

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Parental Involvement and African American and European American Adolescents' Academic, Behavioral, and Emotional Development in Secondary School

Wang, M.-T., Hill, N. E., & Hofkens, T. (2014). Parental involvement and African American and European American adolescents' academic, behavioral, and emotional development in secondary school. *Child Development, 85*(6), 2151-2168. doi:10.1111/cdev.12284

**SUMMARY:** Adolescents experience multiple changes throughout secondary school in academic performance, behavior, and emotion, and it is important for parents to adapt their parental involvement accordingly. The associations between parental involvement and adolescent outcomes were examined at 7th, 9th, and 11th grades. Results revealed that different aspects of parental involvement associated differently with adolescent outcomes, and parental warmth played an important role in the relationship.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Increases in parental involvement were associated with increased grade point average (GPA), and decreased problem behaviors and depressive symptoms.
- From 7th grade to 11th grade, communication between parents and schools declined, but parents were more likely to scaffold independence, provide home structure, and link education to children's future success.
- More home structure was related to better adolescent performance only when parental warmth was high.
- Compared to White parents, Black parents were more likely to provide structure at home and link students' educational pursuit to their future success, and less likely to scaffold independence.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Educate military parents about their adolescents' needs at different stages, and teach them parenting strategies for each stage
- Encourage communication between teachers and military parents

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Help military parents develop parenting skills that adapt to adolescents' development
- Offer family activities for military parents and their adolescents to enjoy time together

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend routine and effective communications between schools and military parents
- Promote parent education programs that help military parents adjust their parental involvement according to their adolescents' needs

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited from 23 public schools in Maryland through letters to 7th graders' families.
- Each participant was assessed in Wave 1 (7th grade), Wave 2 (9th grade), and Wave 3 (11th grade); the retention rates at Waves 2 and 3 were 85% and 78%, respectively.
- Data were collected through questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and school records, and included information such as GPA, problem behaviors, depressive symptoms, parental involvement in education, and parental warmth.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 1,452 (51% female) adolescents who were assessed at Waves 1, 2 and 3; their average ages at the three waves were 12.9, 14.3, and 17.2 years, respectively.
- Most of the participants were Black (56%), followed by White (39%), and other ethnic minorities (5%).
- The socioeconomic distribution was comparable for the Black and White participants.

## LIMITATIONS

- The study solely focused on Black and White families, so the results may not apply to other racial or ethnic groups.
- The sample was recruited from a single county in Maryland that is not diverse in socioeconomic status, therefore the findings cannot be generalized to the overall population.
- Although the study examined the trajectory of parental involvement through secondary school, the mechanism of such changes was not specified, therefore it is unclear why the changes happen.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit families from other races and ethnicities to understand how they are similar or different from White or Black families
- Recruit participants from several different geographical areas to increase the diversity of the sample
- Examine the underlying mechanism of the changes in parental involvement over time, and develop strategies for effective parenting

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:  
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>