

## The Impact of Parent Expectations and Home and Neighborhood Influences on Education Goals

“Less than half of parents with annual incomes of less than \$30,000 expect their child will attain a four-year-college degree, compared with nearly eight in ten parents with incomes over \$75,000.”

“Expectations parents have for their children’s school attainment influence their children’s expectations and achievement, and early expectations tend to persist throughout the child’s school years.”

Child Trends (2015)

Schools and parents want children to do well in school and thrive. At the same time, schools are called upon to establish and maintain high expectations for students. Few parents would not agree with this. Problems arise when students feel unduely pressured to meet expectations.

Considerable research has focused on the impact of parent expectations. Much of the early research focused on European American, middle-class families. A 2010 review by Yamamoto and Holloway broadened the focus. Their review highlighted that “the relation of parental expectations to concurrent or future student achievement outcomes is weaker for racial/ethnic minority families than for European American families.” A 2016 report from Ireland extends the discussion to parents of children with disabilities and emphasizes the need to provide the parents support that promotes education and employment as real options (Banks, Maître, McCoy, & Watson, 2016).

### Child Trend’s 2015 Brief Summary on Parental Expectations for Their Children’s Academic Attainment

“Expectations parents have for their children’s school attainment influence their children’s expectations and achievement, and early expectations tend to persist throughout the child’s school years (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2005). Research has shown that parental expectations for children’s academic achievement predict educational outcomes more than do other measures of parental involvement, such as attending school events (Fan, 2001; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Redd, Guzman, Lippman, Scott, & Matthews, 2004).

Parents’ expectations influence child outcomes through multiple pathways. Parental expectations are more likely to affect their children when parent-child relationships are characterized by closeness and warmth (Moore, Whitney, & Kinukawa, 2009). Parental expectations directly affect the amount of parent-child communication about school (Singh Bickley, Keith, Keith, Trivette, & Anderson, 1995). In addition, families with high educational aspirations for their children provide more out-of-school learning opportunities for them (Catsambis & Garland, 1997; Entwisle, et al., 2005). Students who reported their parents expected them to attend college had better attendance and more positive attitudes toward school, according to one study (Astone & McLanahan, 1991). Parental expectations also affect the child’s own aspirations and expectations; for instance, studies suggest that parents’ expectations for their children’s academic attainment have a moderate to strong influence on students’ own goals for postsecondary education. Further, both sets of expectations are moderated by characteristics of the parent, child, and community (gender, race, economic differences, immigrant status, grade level, current performance at school, and number of activities parents and child share) (Redd, Guzman, et al. 2004; Lippman, Guzman, Dombrowski Keith, Kinukawa, Schwalb, & Tice, 2008).”

\*The material in this document reflects work done by Orly Termeie as part of her involvement with the national Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. The center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor in the Dept. of Psychology, UCLA, Website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> Send comments to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)

***Expectations are realistic beliefs or judgments about future events. These can be contrasted to aspirations which are desires, wishes, or goals.***

As the focus of research on parent expectations about a student's educational future broadens, so do the explanations of factors shaping such expectations. For example, besides social, cultural, and personal factors, one of the most potent influences is a student's actual school performance over time. Of course, as Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) stress, other factors may moderate positive expectations. These include belief that effort rather than ability affects school performance, a lack of understanding or mistrust of feedback from the school about a student's performance, and indications of inadequate support for the student's future. Yamamoto and Holloway also emphasize that "expectations influence student's academic outcomes through a variety of mechanisms, some of which are more powerful for a particular racial/ethnic group." With respect to parental expectations, they outline four such mechanisms: (a) child's internalization of parents' valuation of achievement, (b) child's higher competency beliefs, (c) more intensive and effective parental involvement, and (d) more optimistic and positive teacher perceptions of child's capabilities.

Clearly, what parents do is important. But it is important to remember that there is an inherent bias in emphasizing the impact of the role of *parenting*.

To counter the bias, researchers need to clarify the impact of the experiences of youngsters who grow up in situations where parents are not the primary caretakers or main influences on their development. This includes those who are being raised by grandparents, older siblings, and other relatives; those whose care is left mainly to surrogates such as neighbors, nannies, daycare staff; those in foster care; those who are homeless; those who spend most of their time with siblings and peers. More research on children growing up in such circumstances will help shed greater light on the moderators and mechanisms that influence the development of a youngster's attitudes about learning and schooling.

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### **A Few Studies on Parental Pressure**

Orly Termeie, the undergraduate student who worked on reviewing research for this information resource, brought a personal concern to her review. As she noted:

*"Both of my sisters were doctors by the time I was fourteen. My oldest sister became a doctor when I was eight years old. Thus, growing up I had a lot of pressure placed on me. While this did make me work hard, it also has led to a lot of stress to be a high performer like my siblings."*

Because of her experiences, Orly was particularly interested in studies of the effects parental pressure on their children. Here are a few of the studies she found of particular interest:

>Eskilson, Wiley, Muehlbauer, and Dodder (1986) asked a sample of adolescents from an affluent community about parental pressure. They found that such pressure was strongly associated with lower self-esteem, self-reports of deviant activity, and feelings that they could fulfill the goals set for them.

>A study by Chen, Dong, and Zhou (1997) examined "the relations between authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles and social and school adjustment in Chinese children. A sample of second grade children, aged eight years, and their parents in Beijing, People's Republic of China, participated in this study. The children were group administered a peer assessment measure of social behaviour and a sociometric nomination measure. Teachers completed a rating scale on school-related social competence and problems for each child. Data concerning child-rearing practices were obtained from parents. In addition, information on children's academic and social competence was obtained from school records. It was found that authoritarian parenting was associated positively with aggression and negatively

with peer acceptance, sociability- competence, distinguished studentship and school academic achievement. In contrast, parental authoritative style was associated positively with indices of social and school adjustment and negatively with adjustment problems.”

>In their research review, Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) stress that parental pressure was correlated with achievement in European American students, but not for Hispanic, African American, or Asian families.

>In a recent study, Randall, Bohnert, and Travers (2015) also focused on how perceived parental pressure affected affluent youth and how they cope and deal with high expectations. They report that “adolescents with more perfectionistic parents perceived more parental pressure and experienced poorer adjustment. Results also demonstrated that affluent adolescents who perceived more parental pressure were more intensely involved in organized activities, but that higher organized activity intensity was linked to better adjustment.” The researchers suggest that the students that felt more pressure joined more extracurricular activities for extrinsic "resume building" rather than for intrinsic reasons. Nevertheless, the organized activities were seen as decreasing anxiety and stress levels. Activities served as a type of "refuge" and allowed for time with peers. The investigators conclude that their findings “highlight the importance of considering parental perfectionism when understanding adolescent behaviors and psychological outcomes, confirm the negative direct effects of parental pressure on adjustment, and corroborate prior research dispelling that highly intense organized activity involvement is linked to adolescent maladjustment.”

Based on her literature review, Orly concluded that research indicates that appropriate parental pressure and expectations can make a child work harder; however, undue parental pressure and excessively high expectations can inhibit a youngster’s development of confidence and a sense of self and lead to poor outcomes at school. She was impressed with findings that stresses that authoritative, in contrast to authoritarian, parenting leads to better grades and academic achievement.

Her final comments to us about parental pressure:

“It is clear that children should be motivated by their guardians to work hard in school; however there should be a limit. Parents should not become overbearing. At home, kids need to feel that they are able to work hard, but also take a breather from all the stress of school. It was highlighted that authoritative parenting yields the best results. This is because parents enforce rules and have expectations, while also supporting their children. Students who have this type of balance in their lives, will have lower symptoms of depression, and are happier.”

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For links to related resources, see the Center's online clearinghouse Quick Finds on:

>Parent/Home Involvement and Engagement in Schools  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/homework.htm>

>Parenting Skills and Parenting Education  
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2103\\_02.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2103_02.htm)