

# Parents aiming too high can harm child's academic performance

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When parents have high hopes for their children's academic achievement, the children tend to do better in school, unless those hopes are unrealistic, in which case the children may not perform well in school, according to research published by the American Psychological Association.

"Our research revealed both positive and negative aspects of [parents'](#) aspiration for their children's [academic performance](#). Although parental aspiration can help improve children's academic performance, excessive parental aspiration can be poisonous," said lead author Kou Murayama, PhD, of the University of Reading. The study was published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Murayama and his colleagues analyzed data from a longitudinal study from 2002 to 2007 of 3,530 secondary school students (49.7 percent female) and their parents in Bavaria, Germany. The study assessed student math achievement as well as parental aspiration (how much they want their child to earn a particular grade) and expectation (how much they believe their child can achieve a certain grade) on an annual basis.

They found that high parental aspiration led to increased academic achievement, but only when it did not overly exceed realistic expectation. When aspiration exceeded expectation, the children's achievement decreased proportionately.

To reinforce the results, the researchers attempted to replicate the main

findings of the study using data from a two-year study of over 12,000 U.S. students and their parents. The results were similar to the German study and provided further evidence that parents' overly high aspirations are associated with worse academic performance by their kids.

Previous psychological research has found the association between aspiration and [academic achievement](#), but this study highlights a caveat, said Murayama.

"Much of the previous literature conveyed a simple, straightforward message to parents - aim high for your children and they will achieve more," said Murayama. In fact, getting parents to have higher hopes for their [children](#) has often been a goal of programs designed to improve academic performance in schools. This study suggests that the focus of such educational programs should not be on blindly increasing parental aspiration but on giving parents the information they need to develop realistic expectations.

"Unrealistically high aspiration may hinder academic performance. Simply raising aspiration cannot be an effective solution to improve success in education," he said.

**More information:** "Don't Aim Too High for Your Kids: Parental Overaspiration Undermines Students' Learning in Mathematics," by Kou Murayama, PhD, University of Reading; Masayuki Suzuki, PhD, National Institute of Informatics, Japan; Reinhard Pekrun, PhD, and Stephanie Lichtenfeld, PhD, University of Munich; and Herbert Marsh, PhD, Australian Catholic University, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, published online Nov. 16, 2015.  
[www.apa.org/pubs/journals/rele ... /psp-pspp0000079.pdf](http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/rele.../psp-pspp0000079.pdf)

Provided by American Psychological Association

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