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# Website Resource For Strengthening The Relationships Of Fathers And Their Children To Increase Academic Achievement

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WEBSITE RESOURCE FOR STRENGTHENING THE RELATIONSHIPS OF FATHERS  
AND THEIR CHILDREN TO INCREASE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.

by

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A Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The definition of fatherhood is the state of being a father. One can only wish that being a father was as simple as the definition. The author Kent Nerburn wrote some strong truth “It is much easier to become a father than be one.” Fatherhood is intimidating, even to those who have experience. We can master our jobs and careers, sports, but we lose a lot of that control in fatherhood. If a child is crying we can’t make them stop, we can help. If our son or daughter is failing in school, we can’t make them pass, we can only help. Fatherhood takes a lot of slow, hard work and that can make us feel like failures. There is a father absence that is taking over America and I believe we, as fathers can do better to impact our students life through the exploration of this question: “*How can empowering fathers in their child’s life increase student academic achievement?*” As a male and father of three daughters (and mostly likely more to come) and an educator, I have a responsibility to raise and serve children. This chapter introduces some of the challenges men face and challenges students face when a father is not present. Information on how we can be better fathers will also be presented.

Being a father and dad is one of the most important roles in the life of your child. There is a father absence crisis over taking America. Next to the child’s mother we have an equal impact on our children. This is intimidating, as we all want what is best for our child and we don’t want to see them fail, even in the slightest, because that means we

failed. My first step at becoming a better father for my child is knowing I will fail, however, I need to be a model for my children and students to show what to do when you fail, there are ways to overcome. I am going to have an impact on my children whether I want to or not, but not being present in my children's lives puts them instantly at a disadvantage to succeed.

### The problem(s)

According to the U.S. census bureau, 24 million children, 1 out of 3, live without their biological father in the home. Consequently, there is a father factor in nearly all social ills facing America today. These are some of the challenges that these 24 million children faced when pitted against their peers: Four times greater risk of living in poverty, more likely to have behavior problems, two times greater risk of infant mortality, more likely to go to prison, more likely to commit crime, seven times more likely to become pregnant as a teen, more likely to face abuse and neglect, more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, two times more likely to suffer obesity, two times more likely to dropout of high school.

These are some hard statistics to swallow, but these are statistics not facts, there are many children that are able to grow up without a father and be successful, but I am not one to leave things to statistics. I want fathers new, old, even if you are not in your child's life but want to be, to have tools and simple resources to better one self and make huge impacts in your child's life. The biggest factor for that positive impact is to be present, that effort alone is the most important aspect of being a father. When we are

present as fathers, especially early on in a child's development, they are able to grow and learn with healthier habits.

### Being a Father

My journey to fatherhood was not a smooth one. With my wife and I both having backgrounds in Early childhood education and coming from "larger" families, we want a lot of children. We experienced three miscarriages, one being a stillborn just shy over 20 weeks. We were fearful, attended support groups, and continued at specialty clinics. We have been blessed with three beautiful daughters. Now that I am father, it is not what I ever expected or planned it to be. The effort, love, sleepless nights, and work that you need to put into your family is never enough. To me fatherhood is the greatest test to see how much of a man you really are. Even though it comes with so many challenges, I have never felt so much joy, pride and happiness. Being a father has brought me new perspectives to how my life impacts others, as now there is direct reactions to my actions or even my absences. I want to be a loving, successful father and with that passion comes my passion for this research, I want all fathers to succeed.

### Teaching as a Father & The Importance of Father Involvement

I currently teach Pre-K and Kindergarten students as my educational background and passion is in early childhood development. Being a young father, I am now developing a stronger sense of fatherhood and the impact I make as well as other fathers on their child's academic and life successes. However, the hardest part of being an educator in early childhood and at a high priority school is the lack of male role models, both at school and at home, when the first 5-6 years of a child's life is so



crucial. I always ask myself why are there so few men in early childhood and even elementary schools? Yet, I am now seeing more and more of my students coming from single parent households, and not a father present. Seeing students struggle, not just academically, but socially, emotionally, and more and more students having behavior problems, something needs to change and I see that us as men need to step up as we have fallen behind and are roles in society can be labeled as not needed. Every father should feel empowered to know that they can and are making a difference in their child's life and we do need to put forth a better effort. My goal is to provide fathers with information and answers for how to help be present with their child, even if that time is very limited.

I always want to be the first to say that I am not a perfect dad and father, but I try as hard as I can to be. I will always have times when I look back and wish I had moments back or why didn't I just spend a little more time with my daughter(s). I often reflect on myself and being a little critical at times, but I have a daily goal to do at least 1 special thing with my children: Go to the park (weather permitting), read a book, or an activity-art project, exercise together, dance, play-doh, etc. This is a 1 on 1 time or as my children get older a 2 on 1 time that will last 10 to 30 minutes. During that time, I don't use electronics, I talk, listen, ask questions, praise, encourage, give hugs, kisses and expect nothing in return. It doesn't matter if I can't draw, if I can only do five push ups with them on my back or I'm a horrible dancer. They care that I am their father, and this father-child interaction that is brief is giving them confidence as a person that will carry over into their academic development. Many professors concluded from research

that “men continue to play important roles in their children’s lives. Fathers can influence their children by providing direct care, as well as indirectly through financial support and social modelling. Father involvement has impacts which begin prenatally and extend through the child’s life course. Men’s investment in offspring can influence offspring survival, health, socioemotional outcomes, social competence, and educational attainment.”

### A Major Challenge

I would like to share a story during my teaching experience of a student and his father. This student had struggles in school, both academic and behavior. His father was part of a gang and drug addict. He still make an effort to drop off his child, pick up, discuss about the day and wanted a good education for his child. When the father was doing this, this student would make great progress. However after winter break, dad was arrested and placed in correction for 5 months. During this time this student regressed with high anger, bullying and completely checked out of school. We would do many interventions with no positive change and progress. When dad came back, it was like a light switch went off and this child’s behavior changed immediately. I was very excited for this and let this father know how much he mattered and what I was seeing in the classroom. A few weeks later, dad had disappeared, the behavior returned. The following week, this student did not show up to school and found out by a phone call from his mother that the father had been shot three times and was killed. This was a gang related incident and that means there is no news coverage or reporting of the killing. The student returned to the last few days of school with a lot of anger and you

could tell by his expressions and communicating about his dad dying that he was having a difficult time processing. This father, who by today's "guidelines", did not live the best life to follow, meant the world to his son. He made his best efforts to show the importance of school and it showed in the child's behavior and academic work. All fathers make a difference in the success of their child's life.

### Summary

Chapter one laid the framework and showed children that live in a household without a father figure face great disadvantages that pose negative risks to their academic, physical and social/emotional development. There is a father absence crisis over taking America. Next to the child's mother we have an equal impact on our children. Being a father is not an easy role and many can and will feel like failures in a ever changing society. One of the most important ways to battle this father crisis is to provide fathers with more supports to use their strengths to strengthen their relationships with family and most importantly, their children.

Chapter 2 will review the major influences a father has on the development of their family and children both academically and throughout life. This will come from the review of research and best practices for fathers. The chapter will explore and provide descriptive support roles fathers can use and how those roles support their child. The review of literature will be used to determine which information and activities can be used when creating a online resource for fathers and their children.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Introduction

Chapter two reviews literature that focuses on the research question: “*How can empowering fathers in their child’s life increase student academic achievement?*” There will be three central themes in chapter 2 that will give a solid understanding of: 1) The general statistics of the impact of fathers in the lives of their children; 2) what researchers have found to support fathers in their roles with their children; and 3) the impact researchers have found of fathers with their children’s development. This review will start by looking at why fathers play such an important role and what advantages and disadvantages children have because of the impact of their fathers.

Extensive research exists on the importance of parental involvement in children’s education, yet relatively few studies have examined the individual contributions that mothers and fathers make to their children’s schooling. There is a great deal of interest, however, in the role of fathers in children’s lives. This interest stems from the fact that until recently fathers were the hidden parent. They were assumed to be the breadwinners of two-parent families, but of limited importance in non-financial aspects of children’s well-being and development. Reflecting this bias in research on child development, many federal agencies and programs that deal with family issues focused almost exclusively on mothers and their children.

It is important to understand that while almost every man can father a child, there is so much more to the important role of being a dad in a child's life. Fathers are very capable caregivers, and are important models and support for the emotional wellness of their children. Yet, there is a losing battle for fatherhood in the United States, as more and more homes and children are without a father or presence of their biological dad. There is a father absence crisis in America. According to the U.S. census bureau, "24 million children, 1 out of 3, live without their biological father in the home. Consequently, there is a father factor in nearly all social ills facing America today" (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2017).

### Recorded Data

These statistics from research and posted by Sabrina (The Fatherless Generation, 2010), show some strong disadvantages children face from an absent father.

- 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes – 5 times the average.
- 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes – 32 times the average.
- 85% of all children who show behavior disorders come from fatherless homes – 20 times the average.
- 80% of rapists with anger problems come from fatherless homes – 14 times the average.
- 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes – 9 times the average. (Statistics, 2010)

Fathers have an impact on children with their academic success as well (2010):

- Children with fathers who are involved are 40% less likely to repeat a grade in school.
- Children with fathers who are involved are 70% less likely to dropout of school.
- Children with fathers who are involved are more likely to get A's in school.
- Children with fathers who are involved are more likely to enjoy school and engage in extracurricular activities.
- 75% of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes – 10 times the average. (Statistics, 2010)

The National Fatherhood Initiative began publishing research from the beginning of the 1990s. They have published data to show how important dads are to the wellbeing of their children (Fig. A.). Many people believe that family structure doesn't really matter, as long as children are cared for and loved by someone, anyone. However, new research on father absence shows that old adage, "correlation doesn't imply causation," does not apply to the effects of father absence on children. In other words, for many of our most intractable social ills affecting children, father absence is to blame (NFA, 2017).

There has continued to be a substantial trend in more and more children living without their fathers. Data starting as far back as the 1960s show drastic differences from that of today of how fathers have played a role in being present in the lives of their children. Looking at the growing trend of fatherless households, the National Center for

Fathering (2017) posts an estimated 24.7 million children (33%) live absent their biological father. Of students in grades 1 through 12, 39 percent (17.7 million) live in homes absent their biological fathers. 57.6% of black children, 31.2% of Hispanic children, and 20.7% of white children are living absent their biological fathers. With the increasing number of premarital births and a continuing high divorce rate, the proportion of children living with just one parent rose from 9.1% in 1960 to 20.7% in 2012. Currently, 55.1% of all black children, 31.1% of all Hispanic children, and 20.7% of all white children are living in single-parent homes (National Center for Fathering, 2017). Figure B. Shows the national average of children living with a mother only increasing from 8% in 1960 to close to 25% in 2012, it has only continued to rise at present day.

### Statistics Summary

The statistics provided from all sources provide a sobering reality as to just how important fathers are in the lives of their children. Much of this information should still be taken as it is, a statistic; there are many children whose mothers and fathers do not meet this criteria and are very successful. "In every state, the portion of families where children have two parents, rather than one, has dropped significantly over the past decade. Even as the country added 160,000 families with children, the number of two-parent households decreased by 1.2 million. Fifteen million U.S. children, or 1 in 3, live without a father, and nearly 5 million live without a mother. In 1960, just 11 percent of American children lived in homes without fathers" (Rosiak, 2012). Many rooted and serious problems occur because the fall of fatherhood in America. Vincent DiCaro, vice president of the National Fatherhood Initiative believes that "America is awash in

poverty, crime, drugs and other problems, but more than perhaps anything else, it all comes down to this, deal with absent fathers, and the rest follows.”

To battle these statistics we must come to an understanding of what fatherhood is. Ray Williams writes in *Wired for Success* (2011), “America is facing not just the loss of fathers, but also the erosion of the ideal of fatherhood. Few people doubt the fundamental importance of mothers, but increasingly the question of whether fathers are really necessary is being raised and said by many to be a merely a social role that others-mothers, partners, stepfathers, uncles and aunts, and grandparents -can play.”

### The Role of Fatherhood

Despite current interest in father involvement in families, an extremely large proportion of family research focuses on mothers and children. Health care agencies and other organizations exclude fathers, often unwittingly. Starting with pregnancy and labor and delivery most appointments are set up for mothers and held at times when fathers work. The same is true for most pediatric visits. School records and files in family service organizations often have the child's and mother's name on the label, and not the father's. In most family agency buildings, the walls are typically pastel colors, the pictures on the wall are of mothers, flowers and babies, the magazines in the waiting room area for women and the staff is predominantly female. In most welfare offices, fathers are not invited to case planning meetings, and when a home visitor is greeted at the door by a man, she often asks to speak with the mother. Given these scenarios, fathers are



likely to get the message that they are invisible or irrelevant to their children's welfare, unless it involves financial support (Williams, 2011).

The role of the father has been an ever changing one and that is where the water gets murky. Going back to the colonial period, fathers were the primary caretaker, with having full say in matters to the child, and in rare cases of divorce, the law would award custody of the child to the father, in contrast to many today's divorce custody cases. During this time the father did have multiple roles: provider, moral overseer, disciplinarian, companion and teacher. Mothers were responsible for the day to day care of the family, but were assumed too emotional and indulgent to raise children on their own. Then in the 19th century, during urbanization and the industrial revolution, came a redefinition of roles of fathers. This is where fathers become the "providers" and were predominantly the breadwinners. The mothers became the primary caregiver while ensuring the head duties of operation of the household. This patterned lasted much into the late 1950s before shifts in society once again began to change the roles of fathers (Nord, Brimhall, West, 1997). There has been many things that have impacted and altered the roles, these things include the increasing labor force participation of mothers, mothers with young children, and the high levels of divorce and nonmarital childbearing. The greatest impacting factor has been the entry of a large number of mothers into the labor force many scholars and researchers determine that this has marked the decline in the strict gender division of labor within a family to an arrangement where the roles of mothers and fathers overlap to a great extent (p. 3).

## Change of Fatherhood

In today's world we hear the term “co-parents” as both have multiple roles: provider, protector, nurturer, companion, disciplinarian, teacher, and model of societal norms. Both parents may share equally the responsibilities of raising the family. However, this still not the case for all families as some may work out their own divisions of responsibilities and labor within the family. Many families with a single parent may have additional adults present including grandparents, aunts, uncles, other relatives and friends. “In 1990, approximately 18 percent of 1 children in mother-only families and 20 percent of children in father-only families also had a grandparent living with them” (p. 4). Roles still fall along traditional lines with mothers assuming more household work and raising the family and fathers taking responsibility for providing. This may still be from men making more in the labor force. “Society in many ways dictates the roles that mothers play and has clear expectations about the appropriate behavior of mothers. Societal expectations of how fathers are supposed to behave, beyond being a good provider, are not as clear, and thus the pressure to behave in specific ways is not as strong” (p. 4).

Ray Williams (2011), President of Ray Williams Associates, which provides executive coaching and professional speaking services, brings up research from David Popenoe, a professor of sociology at Rutgers University, that there are very distinct differences that the role of fathers do in raising children than that of mothers. The largest difference, which is at times discussed, but often overlooked, “dimension of fathering is play.” Fathers tend to raise their children through play, whether direct or

indirectly, this occurs from the child's birth through adolescence. "The play is both physically stimulating and exciting. It frequently resembles an apprenticeship or teaching relationships, and emphasizes often teamwork and competitive testing of abilities. The way fathers play affects everything from the management of emotions to intelligence and academic achievement. It is particularly important in promoting the essential virtue of self-control" (para. 8). "A committee assembled by the Board of Children and Families of the National Research Council, concluded "children learn critical lessons about how to recognize and deal with highly charged emotions in the content of playing with their fathers. Fathers, in effect, give children practice in regulating their own emotions and recognizing others' emotional clues" (para. 9).

The roles of fatherhood continue to expand in play and spread into other realms as well. Fathers tend to " stress competition, challenge, initiative, risk taking and independence. Williams (2011) continues with the father's involvement shows a strong connection to "improved quantitative and verbal skills, improved problem-solving ability and higher academic achievement for children." Involved fathers, it turns out according to one 26 year longitudinal research study may be of special importance for the development of empathy in children.

### Differences Between Fathers and Mothers

Fathers use a lot of play-like-parenting to develop relationships with their children, and in the process help teach and strengthening the child's developmental needs in the process. Accomplishing this does take time, according to Dr. Kyle Pruett (2000), professor of psychiatry at the Yale Child Studies Center says the best way to

stay close and make connections with your child and fulfill your fatherhood role is to be present.

First of all, it's never too late, to be present, to take your turn with the nighttime feedings, the getting ups. Take your turn at the diapering table. As your child gets older, make sure that you stay in their life. Adolescence, a time, when a lot of fathers back away because they're not sure. I'm here to tell you, don't back away. If there was ever a time they needed you, it is now. They need your strength, your authority. How about special times we keep hearing about, you know quality time? Children are raised in ordinary time. Quality time is a myth because our children may not be ready when we are and we may not be ready when our children are, so it has to be regular time. That's not to say that special time with your child can't be wonderful, but it shouldn't be the only kind of time you have with your child.

Mothers are not the only ones to offer something special, father's do too. From research, that there are unique, idiosyncratic things that fathers do with their children that are very important and valuable to their development. Fathers play and even hold their child differently than mothers, research has shown that infants are even responding to when a father holds them, at as young as six weeks, they are adjust their bodies when being held by fathers than mothers (Pruett, 2000). Pruett explains that, fathers, when they experience a baby that is troubled or fussing will not bring them close like most mothers. Fathers will choose to change the baby's position around,

show them something in the world, hold them upright. Pruett explains further that fathers seem to lead the baby into the world instead of isolating them to figure out what is wrong. They use the world around them a slightly different way than mothers, which should not be looked down on or corrected. This works for some babies of course, but others, not so much. Some children may then need that closeness and retreat back to quiet. Research shows again that fathers are very capable of picking up on this social/emotional cues and adjust. This research shows that the same physiological response of a cry baby is the same for both a father and mother. Fathers need the chance to sort out this and respond, fathers need support in this role (Pruett 200).

#### Fatherhood during Child Adolescence

Adolescence becomes a time when fathers then to back away may not think children need them in their life as much, but fatherhood roles should not change, especially in teenage years. Teens do look to their peers much more often and for more advice for who they should be at that time, but than they look to their parents as who they will become later. This happens when children become parents, they will look and use their own experiences from how they were parented and use that to determine what they should or should not do. Pruett (2000) shares for young girls in particular, their fathers can make a huge impact on their self-esteem and how they grow into women. There are also interviews and autobiographies of Hillary Clinton, Madeline Albright, and many prominent women scientists that emphasize fathers' influence on girls.

As any responsible parent can bear witness, the commitment is far longer than eighteen years and that really is the point (Silver, 2008). Men must step up as fathers,

the role of fathers has been changing and now masculinity is taking on many different forms. “A growing body of research is confirming that engaged, supportive, and loving fathers, even those who don’t live in the same household, positively impact the lives of their children” (Silver, 2008). It is not easy being a father and it never will be, there is no big fancy fatherhood magazines, and definitely no Oprah for dads. Many times dads have to “wing it”, when looking for help for ways to increase your fatherhood role in your family, Derek Markham (2017), a freelance writer and father helps by giving many different kinds of advice. A few ways from his list of *100 Ways to be a Better Father*. Be present with your children. Don’t be afraid to show your emotions to your family. Laugh at yourself. All the time. Listen to your kids with all of your attention. Make a meal for your family (even simple ones count). Get moving. Have a fitness plan in place and get your kids to join in. Take more walks, and leave the car at home. Remember that kids mirror our actions, so watch what you say to or around them. Parenting is a shared responsibility. Jump in and do something mom normally does. Give high fives for each tiny accomplishment they make. Get down on their level and try to see things as they do. Chances are, you’ve forgotten what it’s like. Remember, they’re never too old for piggyback rides. Remember to let your children save face. Embarrassing them in front of their friends is not cool. When your children were babies, you gushed over them. Do the same thing for them now. Make something by hand with them. Don’t worry about perfection, just enjoy the process. These are all but examples, it is important to make connections which your child.

## A Father's Influence on the Development of the Whole Child

The impact a father has, greatly affects the development of the whole child. It is important for fathers to see and reflect on how father's can have positive impacts on their sons and daughters development in education. The first part of the section will look at how fathers need to be more involved in all areas of their child's life during early childhood. The last section will discuss the impact a father has on daughters.

Children from low-income, two-parent families outperform students from high-income, single-parent homes. Almost twice as many high achievers come from two-parent homes as one-parent homes according to a study by the Charles F. Kettering Foundation.

The Board of Children and Families of the National Research Council, concluded "children learn critical lessons about how to recognize and deal with highly charged emotions in the content of playing with their fathers. Fathers, in effect, give children practice in regulating their own emotions and recognizing others' emotional clues." At play and in other realms, fathers tend to stress competition, challenge, initiative, risk taking and independence. Mothers, as caretakers, stress emotional security and personal safety. Father's involvement seems to be linked to improved quantitative and verbal skills, improved problem-solving ability and higher academic achievement for children. Men also have a vital role to play in promoting cooperation and other "soft" virtues. Involved fathers, it turns out, according to one 26 year longitudinal research study, may be of special importance for the development of empathy in children.

Family life-marriage and child rearing-is a civilizing force for men. It encourages them to develop prudence, cooperativeness, honesty, trust, self-sacrifice and other habits that can lead to success as an economic provider by setting a good example (Ferreira, Cadima, Matias, Vieira, Leal, Matos,2016).

### Positive Behaviors

One of the most interesting findings through research is unlike the mother-child relationship, the father-child relationship was directly linked to child prosocial behavior, which is positive social behavior that benefits another person and society as a whole. Research has always shown that there is consistent growth of fathers' involvement in housework and childcare related tasks over the last decades. The involvement of fathers in housework and childcare is stronger in dual earner-families in which parents share family tasks and responsibilities. The research shows that children who are from dual-earner families benefited more with the experiences of high levels of fathers' involvement in family daily routines. the Fathers' increasing involvement in family life, partnered with engagement/play activities with the child, is a huge contribution and influences the father-child relationship to children's prosocial behavior. Many Studies and research shows that play and quality activities is a key component of fathers' involvement. Fathers spend a large proportion of their time engaging in play activities with the child, whereas mothers spend more of their time in childcare activities (Ferreira, Cadima, Matias, Vieira, Leal, Matos,2016).



### Children with Special Needs

Fathers who interact with their children with special needs have a strenuous, highly attentive role, that requires just as much involvement. Research found that in these relationships, socioeconomic indicators, education and income, did not directly influence any outcomes of support for both the father or the child. The biggest factor that was found is the empowerment for support. This support had a higher importance than the need of a father-attachment (feeling a strong connection to the child), engagement (participating in activities with the child) and responsibility (meeting the child's needs). Research found that this indicates that the success of children with developmental needs, have higher rates of when fathers are loving, engaging and caring (Fox, Nordquist, Billen, Savoca, 2015).

### Parenting Tasks

Research shows that fathers tend to lag behind mothers in terms of how they approach and become involved in parenting tasks. Fathers that assume a more active and engaged role in raising and teaching their children play a huge part in exposing and facilitating their well being and development. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) 1996 National Household Education Survey also suggests that children do better in school when their fathers are involved in the educational process, regardless of whether their fathers live with them. This is positive findings, but tells very little about how and in what ways men become involved in early childhood settings while providing very little insight into those factors which encourage

fathers/men to assume more active roles in their children's education (McBride, Brent, Rane, Thomas, 2001).

### A Father's Impact on Early Childhood

Research and personal experiences as an Early Childhood teacher shows that there is a very low proportion of fathers that participate in parent involvement activities and contacts at both treatment and comparison site programs that included fathers/men. Findings show that in between 12-23% of fathers participate in such events (McBride, Brent, Rane, Thomas, 2001). Active father/male involvement in early childhood settings is gaining momentum, but yet there is little to no data that exists which documents the impact of such involvement on child outcomes. If as a society we truly believe that active father/male involvement in early childhood programs is beneficial and desirable, such low rates of participation are not acceptable (McBride, Brent, Rane, Thomas, 2001).

It is clear that large numbers of children are continuing to show up for kindergarten without the skills and resources needed to succeed, particularly those from less advantaged backgrounds. And these early introductions into classrooms and the educational system play a significant role in defining a child's developmental and educational trajectory, which becomes quite stable around third grade, usually by the age of 8 (Mcwanje, Downer, Campos, Harries, 2013).

Several developmental theorists found that fathers help to support their children's self-regulatory capacity and language development. Researches continue that when fathers' help teach and model, the management of children's emotions at age 5 carried

over and build success for their children's positive peer relationships several years later. Other findings show that fathers' sensitive and challenging interactive play during toddlerhood helped support their children's later emotional security at age 10 and above. The benefits continued that fathers use more words that positively leads to challenging speech with their child and serves for opportunities for learning higher language skills and communicative environments. Fathers do tend to spend more time and are involved when children are younger. This is a great finding which shows that there is a connection between father engagement and academic success. Studies continued to show that higher engagement rates partnered with the benefits of father involvement to children's academic and social success shows that there is indeed a direct link between direct father involvement and children's early learning (p. 899).

Studies continue to find that there is a needed relationship between children's prosocial skills and quantity of engagement from fathers. In addition, research found that there is a strong need in the frequency of fathers' positive engagement activities, and if this was lacking, is associated with children externally showing behavior problems. In all understanding and keeping regard with multiple elements of fathering, research supports there is strong bonds between positive parenting behaviors that led to positive growth in children's cognitive abilities, academic skills, prosocial skills, and self-regulation. In the opposite effect, research found that negative parenting behaviors caused children to externalize their behavior problems and had a negative effects with their children's cognitive and academic skills. In these studies, it was found that the

strongest relationships were between fathers' direct involvement (quantity and quality) (pg. 911).

Continuing with how fathers interact and how often, quantity and quality, research shows the strengths of both and how they are needed with father involvement and child academic success. Looking more specifically at the aspects of parenting quality: warmth, nurturance, and responsiveness reflecting positive parenting and, alternatively, harshness, punitiveness, nonresponsiveness reflecting a negative parenting style. When quality is then linked with frequency of positive engagement activities (playing) and learning specific activities (reading to the child) are strong indicators in predicting children's social and academic success (p. 914).

### Cognitive Development

The importance of a father involvement starts at the very beginning of their child's life. Research shows that infants of highly involved fathers, that includes high amounts of interaction, high amounts of quality and quantity play and being a caregiver, have more success in their growth of cognitive skills at 6 months and score higher on the Bayley Scales of Infant Development. This continues as at one year they continue to have higher cognitive functioning, are better problem solvers as toddlers, and have higher IQ's by age three (Allen, Daly, p. 1, 2007).

As children continue to develop, research and studies show that school aged children of involved fathers are also better academic achievers. These children have higher tendencies to get high grades, have better communication and problem solving skills, have higher grade point averages, are able to handle stress and can focus on

tests-getting better achievement test scores, can perform a year above their expected age level on academic tests, are higher readers and will achieve higher scores on reading examines, having higher executive functioning skills (ability to learn) so they can perform better in school. When fathers are more involved with their children, they help create a better stimulating home environment that encourages positive cognitive growth. A large influence and factor for academic success is in the academic support that involved fathers give. This support and involvement shows that adolescent boys' have higher academic motivation to try their best in school, place emphasis and importance on good grades, and to place a high value on education to a gateway to success in life. When fathers continued to be involved in their child's academic life, their children have higher cognitive competence with increased on standardized tests (p.1-2).

### Emotional Development

Studies show that father involvement is positively correlated with children's overall life satisfaction. The studies continue that father involvement helps the child experience of less depression, less emotional distress, less expressions of negative emotionality such as fear and guilt, less psychological distress, greater sense of social competence, higher levels of self-reported happiness, fewer anxiety symptoms, and lower neuroticism. Research findings showed that when children feel and know they are accepted by their parents, and even in adoptive families In adoptive families, this has positive psychological effects (p. 3).

Children of involved fathers continue to have healthy emotional development. They are able to have a higher ceiling of tolerance for dealing and adjusting to

frustration and stressful events, they develop better problem solving skills, have more energy for playing, gain skills to be responsible, focus on learning and giving higher levels of attention when presented with problems, and have a model figure to help them manage their emotions and egocentric impulses in a positive way. Research found that father involvement impacts and contributes to adolescent happiness. A positive relationship between fathers and step-fathers to their children, even when there is no permanent home, improves the overall well-being of the child and has better outcomes with grades, internalizing problems and behaviors, self-independence and efficacy, as well as less behavior outbursts in school.(p. 3).

### Social Development

When looking at social development, children of involved fathers benefit in many areas. Research shows children have higher overall social competence, social initiative, social maturity, and capacity for relatedness with others. Children of involved fathers are more likely to have positive friend relations and have more friends with being liked as well. Their peer relations, because of more support and social modeling at home, are typified by less negativity, less aggression, less conflict, more reciprocity, more generosity, and more positive friendship qualities. Research found that the strongest predictor of empathic concern in children and adults is high levels of paternal involvement while a child (p 4-5).

### Daughters

The father daughter relationship is a very major part of the little girl's feelings about herself. Look for times to spend together, times for 1 on1 or go off and do an

activity. If busy or not at home, use the phone, snapchat, facetime, say I miss you, I wish I could be there with you. Daughters need to hear those words. When a father comes home, there can be two reactions, one is the wonderful hugging, excitement and everything is great. However the second is when a father returns home, does the daughter reject him, turn away or act as if she doesn't care. This could mean that parents have to take it as behavior is shown, but the other is to say "I've missed you all day long, dad and I'm so glad your home, not many see this, but they are seeking that fulfilling attention (Brazelton, 2005).

According to Mary Williamson "the father – daughter relationship is crucial to the development of femininity and the preservation of womanhood" (2004). Daughters learn much through a strong relationship with their fathers. They learn traits and expectation of males and points to a strong impact on the importance of later psychological happiness. Through her relationship with her father she will learn to relate to male expectation in general, and this would seem to be of vital importance to her later psychological happiness (2004). Not all daughters and woman take pride in their femininity, but maybe masculinity and mothers. Williamson continues that daughters, to a develop a healthy self, the child must have three needs adequately met: first, she must be seen, heard, mirrored by the relationship from her parents, especially from the mother. It is important for daughters to know their uniqueness and feel confident in that. Second, the daughter needs to have a parent to idolize. This is usually the father, but can still be the mother. One that " offers a strong, calm and confident image that is protective and can be trusted" (2004). Third, knowledge that they gain from their

fathers/mothers that can are like others. The ability to communicate, social/emotional development/norms with interacting with peers.

Summary:

There is very extensive research in chapter two that shows through statistics the impact and challenges children face in a fatherless home. Most literature and professional reviews and studies show that a father is of irreplaceable importance to the development of their children. Fathers are very capable caregivers, and are important models and support for the emotional wellness of their children. The role of the father has been an ever changing one and that trend continues in present day. It is important for fathers to see and reflect on how father's can have positive impacts on their sons and daughters development in education. A present father is what is needed, both quantity and quality of direct father involvement matter. Aspects of parenting quality, frequency of positive engagement activities and learning specific activities are important in predicting children's social and academic success.

Chapter Three provides a lay out of the methods for which I will design and create an effective online resource (website) that will increase interaction and build stronger relationships between fathers and their children. I will use evidence based instructional strategies when creating the website. I will illustrate and expand on activities as well as identify who the resource will be intended for. I will go through the procedures I have used for designing the website and review a timeline for when the project will be created and finished.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Preview

Fathers are very capable caregivers, and are important models and support for the emotional wellness of their children. Yet, there is a losing battle for fatherhood in the United States, as more and more homes and children are without a father or presence of their biological dad. According to the U.S. census bureau, 24 million children, 1 out of 3, live without their biological father in the home. Consequently, there is a father factor in nearly all social ills facing America today. Fatherhood is intimidating, even to those who have experience. We can master our jobs and careers, even sports, but we lose a lot of that control in fatherhood. There is a father absence that is taking over America and I believe we, as fathers can do better to impact our children's and student's life through looking at *How can empowering fathers in their roles in their child's life increase student academic achievement and their lives?*

A father that is active and present in the family is of the utmost importance. This fatherhood role greatly reduces not only the frequency of behavior problems of boys and helps the psychological welling being of girls, but has a great, positive effect on the social/cognitive development and diminishes economic disadvantages in low income families (Flynn, 2017). Even though more and more research is showing just how important fathers are, however there are many challenges and frustrations that fathers can face. What can be to help fathers be more effective and support their families? This led me to wonder, how can I design and create an effective online resource that is

easily accessible, meaningful and useful for fathers to use and learn to create better relationships with their children and families?

### Overview

In this chapter I will outline the methods for how I planned the design and created an online resource (website) that gave supports to the role of the fathers: current, new or future, and provide ideas/activities to help support father-child relationships. I looked to resources in what makes a useful online resource and user friendly guides. I used evidence for supporting fathers from research as well as advice or experiences from other fathers. This chapter will explain the outreach, target audience, illustrate discusses guides on designing websites, explain the online resources and the timeline of how the project progressed.

### Method

Currently, today's world is ruled by the tech industry, with articles, research, all kinds of information at almost everyone's fingertips. By choosing to do an online resource/website, its is something user friendly that doesn't carry a lot of weight, something of reference. There are many informational resources that provide statistics and help. This method of a resource will provide fathers with ideas and means to build relationships. When building a website, there were four areas to take into consideration: Communication, usability, and navigation (Snell, 2009). When considering online users, research found that the most important area in designing a website is web navigation. It is so important that educators solely based the website usable and very important if they found the web navigation user friendly (Ng, 2014). The website was created with a

navigation bar placed strategically with readable font. When looking at usability, research found that multimedia elements are needed, this includes color, graphics, fonts and the flow of text/pages. Online users, when considering whether they wanted to remain and explore the website, looked first at its appearance. The beauty and flow of an education website affects users' decisions to browse at a high rate (Ng, 2014). The creation of the website maintains clear communication with useful and usable information and activities for fathers to use to help their children.

Communication is one of the foundational elements of a good website. It is essential for a positive user experience and for a successful website that truly benefits its owners. All types of websites are affected by the need for good communication in one way or another. Regardless of whether the website in question is an e-commerce website, a blog, a portfolio website, an information website for a service company, a government website or any other type of website, there is a significant need to communicate effectively with visitors (Snell, 2009, para 1).

Using a website helps create an easy access bridge for fathers to find and use information and activities to create and strengthen their relationships with their children. Communication is the key to providing these examples and allowing this communication to flow both ways will increase effectiveness. A website is a well known tool to find and use to read and communicate information for any audience in the 21st Century.

## Audience

The website is intended for all fathers: single, married, divorced, young, old. The plan was to mainly focus on local families within my school community, family and friends, before branching out further, as I included local and area events as well. The community in which I serve as an educator is urban lower class with around 90+% on free and reduced lunch. Many do not have fathers in their homes or active with their education. This website is to be a resource for these families that can be easily linked and sent to fathers which then is used with smart devices when they spend time with their children. This online resource site is intended for father's who are looking for more ideas for interactions with their children that might not have the time to develop their own activities. There is activities to include all fathers, families and children who might have both verbal, nonverbal skills and communication impairment. This resource is useful for fathers who feel time is not on there side by allowing them to find strategic and effective activities to build relationships with their children.

## Project Description

There is a homepage that offers an introduction, welcome, page guide and shortcut links to local, city and area event pages. There is different pages for resources on activities for improvement in academic areas-literacy, science, math. There is a wide range of extracurricular activities to allow fathers and families to manipulate the website depending on child's age and grade. There is a specific page for these extracurricular activities of just dad and me around the twin cities. Activities to build, plan, play, and interact for time increments: 5min, 10min, to multiple day activities. There is a page to

have communication, where fathers can ask questions, send me an email and communicate with each other. The focus is to be a resource in which to speak together, not at someone.

This project had the abilities to be simplistic but with many time consuming and complex designs. Today, it has never been “easier” to build/make going from guides and the DIY (Do it Yourself) craze that has hit America. I used resources and experts in the field of web design to help to create an effective, useful site. The duration of the project set limits, but this website filled in gaps to what fathers may be thinking about what can they do with little time and not needing to spend little to no funds. The website resources are about the father’s presence, and not about “presents” fathers can give.

### Timeline

This capstone project was developed during the fall semester and months in 2017 and will be used with fathers, families and students beginning in the winter of 2017-2018. Publishing and the implementation of the website is flexible so it can be shared with individuals, small groups of families or to the community during different times of the school year. The website is expected to be used as often as needed, anytime during the year, thus there is planed times to provide maintenance for the website to make sure all links are still working. The project will continually be built upon and changed as the years go on to keep up with research and provide new resources. This website is to be a lasting resource for fathers and their children.

## Summary

The goal of this capstone project is to design and create an effective online resource that provides information, including home activities and local involvements that will help to strengthen a father's relationship and boost children's academic skills. The question of “ *how can empowering fathers in their child's life increase student academic achievement?*” kept the project process guided. Chapter three described the aspects of what is needed in a effective website. The website is designed for all fathers and children, single, divorced, married, young and old, and most importantly to help potentially struggling children.

Chapter four provides feedback to the capstone project process and offers a reflection about what was completed with the website. There will be information on continued research into why creating a useful and effective website is necessary to reach fathers to help support student learning. Challenges with limitations as well as success in the development of the project will be highlighted. Ways to gather data on how the website is best being used and future potentials will be shared along with my own professional growth.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

#### Overview

In conclusion to my capstone thesis on *how can empowering fathers in their child's life increase student academic achievement?*, chapter four will include the project characteristics, re-examine implications from the research, explain project limitations and future/next steps, and give reasoning as to how this capstone project provided benefits to me in my growth as a professional teacher in education. My capstone project was to create a website that would be an informational resource to fathers to see how powerful their relationship with their children can be and give them insight into how they can interact with their children. My website provided information on the role of fathers, impact, academics, activities in the twin cities, NAZ (North side achievement zone) and other online resources.

The research that I found for my literature review, strongly supports the important role fathers play in the lives of the children and the influences on academic success. The results from years of research are still only statistics and will not apply to everyone, nor does it mean that only fathers can have such positive or negative impacts. The limitations with my specific project resides in me being able to share this resource, website upkeep and the ever changing world of technology. The website does not have a common URL address and is lengthy to type by hand, URL shortcuts will help online,

but may pose a burden to look up when individuals receive the information by word of mouth, newsletter home or other forms of written/printed communication. My website also has communications to other resources for parents that will need to be updated if those contacts and resources change in the future.

I have been able to grow professionally as an educator by learning about web design and this capstone project. This project provided a means to pursue a passion of the importance of fathers being involved in the lives of their children, especially during the stages of early childhood development. The benefits from this research could have lasting positive effects on student academic success. If my website is able to reach multiple families and fathers in the community and in the state of Minnesota, this would be a huge benefit for others to become more informed and be reflective of their parenting involvement.

### Project Characteristics

I started my website during the month of August, 2017 and finished its founding in December of 2017 using the web creator from google sites. My website, <https://sites.google.com/view/heartoffatherhood>, is designed with families, fathers and children in mind. Fathers and families are able to visit the homepage and click through the side navigation to find information on the impact of fathers, how to take action, academics, father-child activities, NAZ and other online resources. The users are able to click back and forth to a direct page using the sidebar navigation. In each website page, they will find information to help become informed, ideas and activities with links to various destinations around the Twin Cities, if fathers feel the need to want to explore



with their child whether they want to spend money or not. Through research I focused on building an effective website that had easy readability, meaning that my google site can be accessed on multiple platforms: phone, tablet, and computer. The layout was planned to be laid out with fluency and a flow with precise wording and making sure each link was functional (Ng, 2014, *Research-based web design & usability guidelines, 2006*). My website strictly followed those designs and meets them.

I was able to place images with my links and tested all of them in my website to make sure that pages loaded appropriately with loading a new user window. I was able to have multiple colleagues and coworkers test my google site will in the Beta process and accepted feedback on accessibility, attractiveness, user friendly and informative. No errors were found in navigating the site, but suggestions and input was made to help improve central ideas and the flow of information. Some wording was replaced, and more images placed to help add meaning with text. It was enjoyable and learned much about the process of web design and being self reflective, found it easy to create a website using google sites web builder. My research on building effective websites aided me in creating my capstone project.

My project will move forward in January of 2018 when I will be sharing and introducing the website with my classroom families and school community. I will start by sending letters home with students asking if families and fathers need any additional resources. The website information will be shared with parents during the February teacher-parent conferences, 2018. This will be an opportunity to connect with families and even ask if they know anyone else who might benefit from the website resources. I

will then by the end of the 2017-2018 school, ask in my family-school survey if the website was found informational, helpful or useful and will accept any feedback to make changes and update the site.

Through my experience and studies in Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education, I am confident this website will be effective for support fathers and their children to further academic success. I have seen first hand the negative and positive effects of how a child is more successful when their father is present with their academics. Students with fathers who attended school events: parent days, conferences, phone calls, volunteer, were overall better rounded in their development as a whole child. I work with many children who come from single mother working households, or with fathers who might be hesitant with smaller children. My excitement and passion to work with parents, especially fathers, is what drove me to dive deeper into research into the impact that fathers have with their child's development.

### Implications and Research

My attitudes and focus has always been on families in education, especially involvement in early childhood. Seeing a lack of father involvement, provided a stronger personal philosophy to bring fathers back into the spotlight with mothers. There are many positive insights and attitudes within my project, however, some issues made the project difficult to conform and publish. Beginning with the implications of research and the project development, the agreement from researchers that there is a huge problem between the relationships between father absence and lower educational attainment.

Meaning that a longer duration of father absence is a predictive factor for lower educational success.

Studies report that when the duration of father absence is longer it also leads to lower family income and economic stress, putting children at a higher risk of low academic achievement and growth (*Gillette, Gudmunson, 2014*). An involved Father has strong links to their child's positive cognitive, developmental, and socio-behavioral outcomes, even when their children are infants. Research shows with father involvement improved weight gain in preterm infants, improved breastfeeding rates, higher receptive language skills, and higher academic achievement (*Garfield, Isacco, 2006*). The actions from fathers who are disengaged and/or only have deslate interactions with infants is a predictor of early childhood problems and can lead to children having severe externalizing behaviors as early as age 1 (*Ramchandani, Domoney, Sethna, Psychogiou, Vlachos, and Murray, 2013*). A study in Florida, of 1,397,801 infants, followed and evaluated how a lack of father involvement impacts infant mortality. This lack of involvement had a direct relationship to the infants being born with low birth weights and early term births. Research continued to find that when there is a absent father, it increases the rate of infant mortality, and this rate increase by four times within the first 28 days of life compared to fathers who are involved (*Alio, Mbah, Kornosky, Wathington, Marty, & Salihu, 2011*).

Research points to the same important factor for a child's academic as well as their whole-being success, is an involved father. I have confidence that with his research to support and inform father's, my website, promotes, elevates and guides

fathers to being more involved in their child's life, improving academic achievement and healthy development.

### Limitations of the Project

There have been difficulties when creating the website, starting with my lack of design knowledge and skills, limited time in locating and organizing research and tools, and organizing my website to allow a friendly and easy usability across smart devices. I used google sites, which is a free website creator, but requires a google account. I do not have a very usability URL name of <https://sites.google.com/view/heartoffatherhood>, this URL is lengthy and would be hard for users to remember and tedious to type in on smaller smart devices. Google sites has many great help strategies for designing a website, but there was still time needed to adhere to the learning curve. To help gain better design knowledge, I was able to read through multiple resources to form a professional layout, attractiveness and usability. Besides using text to help inform families and fathers, I was able to link various resources, but must maintain maintenance to make sure this links continue to work. There are many more sources that can be used to support fathers than what I was able to find and publish.

### Next Steps

My website, <https://sites.google.com/view/heartoffatherhood>, is now published and fully accessible. I will be communicating my website through emails and newsletters as a resource to my education families and community. I will continue to expand, update and provide additional resources on my website technology changes and grows, and accepting feedback from peers and families. The most day to day maintenance and

upkeep would be responding to emails and critical suggestions to make the website more accessible and user friendly to make it a more effective resource tool for fathers.

### Benefit to the Education Profession

Through my experience in the field of education and being a father, there is limited resources and information about the benefits of fathers being involved with their children. I was able to locate national websites that was informational and data driven, but not many with built for support and focused and much of the negative aspects of being a father. I have created this resource for fathers, families, and teachers to help empower fathers and give them the support they deserve when raising children. I will be using my project as a tool to be helpful in the future with families and with others in my community. Fathers should be proud of their own unique parenting that encourages cognitive, social, behavioral and academic benefits that will give their child a better chance to succeed.

### Personal Growth

In my educational philosophy, families and parents are and always will be the greatest teachers to their child. In doing hours of research and creating a website have furthered my own beliefs in how much of a positive impact an involved father has on their child's academic success. I am now able to speak and reference a higher level of awareness when discussing matters for father and parent involvement in a child's education.

## Final Thoughts

With the conclusion of chapter four and this capstone research project on “*how can empowering fathers in their child’s life increase student academic achievement?*” I will review my research points and benefits of how an involved father has many positive benefits. The information which I researched strongly supports and encourages fathers to be involved with their child/children and in doing so will help give their child a better chance to succeed with lasting effects on their development and learning. The benefits that a an involved father can give to their child, starts during the pregnancy and birth and carries on with their child into adulthood. The website project I created, <https://sites.google.com/view/heartoffatherhood>, is published and will be used to help supports families in Minnesota, closely related to my teaching in North Minneapolis. During the next few years, the website will be monitored, updated and changed based on feedback and reviews from friends, colleagues and families. The capstone project has given me great benefits in my professional growth in the field of education, granted there were and still are limitations in the website setup and in the userface. I know this website helped me take the next step in pursuit of family research, support and instruction.

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## Appendix

Figure A

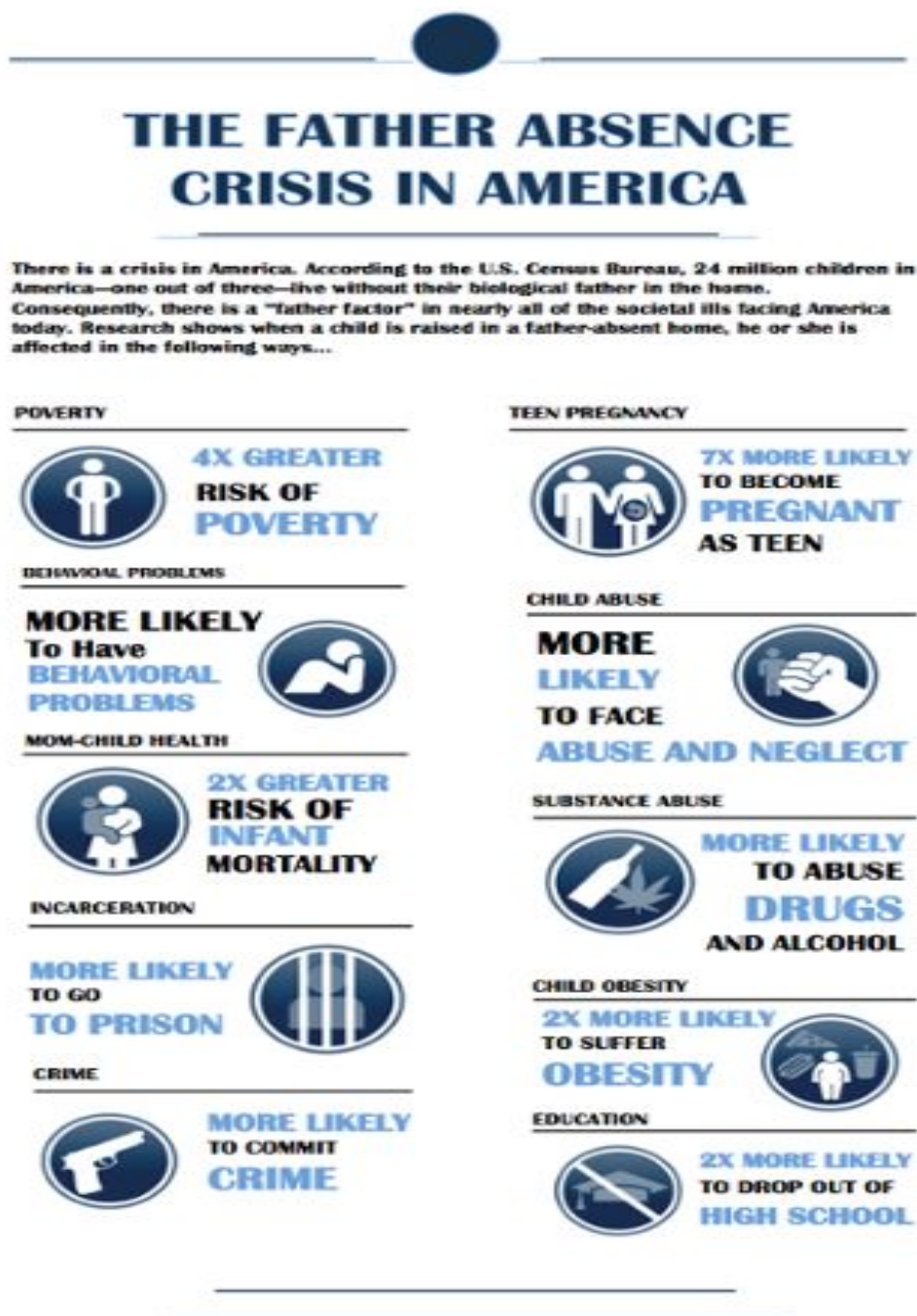


Fig. A. Snapshot data of how important dads are to children's well being (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2017).

Figure B

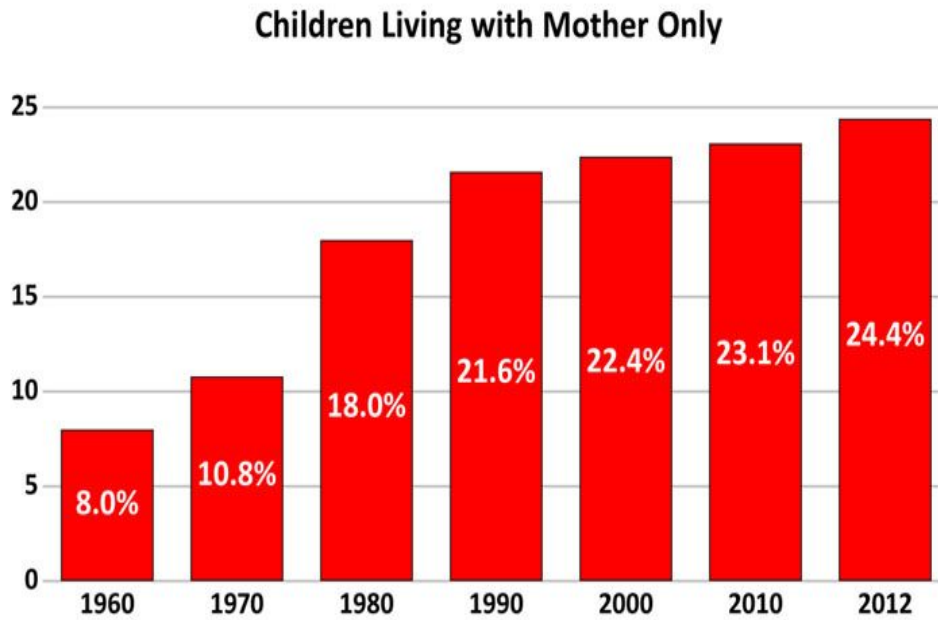


Fig. B.  
Census Bureau. "Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years Old: 1960 to Present." U.S. Census Bureau, July 1, 2012. <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/ch5.xls>