THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN K-12 EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Recent research on levels of parental involvement uses advanced statistical techniques to describe the scope and scale of involvement and to determine its unique impact on student achievement. The present thesis looks into the unique impacts parental involvement has on k-12 student’s academic performance. This thesis will review the positive relationship between parental involvement and pupils’ academic achievements and that parental involvement is ultimately low.

Ways to increase parental involvement in a pupil's education have been the effort of many establishments. Whether it is a government program or a local born idea, programs are in existence that have been successful in connecting the positive impacts of a parent’s involvement in their child’s education and outcomes, like grades, behavior, and overall school performance.

This thesis argues in favor of one particular program to increase parental involvement, WATCH D.O.G.S. The thesis begins with a review of literature surveying the current parental involvement programs that have been successful. Next, it evaluates and recommends one particular program, as well as the logistics of implementation. Finally, the project concludes in favor for the need of parental involvement programs in schools.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Educational researchers have studied many ways of strengthening student performance in educational outcomes. Out of the many successful factors regarding ways to increase student performance, parental involvement stands out as key in academic achievement.\(^1\) When parents encourage learning and voice high expectations for the future, they are promoting attributes that are fundamental to achievement.\(^2\) Parental involvement can be defined as regular, two-way, and meaningful communication between parents and schools to ensure that parents are full partners in the child’s educational experience.\(^3\)

Parent involvement in a child's education is consistently found to be positively associated with a child's academic performance.\(^4\) If we recognize that parental

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involvement is low, leading to less educational achievement, we can then turn to programs to aid in parental involvement to strengthen K-12 education.

Among the many programs that are available today, one program is unique for its approach to strengthening parental involvement. WATCH D.O.G.S. provides ways for parents to become involved in their children’s school and what makes the program unique is the focus WATCH D.O.G.S. places on the role of student’s fathers. WATCH D.O.G.S. is a K12 program that provides ways for fathers or father figures to spend meaningful time with their children in a school setting and encourages the parental figures to become more involved in their children's education.

WATCH D.O.G.S. operates as a non-profit organization to create an environment conductive to learning. Children who have an involved father in the early years of their lives have more qualities needed for learning. They are more patient, curious, and confident. They are better able to remain in their seats, wait patiently for their teachers,

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and maintain interest in their own work.\textsuperscript{11} Fathers who participate in WATCH D.O.G.S. get a glimpse of their student’s everyday world and learn about the increasingly complex challenges and decisions today’s youth are facing. As a result, they can learn to relate better to their student and hopefully connect with them. Fathers also gain a greater awareness of the positive impact they can have on their student’s life in three critical areas including: academic performance, self-esteem, and social behavior.\textsuperscript{12}

Given the concepts that WATCH D.O.G.S presents and the educational research on the relationship between parental involvement and educational outcomes, there is promise to WATCH D.O.G.S’s methods. Schools and parents together can play an important role in promoting parental involvement with the collaboration of WATCH D.O.G.S.

**Motivation for Chosen Topic**

I personally believe education is the most important thing one can do to better one’s life. It is more than just going to school and making good grades. It is an outlook on life. At its best education equips individuals with the skills and knowledge that allows them to define and to chase their own goals, and also allows them to participate in the life of their communities as full-fledged, autonomous citizens.\textsuperscript{13} An education gives you the tools to achieve your goals.

Growing up in Jackson Mississippi, it wasn’t seen as practical for me to attend one of my city’s public schools. I graduated from a reputable private school and for the

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most part lived in a bubble with other private school children. I always knew that the public schools in Jackson were not great, but it wasn’t until college that the realization hit that they compared so poorly to schools in other states. When I took an education policy class I learned the difficulties in changing the education system both financially and politically. I also learned how a poor education could lead to lifelong hardship. Knowing that my state comes in nearly last in every comparison to other national statistics regarding k-12 education, I couldn’t help but become interested in ways to help the state’s school system.

Making financial investments in education is a lifelong reward, and I have always wondered why Mississippi is considered last in most aspects of k-12 public education. I have the personal opinion that if a state were to make an investment in the future, the people would benefit for generations.

My father has always expressed the importance of fathering in all realms of life and I have always admired his encouraging nature towards my educational career. I can firsthand say that there is a direct correlation between educational outcomes and how involved a parent is in your education. The program WATCH D.O.G.S. surfaced after I had decided to write my thesis on education policy and specifically the state of Mississippi. The program has the potential to directly fill the needs and ‘connected the dots’ of how school and family life can be intertwined. Once I spoke with the director of WATCH D.O.G.S. on the phone and heard the passion in his voice, I knew that the program was something I wanted to fully explore.

Nelson Mandela wrote, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” With the importance I place on education and family values,
WATCH D.O.G.S. was an ideal combination of education and parental involvement. I believe that with programs like WATCH D.O.G.S., we have the tools to change our state.

**Structural Description:**

This thesis will process in 3 steps, beginning with a review of the relevant literature. The literature review section begins by defining parental involvement and stating the relationship that parental involvement has to educational outcomes. The articles and studies used indicate that parental involvement activities are significantly related to high academic achievement and also suggest that parental involvement with children’s education is low.

Once it is established that parental involvement is low, it is important to examine the current programs and initiatives that seek to increase parental involvement in education. Included in the literature review are seven summaries of programs that involve parents in child’s education. Among the seven programs listed, the program WATCH D.O.G.S. is highlighted for its unique approach to increasing parental involvement.

The analysis section seeks to address the question why WATCH D.O.G.S. is worth supporting and should be implemented. It answers this question by focusing on the ways in which a father or father figure can play a unique and beneficial role in enabling academic achievement with children in schools. This section also addresses the ways WATCH D.O.G.S. can be funded at the community, state, and federal levels. And finally the ways WATCH D.O.G.S. would benefit from rigorous testing on the relationship between WATCH D.O.G.S. participation rates and student academic success is discussed.
The final chapter of this thesis is the concluding remarks and final recommendations. In the concluding chapter, a test trial of WATCH D.O.G.S is suggested and from what will be shown in this thesis, will likely result in WATCH D.O.G.S improving academic success of K-12 students. If the test run shows positive result, there would be strong reason to expand WATCH D.O.G.S. widely.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research supports that parental involvement has been shown to be an important variable in children’s education. One of the variables used motivation; Parents instill motivation when they supervise their children’s homework and convey the importance of schooling. In a study titled “A Longitudinal Assessment of Teacher Perceptions of Parent Involvement in Children’s Education and School Performance,” it was found that, “When parents communicate constructively with teachers and participate in school activities, they gain a clearer understanding of what is expected of their children at school and they may learn from teachers how to work at home to enhance their children’s education.”14 When parents attend parent/teacher conferences, a child can see the importance their parents place on education from the communication between two major spheres of influence in the child’s life- home and school. Anne Henderson states it clearly when she wrote how the most accurate predictor of a student’s achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student’s parents are able to: create a home environment that encourages learning, express high/realistic expectations, and become involved in their children’s education at school and in the community.15

Many see a correlation between socio economic status as a determinate of how well a child will perform in school. Although a correlation can be found between the two,  

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it is evident that it is what the parents do in the home rather than their status that is important. Parents from a variety of cultural and education backgrounds, income or occupational status can and do provide stimulating home environments that support and encourage the learning of their children.

When schools encourage parents to work with their children and provide helpful information and skills, they reinforce a positive cycle of development. Studies show that such involvement has significant, long-lasting effects. The same is true for the opposite; if schools undervalue parents, or treat them as negative influences, or do not include them in their child’s education, they promote attitudes in the family that inhibit achievement at school. The evidence is clear: when schools work with parents to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but also throughout life.

Not only does parental involvement lead to positive educational development, but also behavior. Children tend to fall behind if their parents do not participate in keeping up with their children’s schooling and develop a working relationship with their teachers. High school students who have parents that are not involved are more likely to drop out.\(^\text{16}\)

But, those with parental involvement tend to stay in school longer. Parental involvement gives parents access to insider information. When children have problems at school, involved parents learn about these problems earlier and know more about available solutions.\(^\text{17}\) Another reason from the viewpoint of the school is that parental involvement

\(^{16}\) Henderson, 1994.
leads to a better school and a better community. When more parents in a school become actively involved, the school as a whole begins to excel.  

A study titled *Leveling the Home Advantage: Assessing the Effectiveness of Parental Involvement in Elementary School* sought to measure aspects of parental involvement. The study used six variables to measure parental participation in school-based parental involvement activities and at-home parental involvement. The at-home involvement included child reported parental involvement activities on how often the parents helped the child with homework and how often the parent checked the child’s homework. The study indicates that several parental-involvement activities are significantly related to high academic achievement that are associated with a positive score changes on academic achievement tests:

- Attending parent-teacher conferences
- Attending Parent-Teacher Association meetings
- Volunteering both in and out of the classroom
- Checking homework

Attending parent-teacher conferences and Parent Teacher Association meetings, volunteering both in and out of the classroom, and checking homework are all positively associated with subsequent scores on academic achievement tests.  

Furthermore, the study also concluded that: Children whose parents participated in five involvement activities scored an average of 15.35 percentage points higher on the

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19 Domina, 2005.
given examination in the study. This clearly shows that children with involved parents tend to have higher academic achievement.²⁰

Another report useful in measuring parental involvement is titled *How parent involvement affects student achievement*.²¹ The study states that while virtually all schools promote parent involvement, there are different types of involvement, ranging from encouraging volunteering and fundraising to providing parents with home-based learning activities. Joyce Epstein of the Johns Hopkins University, Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships, one of the nation’s leading experts on parent involvement, has divided school parent involvement programs into six broad categories²²:

1 **Parenting**, in which schools help families with their parenting skills by providing information on children’s developmental stages and offering advice on learning-friendly home environments;

2 **Communicating**, or working to educate families about their child’s progress and school services and providing opportunities for parents to communicate with the school;

3 **Volunteering**, which ranges from offering opportunities for parents to visit their child’s school to finding ways to recruit and train them to work in the school or classroom;

²⁰ Domina, Thurton. "Leveling the Home Advantage: Assessing the Effectiveness of Parental Involvement in Elementary School."
4 **Learning at home**, in which schools and educators share ideas to promote at-home learning through high expectations and strategies so parents can monitor and help with homework.

5 **Decision-making**, in which schools include families as partners in school organizations, advisory panels, and similar committees.

6 **Community collaboration**, a two-way outreach strategy in which community or business groups are involved in education and schools encourage family participation in the community.

In summarizing findings of this study and others in a major meta-analysis, scholars at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory concluded that families positively influence the educational achievements of their teens (as evidenced by larger number of course credits and more college-prep courses) through high levels of educational expectations and consistent encouragement.

The SEDL report, *A New Wave of Evidence*, synthesizes research from 51 studies over the preceding decade to reach conclusions about the effect of parent involvement on student learning. When drilling down to determine what types of involvement work best, SEDL found one common factor: “Programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children’s learning at home are linked to higher student achievement.” Other forms of involvement among Epstein’s six factors (volunteering, attending school events) appeared to have less direct effect on student

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achievement, particularly in high school. The study concluded that “parents of all income levels and ethnicities want to be involved in their child’s learning, even if they aren’t often visible at bake sales or PTA meetings.” However, schools and parents often have a different understanding of what that involvement should look like. Creating a partnership between schools and parents can have a significant impact on student achievement.24

**Parental Involvement Matters**

Through research on academic setbacks and the correlation with parental involvement, it appears that parental involvement is a major factor in a student’s academic outcomes. One study sought to identify individual and family risk factors that may explain why some students are at risk for academic failure.25 What the study found was that a student’s self-concept, academic motivation, and parent’s involvement in education were reported by both students and teachers as low. Children at risk tend to have lower Parental involvement. The study even went on to look into the correlation between the two factors and found that students with low parental involvement in their education are those who also exhibit a low sense of competence and motivation towards learning.26 As expressed earlier, motivation for academic achievement can often be found from the encouragement of parents. Levels of parental involvement in education are evident as a factor in determining academic outcomes.

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26 Quilliams, Laura, and Tanya Beran, 2009.
In a study titled *Increasing Parental Involvement at a Middle School by Involving Parents in Workshops and School Activities Designed To Meet the Needs of Their Adolescent Child*, the author, John Amato, wanted to address declining parental participation in school functions and activities at a middle school, along with a low level of parental involvement or interest in their children's education. The problem the study addressed was that many parents of middle school students were unaware how to approach new techniques of instruction, academic issues, related technology, along with the understanding of personal problems and social needs of their contemporary middle school adolescent. Parents claimed they were afraid to help their children with homework because they were unfamiliar with the material. Other parents felt intimidated by the teachers and even administrators.

Before the workshop was enacted, the school made a modest attempt to involve the parents. The attempt suffered due to poor communication networks. Considering that parental involvement usually decreases as the child progresses through school, it is crucial to develop the communication early. Most parents lacked the encouragement and basic understanding of the issues and problems that supported their involvement with their children.

After only one year of the program, Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO) membership and attendance at PTO meetings increased, and parent participation in

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27 Amato, John K. "Increasing Parental Involvement at a Middle School by Involving Parents in Workshops and School Activities Designed To Meet the Needs of Their Adolescent Child." Diss. Nova Southeastern U, 1994. ERIC. Web.
29 Ibid.
school committees rose significantly. Discipline problems within the school declined as well as student grades and self-esteem improved.\textsuperscript{30}

When the teachers were committed to the workshop and increasing the parents’ knowledge of school activities and involvement, parental involvement inevitably rose. But teachers and school administrators also see obstacles that exist. Teachers report that while they engage in traditional means of parent teacher communication, many do not go beyond such attempts.\textsuperscript{31} They worry that parents may not have enough time, training, or education themselves to help their children with their schoolwork.\textsuperscript{32} Regardless, if the parents feel they cannot help or teachers see problems in parents not being able to aid their children, there is a lack of communication and ways in which parental involvement can be increased to help the children.

In conclusion, if there is better communication and exchanges among schools and parents to assist students, academic success results. Parental involvement leads to motivation in a child, from staying in school to performing at higher levels. Evidence found that parental involvement even led to greater community efforts to support the schools. Through specific plans and programs designed for parental involvement, improvements can be made.

**Demographics and Parental Involvement**

Despite the range of positive child outcomes, it is clear that not all parents are able or willing to be involved. A number of studies have found that in general, low-
income and or ethnic/racial minority parents are less likely than other parents to participate in some forms of involvement in their children’s schooling. However, relatively few studies have examined why socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity are associated with parental involvement. One recent study titled No Parent Left Behind: Predicting Parental Involvement, does highlight sociodemographic diverse families and parental involvement in student’s education. Using a nationally representative sample of 3,248 parents drawn from the 2007 National Household Educational Survey, the authors examined the relationship of high school outreach efforts, parent satisfaction with the school, and parental beliefs to 3 types of parent involvement.

The aim of the study was to explore forms of parent involvement and investigate distinctive patterns of parent involvement across diverse social economic status and racial/ethnic groups. The findings suggest that school outreach efforts are particularly important in promoting historically disenfranchised parents’ involvement in the schools, whereas enhancing parenting self-efficacy is crucial for supporting engagement at home. Strong racial/ethnic differences with respect to parental involvement in school were found. Overall, white parents were more likely to engage in school-related involvement practices than were black and latino parents. Black and Latino parents were actively engaged in parental involvement in homework and Black parents were more likely to have a plan for funding their children’s college education. Overall, parents from high

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34 Park, Sira, and Susan D. Holloway, 2013.
socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be involved than parents of lower socioeconomic status at school and in educational expectations and college planning.

A growing national concern over failing schools, and the fear that American students continue to lag behind in other industrialized nations, has generated strong interest in parent educational involvement among researchers and school reformists. Parental involvement has also been strongly emphasized among educators and policymakers concerned with the achievement gap between African American and White students.36

One may argue that when African American parents are uninvolved in their children’s school work, their academic achievements suffers. In a meta-analytical study conducted by Lee and Bowen in 2006 that looked at parental involvement, cultural capital, and the achievement gap among elementary school children, they found that ethnicity was associated with parents’ involvement.37 Teachers reported significantly lower academic achievement among Latinos and African Americans whose parents were less involved in their school life. It therefore can be deducted that when African American parents are involved in their children’s school life, their academic performance

is enhanced, but when they are not involved, the student’s underachieve in comparison to other dominant and less dominant groups.\textsuperscript{38}

Although literature revels that African American parents are involved to some extent in their children’s education, the literature also suggests that they are not involved as much as they should be. In a study titled \textit{Bringing Parents Back In: African American Parental Involvement, Extracurricular Participation, and Educational Policy}, empirical evidence indicated that low parental involvement is an issue for the age and group of interest in the study.\textsuperscript{39}

Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), this study explores the relationship between African American student participation in extracurricular activities and parental educational involvement. Results suggest that school-based activities may be an underutilized tool in the search for more effective and creative strategies to involve parents in schools.\textsuperscript{40} With regard to sports participation in particular, African American parents of high school seniors involved in varsity sports were found to be highly engaged with their children around educational matters.

For a long time, some researchers have reported on the underperformance of some African Americans in comparison to other minority and non-minority groups. There have been debates over the causes for the differences in educational achievement between the various subgroups of students studied. In the article, \textit{Cultural, Ethnic Differences, Parental Involvement Differences, and Educational Achievement of African Heritage}

\textsuperscript{38} Pinder, 2013.
\textsuperscript{40} O'Bryan, Simone Travis, Jomills Henry Braddock II, and Marvin P. Dawkins, 2006.
Students, a major explanation for differences in educational achievement between African American, Afro-Caribbean, and African students within the USA discusses level of parental involvement and its effects on student achievement.\textsuperscript{41} Very few studies address the disparity in test scores between students of the same Black race and attempt to explain some of the causes for the achievement differences. The two major reasons cited for differences in achievement between African heritage students are cultural reasons and levels of parental involvement.\textsuperscript{42} The educational achievement differences of Blacks of diverse ethnicities can be linked to the influences of cultural factors and levels of parental involvement.

\textbf{The Role of Community}

Although school-related parental involvement is particularly important in affecting adolescent academic achievement, the effectiveness of school-related parental involvement in influencing positive adolescent academic outcomes may be hindered by certain circumstances in the broader community context.\textsuperscript{43} In an article titled ‘\textit{Academic Achievement and Community Poverty},’ the role of community poverty is examined on the association between school-related parental involvement and adolescent academic achievement.


\textsuperscript{42} Pinder, Patrice, 2013.

Distressed environments may weaken parents’ efforts to assist with their adolescent’s academic achievement. For example, when schools resources for funding school projects have a lower performance expectation, parent’s involvement may not be as effective. In another example, parent’s promoting of school attendance and education may be hindered by the truancy and delinquency of other peers in the community. For low-income families, parental involvement may be hindered by challenges such as inadequate resources, lack of knowledge of their adolescent’s schoolwork or unavailability due to inflexible part-time jobs.\textsuperscript{44}

The study explores how community poverty can prevent parents from effectively influencing adolescent to achieve developmental milestones. The methodology used a nationally representative community sample to investigate the nonlinear multiplicative effects of parenting and community-level poverty on adolescent’s academic achievement.\textsuperscript{45} The goal of the study was to test whether community poverty influences the association between school-related parental involvement and adolescent’s academic achievement.

The findings suggested positive effects of parental involvement on adolescents schooling from high-income communities and low-income communities and that community can affect the effectiveness of parenting in influencing adolescent’s academic achievement. Also in the findings, White adolescents appear to have higher academic achievement than Blacks and Hispanics, but lower than Asians. Communities high in

\textsuperscript{44} Gordon, Mellissa, and Ming Cui, 2014.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
poverty have an adverse impact on the effectiveness of school-related parental
involvement on academic achievement.\(^\text{46}\)

**A Review of the Literature on Parental Involvement Programs**

Now that it is evident that our nation has low parental involvement, it is important
to examine some of the current programs and initiatives that seek to involve parents in
education:

- Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)
- The Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL)
- Parent Leadership Exchange (PLE)
- Project EASE (Early Access to Success in Education)
- James Comer’s School Development Program
- No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)
- Local school councils
- WATCH D.O.G.S (Dads of Great Students)

**Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)**

Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) is an interactive homework
program that features homework assignments that require students to talk to someone at
home about something interesting that they are learning in class. TIPS was originally
designed for elementary schools, but now includes designs for seventh and eighth

\(^{46}\) Ibid.
grades. With TIPS, homework becomes a three-way partnership involving students, families, and teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school level.

Families immediately recognize and appreciate the efforts of teachers to keep them informed and involved. TIPS activities keep school on the agenda at home so that children know that their families believe schoolwork is important and worth talking about. Students need as much guidance as parents about how to keep their families aware of and involved in the work they do in school. Over time, as TIPS activities are used each year, students get the idea that their teachers want their families to know about what they are learning in class.

In a study of TIPS that examined writing in two Baltimore middle schools, it was found that parent involvement in TIPS boosted sixth- and eighth-grade students’ writing scores. Almost 700 sixth- and eighth-grade students and their families took part in the study. The more TIPS homework students completed, the better their grades in language arts.

**The Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL)**

The Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) is a parent leadership, training program in Kentucky. CIPL is offered by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, a statewide citizen group. The institute is designed to help parents understand how Kentucky’s education reform law works and how to use the law to press for better

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results in their schools. The program focuses on schools that are very low performing and have little or no parent and community engagement. Because it is based outside schools, it focuses on accountability, and is demanding of improved performance.\textsuperscript{50} The Prichard Committee created CIPL and supports its implementation by training parents and community members to understand what is needed to educate all children to high standards and to help schools get there.

The six-day curriculum covers the state academic standards, data on student progress, action planning, parent engagement, and effective communications with teachers and school staff. Each participant agrees to design and complete a project aimed at engaging other parents to improve student achievement. Parents receive training in effective school partnership skills and more than 1,100 parents have graduated from the institute.\textsuperscript{51} CIPL has been an effective vehicle for: equipping parents with valuable information about how schools should and do operate, instilling confidence in themselves as credible education stakeholders and giving them a willingness to act on the behalf of all students, not just their own.\textsuperscript{52} Many go on to become officers of parent teacher organizations, win election to school councils and run for school boards.

\textbf{Parent Leadership Exchange (PLE)}

Efforts to develop parent leaders and promote school achievement are under way in other cities and states as well. In Boston, the Parent Leadership Exchange (PLE), part of the Institute for Responsive Education, works with parent leaders in three New England states. PLE seeks to foster school, family and community partnerships that

\textsuperscript{50} Henderson, Anne T., and Karen L. Mapp, 2002.  
\textsuperscript{52} Henderson, Anne T., and Karen L. Mapp, 2012.
improve student outcomes; expand networking opportunities; and build leadership skills. To meet the professional development needs of parent leaders in schools and community organizations, PLE offers networking opportunities through conferences, newsletters, a Web site and a forum for sharing best practices. PLE also provides technical assistance and training on critical issues. 

**Project EASE (Early Access to Success in Education)**

Project EASE (Early Access to Success in Education) is a literacy program in Minnesota that offers home and school activities for kindergartners and their families. In sessions at school, trained parent educators coach mothers in developing literacy skills. Then teachers send home book-related activities for parents to do with their children. A study was completed in 2000 that looked at the project in four lower-income schools in a mostly middle-class district. Over one year, the students in Project EASE made significantly greater gains on language scores than children in a control group. The more activities a family completed, the higher their students’ gains. Children who started out with the lowest skills gained the most.

**James Comer’s School Development Program**

In 1968, Dr. Comer founded Comer School Development Program, which promotes the collaboration of parents, educators, and community to improve social, emotional, and academic outcomes for children that, in turn, helps them achieve greater school success. This program centers on teamwork and has improved the educational outcomes.

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The Programs creates relationship experiences and a culture in schools that help students grow along developmental pathways needed for school success.

These teacher-led curriculum units that involved students and parents in the planning, engaged low-income, socially marginalized students with the kind of experiences that promote executive function and social skills that many mainstream children acquire in their families.  

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Another structure to examine for parental involvement is The No Child Left Behind Act. Even though its main focus is not parental involvement, it encompasses increased parental involvement. No Child Left Behind is the largest federal commitment made to improving elementary and secondary education. NCLB strengthens national accountability by requiring states to implement statewide accountability systems covering all public schools and students.

NCLB requires annual testing to measure a school’s progress. If a school is identified as low performing and does not improve, parents may request that their children be moved to another, more-effective school. Parents can become involved in addressing the academic issues that resulted in the low performance. Also, parents are

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55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
informed if their children are eligible for supplemental services, arrange for those services, and make sure parents are informed regularly of their child’s progress.

Another way NCLB involves parents is that the act calls for at least 1 percent of the school’s Title I funds to develop a parent involvement program. This money can be used for a wide range of activities—to hire parent liaisons, hold workshops and meetings, provide transportation and childcare, and make home visits. The law defines parent involvement as activities that “improve student academic achievement and school performance.” This legislation signals a clear and growing commitment to the role of families, not just to improve achievement, but to hold schools accountable for results. The law also gives schools significant resources to make the changes necessary to educate all children to high standards. Placing the findings of the research in this review into practice can help all schools build the partnership with families that will make this law work. Doing so could begin the process of community renewal in poor, urban, and rural districts across our country. Increased parent and family involvement is a key lever in the accountability mechanism of NCLB.

**Local School Councils**

Another approach to increasing parental involvement is local school councils rather than the parents working directly with their children. The 1988 Chicago School Reform law requires every public school to elect a local school council (LSC). A majority of members must be parents with children in the school. Among other tasks, Local School Councils select the principal and develop a yearly school-improvement plan. The program found that schools “substantially up” in reading scores tended to have

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59 Ibid.
strong councils, while schools with level or declining reading achievement tended to have weak councils.\textsuperscript{61}

These councils select and evaluate the principal, develop school improvement plans, and develop and approve the school budget. The study found that elementary schools with more effective school councils were significantly more likely to have improved student achievement in reading. Schools with effective councils moved from twenty percent to thirty-seven percent of students reading at the national average, compared to no significant increase for schools with ineffective councils.\textsuperscript{62}

Chicago’s local school councils and the social networks among parents, neighbors and school staff that have developed as a result are a unique, nationally significant model of the kind of civic engagement that is identified as being key to improving the quality of a community.\textsuperscript{63}

In studying the effect of Local School Councils, weak versus strong ratings were made using 27 indicators of LSC contribution to the school’s educational program, leadership, and climate. The author found a strong relationship between “cooperative adult effort” among the teachers, parents, community members, and administrators involved in the school and “a trend of substantially improved achievement.”\textsuperscript{64}

**WATCH D.O.G.S (Dads of Great Students)**

Considering the vast number of programs that are available today, one program stands out for its approach to parental involvement. By providing parental involvement with fathers or father figures, the program WATCH D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students)

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Henderson, Anne, 2004.
\textsuperscript{63} Henderson, Anne, 2004.
\textsuperscript{64} Henderson, Anne T., and Karen L. Mapp, 2002.
has unique ways that use effective techniques to involve parents with schools.\textsuperscript{65} WATCH D.O.G.S. is a K-12 program that makes it easy for fathers or father figures to spend meaningful time with their children in a school setting and encourages the parental figures to get more involved in their children's education.\textsuperscript{66} WATCH D.O.G.S. starts with spending a day volunteering at school. WATCH D.O.G.S. are fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and other father-figures who volunteer for at least one day each year at an official WATCH D.O.G.S. school. The program is overseen by a ‘Top Dog’ volunteer dad who partners with the school administrator to identify opportunities for the WATCH D.O.G.’s dads. During the day, WATCH D.O.G.S. may read and work on flash cards with students, play at recess, eat lunch with students, watch the school entrances and hallways, assist with traffic flow and any other assigned activities where they actively engage with not only their own students, but other students as well. These activities are assigned by the school principal or other administrator. On the day of their participation, WATCH D.O.G.S. are given a brief review of their involvement and they wear an official WATCH D.O.G.S. t-shirt with a disposable ‘Dog Tag’ identifying them as WATCH D.O.G.S. Administrators who use the program said that once dads get in the building, they often continue to volunteer and attend other school functions such as parent conferences, awards nights, and PTA meetings.\textsuperscript{67} They also report more positive school climates and improvement in student behavior since unleashing the WATCH D.O.G.S. program in their buildings.

\textsuperscript{67} Delisio, 2006.
Chapter 3: Analysis Section

From the literature review it is evident that there are many programs that focus on parental involvement that have succeeded in increasing the communication between parents and schools, and their children. Among the many successful programs that are in use, one program has a unique approach to strengthening parental involvement. From the information given on WATCH D.O.G.S., it is evident that involving a father in a child’s education is a strategy that is creative and can be further extended. Given the concepts that WATCH D.O.G.S presents and the educational research on the relationship between parental involvement and educational outcomes, there is promise to WATCH D.O.G.S’s methods. However, WATCH D.O.G.S needs further research to test program’s effectiveness. Below are the methods of implementation and suggestions on how WATCH D.O.G.S should be further analyzed.

Part 1 of Analysis Section: WATCH D.O.G.S.: Review and Analysis

WATCH D.O.G.S. began in 1998 in a single school in Springdale, Arkansas. It has evolved out of one father’s concern about school safety. After the 1998 shootings at Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas, WATCH D.O.G.S founder Jim Moore decided he wanted to prevent that type of tragedy at his children’s school or any other school by getting more men into school buildings.68 Moore talked with the principal of

68 Delisio, 2006.
his oldest child's school, George Elementary in Springdale, Arkansas, and the program was launched there.

WATCH D.O.G.S. has since grown into a nationally recognized program that has brought hundreds of thousands of fathers and father figures into the school classrooms and hallways across the country, creating millions of hours of “in school” volunteer time and having a tremendously positive impact on the educational process. As a program of the National Center for Fathering, it is now in 4,615 schools in 46 states that participate in the WATCH D.O.G.S. program, in addition to participation in China, Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Barbados.

President’s Advisory Council

In the report titled ‘President’s Advisory Council: A new era of Partnerships: Report of Recommendations to the President’ WATCH D.O.G.S. is one of the main recommendations of the Fatherhood and Healthy Families section. Publication of the document was coordinated by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships with support from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The report has significant data on father absence in America and stated that many statistics underscore the importance of addressing fatherhood in America in new and powerful ways, especially the importance of men taking responsibility for the children they father. Over 24 million children live in father-absent homes. That is 1 out of every 3 (32.7%) children in America. Nearly 2 in 3 (64%) African American children live in father absent homes. Nearly 4 in 10 (36%) Hispanic Children, and nearly 1 in 4 (25%) white children

70 “All About WATCH D.O.G.S.” 2015.
live in father-absent homes. Children who live in father-absent homes, on average, are at least two to three times more likely to use drugs; to experience educational, health, emotional, and behavioral problems; and to engage in criminal behavior. In efforts to support fathers and engage them fully in their families’ lives will make a major contribution to the statistics stated above.

**Part 2 of Analysis Section: Why focus on the fathers**

There is a substantial body of research literature documenting the positive benefits fathers bring to the lives of their children. Children who have an involved father in the early years of their lives have more qualities needed for learning. They are more patient, curious, and confident. They are better able to remain in their seats, wait patiently for their teachers, and maintain interest in their own work. The presence of a father or father figure will provide an additional deterrent to bullying, enhance a sense of security in the building, and will help to create an environment conducive to learning. Fathers get a glimpse of their students’ everyday world and learn about the increasingly complex challenges and decisions today’s youth are facing. As a result, they can learn to relate better to their students and hopefully connect with them. Fathers also gain a greater awareness of the positive impact they can have on their student’s life in three critical areas including: academic performance, self-esteem, and social behavior. The main reason WATCH D.O.G.S. works to help improve overall academic achievements is the way the program incorporates the importance of fathers or father figures.

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Fathers also play a significant role in fostering social-emotional, cognitive, language, and motor development in the lives of their young children. Research shows that fathers strengthen development when they take an active role early and often in the lives of their children. Even from birth, children who have an involved father are more likely to be emotionally secure, be confident to explore their surroundings and as they grow older have better social connections with peers. These children are also less likely to get in trouble at home or in school.

*The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children* is a study that was conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to further understand the role fathers play in development. In order to examine fathers and their impact on a child’s well-being, an analysis of several studies and reports are included in this study to address this impact of fathers discussed. This analysis includes cognitive abilities, educational achievements, psychological well-being, and social behavior. When looking at the impact of fathers on cognitive ability and educational achievement, it was found that children with involved, caring fathers have better educational outcomes.

In one of the studies mentioned, titled *Defining the Role of Fathers*, the concept of an “involved father” is examined beginning at infancy to identify which aspects of paternal involvement lead to better outcomes or what theories best explain paternal

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involvement. It was found that fathers who are involved, nurturing, and playful with their infants have children with higher IQ’s as well as better linguistic and cognitive abilities. Toddlers with involved fathers go on to start school with higher levels of academic readiness. They are more patient and can handle the stresses and frustrations associated with schooling more readily than children with less involved fathers.

The relationships between father and their children are also examined in adolescence and young adulthood in the study titled Fathers’ Absence and Cognitive Development of 12- to 17-Year-Olds. A national probability sample of 12 to 17 year old children provided an opportunity to examine the effect of the fathers’ absence on cognitive development while controlling for the major confounding factors of parental education and income. Measuring vocabulary, block design, reading and arithmetic provided evidence that an active and nurturing style of fathering is associated with better verbal skills, intellectual functioning, and academic achievement among adolescents.

In 2001, a study by the U.S. Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics was designed to address high priority education data needs; provide consistent, reliable, complete, and accurate indicators of education status and trends. In the relationship with fathers and their children, it was found that highly involved

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81 Goldstein, 1982.
82 Nord, Christine, and West, Jerry. *Fathers' and Mothers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools by Family Type and Resident Status*. National Center for Education Statistics. 2001.
biological fathers had children who were forty three percent more likely than other children to earn mostly A’s and thirty three percent less likely than other children to repeat a grade.\textsuperscript{83} This was determined by examining questions at the intersection of three separate lines of research: Research on the effects of family structure on children’s well-being, research on the importance of parental involvement to student outcomes, and research on the effects of nonresident parents’ involvement on children’s well-being. In order to test the differences in parent’s involvement with their child’s education, family structure is divided into family type and parent type. Family type is divided into two-biological-parent family, stepparent family, single-parent family, or nonparent guardian family and parent type is divided into biological, stepmother or stepfather, or nonparent guardian.

A logistical regression model is presented to show the results of student outcomes in comparison to Mothers’ and Fathers’ school involvement. Three student outcomes are used to compare father and mothers roles: get mostly A’s, ever repeated a grade, and ever suspended or expelled. The results show that fathers’ high involvement increases the odds of getting mostly A’s by 42 percent, and mothers’ high involvement increases the odds of getting mostly A’s by 20 percent compared to students whose parents have low involvement. With respect to grade repetition, it is father’s involvement in two-biological-parent families that reduces the odds of students’ ever repeating a grade. For this outcome, both moderate and high involvement by the father reduces the odds of ever having repeated a grade. The above results suggest that fathers’ involvement is

\textsuperscript{83} Nord, Christine, and Jerry West, 2001.
particularly important for academic achievement, as measured by getting mostly A’s and not having repeated a grade.

A recent meta-analysis of parental involvement titled *Parental Involvement in Schools: Indicators on Children and Youth* records the trends of parental involvement.\(^84\) The article breaks down parental involvement into five categories: differences by grade, race and origin, parental educational achievement, parent’s language and national goals. It was found that, “The percentage of students whose parents reported involvement in their schools rose significantly between 1999 and 2007 across several measures, including attendance at a general meeting, a meeting with a teacher, or a school event, and volunteering or serving on a committee. However these proportions fell or remained the same in 2012.” In 2007, 89 percent of students in kindergarten through twelfth grade had parents who attended a general meeting, compared with 78 percent in 1999. In 2012, 87 percent had parents who attended a general meeting.\(^85\) In 2007, 78 percent had a parent who attended a scheduled meeting with a teacher, 74 percent had a parent who attended a school event, and 46 percent had a parent who volunteered in school or served on a committee, compared with 73, 65, and 37 percent, respectively, in 1999.\(^86\) In 2012, the proportion that attended a scheduled meeting had fallen to 76 percent, and the proportion who volunteered or served on a committee had fallen to 42 percent. Research shows that students perform better in schools if their fathers as well as their mothers are involved, regardless of whether the fathers lives with the students.

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\(^85\) “Parental Involvement in Schools: Indicators on Children and Youth” 2012.
\(^86\) Ibid.
The book *Promising Practices for Fathers' Involvement in Children's Education* provides an overview of studies about fathers' involvement in children's education from numerous places around the globe. The various chapters are written by authors from different countries, making this a captivating volume and helps to test theories across cultures.

The first chapter, written about fathers from the United States, discusses how fathers might be hesitant in school settings based on their own past negative experiences, or the high number of females working in schools, or the fact that they may have dropped out of school. The authors also discuss how gay fathers face obstacles of acceptance by school administrators or teachers. On a more positive note, the chapter covers how Head Start programs, virtual visit programs with fathers in prison, and reading programs targeted to immigrant fathers motivate fathers to be more involved with their children.

A cross-cultural perspective on father involvement in early childhood education in Turkey and the United States was provided in Chapter 6. More specifically, it provided an overview about what kindergarten teachers perceive father involvement as, the forms and rates of communication between fathers and teachers, and the roles of fathers in their young children’s education. Overall, it appeared that low father involvement was an issue that needs to be addressed through professional development in both countries.

The last chapter of the book was dedicated to predicting delinquency and academic outcomes for ethnic minority adolescents in the United States. It described how, when fathers are not present in their children’s lives, the chances of the children

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89 Ibid.
living in poverty increase. Yet, if fathers spend quality time with their children, they can help prevent future criminal conduct in teenagers. Furthermore, positive relationships between fathers and their children had a positive influence on their scholastic results.

**Analysis Part 3: Past and Future Testing**

Parental involvement at home and at school is very important in helping children succeed in school. This can look different from home to home, city to city, state to state, and certainly from country to country. In particular, fathers' roles in raising children can be vastly different depending on the cultural norms where they live, their work status, their need to help based on the mother's (or extended family's, caregiver's, etc.) availability, the mother's willingness to be open to the father's help, and time permitting. Research already exists on fathers' involvement in their children's lives, yet not as much exists related to their involvement in schools, though it is growing.

The program WATCH D.O.G.S. has not internally conducted statistical studies on how successful their approach is relevant to test scores. However, they ensure their program is successful to their mission by conducting daily scheduled surveys of the teachers and fathers who participate in the program. The process behind the surveys is listed below.

**Daily Schedule Survey:**

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91 Martinez-Alba, Gilda, 2013.

In order to continually improve the effectiveness of the WATCH D.O.G.S. program, teachers who participate are asked to fill out a Daily Schedule Survey that best corresponds with their school. The Daily Schedule Survey is a key component to your WATCH D.O.G.S. program; it helps keep a balanced schedule throughout the day and leads to a greater appreciation for those that participate. The teachers are asked for input on the following questions: What day would you prefer a WATCH DOG participate with your class and what time of day would you prefer a WATCH DOG participate with your class?

**End of the Day Survey**

Those who participate in WATCH D.O.G.S. (the fathers or father figures) are asked to take an end of the day survey because their opinions and input are important to the program. The questions asked in the survey are listed below:

- My experience as a Watch DOG today was rewarding (Scale of 1-5).
- A WATCH D.O.G.S. Representative from the school met with me for volunteer orientation? (yes/ no)
- A photo was taken of my student and me for the WATCH D.O.G.S. Wall of Fame banner. (yes/ no)
- I will recommend participating in the WATCH D.O.G.S. program to other fathers and father-figures. (yes/ no)
- I signed up to be a Watch DOG this year because: (Choose the ONE that is most responsible for your involvement)
  - I attended a Launch Event (i.e. Pizza Night, Donuts with Dads, etc.)
  - I was recruited by another Watch DOG
I saw a newsletter/poster announcement

PTA promoted the program

I have served as a Watch DOG before

My child/Student asked me

Free Response questions:

The highlight of my WATCH D.O.G.S. experience was ______.

I would help improve my school's Watch D.O.G.S. program by ____.

Although the questions from the surveys above will produce data on the successes and failures of WATCH D.O.G.S. in relation to communication between fathers and the schools, there is little to no data collected on changes to the student’s academic achievement. The program WATCH D.O.G.S. would benefit from rigorous testing on the relationship between WATCH D.O.G.S. participation rates and student academic success.

Analysis Part 4: Funding for Education Programs in Mississippi: Ways to implement WATCH D.O.G.S.

I. Funding through Government

The Mississippi Department of Education established The Bureau of Program Evaluation (BPE) to provide independent, professional evaluations to the School Performance and Accountability Subcommittee (“Accountability Subcommittee”) of the Board of Education and the Mississippi Department of Education. The BPE consists of program evaluators who report to the Director of Program Evaluation/Public Reporting in the Office of Educational Accountability. The Office of Educational Accountability is responsible for monitoring and reviewing programs developed under the Education Reform Act, the Mississippi Adequate Education Program Act of 1994, the Education

Enhancement Fund, and subsequent education initiatives, and shall provide information, recommendations and an annual assessment to the Legislature, Governor, Mississippi Commission on School Accreditation and the State Board of Education.  

The Office of Educational Accountability also has the following duties and responsibilities: to develop and maintain a system of communication with school district personnel; to provide opportunities for public comment on the current functions of the Mississippi Department of Education’s programs, needed public education services and innovative suggestions; and to assess both positive and negative impacts on school districts of new education programs, such as the Mississippi Report Card and alternative school programs.

In order to select which projects will receive funding, the Bureau of Program Evaluation will submit an Annual Evaluation Plan to the Accountability Subcommittee for approval. Projects are submitted to the Bureau of program evaluation in an evaluation request form. The form includes asking if the program has been evaluated in the past five years as well as a detailed description of the policy or program. Next, the form asks for a detailed description of the need to evaluate the policy or program. The form includes a detailed cost description of how much the program or policy would require if awarded a grant. The sources of funding are divided between state, federal, local, and other sources of funding.

If the form is approved, it next goes to the Subcommittee on Accreditation and Accountability for Approval and is subject for revision. Projects are limited in scope to policies or programs administered by the Mississippi Department of Education, and

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94 "Office of Educational Accountability Bureau of Program Evaluation."2012
specifically to those policies or programs over which the Board of Education has some
degree of fiscal accountability. Programs and policies are selected for evaluation based
on Mississippi Board of Education priorities (as stated in the Strategic Plan, Legislative
Budget Requests, and the Board’s mission, vision, and goals), planning meetings with the
State Superintendent and Chiefs, proposals submitted by evaluation staff, and evaluation
requests.

II. School Support Services- Federal Funding

School Support Service's responsibilities include working with school
communities in an effort to improve school performance by assisting them with practical
information, scientifically conducted research and effective practices designed to aid
schools in developing a plan of consistent and continuous improvement. Our goal is to
design and implement a coherent and sustained statewide system of support and process
for improvement, provide local education agencies (local school districts, herein referred
to as LEAs) and schools in Mississippi with tools, resources, and intensive support for
Focus schools.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provides funds to local
educational agencies (LEAs) for the purpose of building the capacity of schools to
increase student achievement, in accordance with section 1003 of ESEA as reauthorized
by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and as approved in Mississippi’s ESEA
Flexibility Request.

Eligibility: As approved through the Request, a state educational agency (SEA)
may allocate section 1003(a) funds to its LEAs in order to serve any of the State’s
Priority and Focus schools that meet the definitions of “priority schools” and “focus
schools,” respectively, provided the school does not also receive 1003(g) grant dollars in the same year. In accordance with section 1003, the SEA shall give priority to LEAs that serve the lowest achieving schools to ensure that funds are used to enable these schools to meet the criteria for exiting Priority and Focus designations.

Funding: All qualifying applicants will receive awards based on a prescribed formula that provides a base allocation relative to the school designation (Priority School designation: $90,000 per school site; Focus School designation: $40,000 per school site). Any remaining amount after the base allocation is allocated will be based on a per pupil amount, based upon the total number of students enrolled in the eligible schools.

Uses of Funds: Schools may use funds to support interventions needed to address the school’s reason for receiving the designation. As these funds are a part of Title I, the same limitations to expenditures apply (e.g., Supplement not Supplant).

III. Funding from Local Support

Another way to raise funds to support WATCH D.O.G.S. would be the use of foundation grants and local funding sources. Starting at the local community level would be low risk than federal or state funding. Using local support would also require lower investment needs and could be easily duplicated. Local support and foundation grants could work in addition to or in alliance with money allocated by the Mississippi Department of Education. Since this program is a low-cost program, communities might be willing to help in improving the overall standard of education and living by contributing to the WATCH D.O.G.S. program. Foundation grants are not expected to be paid back, but in their own way they are a return on investment by increasing the well
being of the community. Local sources like churches, local banks, and other civic organizations could contribute to the program.

In order to encourage foundation grants and local funding, these potential donors would want to know:

- How WATCH D.O.G.S. works?
- How much WATCH D.O.G.S. costs on an annual basis?
- How effective WATCH D.O.G.S. is in terms of increase in Parental involvement, improved academic gains for those participating in the program, and impact on student behavior.

This information would be provided to potential donors and help in encouraging local support.
Chapter 4: Conclusion and Recommendations

With the information presented on WATCH D.O.G.S and the techniques used to determine that parental involvement is seen to have a positive effect on a child’s level of academic attainment, there is reason to suspect that such a program could be of value to the state of Mississippi.

With the lack of data on the changes of student’s academic achievements produced from WATCH D.O.G.S., it is recommended that testing the program would greatly benefit the program’s support and potential implementation. I advocate for a small test trial to produce data on the relationship between WATCH D.O.G.S participation rates and students’ academic achievements. This test trial could be of small-scale trail and easily funded with the options described above.

From what has been shown in this paper, the test trial will likely result in WATCH D.O.G.S improving academic success of K-12 students, showing that the program is worth supporting and funding on a larger scale. If results of the test show a strong result, there would be reason to expand WATCH D.O.G.S. widely.
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