

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Parent Involvement and Children's Academic and Social Development in Elementary School

El Nokali, N. E., Bachman, H. J., & Votruba-Drzal, E. (2010). Parent involvement and children's academic and social development in elementary school. *Child Development*, 81(3), 988-1005. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01447.x

SUMMARY: Children, their families, and teachers completed measures at pre-kindergarten and grades one, three, and five to consider the benefits of parental involvement for the academic and social development of children. Higher parent involvement promotes better social skills and fewer problem behaviors in middle childhood, but is unrelated to average achievement across elementary school. Between-child variation in the average level of parent involvement was generally not predictive of growth in achievement and socio-emotional functioning across elementary school.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Greater engagement in a variety of parental involvement practices was largely unrelated to academic achievement. Improvements in parental involvement did not predict gains in any of the standardized achievement measures (math, reading, and vocabulary).
- Increases in parents' involvement over time were related to increases in children's social skills and declines in problem behaviors (based on both teacher and parent reports).
- Increase in parent involvement over time for children was associated with related improvements in teacher-reported social skills.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with other professionals in the field about ways to support military families promote academic and social outcomes for their children
- Facilitate support groups for military parents with children who are having behavioral issues to increase kinship and support among these families

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes for military parents that provide training for how to increase children's social skills and decrease behavior problems
- Provide courses for military parents that provide specific examples of ways in which they can be involved in their children's schooling, even in the context of a busy military career

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend that Service members be supported in their efforts to be involved in their children's school activities, which may involve some flexibility in work schedule
- Recommend professional training for military family program workers in effective means of fostering social skill development among military children

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METHODS

- Data from a nationally representative longitudinal sample from birth to fifth grade students was used.
- In first, third, and fifth grades, parents and teachers were asked about parental involvement and socioemotional development of the children.
- In pre-kindergarten, first, third, and fifth grades, children were given tests of academic achievement.

PARTICIPANTS

- One thousand one hundred thirty-three children and their families and teachers participated.
- As this was part of a larger nationally representative longitudinal study, additional demographic data for the final sample was not presented.
- Mothers who were younger than 18 years at the time of the participating child's birth were excluded.

LIMITATIONS

- No demographic data for the final sample was presented; therefore, it is difficult to determine generalizability.
- There were several instances when the parent and teacher reports contradicted one another, making it difficult to understand some of the smaller findings.
- Parental military status was not assessed limiting the generalizability of results to military parents who may have access to additional programs and supports.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Assess whether gains in social skills and declines in problem behaviors are associated with improvement on academic performance and behavior in the future
- Isolate parent involvement efforts to identify the impact of those elements independently
- Conduct a similar study with a military sample to explore how military status influences parent involvement and child outcomes

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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