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# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS

## **THESIS**

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the

Department of Human Education and Development

State University of New York

College at Brockport

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Education

By

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#### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between the level of parental involvement of fifth grade students and the scores that these students achieved on their fourth grade New York State Math and ELA Tests. Surveys were returned from the parents of fifty-eight students.

The students were divided into two groups - high and low achievers based on their scores on the NYS Math and ELA tests. High achievement was defined as a score of 3 or 4 and low achievement was defined as a score of 1 or 2. Surveys were sent home to parents of these students to collect information about the level of active parental involvement in their lives. Comparisons were then made to determine the relationship between the achievement level of the student on the state tests and the amount of parental involvement in the life of that student.

Fifty-eight surveys were returned. Results revealed that there was no significant correlation between what the researcher described as active parental involvement and student success in school.

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#### CHAPTER I

## Statement of the Problem

An increasingly alarming number of children in the United States enter and attend school without their basic needs having been met and without the support that they desire and need to be successful in an educational setting. This situation makes it difficult for educators, as school systems must assist children with meeting these basic needs and providing additional support in an attempt to make them successful in the classroom.

Research has shown that the home environment plays an important part in a child's learning (Ramarumo, 1994). While the socio-economic status (SES) of a family does play a part in a child's education there are other, more important factors that benefit children. A supportive family, headed by involved parents who are active in community and school activities is a major indicator of a child's success in school. (Henderson & Berla, 1994). From exploring picture books to attending school functions, a parent has a plethora of opportunities to support and assist a child's journey through the educational system.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between active parental involvement in a child's life and that child being academically successful in school.

## Need for the Study

It is important for the educator to understand to what extent the home environment helps a child become academically successful. Some children come to school with the necessary background and support to have a realistic chance at being successful; others do not. The teachers should be aware of the background of each child and be ready to establish, or continue to nurture a link between the parents and themselves.

At this point, teachers can introduce reading and writing materials into households without any literary elements. They can also strategize with parents ways that can enhance what a child is learning in the classroom. Suggestions can be offered to parents on what can be implemented at home to maximize the opportunities a child has on becoming successful.

The research analyzed in this report finds that teachers can use a variety of techniques when approaching parents to encourage them to assist with their child's education. Although much of the previous research focuses on what can be done at the early stages of a child's formal schooling, this report is designed to see if continuing parental involvement is helping the child to become academically successful.

Much of the research done so far on this topic has limitations. One major limitation is how home literacy is measured. Questionnaires and self-reports are apt to be biased because individuals tend to put down what they believe to be socially acceptable answers. This study will attempt to overcome that limitation by matching up surveys filled out by parents with how well the child scored on the 4<sup>th</sup> grade New York State ELA and Math Tests.

Another area that should be explored is if the gender of the reader has any effect on whether the parents implement certain controls or strategies towards enhancing skills. Few studies have been found using this variable. This would be consistent with previous research that shows a literature rich environment with actively involved parents who are concerned about having their child become a literate individual does increase the chances of this happening.

## **Limitations**

There is a strong likelihood that families of the same socio-economic status (SES) have generally the same amount of formal schooling. The attitudes and strategies of the parents are more likely to be similar in the same SES level than with families in a different SES. The surveys for this research were sent out to students of only one school district. A majority of the families of that school district have approximately the same SES.

## **Definition of Terms**

Active parental involvement - This is a proactive approach by parents to assist a child in becoming academically successful. This includes, but is not limited to taking the child on educational trips, assisting with schoolwork, transporting the child to and from their sport practices and games, and attending plays, open houses and any other school function in support of the child.

Homework - a task or assignment that is given by the teacher with the intention that it will be completed during non-school hours

#### **CHAPTER II**

## Review of the Literature

Many children enter school with the ability to be successful in conventional literacy tasks. Oral language skills such as vocabulary and phoneme awareness and written language skills such as letter identification and understanding print concepts are associated with later reading achievement (Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998).

It has been suggested by parents, teachers, and researchers that the home environment is where many of these students acquire the skills necessary to enhance their oral and written language development. This thinking ties in with Vygotsky's sociohistorical theory of cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky believes that social guidance helps shape the ways in which children come to think and problem solve. Following this thinking Rogoff, 1990, (as cited in Van Kleeck, Gillam, Hamilton, & McGrath, 1997), asserts that "individual development of higher mental processes cannot be understood without considering the social roots of both the tools for thinking that children are learning to use and the social interactions that guide children in their use" (p. 35).

It follows that the home environment plays an important part in the development of the emergent reader. Rasinski and Fredericks (as cited in Durham, 1994) discuss these "two parallel strands of development". Children become empowered when teachers and parents work together to give children the necessary tools to acquire literacy skills.

Home literacy has been defined many ways. Some of the more common range from the counting of the number of children's books in the home to estimating the time spent on shared book reading and other literacy activities.

(Leseman & deJong, 1998). However most studies examining home literacy have dealt with only one facet at a time; either quantity (the number of books), or the amount of time spent in literary activities.

Voluntary readers come from homes where there is a supportive "literary environment" (Greaney, 1980). Children interested in books come from homes where many types of literature are available and parents read to their children.

The single most important influence is the parents themselves. Modeling the behaviors and interest that should be expressed while performing literary exercises contribute mightily toward the goal of having the child become literate.

Yet, improvements can be made to enhance the educational atmosphere of the home environment. Parents are more likely to help children with just the decoding of the text. Teachers are prone to discussing the text with the students while reading with them (Greenhough & Hughes, 1998). The educational level of

the parents also seems to make a difference in the amount of "conversing" (discussion of the text) that is involved between the adult and the child. Parents with higher levels of formal education tend to converse more with the child than parents with a lower level of formal education (Dickinson & Martin, 1994; Greenhough & Hughes, 1998).

## Home Literacy Experiences

The Haringey study (Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison, 1982) provides support showing the beneficial effects of parents hearing their children read aloud at home. This study involved groups of children that received extra reading practice at home and others with no interventions. There was a significant improvement with the groups that received the extra practice. A study completed by Robinson, Larsen, and Haupt (1997) suggests that interest in reading, even at a very young age, is a factor in reading achievement.

Yet other studies contradict these findings. Research completed by
Hannon (as cited in Greenhough & Hughes, 1998) failed to find significant gains
for children whose parents are actively involved. A reason that Hannon suggested
was the cause for the discrepancy was the SES of the population in his study. It
was felt that the low educational level of the parents made it difficult to enhance

the ability of the children. The parents could listen to the children read, but not supply any corrective strategies when errors were made.

Parents must know what types of books emergent readers are interested in.

Once interest has been established, these certain books need to be made available to the young reader so interest does not wane. There is evidence (Robinson, Larsen, & Haupt, 1997), that young children can develop book selection strategies and that "genre preferences do appear to exist for young children" (p. 303).

This goes along with the findings of Dickinson and Smith (1994) that the type of interaction and the book being read does have a lasting effect on 4 year olds' vocabulary and story understanding skills. The holistic approach researched in this experiment treated the reading of books as "a performance to be enjoyed and interrupted only for important matters" (Dickinson, 1994). The performance-oriented approach supports vocabulary growth more successfully than the didactic-interactional approach. This approach is characterized by limited talk, a recall by the group of recently read text, and a high percentage of time spent dealing with organizational matters.

Another study focused on the relationship among parent-child storybook reading, direct instruction by parents in reading related activities, and oral and written language outcomes of children entering and in the first grade (Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). Parents were surveyed and filled out questionnaires concerning parent child activities. This study, completed in

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, involved 168 participants in three schools. The area is regarded as middle to high SES sample. This would prove to be a constraint on the data as low SES and working-class families were not involved in this study. Other research has noted that parents with higher levels of formal education read frequently while parents with less education stated that they read only sometimes or that they don't have the time to read (Greenhough & Hughes, 1998).

The findings here are consistent with other literature conducted by Fitzgerald, Spiegel and Cunningham (1991). All parents answering the questionnaire in this study felt that early literacy experiences such as storybook reading do increase early literacy development yet many were unconvinced that formal workbooks for pre-school children had any effect on early literacy.

What does make a difference is that children are allowed to select books in an unhurried manner. The books must be displayed with the covers exposed, not just the spines. This gives them sufficient time to pick out books with familiar titles, pictures, or words on the cover (Robinson, Larsen, & Haupt, 1997). The ability for the child to have a choice in the selection of reading material gives the reader ownership in the matter. This will further the emergent reader's interest and enthusiasm as was noted by the researchers in this study.

It is interesting to note here that parents who read storybooks to their children did not necessarily engage in writing activities with the child nor were they necessarily teaching their child how to read. The results of this research

(Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). "provide support for a distinction between two different aspects of home literacy experiences" (p. 113). Children's acquisition of oral language skills was found to be related to parents' knowledge of children's literature while written-language skills were related to the amount of teaching about reading and writing from the parents.

## The Link between the Home and School Environments

Several research reports indicate that there is a direct link between the amount of time spent on literacy activities in the home and the ability of the child as a reader once formal schooling begins. One descriptive study (Purcell-Gates, 1996) focused entirely on literacy events occurring in the home. This 1-year report focused on families that qualified for low socioeconomic status. Observers were placed in the homes of 24 families under the pretense that they were there to better understand how young children learn.

The results of this study completed by Purcell-Gates (1994) strongly suggest that "formal schooling plays a significant role in the construction of literacy concepts among low SES children" (p. 426). Parents of low SES children often view school with a certain amount of disdain, often because of their own failures concerning formal schooling. However, this study (Purcell-Gates, 1994)

indicates that parents of these children actually increased the involvement in their children's literacy activities.

It is very important that the educational system reach the parents of emergent readers, especially those in low SES areas. Research by DeBaryshe (as cited in Hise, 1994) indicates that the quality and frequency of reading at home between parents and preschool children is related to the mother's education, literacy skill and interest and the belief in reading aloud. Since reading at home is so important, it follows that parents should attempt to maximize the experience of the emergent reader. A link between classroom teachers and the home environment would help parents to improve their children's skills.

Parents tend to focus on helping the child with decoding skills as the emergent reader develops. The child will stop or hesitate when attempting an unfamiliar word. The parent will then use the corrective strategy of asking the child to sound out the word. This is not always the most effective means of helping the reader to gain knowledge.

Feedback that teachers provide to readers varies. This is because some feel that the purpose of reading is to gain meaning from print. Others feel that it is a tool to gain reading fluency. A study done by Hoffman (1979) indicates that teachers use a complex decision-making process in which three strategies are used. When the miscues are responded to, which miscues are responded to, and how the miscues are responded to are decisions the teacher has to decide upon.

One such program that has been researched is Early Access to Success in Education (Project EASE). This program was designed to give parents information on how they could better service children with their literary abilities and to increase the frequency and quality of language interactions through bookcentered activities (Jordan, Snow, & Porche, 2000).

There were many positive aspects to come out of this program. Attendance was high at the training sessions for parents. Comments on weekly reports turned in by participating parents were overwhelmingly supportive of the intervention.

Most importantly, parental intervention did result in an improvement of children's language and language analysis skills (Jordan et al., 2000).

Limitations to this program included the cost of the materials and the time needed to properly train the parents. This study was done with basically a low-risk sample because of the relatively high SES of the population. Communicating with the home was effortless for the most part because of the level of involvement already happening. Volunteers were easy to recruit and many stay-at-home moms had the time to spend on this endeavor.

### Parent Input and Effect in the Classroom

As stated previously, it is imperative that teachers in the beginning elementary grades establish a line of communication between the school and the home environment. Educators need to be made aware of what, if any literature has the child been exposed to at home. Once this has been established, then the parents can be informed of any improvements that can be made to enhance the child's literary skills.

Teachers also must realize how the literature has been selected (Robinson, Larsen, Haupt, & Mohlman, J., 1997) and how books are read in the home.

Mothers take it upon themselves to share text with children in a way that they feel will make it more enjoyable and comprehensible for them (Martin & Reutzel, 1999). They feel that they are acting in the child's best interest when reading a story that the mother deems too complex for the child. Parents also should not be led to believe that just because a child is verbally contributing to the discussion of the story, that the child will automatically will become a successful reader (Flood, 1977).

## **CHAPTER III**

## The Research Design

## <u>Purpose</u>

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between active parental involvement in a child's life and that child being academically successful in school.

## Research Question

Is there a statistically significant correlation between parental involvement and children's academic success?

## Methodology

## Subjects

The subjects of this study consist of 58 fifth grade students from a rural middle school in upstate New York. The subjects consist of 32 females and 26 males with varied academic abilities.

## Materials

The materials for this study consist of a researcher-developed survey for parents. The survey consisted of 14 questions and was scored using a 1-5 Likert Scale. The questions were designed to determine the parents' level of involvement in their children's education. In addition, 4<sup>th</sup> grade New York State ELA and Math test results were accessed to determine the students' academic achievement.

## **Procedures**

Surveys were sent out to parents of all the students. Sixty percent of the 96 surveys were returned. The surveys collected information about family literacy at

home and the level of parental involvement in relation to school activities. All of the students remained anonymous. Students were given a number that matched up the survey with their test scores. Only the researcher had access to the key. The reporting of the data was also anonymous. The researcher was able to match each parental survey with school records of that child.

## Chapter IV

## Analysis of the Data

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between active parental involvement in a child's life and that child being academically successful in school.

## Findings and Interpretations

The researcher found that there was no statistically significant difference when comparing the Math or the ELA test with the results of the survey. A <u>t</u>-test was administered comparing the means of the scores of the low (1-2) and high (3-4) groups for both the Math or ELA tests.

Since the <u>t</u> required for 56 degrees of freedom at the 95% confidence level is <u>+</u> .259, and since the <u>t</u> obtained is -.65, the data failed to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no statistically significant difference when comparing the means of the scores of the low and high achieving groups on the ELA Test with the survey results.

Table 1

Analysis of Mean Scores: Parent Survey: ELA

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances- ELA

	LOW	HIGH
Mean	58.3125	59.21428571
Variance	29.5625	23.44076655
Observations	16	42
Pooled Variance	25.08051658	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0.05	
df	56	
t Stat	-0.646906602	

In addition, the data for the comparison of the survey results with the mean of the sores of the Math Tests fail to reject the null hypothesis since the  $\underline{t}$  obtained for this sample was .64

Table 2

Analysis of Mean Scores: Parent Survey: Math

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances - MATH

LOW	HIGH
60.14285714	58.80392157
3.80952381	27.60078431
7	51
25.05172069	
0.05	
56	
0.638899489	
	60.14285714 3.80952381 7 25.05172069 0.05 56

A discussion of the results will follow in Chapter Five.

## Analysis of the Data

This study correlated student achievement with the level of parental involvement in that student's home environment. The students were divided into two categories. High achievers were determined by scores of 3 or 4 on both the New York State Math and ELA tests. Low achievers were defined as those students who received either a 1 or 2 on both of these tests. A t-test using independent variables and a correlation was done for both the ELA and Math exams.

#### CHAPTER V

## Conclusions and Implications

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between active parental involvement in a child's life and that child being academically successful in school.

#### Conclusions

The findings suggest that there was not a statistically significant difference in either test. The researcher found that there was no statistically significant difference when comparing the Math or the ELA test with the results of the survey.

Why was there not a statistical significance in either case? There could be several reasons for this. One is that there is a possibility that the survey was responded to in a manner that the parents marked the answers that they thought were the correct ones, without really giving credence to what was taking place in their home. This is a flaw in many surveys. People tend to answer them in a manner that they think is appropriate.

Another possibility is that parents who did not return the surveys were actually the ones who have less involvement with their children's education. Parents who are concerned with how their child is doing in school are more apt to check backpacks, talk with the student, and answer correspondence from the school. The parents who are not as active in their child's activities might not be as curious to what the student brings home from school. The survey was just one more item from school that they did not want to deal with and was discarded before they even looked at it.

## <u>Implications for the Classroom</u>

It is important for the educator to understand to what extent the home environment has provided emergent literacy experiences. Some children come to school with the ability to become academically successful, others do not. The teachers at all levels of the school system need to be aware of the ability of each child and be ready to establish a link between the parents and themselves.

This link needs to be established for several reasons. Teachers need to understand that there may be a deficiency in meeting the child's basic needs at home. They need to know if the proper food, shelter, and clothing are being provided for that child. Also, are the child's emotional needs being met? It is

extremely difficult for an individual to focus on the task at hand if these basic needs are not met.

Secondly, has the child been introduced to the proper level of printed material to facilitate a smooth transition into the school environment? Once a teacher realizes that there is a need for intervention, there are steps that can be taken to increase a student's success at school, especially at the elementary levels. At this point, teachers can introduce reading and writing materials into households without any literary elements and strategize with parents of more literature rich environments on ways to maximize the benefits of reading at home.

It is important to note that it is possible for educators to increase the effectiveness of any in-school book reading time without making additions to staff or purchasing costly materials. Small groups reading aloud have shown to be very effective. Volunteer parents can be trained to facilitate these reading groups.

The research analyzed in this report finds that teachers can used a variety of approaches and many types of books as long as there is some child-involved analytical talk. This talk does not necessarily need to take place constantly while the book is being read. Rather, discussion before and after the reading is beneficial with the after reading part being the most effective.

## Implications for Further Research

Further research should focus on how formal schooling and the home environment can complement each other to enhance the learning environment for children. There is definitely an array of differences in how families and schools approach literacy development. In addition, much of the research done so far has limitations. One major limitation is how home literacy is measured.

Questionnaires and self-reports are apt to be biased because individuals tend to put down what they believe to be socially acceptable answers.

This researcher thought about an interesting study to complement this one.

A different study could be done concerning parental involvement and the use of surveys. A researcher could compare the scores of the student's ELA and Math

Tests (or any for that matter) with the surveys that were not returned. Use the idea that there is not active parental involvement in the homes that did not return surveys and correlate that with the students' test scores.

Another limitation of many studies is the fact that the study is done in an area with a homogeneous population. There is a strong likelihood that families of the same SES have generally the same amount of formal schooling. The attitudes and strategies of the parents are more likely to be similar in the same SES level than with families in a different SES.

Future research needs to incorporate areas with as much variety of income levels as possible. This will give the researcher another variable to include in the data. Another area that should be explored is if the gender of the emergent reader has any effect on whether the parents implement certain controls or strategies towards enhancing skills. Few studies were found using this variable.

Finally, home literacy experiences should not be viewed as a solitary construct, independent of separate elements within literary acquisition, or a division of the home and school environment. Continued research needs to be done in areas of both school and home experiences concerning children and the ability to make them competent readers

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## Appendix A

Dear Parents,

I am currently working on a thesis for my Master of Science in Education Degree from SUNY Brockport. The subject of the thesis has to do with parental involvement and how it relates to the success of a child in school. With the consent and interest of the administration of the Williamson Middle School, I am collecting information from parents of 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. Please take a few minutes and respond to the questions. This questionnaire will help us to gain information that will be shared with teachers and administrators in our school district. The survey is strictly confidential so it should be sent back in a sealed envelope with no name attached. Write my name on the front of the envelope and have your child give it to the homeroom teacher. I am asking that all surveys be returned by January 17 so we have time to compile the information and include it with my report.

Thank you for your support!

Scott Kingsbury
Special Education Teacher
Williamson High School

## Parent Questionnaire

		7			
1.)	Do you encour every day?		read at home for a	t least 15 minu	ites (or more)
	1. Never	2. Rarely	3.Sometimes	4. Usually	5. Always
2.)	Does your fam	ily go on educatio	onal excursions?		
	1. Never	2. Rarely	3.Sometimes	4. Usually	5. Always
3.)	Do you encour	age your child vis	sit the local library	?	
	1. Never	2. Rarely	3.Sometimes	4. Usually	5. Always
4.)	Do you encour pleasure?	age your child rea	ad books, magazine	es, or newspap	ers for
	1. Never	2. Rarely	3. Sometimes	4. Usually	5. Always
5.)	Do you buy yo	ur child books (or	educational gifts)	for presents?	
	1. Never	2. Rarely	3. Sometimes	4. Usually	5. Always
6.)	Do you discuss	books and films	with your child?		
	1. Never	2. Rarely	3.Sometimes	4. Usually	5. Always
7.)	Do you help yo	our child with hon	nework?		
	1. Never	2. Rarely	3.Sometimes	4. Usually	5. Always

, .	vide a consistent and ork assignments?	l quiet space for yo	ur child to acco	mplish
1. Never	2. Rarely	3.Sometimes	4. Usually	5. Always
9.) Do you disc	uss new or difficult	to understand word	ls with your chi	ild?
1. Never	2. Rarely	3.Sometimes	4. Usually	5. Always
10.) Do you att	end parent-teacher c	onferences and ope	en houses at you	ur school?
1. Never	2. Rarely	3.Sometimes	4. Usually	5. Always
11.) Are there f	amily meals in your	home?		
1. Never	2. Rarely	3.Sometimes	4. Usually	5. Always
12.) Do you dis	cuss the school day	and happenings wi	th your child?	
1. Never	2. Rarely	3.Sometimes	4. Usually	5. Always
13.) Is your chi	ld encouraged to par	ticipate in after-sch	nool or weeken	d activities?
1. Never	2. Rarely	3.Sometimes	4. Usually	5. Always
14.) Are there of in school?	consequences for yo	ur child for not per	forming up to 6	expectations
1. Never	2. Rarely	3.Sometimes	4. Usually	5. Always
-	omments that you w	ould like to make r	egarding the ro	le you have

Thank you for taking the time to complete this parent questionnaire. It is greatly appreciated!

							Т	able	3					****************			
Student	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	#13	#14	ELA	MATH	SURVEY
1	4	3	4	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	3	2	3	61
2	3	3	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	4	63
3	5	3	3	5	5	3	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	3	63
4	3	3	3	3	4	3	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	2	2	57
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8	3	2	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	4	3	4	4	4	3	3	50
9	4	3	5	5	4	3	5	4	3	5	5	4	5	5	3	4	60
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20	4	3	3	5	3	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	2	62
21	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	3	68
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23	3	3	5	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	4	3	3	59
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							T	able	3	=							
Student	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	#13	#14	ELA	MATH	SURVEY
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31	5	3	5	5	3	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	64
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×. 47	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	5	5	4	4	4	3	4	4	55
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52	4	2	4	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	53

							T	able	3				-				
Student	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	#13	#14	ELA	MATH	SURVE
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56	5	1	3	3	3	3	3	5	5	3	5	3	3	3	2	3	48
57	3	3	3	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	4	4	3	3	4	57
58	2	3	3	3	3	2	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	1	3	4	43