

The Center for Successful Fathering

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NATIONAL STUDY LINKS FATHER'S INVOLVEMENT TO GETTING A'S IN SCHOOL

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According to a new national study, children do better in school when their fathers are involved in their schools, whether their fathers live with them or their mothers are also involved.

"This study provides hard evidence about the powerful and positive influence that parents can have as full and equal partners when they make the commitment to help their children get a good education," Vice President Gore said. "Fathers matter a great deal when it comes to helping their children succeed in school and this study should encourage millions of American fathers to step up to the plate and make a difference in their children's education."

According to the study, fathers can be a positive force in their children's education, and when they do get involved, their children are more likely to get mostly A's in school. The study also shows that fathers in two parent families are less likely than mothers to be very involved in their children's schools. In two parent families, the report indicates, the proportion of children with highly involved fathers is about half the proportion of those with highly involved mothers (27 percent and 56 percent, respectively).

"This study tells me that if America's Dads got as involved as America's Moms in their children's education, America's children would be studying harder and getting a lot more A's," said U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley. "Dads make a powerful difference in defining expectations and challenging children to do their best."

Overall, children in two parent families where the father is highly involved get better grades, enjoy school more and are less likely to repeat a grade, compared with those in which only mothers are highly involved.

The findings come from a new report, *Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools*, which provides data from the National Center for Education Statistics' 1996 National Household Education Survey of the parents of 16,910 kindergartners through 12th graders. The report emphasizes fathers' involvement in their children's schools, but information on mothers' involvement is also included.

According to the study, mothers and fathers are more likely to be highly involved in their children's schools if the schools welcome parental involvement and make it easy for parents to be involved. Parental involvement is also higher if classroom and school discipline are maintained and if teachers and students respect one another.

Fathers in single parent families have a powerful role to play in keeping their children out of trouble and on the right track. The study shows their school involvement reduces the likelihood of their children's suspension or expulsion. In two parent families, mothers' involvement reduces the likelihood that their children will be suspended or expelled.

"Highly involved fathers and mothers almost double the odds of good things happening in their children's education," said Riley. "This is why I urge America's schools to redouble their current efforts to reach out to mothers and fathers."

The study shows that fathers of more than half of the K-12 children participate at their children's school at a moderate (two activities per year) or high (three or more activities per year) level. The study also found that:

- Children who live in two parent families are more likely to get mostly A's, regardless of the level of the mothers' involvement. Children who live in single parent families headed by fathers are twice as likely to get mostly A's if their fathers are highly involved at school, compared with those whose fathers have little (none or only one school activity) involvement.
- While non custodial fathers are less likely (only 31 percent participate in any school activity) to participate at school than custodial fathers, when they are involved, they make a difference, particularly for children in grades six and above. Their children are much more likely to get A's, enjoy school, participate in extracurricular activities and are less likely to repeat a grade.
- In single parent families, children living with single fathers or single mothers are about equally likely to have highly involved parents, 46 percent and 49 percent respectively. When fathers have primary responsibility for raising their children, they are almost as involved in school activities as mothers in either two or single parent families. And the involvement of single parents -- both mothers and fathers -- is similar to that of mothers in two parent families.
- Families with high parental involvement in their children's schools are more likely to visit a library, museum or historical site with their children, and are more likely to have high educational expectations for their children.

The survey is one of the first bodies of research that looks at the individual contributions of mothers and fathers in their children's education. Fathers have in the past been overlooked in research, but in 1995 President Clinton asked all executive departments to include fathers in their programs, policies and research, where possible. The report is based on interviews with the parents of nearly 17,000 kindergartners through 12th graders. The study controlled for other factors that have been associated with a child's school success such as race and ethnicity, parents' education and family income.

Parents were asked which adult in the household had participated in four types of school activities since the beginning of the school year: attending a general school meeting; attending a regularly scheduled parent teacher conference; attending a school or class event; and volunteering at the school.

The report is available via the Internet at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs>