

RUNNING HEAD: Parent-Teacher Conferences

THE EFFECT OF PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE  
ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

A quantitative study was conducted to determine if there a significant difference in student achievement in grades 7 - 12 communication arts courses between students whose parents/guardians attended parent-teacher conferences and students whose parents did not attend parent-teacher conferences. The study was performed in a mid-western rural school district with a student population of 855 for the district. The participants in this study include 274 students in grades 7-12, all of which are in regular education communication arts classrooms. The findings found that students whose parents did attend parent-teacher conference performed better on their next assessment than the students whose parents did not attend. This supports the theory that greater parent involvement leads to higher student achievement. Therefore, the implications of this study indicate that school districts and teachers should determine methods for increasing parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences.

## INTRODUCTION

### *Background, Issues and Concerns*

In recent years, the traditional family unit has changed. Many families are single-parent or led by a family member other than a biological mother or father, such as a grandparent or even older sibling. Many children have parents who work nights and weekends or are students taking classes of their own. Often, issues such as these and others can lead to parents/guardians that are unable to be actively involved in their children's academic careers. One example of this is their ability to attend parent-teacher conferences. This study seeks to examine whether or not this attendance by parents leads to greater student success in school. Most agree that parent involvement has a great impact on student success. Therefore, it is important to determine if parent-teacher conference attendance is beneficial and impactful.

### *Practice under Investigation*

The practice under investigation is the parent-teacher conference. Currently, conferences in this school district are held on two consecutive evenings, Wednesday and Thursday, from 3:30 to 7:00 p.m. one week following the end of first quarter.

### *School Policy to be Informed by Study*

The school can use the results of this study to determine the future necessity of parent-teacher conferences. If a great need is determined, then the school can seek out ways to increase parent attendance.

### *Conceptual Underpinning*

Students tend to be more successful in school when they have parents who are involved in their education. Students who have supportive parents will, therefore, have high levels of academic achievement. Events such as Meet the Teacher Nights, Advisory Boards, and the practices of the Parent-Teacher Organization are all examples of the belief in this theory. Teachers are generally encouraged to make parent contact as often as possible, whether through phone calls, emails, websites, or newsletters because it is believed that students will benefit from parents who are knowledgeable and involved in their education.

### *Statement of the Problem*

If parent-teacher conference attendance is determined to be a factor in student success, then schools and teachers must find a way to increase parent attendance at these events.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to determine if the attendance of parents/guardians at parent-teacher conferences affects student achievement in communication arts in grades 7-12. This would then reflect positive parental involvement's impact on student success.

### *Research Question*

Is there a significant difference in student achievement in communication arts courses between students whose parents/guardians attended parent-teacher conferences and students whose parents did not attend parent-teacher conferences?

*Null Hypothesis*

There is not a significant difference in student achievement in communication arts courses between students whose parents/guardians attended parent-teacher conferences and students whose parents did not attend parent-teacher conferences.

*Anticipated Benefits of the Study*

The benefit of this study is to determine the value or importance of parent/guardian attendance of parent-teacher conferences. It would explain whether or not these conferences are successful in their goal of helping students achieve. If they are, then it would show that more should be done in an effort to increase this attendance.

*Definition of Terms*

A parent-teacher conference is a short meeting between the parent or guardian of a student and the teacher(s) of that student to discuss a student's progress in school and determine the need for any solutions to academic or behavioral problems. Often, parent-teacher conferences are held in mass, at multiple times during the school year, and time is set aside specifically for these meetings between as many teachers and parents/guardians as possible.

*Summary*

A study was conducted to determine if there was a difference in student achievement in communication arts courses between students whose parents/guardians attended parent-teacher conferences and those whose parents/guardians did not. If there is a significant difference, this means that parent involvement has a significant effect on student achievement.

School districts can use this knowledge to determine if it is necessary to find ways to increase attendance at parent-teacher conferences.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is difficult to say when the first realization of the importance of a parent's involvement in his or her child's education occurred. Likely, it was in the very first educational situations in history as this understanding is practically a given. Children thrive when they have parents that are actively involved in their lives. However, it is possible to pinpoint when this understanding began to impact public schools in the United States in the form of the first organization connecting parents and teachers. Not only did parents and educators know that parent involvement was important, but they came to realize that students would be more successful if there was cooperation and collaboration between the parents and the teachers as well.

Harry and Bonaro Overstreet (1949) discuss the beginnings and evolution of the first parent-teacher organizations in their book, *Where Children Come First: A Study of the P.T.A Idea*. Originally called the National Congress of Mothers and then The National Congress of Parents and Teachers, this organization began in 1897. It began with "a dawning awareness that parental attitudes and practices might be altogether sincere and yet tragically mistaken" (Overstreet & Overstreet, 1949, p. 4). This meant that teachers needed to not only educate students, but parents as well, as to the best way to help their children succeed. This belief was not based solely on observation but on scientific research as well. At each meeting of the National Congress, scientists were present, sharing the latest research in their fields as it related to children. At the first meeting, an ethnologist and child psychologist were on the program; 50 years later in 1947, there were 23, including psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, and educators (Overstreet & Overstreet, 1949, p. 6-7).

One of the key concepts of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers was an understanding of "educational science." According to Overstreet and Overstreet (1949), "Educational science is essential to parents and teachers who have wanted to do an accurate job

of setting up a learning environment conducive to the mental, emotional, and spiritual growth of the child” (p. 8). This understanding has only become more important in modern times as the family structure has changed dramatically from 100 years ago. Now known as the National Parent-Teacher Organization, the group’s website acknowledges the challenges facing parents, teachers, and children today. It states “You try to do the right thing. But sometimes you need help depending on what that “thing” is [...] Most parent leaders are so busy these days but they want to be involved in their child’s school” (*National Parent-Teacher Organization*, 2014). The PTO’s goal is to provide education and opportunity for parents and teachers to collaborate in order to make all children as successful as possible. J.C. Rotter (1987) also recognizes this change in his report to the National Educator’s Association:

The great rush to the population centers, the great advances in technology that affect every part of the social structure, increased leisure time, increased affluence, increased mobility, television, space exploration remind the observer of the breakneck speed with which society’s train has been moving in this century. As these technological changes have occurred, their impact on the social structure has been considerable. For example, the family unit has changed from the extended family to the nuclear family. In addition, blended and single-parent families comprise a substantial proportion of households today. The number of households with children under eighteen headed by a single parent (either father or mother) has doubled since 1970, and the number of families headed by a single female has tripled since 1950. (p. 8)

These statistics, reported in 1987, have surely only increased over the last 25 years, making the situation even more critical.

In recognition of this, another similar organization, the National Parent-Teacher



Association has developed six national standards for caregiver/family involvement programs:

1. There must be regular communication between home and school.
2. Schools must provide support in caregiver skills.
3. Schools must provide information on how caregivers can assist student learning.
4. Schools must encourage caregivers to volunteer at school, and caregivers need to volunteer.
5. Caregivers must be involved in school decision making.
6. There must be collaboration with the community to provide resources in schools. (Yellin, Jones, & DeVries, 2008, p. 47)

Rotter (1987) agrees, saying “No longer do parent and teacher share a sense of common experience, nor are the opportunities to interact on a day-to-day basis an integral part of home-school life. This unintentional wedge between teacher and parent has created a gap that many researchers feel must be filled” (p. 8).

The findings and development of these organizations over the years have led to many efforts to better connect parents and teachers. Authors Yellin, Jones, and DeVries (2008) discuss several strategies in their textbook, *Integrating the Language Arts*. Some of these recommendations include letters of introduction, open houses, newsletters, phone calls and e-mails, weekly assignment sheets, and entertainment nights. One of the most commonly used methods of encouraging this contact and collaboration is the parent-teacher conference. While parents and teachers have been conferencing as long as there have been educational institutions, the type of conference referred to in this study is more formal and structured.

While informal conferences that are either parent- or teacher-initiated still often occur, schools have come to realize that many parents and teachers never meet or at least do not do so in an intentional, productive manner. Therefore, most schools now hold formal parent-teacher conference times, where all parents are invited to meet with teachers during a set duration of

time. The details of these conferences vary dramatically from school to school, but most occur at least two times a year and are usually at key educational checkpoints, such as the end of quarters or semesters. Parents and teachers meet for short periods of time (usually 5-15 minutes) and it is a time for sharing successes and concerns as well as providing any information that will help the parent work with their child at home or the teacher work with the child at school.

Many studies have been performed to analyze the importance increased parent-teacher contact. Cheung and Pomerantz (2012) studied the effect of parent involvement in increasing parent-oriented motivation for the student, leading to greater student success in their quarter and semester grades. They define parent-oriented motivation as that which is guided by a desire to meet parental expectations and garner parental approval academically. Interestingly, the study followed 374 American students in the United States and 451 Chinese students in China concurrently from the beginning of their 7<sup>th</sup> grade year to the end of their 8<sup>th</sup> grade year. Students reported each semester on their parents' involvement in their learning. This information, when combined with information obtained regarding the students' grades and their personal learning strategies, yielded favorable results for the authors in both countries as they determined that greater parent involvement did indeed lead to greater student success. In a similar study, Cripps and Zyromski (2009) performed an analysis and review of past and current literature on how a parents' involvement impacts their middle school students' psychological well-being. They explain that there are different levels and types of parental involvement and that how adolescents perceive this involvement has a definite effect on their self-esteem, self-evaluation, and peer relationships. This has significant implications for schools and their need to foster the best types of parental involvement. In particular, Cripps and Zyromski conclude that the authoritative/democratic parenting style leads to the most positive outcomes.

Adams, Womach, Shatzer, and Caldarella (2010) conducted research involving the implementation of a home note program . The notes were used to educate parents on reinforcing the use of the social skills their children were learning in school and help the students practice these skills, such as following directions, accepting responsibility, and showing appreciation. This study was conducted in a suburban K-6 school in the western United States and was comprised of an ethnically diverse group of 383 students. The authors found that the added element of parent involvement led to greater student success in learning these social skills. In a post-study survey, it was determined that the parents were very satisfied with the program overall while the faculty members were mostly satisfied. Similarly, in a case study, Ouimette, Feldman, and Tung (2006) focused on one particular school, Boston Arts Academy, which they consider exemplary in fostering parent involvement and collaboration. In particular, this school is unique in this accomplishment as it is an urban school, consisting of a large population of impoverished minority students. Ouimette, Feldman, and Tung identify several key strategies the school employs that they believe make it successful in growing parent involvement. They also state that they believe this is a significant contributing factor to the high level of academic achievement within the school. Some of these strategies include providing many diverse opportunities for parents to become involved; creating a “vision” focusing on families as a part of the school team; supporting faculty/staff in the quest to really know their students and regularly communicate with parents; and allocating resources (both monetarily and through staffing) to help facilitate parent interaction.

There have been relatively few studies performed in analyzing the impact of parent-teacher conference attendance on student success. Most studies instead focus on the success of various methods of conducting these conferences. For example, Orphal (2012) presents a

common problem with parent meetings: a negative atmosphere which leaves all parties feeling frustrated, defensive, or guilty and anxious to leave as quickly as possible. The author states that there are specific steps teachers can take to make these interactions more productive and help to build partnerships in improving students' education. Some of these suggestions include making contact throughout the year, rather than only at times of trouble; beginning with positive statements; working together to determine how goals can be met; following through with plans and following up in continuing to contact the parents as the student progresses; and celebrating with goals are met.

One study that does deal specifically with the importance of parent-teacher conference attendance though still focusing on the content of the conference as well was conducted by Markstrom (2011). He analyzed parent-teacher conferences in a preschool in Sweden. In this study, the teacher focused on using and explaining educational terminology or jargon and employed visual aids (called "strength cards") to help the parents understand their children more from the teacher's educational perspective. It was found that when parents actually understood the processes from this viewpoint, they became more involved in their children's learning and better able to help at home and support the school and its teachers. Though this was a small study, the article includes information on similar findings in other, larger ones. It was found that there is often a language barrier that limits parents' understanding of their children's progress and needs at school. This leaves the parent-teacher conference ineffective. The methods discussed in this article made the interactions more productive and, ultimately, benefitted the children because their parents became more involved in and knowledgeable about their learning.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### *Research Design*

A quantitative study was conducted to determine if there was a difference in student achievement in communication arts courses between students whose parents/guardians attended parent-teacher conferences and students whose parents did not attend parent-teacher conferences. The independent variable is whether or not the parent attended parent-teacher conferences. The dependent variables are the students' exam scores.

### *Study Group Description*

The participants in this study include 274 students in grades 7-12. All of these students are in regular education communication arts classrooms at a mid-western rural school district with a student population of 855 for the entire school district. Of these students, 95% are Caucasian and 57.4% qualify for free and/or reduced price lunch. These students are taught by four different communication arts teachers in total.

### *Data Collection and Instrumentation*

The data was collected by contacting the four teachers that teach 7-12 regular education communication arts courses in this school district. They recorded the attendance at their parent-teacher conferences as well as the scores on the first major assessment they gave following conferences. This information was then manipulated into an Excel spreadsheet for collection and analysis.

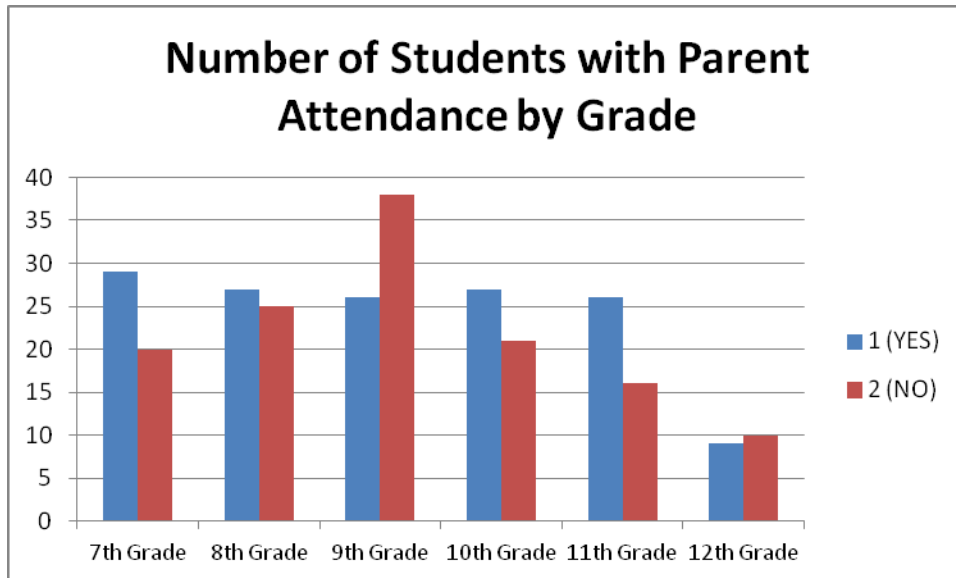
*Statistical Analysis Methods*

A t-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in student achievement in communication arts courses between students whose parents/guardians attended parent-teacher conferences and students whose parents did not. The source was broken down into two categories: those whose parents did attend and those who did not. The mean, mean D, t-test, df, and p-value were concluded from this test. The Alpha level was set at 0.25 to test the null hypothesis.

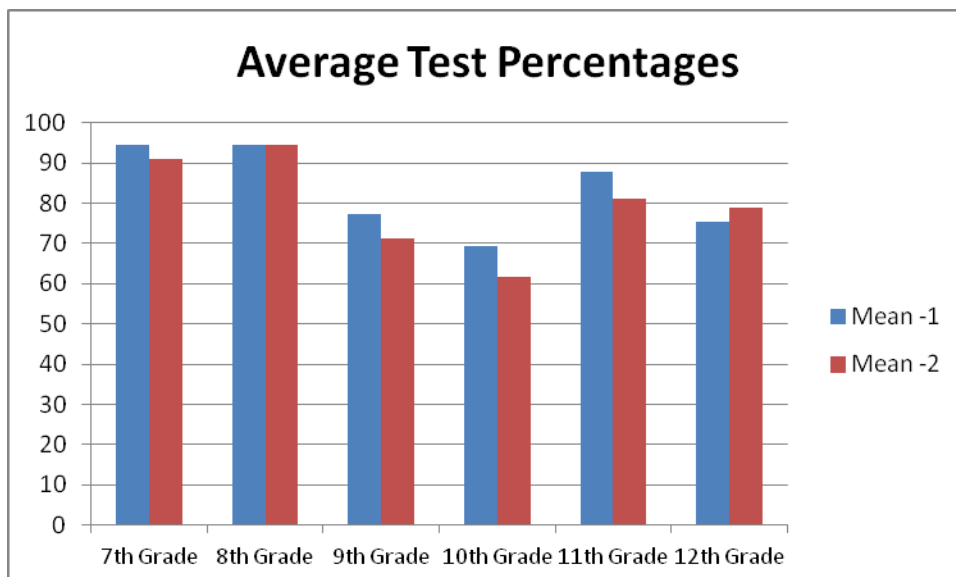
FINDINGS

Using an Excel spreadsheet, the total number of students with parents who did and did not attend conferences was calculated. Those whose parents did attend were labeled as Status 1; those whose parents did not attend were labeled as Status 2. Then, for each grade level, the average, median, standard deviation, maximum and minimum test percentages were calculated for each of the statuses.

<i>Status</i>	<b>7th Grade</b>	<b>8th Grade</b>	<b>9th Grade</b>	<b>10th Grade</b>	<b>11th Grade</b>	<b>12th Grade</b>
1 (YES)	29	27	26	27	26	9
2 (NO)	20	25	38	21	16	10
<i>Scores</i>						
Mean - 1	94	94	77	69	88	75
Mean - 2	91	95	71	62	81	79
Median - 1	97	98	83	69	90	81
Median - 2	97	97	77	63	84	79
St. Dev. - 1	7	8	23	12	12	17
St. Dev. - 2	10	6	29	13	12	12
Max. - 1	100	100	107	94	99	90
Max. - 2	100	100	107	95	95	92
Min. - 1	71	71	30	34	48	44
Min. - 2	69	75	7	32	60	54

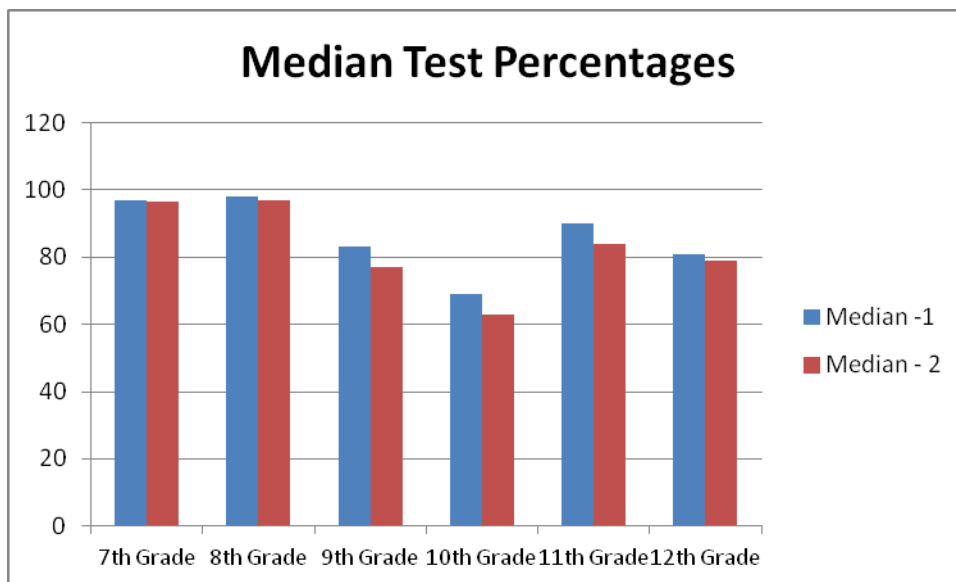


In this analysis, the number of students whose parents did or did not attend conferences is summarized. The class with the greatest number of students was the 9<sup>th</sup> grade with 64 students while the class with the fewest students was the 12<sup>th</sup> grade with 19. The 7<sup>th</sup> grade class had the highest number of parents attend with 29 while the 9<sup>th</sup> grade class had the highest number of parents not attending with 38. In terms of percentages, the 11<sup>th</sup> grade class had the highest overall parent attendance with 62%. The class with the lowest overall parent attendance was the 9<sup>th</sup> grade with 41%.

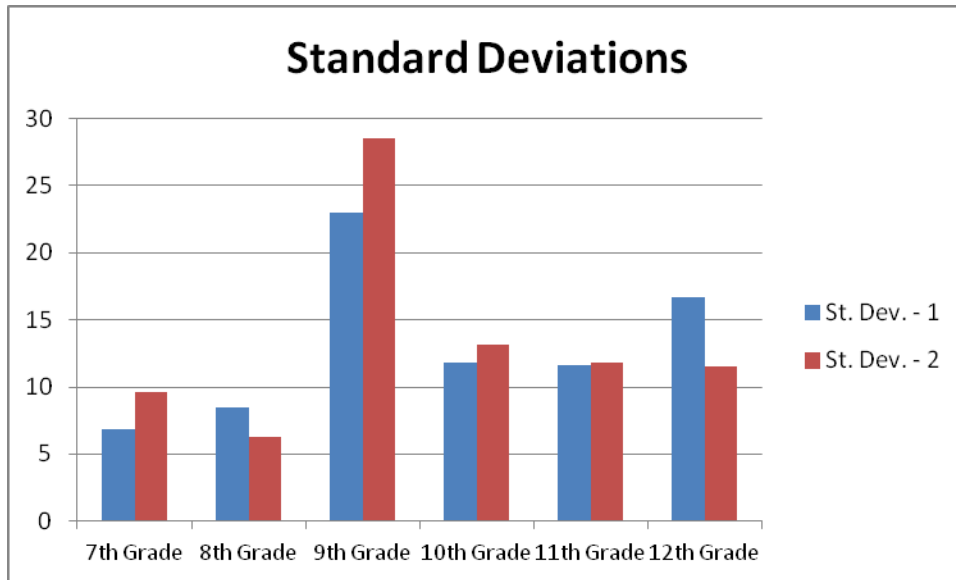




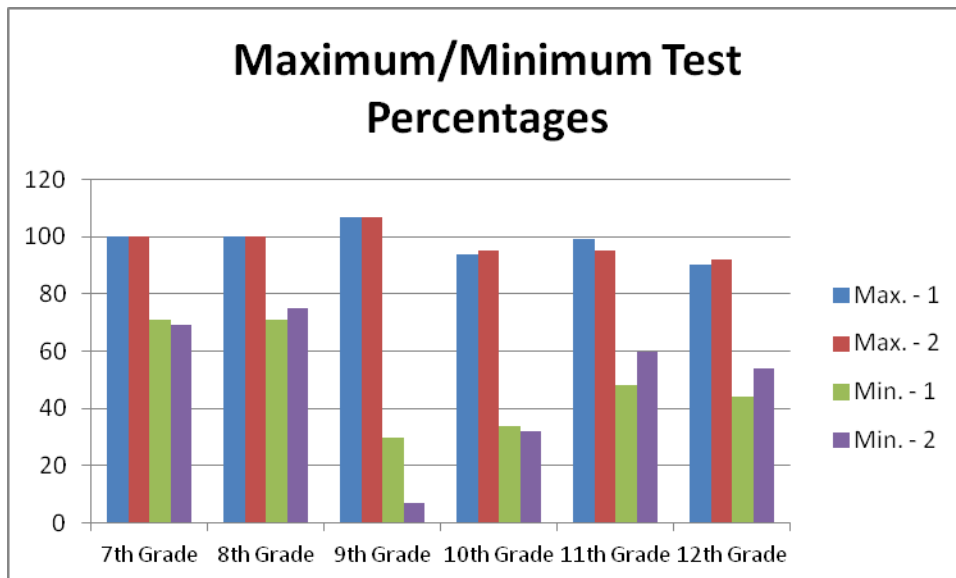
In the above analysis, the average test percentages for Status 1 and Status 2 were calculated by grade. In each grade, the average test percentage was higher for the Status 1 students (those whose parents did attend conferences) than the average test percentage for the Status 2 students except in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade where the averages were essentially equal. For the classes other than the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the Status 1 test scores were three to seven points higher than the Status 2 test scores.



The chart above shows the median test percentages for Status 1 and Status 2 students by grade. The median score for each of the grade levels was higher for the Status 1 students, except for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, which was equal. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the median score was one point higher for Status 1 students; however, in grades 9-11, the median was 6 points higher for the Status 1 students. The 10<sup>th</sup> grade had the lowest median percentages with 69% for the Status 1 students and 63% for the Status 2 students whose parents did not attend conferences.



The standard deviations are expressed in the chart above. The highest standard deviations belonged to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade with the Status 1 students at 23 and the Status 2 students at 29. For the remainder of the grade levels, the standard deviations remain fairly consistent, ranging only from low of six with the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Status 2 students and a high of 17 with the 12<sup>th</sup> grade Status 1 students.



Finally, the maximum and minimum test percentages were calculated for each status by grade level. The highest overall percentages were in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade class, with the Status 1 maximum being 107% (extra credit was available) and the Status 2 being the same. Interestingly, the same class had the lowest minimum test percentages, with the Status 1 minimum at 30% and the Status 2 minimum at 7%. In grades 7-9, the maximum test percentages were the same for the Status 1 and Status 2 students, while in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, the maximum test percentages were one to two points higher for the Status 2 students. Finally, in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, the maximum test percentage for the Status 1 students was four points higher than that of the Status 2 students.

t-Test Analysis Results for Parent-Teacher Conference Attendance and Student Test Achievement (7-12)

Source	Mean	Mean D	t-test	df	p-value
Status 1-Attended (n=144)	84.22				
Status 2- Did NOT Attend (n=130)	78.98	5.24	2.30	272	0.022

Note: Significant when  $p \leq 0.25$

In this analysis, the independent variable was parent-teacher conference attendance and the dependent variable was the student unit exam score. This was calculated using 274 communication arts students in regular education classes in grades seven through 12. They were divided into two groups with 144 students (Status 1) having parents that did attend parent-teacher conferences and 130 students (Status 2) have parents that did not attend parent-teacher conferences. The mean score for students whose parents did attend conferences was 84.22 while the mean score for the students whose parents did not was 78.98. The difference of the mean

score (Mean D) was 5.24. The t-test was 2.30 and the degrees of freedom was 272. The null hypothesis was “There is not a significant difference in student achievement in communication arts courses between students whose parents/guardians attended parent-teacher conferences and students whose parents did not attend parent-teacher conferences.” The null is rejected because the p-value of 0.022 is less than the alpha level of .25. Therefore, there is a significant difference in student achievement in communication arts courses between students whose parents/guardians attended parent-teacher conferences and students whose parents did not attend parent-teacher conferences.

t-Test Analysis Results for Parent-Teacher Conference Attendance and Student Test Achievement (7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> only)

Source	Mean	Mean D	<i>t</i> -test	df	<i>p</i> -value
Status 1-Attended (n=56)	94.41				
Status 2- Did NOT Attend (n=45)	91.00	3.41	1.45	47	0.15

Note: Significant when  $p \leq 0.25$

In an analysis of only the junior high (or 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades), the independent variable was parent-teacher conference attendance and the dependent variable was the student unit exam score. This was calculated using 101 communication arts students in regular education classes in those grades. They were divided into two groups with 56 students (Status 1) having parents that did attend parent-teacher conferences and 45 students (Status 2) have parents that did not attend parent-teacher conferences. The mean score for students whose parents did attend conferences was 94.41 while the mean score for the students whose parents did not was 91.00. The difference of the mean score (Mean D) was 3.41. The t-test was 1.45 and the degrees of freedom

was 47. The null hypothesis was “There is not a significant difference in student achievement in communication arts courses between students whose parents/guardians attended parent-teacher conferences and students whose parents did not attend parent-teacher conferences.” The null is rejected because the p-value of 0.15 is less than the alpha level of .25. Therefore, there is a significant difference in student achievement in communication arts courses between students whose parents/guardians attended parent-teacher conferences and students whose parents did not attend parent-teacher conferences in the junior high grades.

t-Test Analysis Results for Parent-Teacher Conference Attendance and Student Test Achievement (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> only)

Source	Mean	Mean D	t-test	df	p-value
Status 1-Attended (n=88)	77.75				
Status 2- Did NOT Attend (n=85)	71.59	6.16	2.04	171	0.043

Note: Significant when  $p \leq 0.25$

In an analysis of only the high school (or grades 9-12), the independent variable was parent-teacher conference attendance and the dependent variable was the student unit exam score. This was calculated using 173 communication arts students in regular education classes in those grades. They were divided into two groups with 88 students (Status 1) having parents that did attend parent-teacher conferences and 85 students (Status 2) have parents that did not attend parent-teacher conferences. The mean score for students whose parents did attend conferences was 77.75 while the mean score for the students whose parents did not was 71.59. The difference of the mean score (Mean D) was 6.16. The t-test was 2.04 and the degrees of freedom was 171. The null hypothesis was “There is not a significant difference in student achievement in communication arts courses between students whose parents/guardians attended parent-

teacher conferences and students whose parents did not attend parent-teacher conferences.” The null is rejected because the p-value of 0.043 is less than the alpha level of .25. Therefore, there is a significant difference in student achievement in communication arts courses between students whose parents/guardians attended parent-teacher conferences and students whose parents did not attend parent-teacher conferences in the high school grades.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data reported from this study shows that students whose parents attend parent teacher conferences perform better on the next assessment they undergo in regular education communication arts courses, grades 7-12. The null hypothesis is rejected because the p-value of 0.022 is less than the alpha level of .25. Therefore, there is a significant difference in student achievement in communication arts courses between students whose parents/guardians attended parent-teacher conferences and students whose parents did not attend parent-teacher conferences.

The findings from this study support the conceptual underpinning that students tend to be more successful in school when they have parents who are involved in their education. Therefore, students with more supportive parents will have high levels of academic achievement. This affirms the efforts of teachers and districts in planning events such as Meet the Teacher Nights, Advisory Boards, newsletters, phone calls, websites, e-mails, and the practices of the Parent-Teacher Organization because they allow for greater parent involvement. Students will have higher achievement and benefit from having parents who are knowledgeable and involved in their education, through these means and others. In particular, attendance at parent-teacher conferences allows parents and teachers to communicate at convenient times, often at critical benchmarks during the year. Parents are informed of their student's progress and struggles, as well as of the skills and practices with which they can help their children. Teachers are also able to learn about the students in more depth, determining whether there are other circumstances in their lives that may be affecting their academic success. This allows the students to have higher levels of academic achievement than those whose parents do not attend conferences.

It can be concluded that school districts and teachers should do all they can to increase parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences. This may mean determining the times at which the most parents are available, increasing the advertisement of these activities, and making them more appealing and positive to encourage greater attendance. It is important that there is the highest parent attendance possible at conferences because this has been proven to improve student achievement in communication arts in grades 7-12.



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