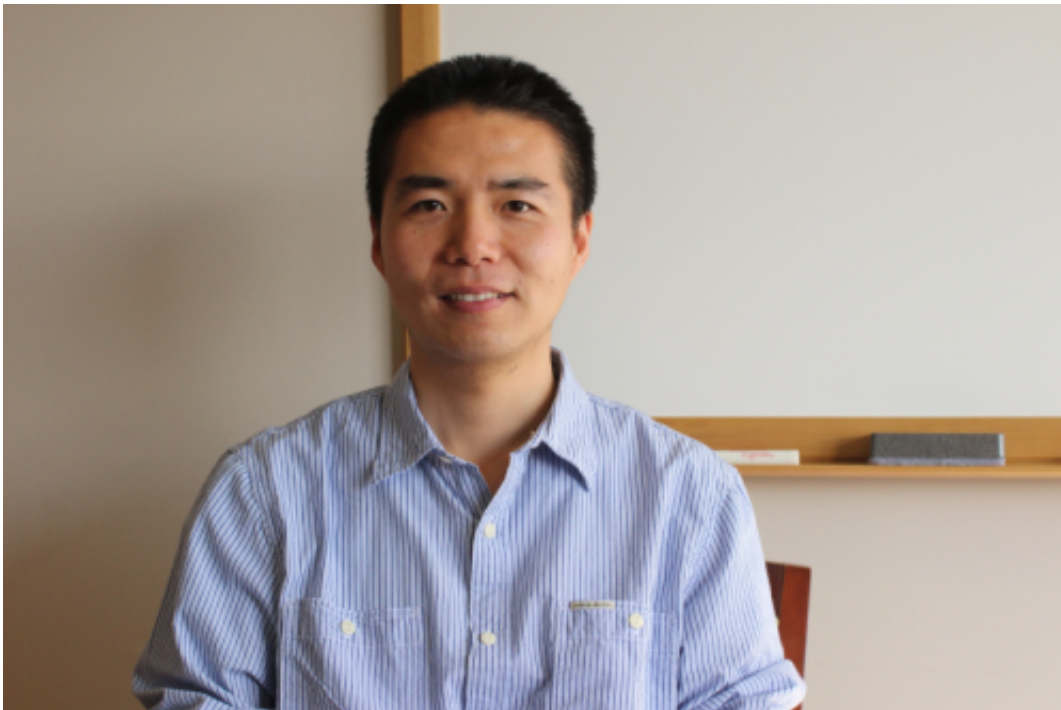


Parental involvement still essential in secondary school

November 20 2014, by Anthony Moore



Ming-Te Wang

Although students become more independent as they rise through grade levels and parent-teacher interactions typically lessen as students age, parental involvement in a child's education during the secondary school years plays an essential role in developing positive academic, behavioral, and emotional outcomes. Relations between parents and teachers are among the factors that can affect a student's success and well-being.

These are the findings of a study by the University of Pittsburgh's Ming-Te Wang, which was published today in the November/December issue of *Child Development*. Parental engagement has been widely recognized as important in the [elementary school](#) years, but up until now it has been unclear if parental involvement was as significant in secondary school, Wang said.

"Our research has found that quality parental involvement is not as simple as more is better or less is more at any one point in a child's life. It is far more complex than that, and there are many variables that go into how [parents](#) interact with their children over time," said Wang, an assistant professor of psychology in education in Pitt's School of Education. "The key findings here are that parents should always be involved, but they need to give great thought as to how they are involved and the manner in which they stay involved as the child ages."

The study was composed of more than 1,400 families in the Eastern United States. Researchers utilized questionnaires and interviews to gather information from a selection of teenagers in the 7th, 9th, and 11th grades and their parents. African Americans comprised 56 percent of participants while European Americans made up 39 percent.

Wang's research team assessed the impacts of five types of parental involvement on academic, behavioral, and mental health outcomes. The parental involvement types they assessed were: 1) the frequency of communication between parents and teachers, 2) the quality of communication between parents and teachers, 3) the extent to which parents encouraged children to figure out their own solutions to homework, 4) the structure parents established at home in the form of schedules and guidelines for studying, and 5) the extent to which parents discussed with their children the importance of education in future success.

Key study findings include:

- **Academics:** all five types of parental involvement were associated with improvements in GPA from 7th to 11th grade. Additionally, the findings showed that high levels of parental structure in the home were particularly beneficial for African Americans and students from low-income families.
- **Behavior:** the frequency of parent-teacher communication, home structure, and linking education with future success were associated with decreased overall problem behaviors for adolescents.
- **Emotional Outcomes:** lower depressive symptoms in adolescents were linked with the quality of communication between parents and teachers, the extent to which parents challenged students to figure out their own solutions to homework, and the linking of education to future success. Also, the level of parental warmth within the home played a significant role in developing emotional well-being across all races and socioeconomic backgrounds.

"Our findings highlight the importance of adapting the level and nature of [parental involvement](#) in education to adolescents' changing psychological needs," said Wang, who also holds a joint appointment in the Department of Psychology in Pitt's Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences and serves as a research scientist in Pitt's Learning Research and Development Center. "What worked in elementary school may not work in secondary school, and what works for adolescents in [secondary school](#) depends on what outcome is of interest or in need of attention. These results pave the way for developing targeted interventions and for providing strategic support to families and their adolescents."

More information: "Parental Involvement and African American and

European American Adolescents' Academic, Behavioral, and Emotional Development in Secondary School." *Child Development*, 85: 2151–2168. doi: 10.1111/cdev.12284

Provided by University of Pittsburgh

Citation: Parental involvement still essential in secondary school (2014, November 20) retrieved 19 April 2024 from

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