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INTERPARENTAL CONFLICT AND THE MEDIATING EFFECTS OF SCHOOL RELATED  
PARENT INVOLVMENT ON ADOLESCENT ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

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## **ABSTRACT**

Parents play a large role in a child's academic success. There are a variety of ways in which parents can influence academic outcomes, including parental involvement in the child's academic life. Prior research has demonstrated that parenting can be impacted by multiple factors, such as, interparental conflict. Overall, previous research on academic related parental involvement is limited. This is especially true when examining factors that can alter this type of parental involvement. Uncovering what impacts parenting behaviors in relation to child academic outcomes is important because academic success in childhood and adolescence has the ability to impact the rest of their adult life. Using longitudinal data from the Promoting School-Community-University Partnerships to Enhance Resilience project (PROSPER), this study examines the influence of interparental conflict on child academic outcomes through parent academic involvement. Results show that interparental conflict impacts child academic outcomes through father academic involvement.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

LIST OF TABLES .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2 The Present Study.....	7
Chapter 3 Methods .....	9
Chapter 4 Results .....	14
Chapter 5 Discussion .....	19
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	29

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1 Correlations and Descriptive Statistics .....	23
Table 2 Interparental Conflict and Adolescent Academic Outcomes.....	24
Table 3 Interparental Conflict and School Related Parent Involvement .....	25
Table 4 Parent Knowledge and Adolescent Academic Outcomes.....	26
Table 5 Parent Rules and Adolescent Academic Outcomes .....	27
Table 6 Parent Academic Involvement and Adolescent Academic Outcomes.....	28

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Academic success as a child and adolescent sets the stage for academic and occupational success later in life (Astone and McLanahan, 1991). School success predicts continuing higher education, better job possibilities, more positive self-concept, less adult psychopathology, and lower likelihood of unemployment (Dryfoos, 1990). Additionally, those with higher academic achievement are less likely to report drug use and drop out from school (Hawkins et al., 1992). Those without a high school degree are more likely to live underemployed, on government assistance, and cycle in and out of prison (Pleis et al., 2010). In 2012, seven percent of males and six percent of females, ages 16 to 24, were not enrolled in school and had not received their high school credentials (NCES , 2014).

The failure to complete high school is a process that has its roots starting as early as elementary school (Astone and McLanahan, 1991). It begins as a child becomes no longer engaged in school. School engagement occurs when a child is able to successfully coordinate multiple skills related to academic success. These skills can include: achievement of values, goal setting, intellectual development, test taking proficiency, obeying authority, following directions, and modifying behavior to fit school standards (Astone and McLanahan, 1991). School engagement has been linked with increased years of education in children (Sewell and Shah, 1968). When children are not proficient in these skills, they become more likely to detach themselves from the goals, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to succeed in school. The process

of school disengagement is gradual, and if the level of disengagement reaches a certain threshold, the child will likely drop out (Astone and McLanahan, 1991).

Specifically, lack of academic success has been shown to lead to school disengagement in children (Roderick, 1994). Academic success is often measured by grade point average (GPA), as higher GPAs tend to reflect a child's intellectual capacity and ability to meet educational standards set by their school (Astone and McLanahan, 1991; Hill et al., 2004). Test scores have also been a means for measuring academic success (Steinberg et al., 1989; Sun and Li, 2009).

Entering middle school is a time of transition and stress for early adolescents (Bronstein, 1996). It has been found that entering middle school leads to a drop in academic performance, which can follow the adolescence into early high school (Guido and West, 2013). This decrease in performance can put middle school students at risk for disengagement and put those who have already disengaged from school at an even greater risk for school dropout (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Ciarns et al. 1989).

### **Parenting and Academic Success**

There are many factors that play into a student's success in school. A primary influence in a child's life is their parents (Bronstein et al., 1996). Parents play a large role in the academic success, or lack thereof, of their child. Parents provide base for which children move to meet challenges of world (Bronstein et. al., 1996). Successful navigation of the complicated school system is partially dependent on parental assistance; ineffective or inadequate parental assistance may lead to a child to feel overwhelmed and withdraw from school (Astone and McLanahan, 1991). There are several ways in which parents have an influence on their child's academic success. This study will examine parental involvement in school related activities.

Parental involvement is a multifaceted construct that has been linked to academic outcomes in children and adolescents (Epstein, 1992; Fan and Chen, 2001). Increased parent involvement has been linked to increased academic success and motivation to learn (Epstein, 1992; Fan and Chen, 2001). Parental involvement remains important through elementary and secondary school, considering the amount and type of involvement has been adjusted to appropriate levels (Catsambis, 2001). Parent involvement can take part at school as well as in the home environment (Catsambis, 2001). The amount and type of parent involvement varies by the student's grade level, SES, race/ethnicity, family relationships, experiences, and school policies (Epstein, 1992). There are several ways that parents can become involved in their child's academics. Some include: supervision, family routines, and monitoring.

A large component of parental involvement consists of daily supervision of a child's activities at home. Not all supervision is directly related to academics, but it still may have an effect on the child's academic performance. Forms of supervision include setting rules regarding the completion of homework, TV viewing, and curfews and discussing plans about school classes (Catsambis and Epstein, 1997).

Parent supervision of homework can involve several parent behaviors. Parents can provide basic levels of supervision by asking about homework and monitoring its completion. They can also actively participate in the completion of the homework by providing necessary assistance and adequate feedback. The level of parent supervision of homework is dependent on parent beliefs about participation in homework, their sense of efficacy in assisting their child, and if they feel invited to participate (i.e. from the child or their teacher) (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001).



Parents play an integral part in their child's academic planning. It has been found that children whose parents have participated in their academic planning have seen gains in achievement (Christenson et al., 1992). Children and adolescents can be faced with many choices when deciding which academic path is best for them. These options can become overwhelming to a child who has no guidance. Parents are able to supervise and assist their children in navigating through each academic path to choose the one that best suits them (Astone and McLanahan, 1991).

Parent supervision is a type of parent involvement that is prominent as children enter middle school. Children are reaching higher levels of independence in deciding how to use their time after school, but are still in need of parental guidance and supervision (Catsambis, 2001).

Parental supervision often ties in with a family's after school routine. Family routine consists of providing structure and organization in a child's life (Annunziata et al., 2006). This includes having designated times to partake in certain activities, such as homework completion. Family process variables, including family routine, are related to school success (Taylor & Lopez, 2005). Family routine is positively linked with school engagement, which in turn is positively linked to school achievement (Taylor et al., 2004).

Parent monitoring is another form of parent involvement that largely overlaps with supervision and family routine. Monitoring is defined as how parents structure their child's home, school, and community environments, the extent to which parents are aware of the child's behavior, and the communication to the child that they are aware of their behavior (Annunziata et al., 2006; Dishion and McMahon, 1998). Monitoring has been found to be a protective factor for academic achievement (Ghazarian and Buehler, 2010). In addition, parental monitoring has been found to increase perceived competence, sense of relatedness to peers, and overall interest

in school (Annunziata et. al., 2006). Children who are poorly monitored by their parents tend to have lower grades (Sattin and Kerr, 2000). Finally, some children/adolescents see monitoring as a way to control their behavior (Sattin and Kerr, 2000). These children are more likely to rebel, which puts them at risk for decreased academic success.

Completion of homework is a prime example of parent involvement that involves family routine and supervision, and monitoring. Parents who structure their child's afterschool activities so that homework can be completed will likely have children who have higher grades than those who do not have a specific time to complete homework. Additionally, parents can make themselves available at the time homework is to be completed to supervise and assist the child as needed.

Parental involvement has become a central issue in policy and research. The concept of parental involvement has been reported as important by parents, teachers, school boards/administrators, and students (Fan and Chen, 2001). Schools are increasingly emphasizing the importance of parental involvement in their child's schooling as a strategy to increase academic success (Catsambis, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001).

### **Interparental Conflict**

Conflict between parents has been shown in numerous studies to have an effect on children. When there is conflict between parents, the overall functioning of the executive subsystem is altered. This altered functioning can trickle down, or spillover, to the other subsystems of the family. It is through this spillover effect that negative outcomes can emerge (Harold et al., 2007).

Negative academic outcomes have been linked to the child's experience of interparental conflict (IPC). It has been found that academic outcomes are not directly related to the

experience of interparental conflict (Ghazarian and Buehler, 2010; Harold et al., 2007). Several studies have shown that interparental conflict leads to problem behavior in children, which in turn leads to negative academic outcomes. Interparental conflict has the potential to effect parental involvement with their children. This occurs due to a spillover from the parental subsystem into the parent-child subsystem (Harold et al., 2007). Parents who have hostile and distressed marital conflict may transfer their hostile affect into their parenting (Buehler et al., 2006; Harold et al., 2007; Harold et al. 2012). If parents are preoccupied with their own conflict, they may be less likely to get involved in their child's lives (Astone and McLanahan, 1991; Catsambis, 2001). Parents may not put as much time and consideration into parenting as they would have if there had been minimal conflict. Additionally, interparental conflict can disrupt communication within the parental subsystem (Grych et al., 2004). This could lead to a change in the level of involvement if parents are not communicating to one another how they are interacting with the child.

## Chapter 2

### The Present Study

This thesis explores new territory by testing interparental conflict and parents' school-related involvement as predictors of adolescent academic outcomes. Guided by findings that interparental conflict has an effect on parent involvement and that this can effect children's academic outcomes, a three-step sequence of analyses were conducted along the following hypotheses related to mediation. First, interparental conflict was expected to be related to worse academic outcomes by 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Second, interparental conflict was expected to be related to diminished school-related parenting practices (i.e., knowledge, parental rules, and academic involvement). Third, these three parenting practices were hypothesized to predict academic outcomes, controlling for interparental conflict. Specifically, increased parental knowledge, parent rules, and parent academic involvement were hypothesized to lead to higher adolescent grades and increased school adjustment.

Across analyses, key control variables were included to ensure a conservative test of the hypothesized predictors on academic outcomes. The three control variables in this study were: parent income, parent education, and youth sex. Families with a lower income have been found to have children with decreased academic functioning (Davis- Kean, 2005). This could be due to the family having fewer resources that could help the child excel in school. Parents who have an increased education have been found to have children who also do well academically. Parents who have done well themselves academically expect their children to do well. Higher parental expectations have been linked to academic success in children (Davis-Kean, 2005). Additionally, parents with a higher education have the potential to be more of a direct resource for their

children. For example, if the child needs help with homework, the parent may be more able to help if they have had a higher level of education. Finally, differences have been found between girls and boys regarding academic success. Girls have been found to have higher grades than boys through elementary, middle, and high school (Duckworth and Seligman, 2006).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

#### **Procedure**

Participants were selected randomly from a subset of sixth graders who participated in the Promoting School-Community-University Partnerships to Enhance Resilience project (PROSPER). The goal of PROSPER was to test the effectiveness of preventative interventions aimed at reducing substance use initiation among rural adolescents on a large scale (Spoth et al., 2004). Participants resided in 28 rural communities and small towns in Iowa and Pennsylvania. In order for communities to be eligible, school districts needed an enrollment between 1,300 and 5,000 and at least 15% of students needed to be eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches (for more information, see Spoth et al., 2007).

Two evidence-based programs designed to reduce adolescent substance use were implemented in schools in intervention communities. These consisted of: a school based curriculum delivered in seventh grade to all students, and a family based program offered to all families of sixth graders. Schools selected interventions from a list of evidence-based interventions. Schools were also supported by community based prevention teams (see Spoth et al., 2004, for more information on the PROSPER project and the sample). On average, 88% of all eligible students completed in-school assessments at each data collection point for the larger study. 2,267 families from the in-school assessment were randomly invited to participate in an in-home family assessment; 979 completed the in-home assessments. The in-home assessments

consisted of a family composition interview and written questionnaires completed independently by the adolescent, mother, and, if present, father.

### **Participants**

Only participants from the control group were used for this study. Two-parent families were selected for analyses because the study focused interparental conflict. Two-parent families were defined by parent's responses to a marital status question as either married and living with their spouse, or living with someone in a steady, marital-like relationship. Data was not collected regarding the length of the relationship.

This two-parent sample included 406 families at time 1 (T1), 324 at time 2 (T2) and 299 at time 4 (T4). The mean participant ages at T1 were as follows: adolescents ( $M$  11.3 years,  $SD$  0.516); mothers ( $M$  38.8,  $SD$  6.86); and fathers ( $M$  41.4,  $SD$  7.0). Variability was seen among caregiver's relationships to those referred to both mothers and fathers in the study. Female caregivers identified their relationship to the target adolescent as mother (95%), stepmother (1.1%), or other parental figures (3.9%; e.g., parents' significant other, adoptive parent, grandparent). Male caregivers identified their relationship to the target adolescent as father (75.2%), stepfather (16.5%), or other parental figures (8.1%). Sixty-three percent of families lived in Iowa, and 37% lived in Pennsylvania. Fifty percent were male. The median household income was \$50,750. Fifty five percent of adolescents had parents with some postsecondary education. Adolescents identified their race as White (88.7%), Hispanic (3.9%), African American (2.5%), Asian (.5%), or other (2.2%).

### **Measures**

**Interparental Conflict.** At T1, mothers and fathers assessed the frequency of conflict behaviors over the past month on a 7-point scale, from *always* (1), *almost always* (2), *fairly often*

(3), *about half the time* (4), *not too often* (5), *almost never* (6), to *never* (7). Mothers and fathers rated seven items about their own behavior with their partners and their partners behaviors toward them. Sample items include, “criticize your ideas” and “hit, push, grab, or shove you.” Reliabilities were satisfactory for father reports of their own conflict behaviors (.84) and their partner’s behaviors (.89), and mother reports of their own conflict behaviors (.85) and their partners’ behaviors (.89). Scales were reverse-coded so that higher values reflect more conflict. Father and mother scores were averaged together to form a single indicator of interparental conflict.

#### Parental School Related Involvement:

**Parent Knowledge.** At T2, adolescents rated the frequency of parental knowledge on a 5-point scale from, *always* (1), *almost always* (2), *about half the time* (3), *almost never* (4), *never* (5). Two items were rated based on their interpretation of their mother’s behavior and their father’s behavior. Items included, “mom/dad know when you do something well at or away from school” and mom/dad know when you get in trouble at or away from school. Correlations were satisfactory for adolescent reports of father knowledge (.68) and mother knowledge (.86). Scales were coded so that higher values reflect more knowledge.

**Parent Rules.** At T2, adolescents assessed the frequency of enforcement of rules on a 5-point scale from, *always* (1), *almost always* (2), *about half the time* (3), *almost never* (4), *never* (5). Three items were rated based on the adolescent’s interpretation of their parent’s combined behavior. Items included, “most afternoons/evenings, parent(s) ask if I have homework for the next day”, “on school nights, I’m expected to be in bed by a certain time” and “parent(s) ask if I have finished my homework”. The reliability of the adolescent report of parent rules (.67) was satisfactory. Scales were coded so that higher values reflect more rules.



Parent Academic Involvement. At T2, adolescents assessed the frequency of parent involvement related to academics on a 4-point scale from, *often* (1), *sometimes* (2), *rarely* (3), *never* (4). Four items were rated based on the adolescent's interpretation of their mother's involvement and their father's involvement. Items included, "work on homework or project together", "talk about school", "talk about news or current events", and "discuss what you want to do in future". Reliabilities were satisfactory for adolescent reports of father academic involvement (.85) and mother academic involvement (.76). Scales were coded so that higher values reflect more academic involvement.

#### Adolescent Academic Outcomes:

Grades. At T4, mothers, fathers, and adolescents reported on adolescents' grades in school with a single item using a 9-point scale (ranging from mostly F's = 1 to mostly A's = 9). Family members were consistent in their reports on this item ( $\alpha = .94$ ). Mother, father, and adolescent scores were averaged together to form a single indicator of adolescent's grades in school. This variable was recoded so that higher values reflect higher grades.

School Adjustment. At T4, school adjustment was measured using the 9-item *School Adjustment Questionnaire* (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1999). Participants rated items on a 5-point scale from, *never true* (1), *seldom true* (2), *sometimes true* (3), *usually true* (4), *always true* (5). Sample items include in the last year "I had an easy time handling the new academic demands made on me" and "I had a good year at school". Reliabilities are satisfactory for mother (.87), father (.86), and adolescent reports (.82). Mother, father, and adolescent scores were averaged together to form a single indicator of adolescent's school adjustment. Scales were coded so that higher values reflect better school adjustment.

### Control Variables:

**Family Income.** At T1, mothers and fathers were asked to report their yearly household income. This variable was recoded so that 1= up to 10,000; 2=10,001-20,001; 3=20,001-30,000; 4=30,00-40,000; 5=40,001-50,000; 6=50,001-60,000; 7= 60,001- 70,000; 8=70,001-80,000; 9=80,001-90,000; 10=90,001-100,000; 11= 100,000 and higher. The two reports were averaged together to form a single indicator of family income.

**Parent Education.** At T1, mothers and fathers were asked to report their level of education. This variable was coded so that 1=kindergarten/no grade completed; 1-11=grade completed below 12/grade in now; 12=High school graduate or GED; 13=1 year of college, vocational, or technical training/1st year; 14=2 years of college, associate degree/2nd year; 15=3 years of college/3rd year; 16=B.S., B.A; 17=Bachelor's plus; 18=M.S., M.A., Chiropractic with a B.A./B.S; 19=Master's plus; 20=PH.D., J.D., D.D.S., M.D., D.V.M., etc.; and 77=other. The two reports were averaged together to form a single indicator of parent education.

**Adolescent Sex.** At T1, families were asked to report the adolescent's sex as either male or female. Males were coded as 1 and females were coded as 2.

## Chapter 4

### Results

Correlations, variable means, and standard deviations can be found in Table 1. All correlations with interparental conflict were negative, as expected. Adolescent sex was negatively correlated with mother knowledge, father knowledge, parent rules, and youth academic adjustment. Interparental conflict was only significantly correlated with father academic involvement. It was expected that it would be correlated with academic outcomes as well as parent variables. With the exception of father academic involvement and youth grades, all parent variables are significantly correlated with academic outcomes, as expected.

Next, five sets of regression models were estimated with control variables parent income, parent education, and adolescent sex, as well as hypothesized predictors interparental conflict, parent school related involvement, adolescent academic outcomes in relation to each outcome separately. Below, findings are reported by outcome.

#### **Interparental conflict and academic performance**

In the first analysis, a regression equation was computed to predict adolescent grades at time 4. In this equation grades were regressed on parent income, parent education, adolescent sex, and interparental conflict,  $F(4,208)=4.13$ ,  $p=.00$  (see Table 2). Parent education was found to be significant. Specifically, parents with more education had adolescents with higher grades. No other predictors were statistically significantly associated with adolescent GPA.

Then, the same analysis was conducted to predict adolescent school adjustment at time 4. In this equation school adjustment was regressed on parent income, parent education, adolescent sex, and interparental conflict,  $F(4,209)=4.35$ ,  $p=.00$  (see Table 2). As was found for GPA, higher levels of family income was associated with better school adjustment. Similarly, adolescent sex was associated with school adjustment, as well. Specifically, boys tended to exhibit increases in school adjustment over time. No other predictors were statistically significant predictors of school adjustment.

### **Interparental conflict and school related parenting**

The next set of regression equations were computed to predict parenting practices at Time 2. In the first equation, mother knowledge was regressed on parent income, parent education, adolescent sex, and interparental conflict; however, this model was not statistically significant,  $F(4,223)=1.73$ ,  $p=.14$ . This indicates that this prediction model did not account for a significant portion of the variance in maternal knowledge (see Table 3).

A regression equation was computed to predict father knowledge at time 2 ( $F(4,211)=1.25$ ,  $p=.29$ ) and parent rules ( $F(4,222)=1.10$ ,  $p=.36$ ). Neither model reached statistical significance. Therefore specific predictors were not examined.

Then, mothers' academic involvement was regressed on parent income, parent education, adolescent sex, and interparental conflict,  $F(4,221)=3.62$ ,  $p=.01$ (see Table 3). Parent income was found to be significant. Specifically, higher levels of family income were associated with better school adjustment. No other predictors were statistically significantly associated with mother's academic involvement.

Similarly, fathers' academic involvement was regressed on parent income, parent education, adolescent sex, and interparental conflict,  $F(4,212)=5.92$ ,  $p=.01$  (see Table 3). Similar

to mother academic involvement, parent income was found to be significant. Specifically, higher levels of family income were associated with better school adjustment. Youth sex and interparental conflict were also found to be significant. Fathers of girls were more likely to report increases in their academic involvement over time. Parent education did not show significance with father academic involvement.

### **School related parenting and adolescent academic outcomes**

The final three sets of analyses examined parenting practices at Time 2 in relation to academic outcomes at Time 4. First, a regression equation was computed to predict adolescent grades at time 4. In this equation grades were regressed on parent income, parent education, adolescent sex, and interparental conflict, mother knowledge, and father knowledge,  $F(6,178)=7.19$ ,  $p=.00$  (see Table 4). Parent education was found to be significant. Parents with higher education had adolescents with higher grades. Mother and father knowledge were also found to be significant. Specifically, mothers and fathers with increased knowledge had adolescents with higher grades. No other predictors were statistically significantly associated with adolescent grades.

Similarly, a regression equation was computed to predict adolescent school adjustment at time 4. In this equation school adjustment was regressed on parent income, parent education, adolescent sex, and interparental conflict, mother knowledge, and father knowledge,  $F(6,179)=10.35$ ,  $p=.00$  (see Table 4). As with grades, both mother and father knowledge were found to be significant. Specifically, mothers and fathers with increased knowledge had adolescents with higher grades. No other predictors were statistically significantly associated with adolescent grades.

Next, a regression equation was computed to predict adolescent grades at time 4. In this equation grades were regressed on parent income, parent education, adolescent sex, and interparental conflict, and parent rules,  $F(5,189)=4.60$ ,  $p=.00$  (see Table 5). Parent education was found to be significant. Specifically, parents with higher education had adolescents with higher grades. Parent rules was also found to be significant. Parents who had and enforced rules had adolescents with higher grades. No other predictors were statistically significantly associated with adolescent grades.

Similarly, a regression equation was computed to predict adolescent school adjustment at time 4. In this equation academic outcomes were regressed on parent income, parent education, adolescent sex, and interparental conflict, and parent rules,  $F(5,190)=5.71$ ,  $p=.00$  (see Table 5). As with grades, parent rules were found to be significant. Parents who had and enforced rules had adolescents with decreased school adjustment. Parent income and youth sex were also found to be significant. Specifically, higher levels of family income were associated with better school adjustment. Finally, boys tended to exhibit increases in school adjustment over time. No other predictors were statistically significantly associated with adolescent grades.

Then, a regression equation was computed to predict adolescent grades at time 4. In this equation grades were regressed on parent income, parent education, adolescent sex, and interparental conflict, mother academic involvement, and father academic involvement,  $F(6,177)=3.56$ ,  $p=.00$  (see Table 6). Parent education was found to be significant. Parents with higher education had adolescents with higher grades. Father academic involvement was also found to be significant. Specifically, fathers who demonstrated increased academic involvement had adolescents with higher grades. No other predictors were statistically significantly associated with adolescent grades.

Finally, a regression equation was computed to predict adolescent school adjustment at time 4. In this equation academic outcomes were regressed on parent income, parent education, adolescent sex, and interparental conflict, mother academic involvement, and academic involvement,  $F(6,178)=7.23$ ,  $p=.00$  (see Table 6). Youth sex was found to be significant. Specifically, boys tended to exhibit increases in school adjustment over time. As with grades, father academic involvement was also found to be significant. Specifically, fathers who demonstrated increased academic involvement had adolescents with higher grades. No other predictors were statistically significantly associated with adolescent grades.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

Many results of this study did not support the original hypotheses. Interparental conflict was not found to be directly associated with adolescent academic outcomes. There is additional research that has not found a direct association between interparental conflict and child academic outcomes (Harold et al., 2007). This lack of association can indicate the work of intervening variables. Additionally, interparental conflict was not found to be associated with parental knowledge and rules. These types of parent involvement require much less effort than sitting down with the child and assisting with homework or having an in depth conversation about the future. It could be that even with an increased amount of conflict, parents are still able to adequately perform basic supervisory tasks, such as asking about homework completion.

Two hypotheses were confirmed in the results. The first is that school related parenting was associated with adolescent grades and academic adjustment. These results are consistent with previous research. Both parental knowledge and involvement consisted of a combination of parental supervision and monitoring. These parenting practices have both been linked with increased academic outcomes in children and adolescents (Catsambis and Epstein, 1997; Christenson et al., 1992). Parent rules reflect family structure, which has also been linked to increased academic outcomes in children and adolescents (Taylor et al., 2004). Overall these results confirm that parents play an important role in the academic success of their children and that the importance of this role continues into adolescence.



Secondly, interparental conflict was found to be significant with father academic involvement. This demonstrates that a mediational model between interparental conflict, parenting and adolescent academic outcomes exists. Previous studies have found parenting to be the mediating factor between conflict and child academic outcomes (Harold et al., 2007).

The current findings that father involvement was associated with both grades and school adjustment, controlling for mothers' parenting, is a unique finding in the literature. Previous research has indicated that mothers have a primary influence over child academics because they are likely to spend more time with the child (Dumka et al., 2009). Sturge-Apple, Davies, and Cummings (2006) found that marital hostility and withdraw was associated with father emotional unavailability. If fathers become emotionally unavailable to their children, they may be less likely to engage in behaviors such as assisting with homework or talking to their child about their future. Traditionally, fathers take on a more indirect role in parenting. If this was the case for these families, interparental conflict may have caused the fathers to take an even lesser role in parenting (Heard, 2007). Changes in father participation have been linked with increased behavior problems and discipline at school and poor behavior has been associated with decreased performance (Christenson et al., 1992; Heard, 2007). The findings of this study demonstrate the important role that father's play in their child's academics. Because of this, it is essential for interventions to focus on father involvement when targeting academic success.

Family demographic factors also yielded consistent results. Parent education was found to be significant with GPA in all analyses. Parent income was found to be significant with school adjustment (when interparental conflict and parent rules were taken into account) and with parent academic involvement. These results are consistent with previous research. Increased socioeconomic status, which often includes income and education, has been linked with better

school outcomes in school outcomes in children. It has been shown that parents of a higher socioeconomic status have increased beliefs and attitudes about their child's educational success, thus passing these expectations on to their children (Catsambis, 2001). Finally, adolescent sex was found to be significant with school adjustment (when interparental conflict, parent rules and parent academic involvement were taken into account) and father academic involvement. Previous studies have shown that girls outperform boys in math and reading until they reach high school (Sun and Li, 2009). The results of this study indicate that boys are performing better than girls. This could be because grades and adjustment were assessed in eighth grade, which is close to the high school age that boys begin to outperform girls in certain subjects.

### **Implications for Intervention**

These results confirm that interparental conflict has the ability to impact parenting related to academics, which ultimately has an effect on their children. This provides insight for intervention programs targeting children and adolescents who are not succeeding in school. Academic problems go beyond the scope of what occurs in school. The home life of each child plays a role in their success and should be examined in cases where children are not succeeding. The parent relationship and parent practices should be examined as a potential cause of the lack of success. Reducing conflict between parents may lead to more positive parenting practices. However, the findings of the current study suggest that a more direct and effective route is to target parenting practices directly. Interventions can focus on parenting practices related to academics, such as increasing supervision and involving themselves in their child's academic life.

**Limitations**

This study was not without limitations. The majority of the sample consisted of white participants from rural areas. Because of the lack of diversity in the sample, these results may not be seen in other families. There were no reports of the adolescent's perception of interparental conflict. Adolescent perception of conflict may have had an impact on the adolescent's perception of parental involvement. Finally, although the results of this study provide insight into the effects of interparental conflict, parenting and school success, they cannot prove causation.

**Future Research**

Previous research on the effects of interparental conflict on school related parenting is very limited and more research is needed to solidify the findings of this study. Future research can build on this study by examining the perspectives of multiple reporters. In addition to parent and youth reports, teacher reports could also be used to determine the level of parent involvement in the child's academics. Additional forms of parent school involvement should be examined, such as communication with the child's school. Finally, the interplay between interparental conflict and school related parenting should be examined outside of the scope of middle school students.

**Table 1** Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.Parent Income	-										
2.Parent Education	.39**	-									
3. Youth Sex	.11	.10	-								
4. IPC	-.12	-.08	-.06	-							
5.Mom Knowledge	.10	.12	-.13*	-.02	-						
6.Dad Knowledge	.12	.06	-.04	-.09	.48**	-					
7. Parent Rules	.09	.08	-.01	-.07	.33**	.39**	-				
8.Mom Academic Involvement	.22**	.11	.06	-.12	.29**	.21**	.29**	-			
9.Dad Academic Involvement	.24**	.12	.17**	-.13*	.19**	.38**	.31**	.72**	-		
10.Youth Grades	.15	.24**	.15*	-.07	.33**	.30**	.18**	.12	.19**	-	
11.Youth Academic Adjustment	.18**	.16*	-.18**	-.11	.36**	.35**	.20**	.28*	.30**	.74*	-
<i>M</i>	5.78	13.6	4.54	2.07	4.37	4.58	4.00	3.68	7.38	4.02	4.37
<i>SD</i>	2.49	2.23	.88	.71	.96	.59	.75	.90	1.62	.492	.96
<i>N</i>	282	314	254	318	240	254	252	241	237	238	240

\*\*Significant at the .01 level.

\*Significant at the .05 level.

**Table 2** Interparental Conflict and Adolescent Academic Outcomes

	Grades W4	School Adjustment W4
	$\beta$	$\beta$
R <sup>2</sup>	.07	.08
W1 Control Variables		
Parent Income	.11	.16*
Parent Education	.19**	.11
Youth Sex	-.13	-.16*
W1 IPC	-.02	-.07

\*\*Significant at the .01 level.

\*Significant at the .05 level.

**Table 3** Interparental Conflict and School Related Parent Involvement

	Mom Knowledge W2	Dad Knowledge W2	Parent Rules W2	Mom Academic Involvement W2	Dad Academic Involvement W2
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
R <sup>2</sup>	.03	.02	.02	.06	.10
W1Control Variables					
Parent Income	.08	.11	.06	.18*	.19**
Parent Education	.09	.00	.07	.05	.04
Youth Sex	-.12	-.03	.00	.03	.14*
W1 IPC	.00	-.010	-.07	-.10	-.13*

\*\*Significant at the .01 level.

\*Significant at the .05 level.

**Table 4** Parent Knowledge and Adolescent Academic Outcomes

	Parent Knowledge	
	Grades	School Adjustment
	$\beta$	$\beta$
R <sup>2</sup>	.20	.26
W1 Control Variables		
Parent Income	.00	.09
Parent Education	.20**	.11
Youth Sex	-.03	-1.03
W1 IPC	.02	-.04
W2 Parent Variables		
Mom Knowledge	.26**	.27**
Dad Knowledge	.17*	.24**

\*\*Significant at the .01 level.

\*Significant at the .05 level.

**Table 5** Parent Rules and Adolescent Academic Outcomes

	Parent Rules	
	Grades	School Adjustment
	$\beta$	$\beta$
R <sup>2</sup>	.11	.13
W1 Control Variables		
Parent Income	.09	.15*
Parent Education	.21**	.13
Youth Sex	-.11	-.17*
W1 IPC	.01	-.04
W2 Parent Variables		
Parent Rules	.17*	-.20**

\*\*Significant at the .01 level.

\*Significant at the .05 level.



**Table 6** Parent Academic Involvement and Adolescent Academic Outcomes

	Academic Involvement	
	Grades	School Adjustment
	$\beta$	$\beta$
R <sup>2</sup>	.11	.20
W1 Control Variables		
Parent Income	.04	.09
Parent Education	.21**	.01
Youth Sex	-.11	-.20**
W1 IPC	.03	-.01
W2 Parent Variables		
Mom Academic involvement	.00	.13
Dad Academic involvement	.22*	.25*

\*\*Significant at the .01 level.

\*Significant at the .05 level.

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