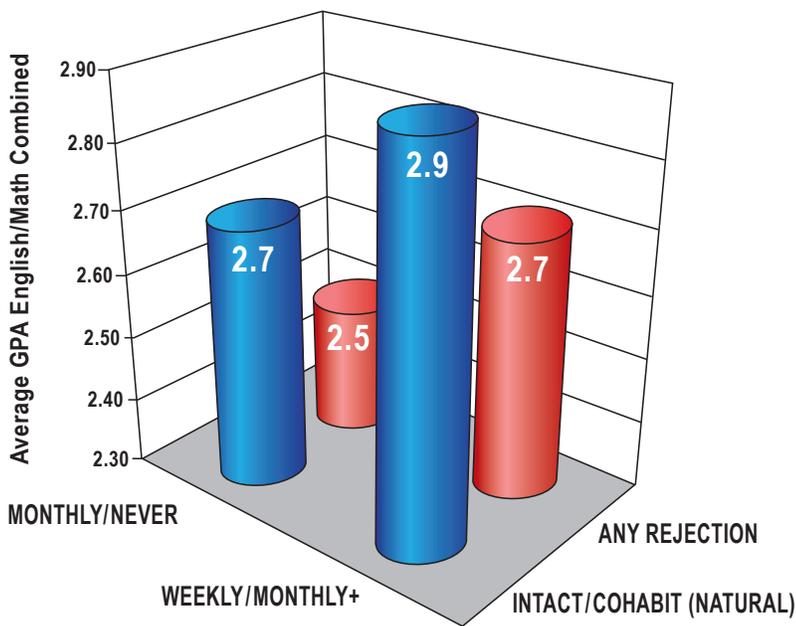




Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 3

Religious Attendance, Family Structure and School Performance of U.S. High School Students

GPA English/Math by Religious Attendance and Family Structure



Religious Attendance and Family Structure Combined

The chart groups the data in four categories: frequency of religious attendance (monthly or more/less than monthly) and family structure (intact/non-intact).

The intact category comprises families with both biological parents, married or unmarried, raising their children. The non-intact category comprises families without both biological parents, including married stepfamilies, cohabiting stepfamilies, divorced single-parent families, and always single-parent families.

The resultant four categories are 1) intact family with monthly or more religious attendance; 2) intact family with less than monthly religious attendance; 3) non-intact family with monthly or more religious attendance; and 4) non-intact family with less than monthly religious attendance.

¹ This chart draws on a large national sample (16,000) from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. This work was done by the author in cooperation with former colleagues at The Heritage Foundation.

American high school students from intact families that worship frequently have as a group the highest Grade Point Average (GPA) for English and math combined.

Teenagers who live in intact families that worship weekly score a combined GPA of 2.9. Students who worship at least monthly but reside in families not headed by both biological parents score a combined 2.7 GPA, as do students who live in a family with both natural parents but who worship less than monthly. Those who are not living with both biological parents and who worship less than monthly have the lowest GPA (2.5).

Other Studies

Several other studies also reveal significant correlations among religious attendance, intact family structure, and educational performance. Examining the National Education Longitudinal Study, Jerry Trusty at Texas A&M University and Richard Watts of Baylor University report that “the more frequently [high school seniors] attended religious

activities, the more likely they were to have parents who were involved in their lives and gave recognition to good grades, to have high expectations for the future and to have a positive attitude toward academics, and to spend more time on homework.”¹

Chandra Muller and Christopher Ellison of the University of Texas at Austin concur in their finding that “youths who were more religiously involved were more likely to report that their parents had high expectations for their education and were more likely to talk with their parents about school.”²

Having natural married parents to talk with about school makes an even bigger difference, according to a study by Nan Astone of Johns Hopkins University and Sara McLanahan of Princeton University. “Children of single or stepparents reported that their parents had lower educational expectations for them, compared to reports from children in intact families. The former group also reported that their parents are less likely to monitor schoolwork ... compared to reports from children in intact families.”³

The combination, then, of an intact married family with frequent religious activity seems key to fostering superior educational outcomes. Diane Brown of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey and Lawrence Gary of Howard University conducted a survey of black adults in a major Eastern city, a demographic in which broken families are quite prevalent, which indicates that although “religious socialization had a stronger impact on educational attainment than did family structure, ... at the highest levels of religious socialization, educational attainment was higher for those individuals who grew up with both parents. In other words, the impact on education was greatest when there was an intact family and high religious attendance.”⁴

When the two great loves are combined, love of God and love of spouse, children thrive most.

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¹ Jerry Trusty and Richard E. Watts, “Relationship of High School Seniors’ Religious Perceptions and Behavior to Educational, Career, and Leisure Variables,” *Counseling and Values* 44 (1999): 30-40.

² Chandra Muller and Christopher G. Ellison, “Religious Involvement, Social Capital, and Adolescents’ Academic Progress: Evidence from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988,” *Sociological Focus* 34 (2001): 155-183.

³ Nan M. Astone and Sara S. McLanahan, “Family Structure, Parental Practices, and High School Completion,” *American Sociological Review* 56 (1991): 309-320.

⁴ Diane R. Brown and Lawrence E. Gary, “Religious Socialization and Educational Attainment among African Americans: An Empirical Assessment,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 60 (1991): 411-426.



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