test was conducted to investigate the relationship between parental involvement in homework and academic achievement, and parental level of education and parental involvement in homework. The researcher hypothesized that parental involvement in homework is correlated to academic achievement in middle school students and that parental level of education is correlated to parental involvement in homework. Table 5 shows the results of the correlation analyses conducted between the independent variable (student academic achievement in Math, Social Studies, Language Arts and Science) and the dependent variables (parental involvement in homework and parental level of educational).

TABLE 5  
Correlation between academic achievement and parental involvement, and parental level of education and parental involvement (n=48)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Math Grade	—							
2. Science Grade	.728*	—						
3. Language Arts Grade	.741*	.640*	—					
4. Social Studies Grade	.656*	.754*	.715*	—				
5. Environment	.119	.190	.278*	.170	—			
6. Assistance	-.020	-.051	-.017	.025	.655*	—		
7. Monitoring	.157	.112	-.017	.243*	.650*	.708*	—	
8. Education	.148	.132	.319*	.266*	.144	.062	.031	—

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed) \* $p \leq 0.05$

The analysis was conducted using the students' final grades from the previous school year in the four core subject areas (Math, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies), parent/guardian responses to the three questions regarding involvement with homework (environment, assistance, and monitoring) and the level of education of the parent/ guardian. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis also showed that daily providing a place and time for homework to be completed predicted Language Arts achievement ( $r[48] = .278, p \leq 0.05$ ). The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis revealed that parents monitoring student homework agendas and making sure homework is complete, which is associated with monitoring of student homework, predicted Social Studies achievement ( $r[48] = .243, p \leq 0.05$ ). However, it did not predict achievement in Math, Science or Language Arts. These significant interactions demonstrate that as the level of parental involvement increased so did academic achievement in Social Studies and Language Arts.

The correlation analysis established that there was a significant relationship between parental level of education and academic achievement in Social Studies ( $r[48] = .266, p \leq 0.05$ ) and also in Language Arts ( $r[48] = .319, p \leq 0.05$ ). Parents who have higher levels of education tend to have adolescents with higher levels of academic achievement in Social Studies and Language Arts. The common factor between Social Studies and Language Arts is reading and writing. The significant correlations between parental involvement in homework and academic achievement in Language Arts and Social Studies and also parental level of education and academic achievement in Social Studies and Language Arts suggest that parental involvement in homework and parental level of education are associated with students' reading and writing achievement. One possible explanation for these findings is that parents with higher levels of education have advanced reading and writing skills, and because they are involved in their

child's homework, pass their knowledge in this area onto their children. Another explanation of the results of the correlation analysis could be that parents do not have the knowledge or expertise to assist their children with Mathematics or Science homework.

The analysis also revealed strong significant correlations between the four core subject areas. There was a significant relationship between Math grades and Science grades ( $r[48] = .728, p \leq 0.05$ ), Math grades and Language Arts grades ( $r[48] = .741, p \leq 0.05$ ), Math grades and Social Studies grades ( $r[48] = .656, p \leq 0.05$ ), Language Arts grades and Science grades ( $r[48] = .640, p \leq 0.05$ ), Language Arts grades and Social Studies grades ( $r[48] = .754, p \leq 0.05$ ), and Science grades and Social Studies grades ( $r[48] = .715, p \leq 0.05$ ). These findings demonstrate that students that did well in one subject area also did well in the other three subject areas, conversely students who did poorly in one subject area also did poorly in the other three subject areas. This data suggests that the differences in grades across subject areas is based on student factors in this study, such as ability, rather on teaching methods or styles.

TABLE 6  
Correlation between parental involvement and parental knowledge (n=48)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Environment							
2. Assistance	.594*						
3. Monitoring	.568*	.652*					
4. Strengths	.399*	.434*	.488*				
5. Weaknesses	.269*	.326*	.279*	.433*			
6. Knowledge	-.087	-.138	.242*	.597*	.460*		
7. Services	.027	-.017	-.045	.252*	.352*	.316*	

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed) \* $p \leq 0.05$

Further correlation tests were performed to determine a relationship between awareness of school services, students' strengths and weaknesses, and knowledge of student learning

standards. The results are shown in table 6. The test revealed that there was a significant relationship between parents who know their children's strengths and weaknesses and the three questions pertaining to parental involvement in homework. While the findings suggest that parents who consistently provide their child with a homework environment, assist with homework, and monitor homework believe they know their child's strengths and weaknesses, there were no statistically significant correlations between academic achievement and parents who believe they know the strengths and weaknesses of their children.

To gain a better understanding of the data provided from the parental involvement questionnaire, a cross tabulation analysis was conducted. The variables Math, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies were compared with each of the three homework questions. The findings of the cross tabulation analysis are presented in the following section's contingency tables.

#### *Cross Tabulation*

For each subject, Math, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies, students' grades were compared to participants' answers to the three parental involvement in homework questions. The homework questions from the survey were developed based on parental involvement behaviors including: homework environment, parental assistance with homework, and parental monitoring of homework. The results of the cross tabulation demonstrate that parental involvement in homework and academic achievement are jointly distributed. Table 7 represents the cross tabulation between student academic achievement in Math and parents' responses to the three homework questions.

TABLE 7  
Cross tabulation Math grades and homework (n=48)

	<i>Math Grade</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Most of the Time</i>	<i>Always</i>
Environment	A	4.8 %	28.6 %	14.3 %	52.4 %
	B	0	10.5 %	42.1 %	47.4 %
	C	0	20.0%	40.0 %	40.0 %
	D	33.3 %	0	66.7 %	0
Assistance	A	4.8 %	42.9 %	19.0 %	33.3 %
	B	0	36.8 %	42.1 %	21.1 %
	C	0	0	60.0 %	40.0 %
	D	2.1 %	66.7 %	33.3 %	0
Monitoring	A	14.3 %	23.8 %	19.0 %	42.9 %
	B	0	31.6 %	47.4 %	21.1 %
	C	0	20.0 %	40.0 %	40.0 %
	D	33.3 %	33.3 %	33.3 %	0

The representation of data in Table 7 shows that 52 percent of participants whose children received an A in Math always established a time and place for the completion of homework. One third of participants whose children earned an A in Math always assisted with homework. In comparison, none of participants whose children received a D in Math provided a homework environment, assistance with homework, or monitored homework on a daily basis. Two thirds of the respondents whose children received a D in Math claimed that the either sometimes or never assisted with homework or monitored homework. The data suggests that students whose parents/ guardians do not assist with homework or monitor homework have lower academic achievement. However, there were no more than three students that received a D in any subject. Because this number is less than 10 the conclusions derived from the data of this study may not be generalizable across different populations.

Tables 8, 9, and 10 show student academic achievement in Science, Language Arts and Social Studies compared to parents' responses on the homework questions. The cross tabulation results for Science, Language Arts and Social Studies demonstrated similar outcomes.

TABLE 8  
Cross tabulation Science grades and homework (n=48)

	<i>Science Grade</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Most of the Time</i>	<i>Always</i>
Environment	A	4.3 %	17.4 %	21.7 %	56.5 %
	B	0	33.3 %	25.0 %	41.7 %
	C	0	0	60.0 %	40.0 %
	D	33.3 %	33.3 %	33.3 %	0
Assistance	A	4.3 %	34.8 %	30.4 %	30.4 %
	B	0	58.3 %	25.0 %	16.7 %
	C	0	20.0 %	40.0 %	40.0 %
	D	0	33.3 %	66.7 %	0
Monitoring	A	8.7 %	26.1 %	30.4 %	34.8 %
	B	0	41.7 %	33.3 %	25.0 %
	C	0	20.0 %	40.0 %	40.0 %
	D	66.7 %	0	33.3 %	0

The cross tabulation of Science grades and parental involvement in homework shows that for students who had A's in Science, 56.5 percent of parents answered that they always provided a home environment for completing homework whereas, 33.3 percent of parents whose children had D's in Science said that they never provided this homework environment. Two thirds of participants whose child received a D in science said that they never monitored homework.

TABLE 9  
Cross tabulation Language Arts grades and homework (n=48)

	<i>Language Arts Grade</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Most of the Time</i>	<i>Always</i>
Environment	A	0	21.4 %	0	78.6 %
	B	0	20.0 %	44.0 %	32.0 %
	C	0	16.7%	50.0 %	33.0 %
	D	33.0 %	0	33.0 %	33.0 %
Assistance	A	0	35.7 %	21.4 %	42.9 %
	B	4.0 %	44.0 %	36.0 %	16.0 %
	C	0	16.7 %	50.0 %	33.3 %
	D	0	33.3 %	33.3 %	33.3 %
Monitoring	A	7.1 %	14.3 %	28.6 %	50.0 %
	B	8.0 %	40.0 %	32.0 %	20.0 %
	C	0	16.7 %	50.0 %	33.3 %
	D	33.3 %	0	33.3 %	33.3 %

The cross tabulation analysis between Language Arts grades and parental involvement in homework shows that students who earned A's in Language Arts, 78.6 percent of participants claimed that they always provided a homework environment, 42.9 percent said that they always assisted with homework, and 50.0 percent said that they always checked their child's homework agenda. 33.3 percent of participants whose children earned D's in Language Arts maintained that they never provided a homework environment and 33.3 percent answered that they never checked a homework agenda.

TABLE 10  
Cross tabulation Social Studies grades and homework (n=48)

<i>Social Studies Grade</i>		<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Most of the Time</i>	<i>Always</i>
Environment	A	3.8 %	19.2 %	23.1 %	53.8 %
	B	0	18.8 %	37.5 %	43.8 %
	C	20.0 %	20.0%	40.0 %	20.0 %
	D	0	0	100.0 %	0
Assistance	A	3.8 %	34.6 %	30.8 %	30.8 %
	B	0	43.8 %	31.3 %	25.0 %
	C	0	40.0 %	40.0 %	20.0 %
	D	0	0	100.0 %	0
Monitoring	A	7.7 %	19.2 %	34.6 %	38.5 %
	B	0	37.5 %	37.5 %	25.0 %
	C	40.0 %	40.0 %	0	20.0 %
	D	0	0	100.0 %	0

The data obtained from the cross tabulation between parental involvement in homework and academic achievement in Social Studies showed that 53.8 percent of parents always provided a time and place for the completion of homework, 30.8 percent always assisted with homework, and 38.5 percent answered that they always checked student homework agendas. Of the parents whose children received D's in Social Studies none consistently provided a homework environment, assisted with homework, or checked homework agendas. The information presented in the contingency tables illustrates the relationship between parental involvement in homework and student academic achievement based upon the grades in each subject area. For each subject, more than half of the students that received an A had parents who were *always* or *most of the time* involved with their homework.

### *Summary*

Chapter four presented the statistical analysis of the parental involvement questionnaire in regards to students' academic achievement. The frequency distribution tests showed that a

majority of the participants were mothers and that almost all participants had some form of a college education. The results of the frequency distribution also demonstrated that the majority of parents who participated in this study provide a homework environment, help with homework, and monitor home work *always* or *most of the time*. The frequency test showed that almost half of the participants did not know their child's academic strengths and weaknesses. The correlation test showed that daily providing a homework environment predicted Language Arts achievement. The correlation analysis established that there was a significant relationship between participants' level of education and the child's academic achievement in Social Studies and Language Arts. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis revealed that parents monitoring students homework predicted Social Studies achievement.

The final statistical test, the cross tabulation analysis, illustrated that parents who are involved in homework have students with high levels of academic achievement. The findings in this chapter support the hypothesis that parental involvement in homework and parental education level is correlated with academic achievement. The findings, implications, and limitations of this study will be examined and discussed in the next and final chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### *Summary of Results*

This Master's Research Project was based on the following two research questions:

1. How does the level of parental involvement in homework affect academic achievement in middle school students?
2. How does the level of parental education affect parental involvement in a child's homework?

Educators and policymakers have long believed that parental involvement in school is one way to improve academic achievement. Research has shown that in elementary school a home-school partnership is necessary and that parental involvement decreases as students move from elementary school to middle school. Unfortunately, there has been little research conducted in the middle level grades concerning parental involvement. This study adds to the knowledge on how parental involvement in homework affects academic achievement in eighth grade students. The method employed to carry out the research design was to relate the results of the homework questionnaire from a sample of parents/guardians on student academic achievement in the form of grades.

The results indicated parental involvement in homework affects student achievement in Social Studies and Language Arts. These findings support the work of Cooper et al. (2000) who have linked academic achievement to parental involvement in homework. The results suggest

that parental level of education also is significantly correlated with academic achievement in Social Studies and Language Arts. The statistical analyses clearly indicate that parental involvement in homework and parental level of education are predictors of academic achievement. The fact that multiple studies have come to the same conclusion adds to the validity of the research findings.

Within these main findings, some complexities emerged. The findings in this study suggest that parental involvement in homework and parental education level only predicted academic achievement in Language Arts and Social Studies, not in Mathematics or Science. This finding aligns with many studies conducted on parental involvement and improved literacy (Hawes & Plourde, 2005; Bergsten, 1998; Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins & Weiss 2006 ). The core standards of both Language Arts and Social Studies are reading, writing, and comprehension. Parents with higher levels of education may have advanced knowledge and skills in these areas and because they are involved with their child's homework the knowledge and skills will be passed on to the child. There were no significant correlations between parental involvement in homework and academic achievement in Science and Mathematics or between parental level of education and academic achievement in Science and Mathematics. These findings can be the result of parental inability to assist with homework in these two areas despite higher levels of education. Another explanation can be the decrease in parental involvement in school from elementary to middle school.

The findings suggest that parents must provide an educational home environment and monitor their child's homework, but not necessarily assist in the completion of homework to increase academic achievement. In this study parental assistance with homework was not found to statistically significant in any of the core subject areas. The causes for lack of parental

involvement in assisting with homework cannot be determined from the data collected in this study. A correlation test between parent's knowledge of their child's strengths and weaknesses and parental involvement in homework revealed a significant relationship. If parents/ guardians are aware of their child's specific strengths and weaknesses, they have a better understanding of how their child learns and can be more effectively involved in homework. While it is reasonable to assume that awareness of the child's strengths and weaknesses would also increase academic achievement, the findings in this study showed no statistically significant correlations. The findings extend the understanding of the relationship between parental involvement, parent education level, and academic achievement. Despite the significant findings of this study, there were some limitations.

### *Limitations*

Although the hypothesized results were confirmed, there were many limitations to this study that potentially could have influenced the findings. One limitation of this study is the fact that it is not a true experimental design with random assignments. Due to logistical barriers, including time constraints, his study was only conducted in one school and only with the cooperating teacher's students. A random sample was not used. Sample size is an important factor when conducting an experiment. The number of parents participating in the research was 48. The characteristics of this small sample size may not be representative of the population and the study may not be generalizable. Another limitation is that there was no control for effects of teachers, community, schools or parenting styles. The teaching methods and practices of the cooperating teacher may have had an influence in the response rate and the level of parental involvement. The type of community in which the school was located could also have influenced the findings. Students attending an inner city school and living in an urban area may be very

different than their suburban counter-parts. Parenting styles and parent-child relationships may also influence both parental involvement and academic achievement. Parents may not honestly report on the questionnaire by offering socially acceptable answers or answers that the teacher or researcher would want to hear.

Parental involvement is difficult to measure. Parents who are involved in their child's education are more likely to participate in research than those parents who are not involved. This is most likely a significant contributing factor in the low response rate. The average grades of student participants of the study ranged between 85 percent (B) and 91 percent (A). Many of the parents stated in their responses that they are involved in homework. The students who performed poorly in the four core subject areas were underrepresented in this research. It is also important to consider that homework itself could be a contributing factor in parental involvement in home education. The amount and type of homework may discourage parental involvement and students' willingness to complete assignments. Another limitation of the current research is the type of analysis conducted. A correlation does not demonstrate causation and the researcher cannot draw cause and effect conclusions based on correlation. More research is needed to better understand implications of parental involvement in homework and parent education level on academic achievement.

### *Conclusion*

The results of the current study support the idea that parental involvement in homework is a means for improving academic achievement in middle school students. The findings of this study provide an insight into the benefits of parental involvement in homework. Schools need to create an educational environment that increases involvement during the middle level years. The school should not only reach out to families to increase parental involvement, but also help

families overcome barriers that prevent involvement. A home-school partnership is crucial for student success. Schools should offer educational opportunities for parents that provide information on the benefits of being involved in their child's education. Implementing school programs based on increasing and encouraging parental involvement would improve academic achievement. Based on the findings of this research, parental involvement in homework, specifically Language Arts and Social Studies, is linked to academic achievement in middle school students. The results of this study extend previous empirical research on parental involvement and its effect on academic achievement.

### *Recommendations*

Further research is needed to explore the effects of parental involvement in homework. There is an extensive amount of research concerning parental involvement in early childhood education. Because little research on parental involvement has been conducted with middle level students, future research should focus on students during these transition years. Future research should also include a larger sample size with a more diverse population. A larger sample size would yield more generalizable results. It would be interesting to compare data from multiple school locations; for example, the differences between inner city school students and students who attend suburban or rural schools. Future research can also incorporate more than one perspective by including a questionnaire for students and teachers to answer questions concerning parental involvement with homework. Contributing factors such as family income and parental occupation can be included to extend the data on socio-economic status and its role in parental involvement and academic achievement. Future research can also explore different parenting styles, practices, attitudes, and beliefs. Examining different factors that contribute to

academic achievement and parental involvement will provide a more extensive understanding of student learning. Determining the factors of student success will provide educators, policy makers, and parents with crucial data for developing and implementing student, school, and community programs that strive to enhance learning.

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## APPENDIX A

## Parental Involvement Questionnaire

## DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Relationship to Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Grade Level:

 7th grade 8th grade**Number of Children in Home** 1 2 3 4 5+**Parent/ Guardian Education Level** Did Not Complete High School High School Graduate or General Education Development Test (GED) High School Plus College Courses Two Year Degree (Associates) Four Year Degree (Bachelors) Four Year Degree Plus**Homework**

1. Last school year how often did you set aside a time and place in your home for your child to complete his/her homework?

 Always Most of the Time Sometimes  Never

2. Last school year how often did you help your child with his/her homework?

 Always Most of the Time Sometimes  Never

3. Last school year how often did you check your child's homework agenda?

 Always Most of the Time Sometimes  Never

4. Last school year would you consider yourself generally knowledgeable about what your child should learn in his/her core subject areas? (Math, Social Studies, Language Arts, and Science)

Yes

No

5. Do you know what your child's strengths were last year in each of the four core subject areas?

Yes

No

If yes, please list your child's major strength last year for each of the core subject areas:

Math \_\_\_\_\_

Language Arts \_\_\_\_\_

Science \_\_\_\_\_

Social Studies \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you know what your child's weaknesses were last year in each of the four core subject areas?

Yes

No

If yes, please list your child's major weakness last year for each of the core subject areas:

Math \_\_\_\_\_

Language Arts \_\_\_\_\_

Science \_\_\_\_\_

Social Studies \_\_\_\_\_

7. Last school year did your child's school provide any of these extra services? Please check each box as appropriate.

- Speech therapy
- Counseling
- Tutoring
- Gifted Services
- English as a Second Language resources (ESL)
- Alternative education
- Special Education/ Intervention

8. Do you know how to access these extra services if your child were to need them?

Yes

No

## APPENDIX B

### Ohio University Research Consent Form

Title of Research: How does parental involvement affect middle school student achievement?

Researchers: Abbigail Maye Mansfield

I am requesting to conduct research in your school. This form is given to you in order for you to understand what the study is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how personal information will be used and protected. Once you (the assistant superintendent) have read this informed consent and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow the researcher to conduct research within the school district. You should receive a copy of this document.

#### **Explanation of Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between parental involvement (e.g. helping with a child's homework, spending time with a child, and involvement in school activities and decisions) and academic achievement measured by core subject area (math, science, social studies, and language arts) grades. The study sample will include students currently enrolled in grades seven and eight. The participating parents in this study will be asked to complete a questionnaire that has items regarding their involvement in their child's education. Students' grades will also need to be accessed in order to complete this study. Permission to release the final academic grades for students' previous year of school will be included in the informed consent and questionnaire sent home to parents. The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes for the parents to complete.

#### **Risks and Discomforts**

There are no risks or discomfort anticipated from participating in this study.

#### **Benefits**

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study. This study is of a research nature. The data provided in the questionnaire may advance the participants knowledge on the topics of this study and will help Abbigail Mansfield complete her Master's Research Project for her Masters degree in Middle Childhood Education.

#### **Confidentiality and Records**

The participants' identity will not be revealed in any report, paper, presentation, or any public discussion of this study, published or unpublished. The participant's responses to the questionnaire will be kept confidential although complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Student's grades will also be kept confidential although complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

\* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;

\* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

#### Compensation

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

#### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact

Abbigail Mansfield at 740-281-0967 or ab244205@ohio.edu or her academic advisor, Dr. Frans Doppen at 740-593-0254 or doppen@ohio.edu

If you have any questions regarding the rights of a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions
- known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol
- you are 18 years of age or older
- you are voluntarily allowing research to be conducted at your school
- you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: How do parental involvement and school readiness affect middle school student achievement?

Researcher: Abbigail Maye Mansfield

Dear Parent,

You are being asked to participate in a research project. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow for your participation in this study. You will receive a copy of this document.

#### **Explanation of Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between parental involvement (e.g. helping with a child's homework and involvement in school activities and decisions), and academic achievement measured by core subject area (math, science, social studies, and language arts) grades. You will be asked to complete a questionnaire that includes questions about your interactions with your child relating to school work. Your child's grades for the previous school year will also be accessed to complete the study. The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

#### **Risks and Discomforts**

There are no known risks anticipated from participating in this study. However you may feel some level of discomfort when answering questions pertaining to your parenting practices.

#### **Benefits**

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study. This study is designed to help me complete my Master's Research Project for my Master's degree in Middle Childhood Education. The data provided in the questionnaire may advance your knowledge in the areas of parental involvement in your child's education and their academic achievement. The findings of this research may also be beneficial not only to the Reynoldsburg City School District, but other educational institutions. The results could be utilized to develop school programs associated with parental involvement in school activities, decisions and homework. Programs such as these could be implemented to bridge the gap between home and school while improving student's academic achievement. This could be beneficial to students, parents, and educators.

#### **Confidentiality and Records**

The participants' identity will not be revealed in any report, paper, presentation, or any public discussion of this study, published or unpublished. The participant's responses to the questionnaire will be kept confidential although complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

\* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;

\* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

### **Compensation**

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact

Abigail Mansfield at 740-281-0967 or ab244205@ohio.edu or her academic advisor, Dr. Frans Doppen at 740-593-0254 or doppens@ohio.edu

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions
- known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is given voluntarily
- you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.
- you are allowing the school to release your child's overall grades in the four core subject areas from the previous school year, which will be identified only by student identification number

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_