THE EFFECTS OF SINGLE-PARENT HOUSEHOLDS VERSUS TWO-PARENT HOUSEHOLDS ON STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS, ATTENDANCE, AND SUSPENSIONS

by

Ronald T. Ferrell
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Submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University
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School of Education
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I do hereby attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: ____________________________________

Signature: ________________________ Date:__________
A Dissertation

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This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Lindenwood University by the School of Education.

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ABSTRACT

The traditional family has been replaced predominantly by stepfamilies, binuclear families, and extended families often headed by grandparents. The purpose of this dissertation was to determine if there was a relationship between single-parent households versus two-parent households on student success as measured by Grade Point Average (GPA), attendance, achievement, and suspensions. The essential research questions were the following:

1. Do students from two-parent households receive better grades in school compared to students from single-parent households?

2. Do students from two-parent households attend school with more frequency than children from single-parent households?

3. Are students from single-parent households suspended more frequently from school than students from two-parent households?

The research hypothesis stated that academic success for students who live in two-parent households will be greater than students who primarily live in single-parent households, while the number of absences and suspensions will be lower. A quantitative research methodology was used to analyze student data. The independent variable of this research study was the type of families involved: single-parent and two-parent families. The dependent variable was the academic success of the students from both single-parent and two-parent households as measured by student academic success, attendance, and suspensions.

The results found that there was not a statistically significant difference between the GPA scores of students who lived in single-parent households compared to scores of
students who lived in two-parent households, while the test on absences found that there was a relationship between the number of times a student was absent and the type of household in which the student lived. The highest number of absences was found in the single-parent households. In addition, the results of the study found that the highest number of tardies was found in the single-parent households. Last, the study found that there was not a relationship between the number of times a student was suspended and the type of household in which the student lived.
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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

In the last 35 years, the proportion of U.S. children being raised in two-parent homes has dropped significantly, from approximately 85% in 1968 to 70% in 2003, while the proportion of children living in single-parent homes has nearly doubled. Before they reach the age of 18, a majority of all U.S. children are likely to spend a significant portion of their childhoods in a single-parent home (Center for Marriage & Families, 2005).

Almost one-third of family households with children are maintained by a single parent, of whom nine out of ten are women (Berry, 1999). Most single mothers do not have a significant other to discuss schedules or housework, nor do they have the income assistance or the emotional support that a spouse can provide. As Cherlin (1981) argued, “It seems likely that the most detrimental aspect of the absence of fathers from single-parent families headed by women is not the lack of a male presence, but the lack of a male income” (p. 81). One-parent families with one breadwinner are relatively more disadvantaged than two-parent families with two breadwinners. The economic circumstances of never-married mothers are worse than those of divorced mothers (Spain & Bianchi, 1996).

An adolescent from a family of lower socioeconomic status is more likely to exit from high school before finishing (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986) and less likely to attend college (Lambert, 1988). According to a report by the National Commission on Children (1991), poverty can affect educational outcomes in a variety of ways.
Adolescents from poor families are more likely to lack basic academic skills and to have repeated a grade as children. They are at risk for poorer health and nutrition, a factor that could affect their ability to concentrate in the classroom.

(National Commission on Children, 1991, p. 1)

The stress and lack of social support to parents in poor families may adversely affect parents’ support for school success, which, in turn, may affect children’s intellectual development. Poor families are likely to live in poor school districts with fewer resources to offer their students. Adolescents in poor families are more likely to be employed, and this may be harmful to school achievement if work hours are long (National Commission on Children).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 revolutionized the way education was viewed. The law set new standards for students, teachers, and schools. Funding was provided to help meet the new requirements, while standardized tests were administered nearly every year to gauge student achievement. If the law could be described in one word, it would be accountability. More accountability was being placed on schools, teachers, students, and most importantly, parents.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between single-parent households versus two-parent households on student academic success as measured by Grade Point Average (GPA), attendance, and suspensions. The researcher wanted to know if family structure had a direct or indirect affect on the success rate of a
child in school, both academically and behaviorally. The essential research questions were the following:

1. Do students from two-parent households receive better grades in school compared to students from single-parent households?
2. Do students from two-parent households attend school with more frequency than children from single-parent households?
3. Are students from single-parent households suspended more frequently from school than students from two-parent households?

The core data was gathered by Comprehensive Information Management System (CIMS). CIMS is a computerized data collection program that keeps an accurate record of all students’ attendance, GPAs, and behavioral reports.

*Rationale for Study*

The non-traditional family is becoming the norm. Students who do not grow up living with both biological parents are more likely to drop out of school, have children out of wedlock, and be arrested (Painter & Levine, 1999). “Such children are also less likely to attend college or hold a good job” (Painter & Levine, p. 1). In East Saint Louis School District 189, the poverty rate is above 95%, while over 98% of the students enrolled receive free and reduced lunch (Illinois School Report Card, 2006). East Saint Louis School District 189 is predominantly African American. Therefore, it is important to note that the subjects involved in this study came from predominantly African American households.
**Independent Variable**

The independent variable of this research study was the type of family involved, single-parent or two-parent families.

**Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable was the academic success of the students from both single-parent and two-parent households as measured by GPA, attendance, and suspensions.

**Hypothesis**

The student academic success rate for students who live in two-parent households will be greater than students who primarily live in single-parent households, while the number of absences and suspensions will be lower for students who live in two-parent homes.

**Limitations of Study**

*Subjects.* The first threat to internal validity in this study was the sample size. Although Wyvetter Younge Middle School had over 642 students, the researcher managed only to secure 75 students who currently lived in two-parent households from the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 academic school years. The students were randomly selected by CIMS during their seventh-grade year. The CIMS system identified their household type. Every seventh-grade student had a chance of being selected for the study,
although there were more single-parent household students who attended Wyvetter Younge.

*Location of study.* The second threat to internal validity in this study was the location of the study. Although the subjects were from various family structures and socioeconomic backgrounds, the constant was that the study took place at one location, Wyvetter Younge Middle School.

*Implementation.* The third threat to internal validity in this study was the implementation used to select the subjects. Although CIMS was the primary instrument that was used to select the subjects, the researcher, along with the school attendance officer, manually programmed CIMS to randomly select students from the seventh-grade class for the study.

*Instrumentation.* Another threat to internal validity in this study was the instrumentation used to collect data. The primary instrument that was used to collect data for the study was CIMS. The CIMS system (a computerized data collection program used district wide) keeps an accurate record of all students’ quarterly grades (mid-term and progress reports), absences, tardies, and suspensions. The CIMS system is a threat to internal validity because the information is added manually. Therefore, it has a *human element* that can not be disregarded.

*Duration of study.* The fifth threat to internal validity in this study lies with the duration of the study. The data from the study were gathered from the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 academic school years. A study of this nature is typically longitudinal. A two-year span may not provide accurate findings.
Loss of students (mortality). The final threat to internal validity in this study lies with the loss of students through the duration of the study. Due to the high mobility rate of students of this community, it is important to note that the ecological validity of the study could be questioned.

Definition of Terms

Single-parent household. A household headed by one mother, one father, an older sibling, aunt, uncle, grandmother, grandfather, foster parent, or extended relative who acts as the primary caregiver and guardian of the child.

Two-parent household. A household headed by two-biological parents, two grandparents, a mother with a stepfather, a father with a stepmother, an aunt with a spouse, an uncle with a spouse, an older sibling with a spouse, foster parents, or extended relatives with spouses acting as the primary caregivers and guardians of the child.

Binuclear family. A post divorce family in which both parents participate in the raising of their children despite living in separate households; the children generally live with one of the parents (Olson & DeFrain, 2003).

Nuclear family. A kinship group in which a husband, a wife, and their children live together in one household (Olson & DeFrain, 2003).

Stepfamily. A family that is created when one or both partners in a marriage have a child or children from a previous marriage (Olson & DeFrain, 2003).

Sample. The group from which information is obtained.

Random sample. A sample selected in such a way that every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected.
Target population. The population to which the researcher, ideally, would like to generalize results.
CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In today’s society, the family dynamic is changing. Children are being reared by a host of individuals who are both related and unrelated. There are many different types of family structures, which often coincide with other variables that may play a vital role in the development of a child. This chapter analyzed the concept of family and how it pertains to African American households. The aspects of single-parent families and two-parent families were also examined in regards to their influence on student academic success, attendance, and suspension rates. The dynamics of the family component, as well as coping mechanisms, were also addressed. It is important to note that all dialogue concerning the effects of family structure begins with one essential word: family.

Family

The word family can be defined in many different ways. The concept of family may have a different meaning from one individual to the next. Several definitions have been proposed that represent a broad meaning of family.

The term family refers to a group of two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption, and residing together in a household. A family includes the householders among its members (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000b). Conventional wisdom holds that family is a group of people who love and care for each other. A family is defined as two or more persons who share resources, share responsibility for decisions, share values and goals, and have a commitment to one another over time (American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, 2004). Families provide emotional, physical, and economic mutual aid to their members. Ideally, such families are
characterized by intimacy, intensity, continuity, and commitment among the members (Alliance for Children and Families, 2004). According to New York State Administrative Regulations (1995), the definition of family “should not rest on fictitious legal distinctions or genetic history” but instead should be based on the functional and psychological qualities of the relationship: the “exclusivity and longevity” of relationship, the “level of emotional and financial commitment,” the “reliance placed upon one another for daily family services,” and how the members “conducted their everyday lives and held themselves out to society” (p. 3).

Throughout history, no society has been discovered that does not have a family system. However, what is a family? Various readings seem to suggest that the term generally refers to a group of people related to one another by birth, marriage, or adoption. In contemporary society, the term is often applied to any group that feels a sense of kinship or family connection (Irving, 2003).

A family is a construct of meanings and relationships; a household is a residential and economic unit (Osmond & Thorne, 1993; Rapp, 1982). To put it another way, “A household is a residence group that carries out domestic functions, whereas a family is a kinship group” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999, p. 21). The researcher defined a family as a social unit of individuals who share a collection of similar attributes and values that are instilled in them in their childhood and last throughout their lives.

The changing nature of the family in our society has given rise to new terminology that is essential in identifying today’s diverse families (Olson & DeFrain, 2003). “Any definition of family should be broad enough to encompass a range of family structures, dynamics, and functions” (Olson & DeFrain, p. 5). The term family seems to
have developed a different meaning in recent years. It seems that the term will continue
to evolve in our society.

Family structure is becoming more complex through divorce, remarriage, and
many other circumstances. New family terminology is needed to describe these complex
relationships, but, as of yet, little progress has been made in clarifying or adequately
defining these new structures. Even less has been done to describe the complexity of
family dynamics in these new relationships (Olson & DeFrain, 2003). The following
trends illustrate the changes in family structure in the United States:

1. In 2002, 69% of all children lived in a nuclear family in which two-parents were
   present. The percentage of two-parent families varies by ethnic/cultural group:
   80% of white children live in two-parent homes; 70% of Latinos; and 47% of
   African American children (Fields, 2003).

2. Single-parent families with children under the age of 18 have dramatically
   increased in number. In 1970, only 12% of children lived in a single-parent home.
   In 1980, this number had increased to 22% and by 1990 to 28%. The most recent
   data obtainable indicate that in 2002 the number remained stable at 28% (Fields,
   2003).

3. “About half (48%) of all African American families are headed by a single
   mother, while 25% of Latino families and 16% of White families are headed by a
   single mother” (Fields, 2003, p. 5). “A small but growing number of families in
   the United States (4% to 5% of families across ethnic/cultural groups) are headed
   by a single father” (Fields, p. 5). Some social scientists have predicted that 60%
   of children in the United States will have lived in a single-parent household by the
time they are 18 years old if current divorce and remarriage rates hold (Olson & DeFrain, 2003).

With regard to family, the question of who does the primary parenting in a household is quite complex because there are so many possible variations. The variables include (a) the number of parents in the household (including guardians in the parental role, such as in households headed by grandparents or foster parents); (b) the gender of the single-parent in the household; (c) the presence or lack of an extended family; (d) the parents’ marital status; and (e) the sexual orientation of the parents (Demo & Cox, 2001).

Each of these variables may have different effects on children depending on their age (Demo & Cox, 2001). For example, a study of African American children in the Woodlawn community in Chicago distinguished 86 different combinations of adults living in households with first-graders (Hunter & Ensminger, 1992). Of crucial importance is the timing and sequencing of changes in children’s living arrangements. According to Demo and Cox, the following are research-based generalizations concerning these variations.

1. The absence of a same-sex parent for daughters of solo-fathers and for sons of solo-mothers tends to have a negative impact.

2. The presence of two adults, even if the second adult is not a legal parent, has been found to diminish adolescent behavior problems.

3. Growing up in nontraditional gender role families does not have adverse effects on the children.

4. Children of lesbian and gay parents have normal relationships with peers, and their relationships with adults of both sexes are satisfactory.
5. Children do better in stable living arrangements than in transitory ones even if the stability involves living with a single-parent. For example, “Children experiencing multiple transitions (e.g., from two-parents to single-parent to parent and stepparent) and experiencing them later in childhood fare poorly compared to those living their entire childhood in stable single-parent families.” (p. 105)

The research seems to suggest that a stable household for children may yield more positive outcomes for children growing up and beyond the home. A theory that illustrates the family as a collective unit is the family system theory. The family system theory states that everything that happens to any family member has an impact on everyone else in the family (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2003). Because family members are interconnected and operate as a group, the group is called a family system. “This approach to describing the family as a system has become very popular in both theory and practice, particularly with family therapists who work with couples and families having relationship problems” (Olsen & DeFrain, 2003, p. 64). Researchers describe the family as intricate pieces of a collective whole, where each part has a role and responsibility to the other.

In 1992, Whitaker, a pioneer family therapist, was fond of saying that in a metaphorical sense “there are no individuals in the world—only fragments of families” (as cited in Olson & DeFrain, 2003, p. 64). In other words, individual human beings are tied inextricably to their families. How people think and behave is influenced deeply by their family background, and people are best understood by understanding their family.

There are many different interpretations of the word family. From educators to therapists, the word family essentially describes a group of individuals who are socially
intertwined with similar values. It is important to examine the essence of family with regard to the African American community, which has a high incidence of single-parent households.

_African American Families_

The African American family has changed throughout the years. It seems to consist of many different family structures such as single-parent families, two-parent families, binuclear families, nuclear families, stepfamilies, and many extended families in which grandparents are raising children.

Although two-parent families were strong during and after slavery, the proportion of African American families headed by two-parents began to decline sometime after 1925, and this decline became more pronounced in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. During this period, African American divorce rates more than doubled, marriage rates declined, fertility rates fell to record levels, the proportion of families in which children lived with both biological parents declined, and the proportion of children reared in single-parent households rose dramatically (Taylor, 2000).

The vast majority of African American households are family households (i.e., the household’s members are related by birth, marriage, or adoption). In 2000, fewer than half of the families (47.9%) were headed by a married couple, down from 68% in 1970 and 56% in 1980. A much higher percentage (82%) of Caucasian families was headed by married couples, although this percentage also slipped over the past two decades (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999; 2002).
Structural features of African American families have received a great deal of attention with respect to their effects on children’s achievement. Because a majority of African American children are being raised in households headed by single mothers and, increasingly, grandmothers, much of this work has been directed to understanding the effects of single-parenthood and documenting the critical role of the extended family structure as a source of support (Wilson, 1987).

To summarize, African American families have changed over time. Divorce rates in African American families have doubled since the 1960s, while the percentage of children who live in two-parent households has dropped. When analyzing the African American family since slavery, it seems that the family component has become fragmented. Many African American families have a single parent as the primary caregiver. Single-parent households seem to have become a mainstay in the African American community.

**Single-Parent Families**

Single-parent families are commonly seen in urban environments. It has been the researcher’s experience as a middle school principle that students from single-parent households perform lower academically, exhibit more behavior problems, and receive less parental support at school. A single-parent household could be defined as one headed by a mother, father, older sibling, aunt, uncle, grandmother, grandfather, foster parent, or extended relative who acts as the primary caregiver and guardian of the child. One might want to assume a link among single-parent families, urban environments, poor academic performance, behavior problems, and low parental support at school.
Ahrons (2004) sometimes prefers the term binuclear family to single-parent family because it acknowledges the positive outcomes that result from divorce. Divorce is a process that results in family reorganization rather than disintegration of the family system (Olson & DeFrain, 2003). The term family reorganization seems to be not only a more accurate, but also a more positive description of divorce as it relates to single-parent families.

A review of the literature seemed to show that the single-parent families are on the rise. According to Demo and Cox (2001):

More than one-fourth of all U.S. children lived with just one parent in 2000, up from 12% in 1970; half of all children spend some of their childhoods in single-parent families and; one in five children spends his or her entire childhood in a single-parent household.” (p. 86)

About 85% of single-parent families are headed by a woman and almost half of these households are below the poverty line (Martin, Emery, & Peris, 2004). “Single mothers, on average, spend a total of about nine years raising children without a partner being present” (Bianchi & Casper, 2000, p. 22). In 2000, 49% of African American children lived in mother-only families, compared with 25% of Latino children and 16% of Caucasian children. Research seems to suggest that the growing trend of single-parent families may continue to rise. Olson and DeFrain (2003) stated the following:

This reorganization of the nuclear family after divorce frequently results in the establishment of two households, the mother’s and the father’s. If one ex-spouse does not drop out of the family after divorce and the two households continue to interrelate, then a binuclear family has been established. (p. 457)
Children may benefit from a binuclear family in which both parents are actively involved in child rearing even though they are divorced and living in separate households.

Children from mother-only families are less advantaged than children from two-parent families (McLanahan & Booth, 1991). It seems that mothers are often the primary caregiver and breadwinner of the family, while fathers, who seem to be less active in their children’s lives after divorce, could have a positive and stronger impact if they were more actively involved.

McLanahan and Booth (1991) conducted research on children from mother-only families compared to children from two-parent families and stated the following:

Children from mother-only families (a) have poorer academic achievement—the relation is more negative for boys than girls; (b) are more likely to have higher absentee rates at school; (c) are more likely to drop out of school; (d) are more likely to have lower earnings in young adulthood and are more likely to be poor; (e) are more likely to marry early and to have children early, both in and out of marriage; (f) are more likely to divorce, if they marry; and (g) are more likely to commit delinquent acts and to engage in drug and alcohol use (p. 406).

The authors paint a grim outlook for the children of single-parent households compared to children from two-parent households.

Although these findings (displaying children of single-parent families more at risk than children from families with two-parent families) are relevant, Zinn, Eitzen, and Wells (2008) stated, “most adjust normally” (p. 346). A review of the research concluded that “most children who experience living in a single-parent family do not get pregnant, drop out of school, or require treatment from a mental health professional” (Zinn et al., p.
Such evidence is an important reminder that many children seem to be able to cope. Thus, Martin et al. (2004) stated, “It seems clear that the majority of children from single-parent families proceed along a relatively healthy child development trajectory as measured by key indicators of their academic, social, and psychological adjustment” (p. 285).

Eighty-five percent of one-parent families are headed by a woman (Martin et al., 2004). Marsiglio, Amato, Day, and Lamb (2001) claimed that the absence of a male adult is detrimental to a child’s development, which may explain the disproportionate pathologies found among the children of single-parent households. Further, the authors argued that the presence of both mothers and fathers contributes to the healthy development of the child. The absence of an adult male in the house seems to be a disadvantage for children.

In summary, children from single-parent households seem to face many challenges throughout their development, though many seem to cope well. The number of single-parents in today’s society is increasing yearly. Many children are being reared by single mothers, who seem to struggle to make ends meet while teetering below the poverty line. Perhaps single mothers and fathers do not have as much time to participate fully in their child’s schooling, thus adding to the challenges for children of single-parent families.

Two-Parent Families

Children from two-parent families seem to have an advantage over children from single-parent families. The researcher defined a two-parent family as a household headed
by two-biological parents, two grandparents, a mother with a stepfather, a father with a stepmother, an aunt with a spouse, an uncle with a spouse, an older sibling with a spouse, foster parents, or extended relatives with spouses acting as the primary caregiver and guardian of the child. Children living with both biological parents remain in school longer and attain higher educational qualifications than children in one-parent families. In particular, children with absent fathers are more likely to drop out of school than children who live with their fathers (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Bethke & Sandefur, 1998; Lang & Zagorsky, 2001; Manski, Sandefur, McLanahan, & Powers, 1992; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Painter & Levine, 2000). DeLeire and Kalil (2001) found that in a sample of children who completed the eighth-grade, high school graduation rates were 90% for those in two-parent families, 75% for those in divorce-mother families, and 69% for those in never-married-mother families.

The involvement of fathers in their children’s schools seems to be important in regards to their academic achievement and social behavior. Nord, Brimhall, and West (1997) found that in two-parent households, “Fathers’ involvement in their children’s schools has a distinct and independent influence on children’s achievement over and above that of mothers” (p. 1). The authors also argued that fathers can be a positive force in their children’s education, and when fathers get involved, their children are likely to do better academically. Unfortunately, many fathers seem to be relatively uninvolved in their children’s schools.

The National Household Education Survey offers further insight into the importance of fathers being actively involved. The survey was designed to gauge “the extent to which fathers are involved in their children’s schools and the link between
fathers’ involvement and the school performance of their children from kindergarten through 12th grade” (U.S. Department of Education, 1996, p. 1). Paternal involvement was gauged by four types of school activities that parents could participate in during the academic school year: (a) attending a general school meeting, (b) attending a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference, (c) attending a school or class event, and (d) serving as a volunteer at the school. The survey stated that fathers who participated in one activity were said to have low parental involvement. Fathers who participated in at least two of the activities had moderate involvement, and those who participated in three or four activities were said to be highly involved in their children’s schools (U.S. Department of Education). The survey found the following:

The proportion of children living in two-parent families with highly involved fathers is about half of the proportion of those with highly involved mothers, at 27% and 56% respectively. In other words, in two-parent families, children are twice as likely to have mothers who are highly involved than to have fathers who are highly involved in their children’s schools. In comparison, children living with single fathers or mothers are about equally likely to have parents who are highly involved in schools, at 46% and 49%, respectively. (U.S. Department of Education, pp. 1-2)

The U.S. Department of Education (1996) concluded that students with parents (mother or father) who are involved in their school tend to have fewer behavioral problems and better academic performance and are more likely to complete secondary school. It seems that fathers’ involvement in their children’s schools is uniquely
important, and in the absence of mothers, single-parent fathers become involved at an 
even greater rate than when mothers are not absent.

Stepfamilies are also a component in the family structure of two-parent families 
and face unique challenges. Zinn et al. (2008) defined a stepfamily as a family created 
when one or both partners in a marriage or relationship have a child or children from a 
previous marriage or relationship. In a stepfamily, one parent is not the biological parent, 
which can increase children’s feelings of attachment to their biological parent (Zinn et 
al.). Further, the authors state that the number of stepfamilies in which one or both of the 
partners have children from a previous marriage rose dramatically with the rising divorce 
and remarriage rates in the 1960s and 1970s. About 75% of those who divorce eventually 
marry again making about 20% of all U.S. families’ stepfamilies (Jones, 2003). Olson 
and DeFrain (2003) stated, “The bonds that children feel with their parents and vice versa 
are often stronger in nuclear families than in stepfamilies” (p. 459).

Zinn et al. (2008) stated, “Children in stepfamilies, compared with those in first-
marrried families, are more likely to experience a broad range of adjustment problems” (p. 
340). There are often loyalty issues in stepfamilies, with children, particularly 
adolescents, feeling greater loyalty to their biological parents than to the stepparent. 
Many stepfamilies struggle with complex and sometimes conflicting dynamics. Issues 
regarding grandparents and step grandparents add to the complexity (Olson & DeFrain, 
2003). There also can be struggles between stepsiblings when both spouses bring children 
into the new family. Financial issues can be complex. Olson and DeFrain stated, “When 
both parents in a stepfamily have children, the financial resources available for child
support payments and for meeting the financial demands of all children can be limited” (p. 459).

A study that compared stepfamilies and biological families in terms of marital conflict, using nationally representative data on 2,655 Black and White married couples with children, found no significant differences between them (MacDonald & DeMaris, 1995). The researchers found, contrary to their expectations, that remarriage and stepchildren are not necessarily associated with more frequent marital conflict and that in some cases, they are associated with less frequent conflict.

The academic achievement of children in stepfamilies is of interest. Thompson, Hanson, and McLanahan (1994) found that children in stepparent families score somewhat higher on tests than children in single-parent families. The authors further argued “that their scores are still over 25% of a standard deviation lower than those of children with two biological parents. Similar gaps are found when grades rather than test scores are used to measure academic success” (p. 223). Children who live with two biological parents receive higher grades (as reported by the parent) than children who live with their mother and an unmarried partner (Thompson et al.). In summary, groups of children in ranking order from highest academic achievement to lowest are (a) children who live with two biological parents, (b) children who live with stepparents, and (c) children who live with their mother and unmarried partner.

Grandparents seem to have become members of the extended family who may be assisting to raise their grandchildren or raising their grandchildren on their own. Welch (2003) found that in the year 2000, 1.8% of America’s children were being raised by their grandparents, with 62% of grandmothers on full-time duty and 38% of grandfathers in
that capacity. Welch further found that nearly 2.5 million grandparents are rearing their grandchildren. Goodman and Silverstein (2001) stated the following:

>This trend toward skipped generation households is the result of teen pregnancy, divorce, drug use by parents, economic marginality, the incarceration of parents, child abuse and neglect, mental and physical illness, and changes in welfare that are adding to the pressure of single-parents. (p. 579)

Grandparent-maintained households are most common in African American households — 13% of African American children are living in grandparent-headed households, compared to 5.7% of Latino children and 3.9% of Caucasians children (Goodman & Silverstein, 2001). “In 2000, almost one in five grandparent caregivers had incomes below the poverty line” (O’Hare, 2004, p. 13). “The economic resources of families are a crucial factor affecting the outcomes of children. The amount of family income available to children depends on the type of family in which he or she lives” (Bianchi & Casper, 2000, p. 27). One could summarize by saying that grandparents serving as parents are often in a bitter-sweet situation; they can provide parental support, but often not adequate financial support.

To restate, two-parent families in a traditional sense are declining in number. Family structures such as stepfamilies and extended grandparent families are now sub-components of the two-parent family dynamic. A child raised in a two-parent household may remain in school longer than one who lives in a single-parent household. Children may benefit academically from more parental involvement at school or have access to more resources due to dual household incomes. The effects of family structure and other social variables may be vital to a child’s academic success.
Family Dynamics

There can be many outside factors that may have a direct or indirect influence on the success rate, attendance rate, and behavior of a child at school. The involvement or non-involvement of a parent can also be critical to a child’s success. There are a variety of components that are involved in making a child successful. For example, Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964) examined the family correlates of children’s affective and academic outcomes. This research is commonly known as Bloom’s sub-environmental model.

Krathwohl et al.’s (1964) research investigated the relations between family influences and academic outcomes. The researchers defined family environments as the conditions, forces, and external stimuli that impinge on children (p. 1). Krathwohl et al. proposed that these forces, which may be physical, social, or intellectual, provide a network that surrounds, engulfs, and plays on a child. The Bloom model suggested, The total family context surrounding a child may be considered as being composed of a number of sub environments. If the development of particular characteristics, (such as academic motivation and achievement), are to be understood, then it is necessary to identify those sub environments that are potentially related to the characteristics. The analyses guided by the sub environment model indicate that it is possible to measure family influences that, when combined, have medium associations with children’s academic motivation and large association with their academic achievement. (p. 1)

In an extension of his family model, Bloom (1980) proposed the following:
The object of family research should be to search for those variables that can be altered, and therefore be the difference in children’s learning. The findings from family learning environment research suggest that children’s academic success is influenced by interrelationships with high parental involvement, occupational aspirations of parents, and a language environment characterized by strong reading habits and rich parent-child verbal interactions. (p. 1)

Bloom (1980) also identified other essential variables such as parental involvement and support:

An intellectually stimulating home setting, in which parents provide opportunities for children to explore ideas and encourage their children to become involved in imagination provoking activities; and parent-child interactions that support the pursuit of excellence in academic and cultural experiences that allow independent-oriented behavior. (p. 1)

With regard to family structure, several authors have argued that single-parenthood itself is not the critical issue in determining children’s school achievement. The authors suggest that there are various factors associated with the economic disadvantaged that may influence whether or not a parent is able to support the children’s educational progress (e.g., lack of social support, work-related stress, and school policies and procedures that assume all children live in dual-parent households). They have determined that when socioeconomic status or poverty status is controlled, in most cases the relation between single-parent families and educational outcomes weakens considerably or disappears entirely (Grissmer, Williamson, Kirby, & Berends, 1998; Patterson, Kupersmidt, & Vaden, 1990; Ricciuti, 1999).
Dornbusch, Carlsmith, Bushwall, Ritter, Leiderman, Hastorf, and Gross (1985) argued that family structure affects behavior problems in schools. “The children of a single-parent, whether living with their mother or father, can have emotional difficulties because they have experienced the stress, often traumatic, that accompanied their separation from or even the death of one of their parents” (Zinn et al., 2008, p. 347). Students who experience family disruption or live in single-parent families are more apt to be placed in a special education class or school (Lambert, 1988). Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, and Fraleigh (1987) found that children in single-parent households have lower grades than those in two-parent households. To restate, family structure and parental involvement can have an effect on a child’s behavior and academic performance.

Parents’ expectations about children’s school performance and behavior are related strongly to child outcomes (Bempechat & Wells, 1989; Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Jimerson, Egeland, & Teo, 1999; Scott-Jones, 1988). Among low-income African American families, parental expectations were one of the only consistent predictors of academic achievement, once other demographic variables were controlled (Reynolds & Gill, 1994).

Kagan (1977) stated the following:

The family’s resources and educational achievements affect the way in which children perceive themselves. These ascribed characteristics (along with race/ethnicity and gender) place children in the perceptions of others, in turn giving children an understanding of their worth. If the family has favored characteristics, children are very likely to gain nourishment from the social power and esteem that come from high social position. However, the children of the poor
and minorities find that they are devalued by persons outside the immediate family and kin network. This perception can have a profound effect on their psyches and behavior regardless of the efforts of their parents. (p. 47)

Expectations about grades, how many years of schooling children should complete, and future career prospects were related to school performance in kindergarten for African Americans and European Americans (Hill, 2001). Longitudinally, early parental expectations are predictive of later school success and experiences. Parental expectations for children’s school performance in kindergarten were related to children’s school performance in third-grade (Hill & Bouffard, 2003), as well as children’s attitudes about school in fourth-grade (Butterly & Hill, 2003).

Parental expectations seem to affect children’s school performance by increasing children’s own expectations and perceptions about their own confidence (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfeld, 1993). Parenting practices and expectations do not operate in isolation, but sometimes combine to impact achievement. For example, Hill and Bouffard (2003) found that high expectations in combination with harsh parenting resulted in lower school performance for children from families of higher socioeconomic status. Although most research examines parenting expectations and parent-school involvement separately, a more complete understanding of their effects in combination and of the complex family dynamics associated with achievement is needed.

Several explanations have been proposed for the relationship between family structure and student achievement in school. When age, gender, and grade level are controlled, secondary school students living in single-parent families score about 33% of
a standard deviation lower on mathematics and science tests than children living in two-parent families (Pong, Dronkers, & Hampden-Thompson, 2003).

In single-parent households, the parent may experience a higher level of stress than their counterparts due to the financial obligations of being the primary breadwinner in the household. “Women have absorbed the male work ethic much more readily than men have absorbed their share of domestic caretaking roles” (Hochschild, 1997, p. 11). “There is a strong likelihood that women raising children alone will be financially troubled” (Zinn et al., 2008, p. 347). When two people share the parental strains, it seems more likely that the needs of the children will be met.

A possible reason for the disproportionate behavioral problems seen among children living in single-parent families is that, for economic reasons, they move more often than two-parent families. Moving can be a source of emotional strain because old friends are left behind and children experience social isolation in the new setting (Marsiglio et al., 2001). Economics could be a reason why children from single-parent families seem to have behavior issues and a hard time adjusting to the inconsistencies in peer relationships.

The stress that mothers face can also have negative effects on their children. Changes in residence require that they, too, leave their social networks and sources of support. These moves are sometimes to disadvantaged neighborhoods, with high rates of crime, poverty, unemployment, and poor educational facilities. Often, these mothers must enter the labor force for the first time or increase their working hours. Such changes add stress to their lives as well as to the lives of their children (Zinn et al., 2008).
Researchers have examined the notion of stress and its effect on the dynamics of a family. Hill (1958; as cited in Olson & DeFrain, 2003) developed the ABC-X Crisis Model in an attempt to understand the process of how families adapt to stress. This model has been used to help identify the resources that a family has to cope with the stressor. The components of the model are the following: A = the stressor; B = the family’s crisis-meeting resources; C = the definition the family gives the stressor; and X = the crisis (Olson & DeFrain). Hill defined a stressful life event as “an event that creates a change in the family system” (as cited in Olson & DeFrain, p. 403) and a crisis as “any sharp or decisive change for which old patterns are inadequate” (as cited in Olson & DeFrain, p. 403). Olson and DeFrain (2003) stated the following:

One could use the ABC-X Model to describe, for example, the outcomes of an adolescent’s running away from home. The event (A), the adolescent’s running away, will turn into a crisis (X) if family members do not use their interpersonal skills as a resource (B) and if they do (C) define the event as a major disruption to the family. The family can use a wide variety of resources (B) inside and outside the family to deal with the stressor, and the more resources there are, the less the chances of it turning into a crisis. Another important component is how the family defines the event (C). A given event can have both positive and negative aspects. For example, a wedding can generally be very positive stress, but also contain some negative aspects. Conversely, a divorce can often create very negative stress, but it can also have positive aspects in regards to creating a positive climate for the children who are involved. (p. 403)
Coping is difficult for any single-parent, male or female, because of three common sources of strain: (a) responsibility overload, in which single-parents make all the decisions and provide for all of their family’s needs; (b) task overload, in which the demands of work, housekeeping, and parenting can be overwhelming for one person; and (c) emotional overload, in which single-parents must always be on call to provide the necessary emotional support (Zinn et al., 2008).

Olson and DeFrain (2003) identified several successful strategies that single mothers or fathers can use to help them cope with their unique situation in life:

1. Don’t rush into a new couple relationship, particularly in an attempt to transfer your dependence onto another person. Let go of the past and move on.
2. Realistically face what has happened. Learn from it; don’t repeat it.
3. Don’t succumb to feelings of failure and worthlessness. Make the best of the situation, and don’t blame yourself completely.
4. Keep busy with constructive activities. Take up new (or old) activities you always wanted to find time to enjoy.
5. Listen to others, but make your own decisions.
6. Take one day at a time, setting small goals at first.
7. Consider going back to school to advance your education.
8. Be flexible, adaptable, and independent. (pp. 465-466)

Watson, Brown, and Swick (1983) concluded that when parents and other family members are involved in a child’s education in a meaningful way, there are positive influences on academic achievement. Students whose families are actively involved achieve higher grades, have better attendance, complete more homework, are better
motivated, and are less likely to be cited for disciplinary action. Students of involved families are more ready and able to learn and more likely to stay in school and benefit from high quality learning experiences (Henderson & Berla, 1995).

This literature review discussed a variety of research on the topic of family structure and how it seems to relate to a child’s behavior and success in school. The meaning of family was discussed with a variety of theories and viewpoints on how the family component affects the development of a child. The African American family was also investigated in terms of how it has become fragmented into various families, which include single-parent families, two-parent families, binuclear families, nuclear families, stepfamilies, and many extended families in which grandparents are raising children. Single-parent families were examined with the notion of how mothers have become the primary breadwinners in their households. A review of two-parent household literature examined the benefits that children receive at home and school when there is more than one caregiver present. The last topic reviewed in the literature was the importance of family influences and parental expectations on a child’s success at school, as well as the importance of parents coping with life stressors.
CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between single-parent households versus two-parent households on student success as measured by GPA, attendance, and suspensions. The researcher wanted to know if family structure had a direct or indirect affect on the success rate of a child in school both academically and behaviorally. The essential research questions were as follows:

1. Do students from two-parent households receive better grades in school compared to students from single-parent households?
2. Do students from two-parent households attend school with more frequency than children from single-parent households?
3. Are students from single-parent households suspended more frequently from school than students from two-parent households?

The researcher’s hypothesis was that the academic success rate for students who lived in two-parent households will be greater than students who primarily lived in single-parent households, while the number of absences and suspensions will be lower for students who live in two-parent homes.

Very few traditional families seem to exist in low-income urban communities. The city of East Saint Louis, Illinois, is one of those communities. The city was once the home of many industrial businesses. Job opportunities were once plentiful. As of 2008, East Saint Louis possesses a population of 30,000 residents, a per capita home income of about $11,000, and a poverty rate of 35.1%. Mothers are the dominant breadwinners of the households accounting for more than 50% of all household income (Illinois School Report Card, 2006).
East Saint Louis School District 189 serves the students of the families just described. The district consists of 18 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and 3 high schools. The district has a drop out rate of 7.8% (state 3.5%) and a low-income rate of 91.9% (state 40.0%). The district services over 8,500 students daily and has an attendance average of 89.5% (state 94.0%), a mobility average of 27.3% (state 16.0%), and a truancy rate of 8.7% (state 2.2%). The racial diversity of the district consists of 0.1% White, 98.6% Black, 1.3% Latino, 0.0% Asian, 0.0% Native American, and 0.0% Multiracial (Illinois School Report Card, 2006) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Ethnic Background of the Student Population for the 2002-2006 School Years

Figure 1 illustrates the ethnic background of the student population of East Saint Louis School District 189 for the academic school years of 2002 through 2006. It is important to note that the majority of students that the district serves are Blacks at
98.60%, followed by Hispanics at 1.30%, and then Whites at 0.10%. There are no Asians or Native Americans in the district.

![Bar chart showing the percentage of students who have met or exceeded state standards in East Saint Louis School District 189 for the academic years 2002 through 2006.](image)

**Figure 2.** Percentage of All Students Who Have Met or Exceeded State Standards (60% Reading/Math) for the 2002-2006 School Years

Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of all students of East Saint Louis School District 189 who have either met or exceeded state standards on the Illinois Standards Assessment Test (ISAT) for the academic school years of 2002 through 2006. The darker bars represent the scores of East Saint Louis School District 189, while the lighter bars represent the average scores of students throughout the state of Illinois. It is important to note that East Saint Louis School District 189 did not reach the state average of 60% achievement in reading or math for the school years of 2002 through 2006.
This study was conducted to determine if a relationship exists between single-parent households versus two-parent households on student academic success, attendance, and suspensions. The CIMS system randomly selected 75 students who were identified as residing in single-parent households and 75 students who were identified as residing in two-parent households during their seventh-grade year and tracked the students until they graduated from middle school (eighth-grade). Seventy-five students were selected for each household structure because the collective total (150 students) was more than half of the seventh-grade population (298 students). The CIMS system (a computerized data collection program used district-wide) keeps an accurate record of all students’ quarterly grades (mid-term and progress reports), absences, tardies, and suspensions. Student data were collected from Wyvetter Younge Middle School from the 2005-07 academic school years, respectively.

The research for this study took place at Wyvetter Younge Middle School. Wyvetter Younge Middle School is the second largest middle school in School District 189. The school’s ethnic background consists of 94.9% Black, 4.6% Latino, 0.4% White, 0% Asian, and 0% Native American. Wyvetter Younge is a middle school that is located in a low-income area of East Saint Louis. The middle school is located on the border between East Saint Louis and Washington Park, Illinois. About half of Wyvetter Younge Middle School students live in the two largest, low-income, project housing complexes
Wyvetter Younge Middle School Demographic Information

- White 0.4%
- Hispanic 4.6%
- Native American 0%
- Black 94.9%
- Asian 0%

Figure 3. Ethnic Background of the Student Population for the 2003-2006 School Years

Figure 3 displays the ethnic background of the student population of Wyvetter Younge Middle School for the 2003-2006 school years. Blacks represent the largest percentage of students at 94.9%, followed by Hispanics at 4.6% and Whites at 0.4%. There are no Asians or Native Americans. The school demographics closely resemble the demographics of the district in which it resides.

Wyvetter Younge Middle School has a low-income rate of 99.3%, an attendance percentage of 90.1%, a mobility rate of 34.4%, and a chronic truant percentage of 29.1% (187 students per year). Forty-nine percent of Wyvetter Younge’s total student population
resides in single-parent households. The Illinois State Board of Education has placed Wyvetter Younge on academic warning due to its failure to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for five straight years (see Figure 4). Wyvetter Younge Middle School is one year away from state restructuring.

![Wyvetter Younge Middle School Percentage of Students who have Met or Exceeded State Standards](image)

*Figure 4. Percentage of Students Who Have Met or Exceeded Standards (60% Reading and Math) Compared to the District and State Level for the 2002-2006 School Years*

Figure 4 shows the percentage of students who have met or exceeded state standards in reading and math at Wyvetter Younge Middle School. Their scores are compared to other middle students in School District 189 and all middle school students throughout the state of Illinois. Wyvetter Younge Middle School only made AYP one
year (2003), while the district as a whole never made AYP at the middle school level for
the 2002 through 2006 academic school years respectively.

*External Validity*

The applications of the results of this study are limited to a population similar to
this study’s population. The study focused on family structure (single-parent and two-
parent families); therefore, serious threats to both external and ecological validity existed.
The study analyzed the effects of family structure on student achievement for a two-year
span (seventh-grade and eighth-grade). Seventy-five students from each family structure
were identified in seventh-grade and carefully monitored until graduation (eighth-grade).
All students’ progress reports, grades, tardies, absences, suspensions, and standardized
test score data were analyzed during this time to determine if a relationship existed
between family structure and these measures. The external validity of the study would be
threatened if several of the students transfer to another middle school during the second
or third year respectively. The data would then become inaccurate because it is not
representative of the core sample of students that began the study.

The ecological validity of the study could be questioned if the family structure of
several of the students changed. For example, a single mother or father may get married
during the duration of the study or a student who was once identified as belonging to a
two-parent household may now live in a single-parent household. Events such as these
can alter the validity of the study. Therefore, the generalization of findings from this
study may be limited to this school due to the unique aspects of family structure, student
mobility, and socioeconomic status.
Research Design/Procedure

This research was a causal-comparative study in that it attempted to determine if there was a relationship between single-parent households versus two-parent households on student academic success, attendance, and suspensions. Both groups of students were randomly selected in their seventh-grade academic year and tracked until graduation (the completion of eighth-grade).

The primary instrument used to collect data was the CIMS system. The reliability of CIMS is unquestioned, although human error can exist due to manual input of the data. Nevertheless, the system always notifies the recorder of students, dates, altercations, and times that may cross-reference each other.

The CIMS system randomly selected 75 students who were identified as residing in single-parent households and 75 students who were identified as residing in two-parent households. The validity of the students, addresses, and family status was continuously checked and confirmed by the school attendance officer. The student data was tagged, labeled, and recorded by the CIMS system, as well as by the researcher on a quarterly (during grading periods) and yearly basis for the duration of the study. All students’ names and information were confidential and kept in a secure location.

Instrumentation

The students’ core grades (grades from their core subjects: math, language, reading, writing, science, and social science) were used to accurately assess their level of academic success and to determine their GPA. The instrument used to compare each
family structures’ academic success (students core grades recorded by CIMS) was the Iowa Basic Skills Test. The Iowa Basic Skills Test is administered biannually each school year. The educational components that the Iowa Basic Skills Test at the middle school level are (a) vocabulary, (b) capitalization, (c) reading comprehension, (d) spelling, (e) punctuation, (f) verb usage and expression, (g) math concepts and estimation, (h) math problem solving and data interpretation, (i) math computation, (j) social studies, (k) science, (l) maps and diagrams, (m) reference materials, (n) word analysis, and (o) listening skills.

In East Saint Louis School District 189, the Iowa Basic Skills Test is often administered during the second week of the new school year. The data from the test are processed and returned to administrators and teachers, usually within two to three weeks. The test is administered again in late April, (usually after the ISAT), and the data is analyzed and returned to teachers before the academic school year ends. The information gained is valuable since it provides teachers with a fair assessment of where their students are academically once the school year ends.

**Summary**

To summarize, the research setting was a predominantly African American low-income middle school called Wyvetter Younge. The seventh-grade subjects were selected by CIMS. CIMS kept an accurate record of all students’ quarterly grades (mid-term and progress reports), absences, tardies, and suspensions. Student data were collected from Wyvetter Younge Middle School from the 2005-07 academic school years. A quantitative
research methodology was used to conduct this study. The results of the data collected by CIMS are reported in chapter four.
CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between single-parent households versus two-parent households on student success as measured by GPA, attendance, and suspensions. The researcher wanted to know if family structure had a direct or indirect affect on the success rate of a child in school academically and behaviorally. The essential research questions were:

1. Do students from two-parent households receive better grades in school compared to students from single-parent households?

2. Do students from two-parent households attend school with more frequency than children from single-parent households?

3. Are students from single-parent households suspended more frequently from school than students from two-parent households?

The researcher’s hypothesis was that the success rate for students who lived in two-parent households will be greater than students who primarily lived in single-parent households, while the number of absences and suspensions will be lower for students who live in two-parent homes.

Analysis of Data

The statistical tests that were conducted to examine the relationships were t-tests and chi square tests. Summary statistics for the variables in the study were included, as well as histograms to compare the variables in the study. In order to compare single-parent and two-parent households with one another by using chi square tests, the
variables of absences, tardies, suspensions, and GPA were grouped into different categories that consisted of a range of values.

For the purpose of this study, the statistical analysis of the data was divided into two sections. The first section was comprised of the descriptive statistics of the variables in the data set. This included the presentation of frequency tables for the categorical variables, as well as summary statistics for the continuous variables in the study. Also presented in this section are histograms and bar-chart comparisons between the two types of households with the number of absences, tardies, suspensions, and GPA categorized into different intervals. The second section illustrates the results of the t-tests and chi square tests comparing the type of households with the absences, tardies, suspensions, and GPA scores of the students.

The first set of analyses presented are the descriptive statistics for each of the variables in the study. Table 1 illustrates the frequency distributions for gender and type of household. There was an even number of households that were single-parent and two-parent (50% each), while 53.3% of the individuals were female and 46.7% were male.
Table 1

**Descriptive Statistics for Gender and Household**

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</tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 illustrates the summary statistics for each of the continuous variables in the model. It was found that the mean value of absences was equal to 4.31 with a standard deviation of 3.24. For the number of tardies, it was found that the mean number was 2.60 with a standard deviation of 2.60. This illustrates that the number of tardies of the students had more variation since the standard deviation was equal to the average number of tardies for the students (Moore & McCabe, 2006). The mean number of suspensions was equal to 1.41 with a standard deviation of 2.07. The mean GPA score for each one of the students was equal to 2.33 with a standard deviation of 0.66.
In order to make a comparison between the single-parent and two-parent households, the average absences, tardies, suspensions, and GPA average are presented in Table 3. On average, the single-parent households had a higher number of absences, tardies, and suspensions than two-parent households. It was also found that students in two-parent households had a higher average GPA score than students in single-parent households. In order to determine if this was statistically significant, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The results of this test are presented in the next section.
Table 3

Summary Statistics for Single-Parent versus Two-Parent Household

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single-Parent</td>
<td>Absences</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>19.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tardies</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suspensions</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>9.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Parent</td>
<td>Absences</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tardies</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suspensions</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distributions of the absences, tardies, suspensions, and GPA for the students are presented in the following figures. The first set of figures (Figures 5 to 8) illustrates the combined average for the different variables. The second set of figures (Figures 9 to 12) illustrates the distribution of the variables for each household type. The distribution of the number of times the student was absent was skewed to the right (see Figure 5) because there were a higher number of students who had lower absenteeism. The same occurrence happened for the number of tardies and suspensions as well; they were both skewed to the right (see Figures 6 and 7). As for the GPAs of the students, it was found that this distribution was not notably skewed like the other three variables in the study (see Figure 8).
The distributions of each household in the study yielded similar results. The number of absences, tardies, and suspensions were skewed to the right, while the GPA scores were not notably skewed (see Figures 9 to 12).

Figure 5. Total Number of Times Absent for Both Students Who Lived in Single and Two-parent Households Combined

Note. The highest number of observed absences was between two and four absences.
Figure 6. Total Number of Times Tardy for Both Students Who Lived in Single and Two-parent Households Combined

Note. The highest number of observed tardies was zero with a decreasing trend in the number of tardies from two up to greater than ten tardies.
Figure 7. Total Number of Times Suspended for Both Students Who Lived in Single and Two-parent Households Combined

Note. The highest number of observed suspensions was zero with a decreasing trend in the number of suspensions from one up to greater than five suspensions.
Figure 8. GPA Scores for Both Students Who Lived in Single and Two-parent Households Combined

Note. The overall GPA scores for students who lived in single and two-parent households has a more symmetrical shape indicating that the GPA scores for the students appear to be normally distributed.
Figure 9. Number of Times Absent for Students Who Lived in Single and Two-parent Households Combined

*Note.* Single-parent students have a higher number of absences than two-parent students for lower number of days absent—one and two days. Two-parent students have a higher number of absences than single-parent students for higher number of days absent—nine, ten, and greater than ten days.
Figure 10. Number of Times Tardy for Students Who Lived in Single and Two-parent Households Combined

Note. Single-parent students have a higher number of tardies than two-parent students for lower number of days tardy—zero, one, two, and three days. Two-parent students have a higher number of tardies than single-parent students for higher number of days tardy—eight, nine, ten, and greater than ten days.
Figure 11. Number of Times Suspended for Students Who Lived in Single and Two-parent Households Combined

Note. Single-parent students have a higher number of suspensions than two-parent students for lower number of days absent—one day. Two-parent students have a higher number of absences than single-parent students for higher number of days absent—greater than five days.
Figure 12. GPA Scores for Students Who Lived in Single and Two-parent Households
Combined

Note. The GPA scores for students who lived in single and two-parent households have a more symmetrical shape indicating that the GPA scores for the students appear to be normally distributed.

In order to conduct chi square tests on absences, tardies, and suspensions for the different types of households in the study, each variable (absences, tardies, and suspensions) was transformed into categorical variables. After the variables were examined, the categories that were selected for each variable consisted of the following. Absences were divided into three categories: “0 to 2,” “3 to 5,” and “Over 6.” Tardies were divided into four categories: “0 Tardies,” “1 to 2,” “3 to 4,” and “4 to 5.” Suspensions were divided into three categories: “0 Suspensions,” “1 to 2,” and “Over 3.”

These categories were selected based on the number of observations within each category. The goal was to obtain groups that were as homogeneous as possible. There were similar numbers of observations in each group. Though not used in the chi square
analysis, the GPA score was divided into three categories in order to compare the
distributions between the two different household types.

The frequency distributions for these created classes are presented in Table 4. Based on the groupings of the variables, it was found that there were 31.3% in the 0 to 2 absences category, 42.67% in the 3 to 5 absences category, and 26% in the over 6 absences category. For the number of tardies, there was a total of 31.3% of the students who had 1 or 2 tardies, 26% who had no tardies, 24% who had between 3 and 4 tardies, and 18.67% who had over 5 tardies. As for the number of suspensions, there were 44.7% of students who had no suspensions, 37.3% who had between 1 and 2 suspensions, and 18% who had over 3 suspensions. It was found for the GPA score that over half of the students had a GPA between 2 and 3 (51.3%), 29.3% had a GPA between 1 and 2, while 19.33% had a GPA between 3 and 4.
Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics for Absences, Tardies, Suspensions, and GPA*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 to 2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>31.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 5</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>42.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 6</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>26.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tardy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>26.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>31.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspensions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>44.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>37.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>51.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 13. Comparison of Times Absent for the Different Types of Households

Note. In the two-parent households there was a decreasing trend in the number of absences observed, while for single-parent households there appears to be a more symmetric distribution in the number of absences.
Figure 14. Comparison of Times Tardy for the Different Types of Households

Note: In the single-parent households there was an increasing trend in the number of tardies observed, while for two-parent households there appeared to be a more symmetric distribution in the number of tardies.
Figure 15. Comparison of Times Suspended for the Different Types of Households

Note. In the two-parent households there was a decreasing trend in the number of suspensions observed, while for single-parent households there are approximately an equal number of students who had zero and one to two suspensions with the number of suspensions decreasing thereafter.
Note: The GPA scores for students who lived in single and two-parent households have a more symmetrical shape indicating that the GPA scores for the students appear to be normally distributed.

Results of t-Test and Chi-Square Test

In order to determine whether there was a significant difference between the GPA scores of students who lived in single-parent households compared to students who lived in two-parent households, the two independent samples t-test was conducted. The independent samples t-test was appropriate for this comparison because the GPA scores were from two different/independent populations. The results of the t-test are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

The first results presented are for the test of the homogeneity of variances between populations (see Table 5). The Levene’s test was performed in order to determine whether an equal variance t-test could be implemented in the analysis or whether an unequal variance t-test would have to be implemented. The use of the equal or
unequal variance t-test was determined by the magnitude of the F-test statistic and the $p$-value of the test. If the $p$-value was less than 0.05, then it could be stated that a significant difference existed among the variances. An unequal variances t-test would have to be used. If the $p$-value was greater than 0.05, one would then be able to use the equal variance t-test. For this test, $\sigma_1^2$ is the variance of the GPA scores for single-parent households, and $\sigma_2^2$ is the variance of the GPA scores for two-parent households. Based on the results in Table 5, the equal variance t-test could be used ($F (74, 74) = 1.10, p = 0.6933$).

$H_0$: $\sigma_1^2 = \sigma_2^2$. There was no significant difference between the variance of students who lived in a single-parent household compared to students who lived in a two-parent household.

$H_A$: $\sigma_1^2 \neq \sigma_2^2$. There was a significant difference between the variance of students who lived in a single-parent household compared to students who lived in a two-parent household.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test for Homogeneity of the Variances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the independent samples t-test, the value $\mu_1$ represented the mean GPA score for single-parent households, and $\mu_2$ represented the mean GPA score for two-parent households. The null and alternative hypotheses for this test were as follows:

$H_0$: $\mu_1 = \mu_2$. There was no significant difference between the mean GPA scores of students who lived in a single-parent household compared to students who lived in a two-parent household.

$H_A$: $\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$. There was a significant difference between the mean GPA scores of students who lived in a single-parent household compared to students who lived in a two-parent household.

The results for the independent samples t-test with the equal variance assumption are presented in Table 6. It was found that there was not a statistically significant difference between the means of the GPA scores for students who lived in single-parent households compared to students who lived in two-parent households $t(148) = -1.32$, $p = 0.1894$.

| Household     | $N$ | $M$ | SD  | Variances | DF  | $t$ Value | Pr > |t|   |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----------|-----|-----------|------|-----|
| Single        | 75  | 2.26| 0.65| Equal     | 148 | -1.32     | 0.1894|
| Two-Parent    | 75  | 2.40| 0.68| Unequal   | 148 | -1.32     | 0.1894|
The next analyses presented are the chi square test results for the categories of absences, tardies, and suspension variables, as well as the type of household. The results of the chi square test between the absences and the type of household are presented first. The 3 X 2 contingency table for the data is presented in Table 7. It was found that twice as many students were absent more than 6 times in the single-parent household compared to the two-parent household. Similarly, twice as many students were absent only 0 to 2 times in the two-parent household compared to the single-parent household. To determine if this was significant, the chi square test was conducted, with the results being presented in Table 8.

Table 7

Contingency Table for Number of Absences by Household Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Absences</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Two-Parent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H₀: The number of times students were absent from school was not related to the type of household in which they lived (single-parent household and two-parent household).
H₀: The number of times students were absent from school was related to the type of household in which they lived (single-parent household and two-parent household).

Based on the chi square test, the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a significant relationship between the number of times absent and the type of household in which the student lived \( \chi^2 (2, N = 150) = 10.73, p = 0.0047 \). This means that the null hypothesis was rejected, with the conclusion that the number of times students were absent from school was related to the type of household in which they lived.

Table 8

*Chi Square Test Results for Absences by Household Type*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi Square</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.7323</td>
<td>0.0047</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next set of results presented is from the chi square test between the number of tardies and the type of household. The 4 X 2 contingency table for the data is presented in Table 9. It was found that almost twice as many students were tardy one or two times in the two-parent household compared to the single-parent household. In comparison, there were six times as many students who were tardy over five times in the single-parent household compared to the two-parent household. To determine if this was significant, the chi square test was conducted, with the results being presented in Table 10.
Table 9

*Contingency Table for Number of Tardies by Household Type*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tardies per Household</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Two-Parent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 Tardy</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**H₀:** The number of times students were tardy from school was not related to the type of household in which they lived (single-parent household and two-parent household).

**Hₐ:** The number of times students were tardy from school was related to the type of household in which they lived (single-parent household and two-parent household).

Based on the chi square test, the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a significant relationship between the number of times tardy and the type of household the student lived in $\chi^2 (3, N = 150) = 19.14, p = 0.0003$. This means that the null hypothesis was rejected, with the conclusion that the number of times students were tardy from class was related to the type of household in which they lived.
Table 10

*Chi Square Test Results for Tardies versus Household Type*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi Square</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19.1379</td>
<td>0.0003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final set of results presented is the chi square test between the number of suspensions and the type of household. The 3 X 2 contingency table for the variables is presented in Table 11. A greater amount of consistency occurred between each household type for the number of suspensions. To determine if there was significant relationship between the number of suspensions and the type of household, the chi square test was conducted with the results being presented in Table 12.

Table 11

*Contingency Table for Number of Suspensions by Household Type*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suspension\Household</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Two-Parent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 Suspensions</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H₀: The number of times students were tardy from school was not related to the type of household in which they lived (single-parent household and two-parent household).
HA: The number of times students were tardy from school was related to the type of household in which they lived (single-parent household and two-parent household).

Based upon the chi square test, the null hypothesis was not rejected. There was not a significant relationship between the number of times a student was suspended and the type of household in which the student lived \( \chi^2 (2, N = 150) = 2.42, p = 0.2981 \). This means that the null hypothesis was not rejected with the conclusion that the number of times the students were suspended from school was not related to the type of household in which they lived.

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi Square</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4206</td>
<td>0.2981</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deductive Conclusions

The data did not support the researcher’s hypothesis that there would be a statistically significant difference in achievement for students who lived in two-parent households compared to students who primarily lived in single-parent households. Based on the equal variances t-test, it was found that there was not a statistically significant difference between mean GPA scores for students who lived in single-parent households compared to students who lived in two-parent households.
The chi-square test on absences showed that there was a significant relationship between the number of times absent and the type of household in which the student lived. This means that the number of times the students were absent from school was related to the type of household in which they lived.

The results of the chi-square test between tardies and the type of household found that almost twice as many students were tardy one or two times in the two-parent household compared to the single-parent household. In comparison, there were six times as many students that were tardy over five times in the single-parent household compared to the two-parent household. It was found that there was a significant relationship between the number of times tardy and the type of household in which the student lived.

The chi-square test between the number of suspensions and the type of household found that there was not a significant relationship between the number of times a student was suspended and the type of household in which the student lived. This means that the number of times the students were suspended from school was not related to the type of household in which they lived.

**Summary**

More research is needed to be conducted to determine if there is a direct relationship between family structure (single-parent households versus two-parent households) on student achievement, attendance, and behavior. The results of this study demonstrated that, in this instance, there was not a statistically significant difference between the GPA scores for students who lived in single-parent households compared to students who lived in two-parent households.
CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between single-parent households versus two-parent households on student academic success as measured by GPA, attendance, and suspensions. The researcher wanted to know if family structure had a direct or indirect effect on the success rate of a child in school both academically and behaviorally. The essential research questions were the following:

1. Do students from two-parent households receive better grades in school compared to students from single-parent households?
2. Do students from two-parent households attend school with more frequency than children from single-parent households?
3. Are students from single-parent households suspended more frequently from school than students from two-parent households?

The researcher’s hypothesis was that the academic success rate for students who lived in two-parent households would be greater than students who primarily lived in single-parent households, while the number of absences and suspensions would be lower for students who live in two-parent homes.

Conclusions

To answer the first research question, two independent sample t-tests were conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference between the GPA scores of students from single-parent households compared to the GPA scores of students from two-parent households. The results of the independent samples t-tests revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference between the means of the GPA scores
for students from single-parent households compared to students from two-parent households.

To answer the second research question, a chi square test on absences and tardies was conducted to compare the frequency of school attendance between students from single-parent households and from two-parent households. The chi square test on absences revealed that there was a significant relationship between the number of times a student was absent and the type of household in which the student lived. The highest number of absences was found in the single-parent households.

The results of the chi square test on tardies revealed that there was a significant relationship between the number of times a student was tardy and the type of household in which the student lived. The highest number of tardies was found in the single-parent households.

To answer the final research question, a chi square test was also conducted to determine if students from single-parent households were suspended from school with more frequency compared to students from two-parent households. The chi square test revealed that there was not a significant relationship between the number of times a student was suspended and the type of household in which the student lived. This means that the number of times the student is suspended from school was not related to the type of household in which he/she lived.

**Recommendations**

Based on the study findings, recommendations for further research, as well as the implementation of several community-based programs, were proposed in hopes of
affecting change in regards to single-parent household students’ socioeconomic status (a per capita income of about $11,000 and a poverty rate of 35.1%) and combating chronic absenteeism and truancy in East Saint Louis School District 189.

The first research recommendation is to increase the number of years of the study. By using CIMS as a guide, it is possible to follow the students throughout high school, tracking their absences, tardies, and suspensions, and carefully monitoring their GPA to determine if there is a relationship between family structure and student achievement at the high school level.

In addition to increasing the duration of the study, another recommendation for further research is to increase the number of students participating in the study. A larger number of participants may yield a more accurate analysis of whether or not family structure has a direct or indirect effect on student academic success, attendance, and suspension rate.

The last research recommendation is to increase the depth (interviews, focus groups, parental surveys, and community assessment surveys) of this study in future research studies. Perhaps by doing so, East Saint Louis School District 189 may use the future data to address ongoing critical issues concerning student academic success, attendance, and suspensions with regard to family structure in the District School Improvement Plan and further expand the Truancy Prevention Program by implementing cohorts with other community organizations.

Recommendations for action, based on study findings, are related to two current programs in the study’s school district. The following program improvements may
directly or indirectly address the findings of this study—children of single-parent families have a higher rate of absenteeism and tardies.

The first recommendation for action is related to a current parent program in the district. For the past three years, East Saint Louis School District 189 has offered a program for district employees (without bachelor’s degrees) called *Grow Your Own Teachers* (GYOT). The GYOT program was put in place to assist the district in recruiting teachers for the future. The GYOT program is a partnership with McKendree College for a 4-year teaching degree in education. The school district pays for tuition, books, childcare, and transportation for candidates in the program. Candidates for the program must fill out an application and go through an interview process (with designated members of the personnel committee). Upon acceptance, the participants, in addition to attending courses, must attend monthly meetings to provide feedback (about the program and coursework) and maintain a full class load (6 hours). Upon graduation, the participants of the GYOT program are guaranteed jobs. They must teach in East Saint Louis School District 189 for five years. After their 5-year commitment expires, participants may continue their employment with the district or seek other employment opportunities.

It is the recommendation of the researcher that, based on the study’s findings, East Saint Louis School District 189 allow Lead Parents (at least two per school) to also enter the program. Lead Parents are at the schools everyday volunteering and assisting administrators and teachers in any capacity. Most Lead Parents are single mothers (recall from chapter 2 that about 85% of single-parent families are headed by a woman and almost half of these households are below the poverty line), but there are some fathers
who attend on a consistent basis. Many seem to be diligent workers. Therefore, the Lead Parents (pending a drug test and criminal background check) could also have a chance to apply for the GYOT program. By opening the GYOT program up to Lead Parents, perhaps a stronger bond would be established between school and community, especially single-parent families. This may have an indirect effect on single-parent household student academic success at school by improving their family’s socioeconomic status.

A second recommendation for action is also related to a current parent program. Many schools in the district have Lead Parents who assist on a daily basis. Nevertheless, East Saint Louis School District 189 has implemented a new parent initiative where every classroom (in the entire district) must have a parent representative who attends all parental forums and meetings at the district’s central office. The parental representative’s responsibility is to voice the concerns of the parents and teachers and act as a spokesperson for his or her classroom.

It is recommended that East Saint Louis School District 189 increase the number of parental representatives from one to three. The number should be increased to ensure that a representative is always present to take notes, ask questions, and relay the concerns of parents to the central office. Related to the second recommendation, a third recommendation for action is for the school district to allow building principals to attend the forums and meetings, so that they, too, may know the concerns of parents, teachers, and students at their schools. Once the implementation of more programs that directly affect single-parent households are in place, East Saint Louis School District 189 may see improvements in community-school relations and student academic success.
At the time of this writing, a change has been implemented at the study’s district based on the study findings. As stated earlier, East Saint Louis School District 189 has a truancy rate of 8.7%, while the entire state of Illinois has an average of 2.2%. In response to the high truancy rate, East Saint Louis School District 189 has amended the School Board 189 Policy Manual—Section 7:70 effective August 1, 2008— for students who are chronically truant and absent (Appendix A). The new policy also places more responsibility on parents concerning the child’s attendance. In the new policy, a chronic or habitual truant student is defined as “a child who is subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without valid cause from school for 10% or more of the 180 regular attendance days” (Appendix B). After 18 unexcused absences, parents will be required to appear in court to explain why the child missed so many days of school. The student will also fail that grade level. According to the policy, valid causes for absences include (a) illness, (b) observance of a religious holiday, (c) death of an immediate family member, (d) family emergency, (e) other situations that are beyond the control of the student (as determined by the board of education), and (f) other circumstances, which may cause reasonable concern to a parent for the safety or health of his/her child (Appendix B). Section 7:70 of the School Board 189 Manual (Appendix C) states that

1. A parent or guardian must phone the school by 8:00 am on the same day of a student absence to inform the school office staff of the nature of the illness in order to have the absence recorded as excused. If a parent fails to comply, he or she will receive a visit by the attendance officer on the same day.
2. Parents must notify the school office staff by 8:00 am of their child being tardy. If parents fail to comply, they will receive a visit by the school attendance officer on the same day.

3. Four or more absences (consecutive or cumulative) require a doctor statement to be considered an excused absence(s).

4. All students are expected to make up work that is missed due to the excused or unexcused absences. Failure to make up missed class work will affect the students’ grades and could result in no earned credit (Appendix C). It is the recommendation of this researcher that East Saint Louis School District 189 form a partnership with the East Saint Louis Police Department to develop a plan to identify and apprehend chronic truants and absentees who walk the streets (during school hours) on a daily basis. These students would be held at the police department, until released to their parent(s) or guardian. Their names would then be forwarded to the school district (Truancy Prevention Program). This partnership between the school district and police department may deter students from missing school and increase the overall attendance rate. With the implementation of Section 7:70 to the School Board 189 Policy Manual and the recommendation that the East Saint Louis Police Department become actively involved in fighting chronic absenteeism and truancy, the school district may begin to improve its district-wide attendance and therefore student achievement.
Summary Statements

Contemporary schools are being held more accountable for student learning. Teachers and administrators participate in yearly workshops on teaching and disciplining students who come from many diverse family structures with the intention in mind that all students will achieve. The effects of family structure on student academic success, attendance, and suspensions at Wyvetter Younge Middle School remain a relevant concern. East Saint Louis 189 does not have a formal program in place to effectively deal with the challenges that many of our students face in today’s society.

The results of the study concluded that there was not a statistically significant difference between the GPA scores for students from single-parent households compared to students from two-parent households. The study also found that the number of times the student is suspended from school was not related to the type of household in which he or she lived. However, the study found that the highest number of absences was found among students from single-parent households in comparison to students from two-parent households. Important to the findings is the fact that East Saint Louis School District 189 has a high number (over 96%) of students from single-parent households. Programs such as those discussed in this chapter that support single-parent families or address absenteeism could benefit the students, families, schools, and community in general. Perhaps, if a stronger link between community and school exists, then truancies and absences may decrease. It is also possible that by improving the socioeconomic status of some single-parents, schools may have an indirect positive effect on student learning.
REFERENCES


   Manuscript in preparation.


APPENDIX A: TRUANCY PREVENTION PROGRAM LETTER TO PARENT

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THERESA E. SAUNDERS, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

August 1, 2008

Dear Parent:

Beginning with the opening of the 2008-09 school year East St. Louis School District 189 will participate in a joint effort with the Regional Office of Education to reduce the truancy rate of students in our district. A description of how the program will work is attached to this letter.

Please carefully read the “Steps in Moving Toward a Truancy Petition to the State’s Attorney Office.” This information is very important because it informs you of the penalties for a student being chronically truant.

You will notice in reading this document that after 18 unexcused absences parents will be required to appear in court to explain why the child refuses to go to school. Penalties could be as severe as charging the parent with child abuse (by refusing to accept the legal responsibility for making sure their child attends school in accordance with the law).

The School Board has also recently added a section to the policy and Procedures section of the District Board Policy Manual. Section 7:70 now allows 3 absences to be excused in accordance with specific conditions. A copy of this section is also enclosed for your information.
Please contact the Principal at your child’s school should you have any questions or need any additional information concerning the new Truancy Prevention Program.

Sincerely,

Dennis Stokes
Assistant Superintendent
Who is a truant?
A child subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without valid cause. This is an unexcused absence.

What is “Valid Cause” for an absence?
1) Illness
2) Observance of a religious holiday
3) Death in immediate family
4) Family emergency
5) Other situations beyond the control of the student as determined by the board of education in each district. (Needs to be specific board policy).
6) Other circumstances which cause reasonable concern to the parent for safety or health of the student.

Who is a “Chronic or habitual truant?”
A child subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without valid cause from such attendance for 10% or more of the previous 180 regular attendance days.

Steps in moving toward a truancy petition to the State’s Attorney office.

I. After the third day of unexcused absences a letter is mailed to the home from building principal stating:
   1. Days absent
   2. Next step will be a mandatory appearance at a Local Truancy Review Board.

II. After the sixth (6th) day of unexcused absences a letter is mailed home from district office stating time, date, and location of their appearance at a local truancy review board. (Local truancy review board designs districts interventions for the truant).

III. After the ninth (9th) day of unexcused absences a letter is sent from the Regional office of Education stating:
   1. The ROE has been contacted with documentation of the child’s unexcused absences.
   2. The next step will be mandatory appearance at the Regional Truancy Review Board.
IV. After the twelfth (12th) day of unexcused absences a letter goes home from ROE stating time, date, and location of their appearance at a local truancy review board. (This Review Board designs interventions for the truant).

V. As soon as eighteen unexcused absences are accumulated a petition will be filed with the St. Clair County State’s Attorney. When a petition is filed, it will be set for an adjudicatory hearing within ten (10) days and acted upon within thirty (30) days.
Amended to add the following to be inserted just after the section labeled Compulsory School Attendance:

A total of three absences due to illness (consecutive or cumulative during the school year) may be deemed excused absences under the following conditions:

The parent or guardian must phone the school by 8:00 am on the same day of the absence and inform the school office staff of the nature of the illness in order to have the absence recorded as excused.

Four or more absences (consecutive or cumulative) require a doctor’s note to be considered an excused absence (s).

All students are expected to make up work that is missed due to the excused or unexcused absences. Failure to make up missed class work will affect the student’s reportable grades and could result in no earned credit.
VITAE

Personal:  
Ronald T. Ferrell  
3 Maurice Circle Dr  
East Saint Louis, IL 62203  
Home Phone: 618.604.1423

Office:  
Assistant Principal  
Dunbar Elementary  
1835 Tudor Avenue  
East Saint Louis, IL 62203  
Phone: 618.646.3842  
Email: ronaldferrell@sbcglobal.net

Professional Experience:  
2006 - Present District 189 / Dunbar Elem. E. St. Louis, IL  
Assistant Principal

2004 - 2006 District 189 / Younge Middle School. E. St. Louis, IL  
Assistant Principal

2003 - 2004 District 189 / Lincoln Middle School. E. St. Louis, IL  
6th Grade Teacher

2002 – 2003 District 189 / Park Annex Elem. E. St. Louis, IL  
3rd Grade Teacher

1999 - 2002 District 189 / Miles Davis Elem. E. St. Louis, IL  
5th Grade Teacher

Education:  
2007- 2008 Lindenwood University St. Charles, MO  
Doctoral Program – Educational Leadership

2006- 2007 Lindenwood University St. Charles, MO  
Specialist Program – Educational Leadership

2002 -2003 So. Illinois Univ. of Edwardsville Edwardsville, IL  
Master of Science – Educational Administration

1994 -1999 So. Illinois Univ. of Edwardsville Edwardsville, IL  
Bachelor of Science- Elementary Education

Professional Memberships:  
IPA Illinois Principal Association

PTA Parent Teacher Association