

# Brazilian Parents' Involvement In Education Supports Their Children's Dedication To Schoolwork and Math and Reading Achievement

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## INTRODUCTION

Decades of research from the United States and other high-income countries has demonstrated that parents' involvement in their children's education positively impacts student academic achievement. However, it is not clear if these findings generalize to a middle income country such as Brazil. Brazil is a large, racially diverse, and highly unequal country with lower education levels and fewer resources to invest in children. Indeed, only half of Brazilian adults have completed high school and the median annual income in Brazil is less than US\$6,500.

On the other hand, Brazilian parents might encourage children's schooling because Brazilians benefit from some of the highest returns to education in the world. For example, a high school graduate earns twice as much, and a college graduate earns five times as much, as someone with no formal education in Brazil. Achieving a high school diploma or higher degree is therefore central to children's future earnings and a higher standard of living in adulthood.

When parents are involved in their children's education, it can inspire children to value their education and motivate them to succeed academically. But children's achievement ultimately depends on the effort and attention they devote to their lessons and homework. Parents can support their children's achievement indirectly by encouraging them to complete their homework.

Using data from over four million fifth- and ninth-grade students enrolled in public schools across Brazil in 2017, this brief reports on a recent study [1] in which the authors examined whether parents' involvement in education predicts children's academic achievement. They examined whether parent involvement directly supported children's reading and math achievement; whether any such links worked indirectly through children's completion of reading or math homework; whether there were any differences between the fifth and ninth graders; and whether there were any differences across parents' years of education.

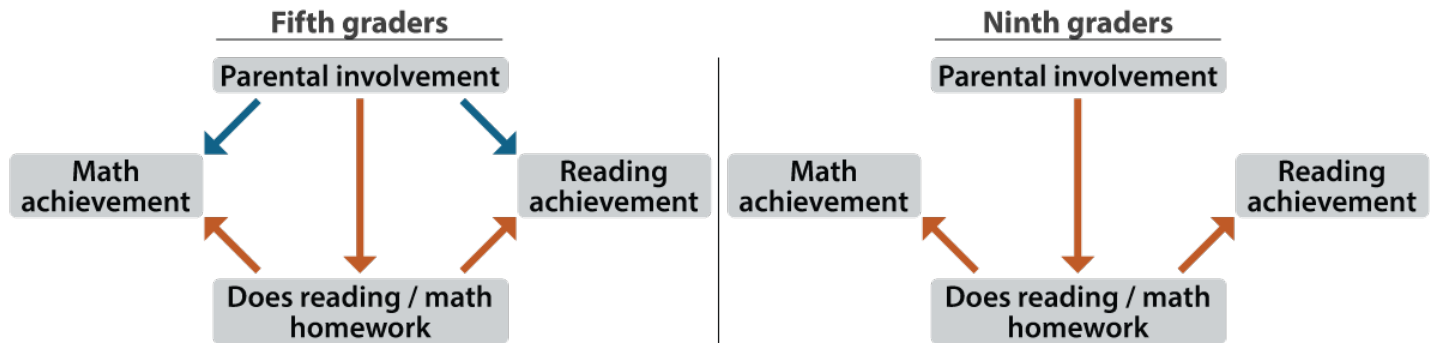
To better isolate the role of parent involvement in student achievement, the authors accounted for other important background characteristics that have been found to predict student achievement. These included student characteristics, such as their gender, race, and history of dropout and school return; household characteristics (an index of household resources, which is an approximate measure of household income); and school characteristics, such as the percentage of teachers with adequate credentials, and the average socioeconomic status of students in the school.

## KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ **Parent involvement was indirectly linked to student achievement through students' completion of homework.** In other words, the more parents were involved in their children's schooling, the more fifth and ninth graders completed their homework. This higher homework completion, in turn, was associated with students' higher academic achievement. See *figure*.
- ▶ **Parent involvement was directly associated with higher levels of fifth graders' reading and math achievement.** No direct association was found between parent involvement and achievement for ninth graders. See *figure*.
- ▶ **Parents at every level of formal education supported their children's academic achievement.** Parents with more education engaged in more behaviors that encouraged schooling. But even parents with fewer than five years of schooling supported their children's academic achievement when they were involved in their education.

## Brazilian parents' involvement in education **indirectly supported** children's math and reading achievement through their children doing more homework

Involvement also **directly supported** fifth graders' achievement



Findings from statistical analyses of over 4 million Brazilian fifth and ninth graders. To better isolate the role of parent involvement in student achievement, all analyses accounted for student, household and school characteristics.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Parents' involvement in education appears to support their children's dedication to their schoolwork and improve math and reading achievement. The everyday parenting behaviors studied here – such as parents encouraging their children to complete their homework and not miss classes – are available even to families with few resources and predict achievement even for parents with few years of schooling. Interventions and outreach programs should therefore target all parents, including those with limited formal schooling. Given high inequality and high returns to education in Brazil, encouraging parents to involve themselves in their children's education could pay large dividends for children's long-term academic and career success.

### REFERENCE

[1] Koepf, A.E., Gershoff, E.T., & Marteleto, L.J. (2022). Parent involvement and children's academic achievement: Evidence from a census of public school students in Brazil. *Child Development* 93:1744–1759. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13816>

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