

## ABSTRACT

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The Effect of Community Family Composition on Student Achievement Measures  
Across Louisiana School Districts

(Major Professor: Bob N. Cage, PhD)

Many worthwhile health, social, and educational programs have been developed or improved since the implementation of high-stakes testing in Louisiana. Schools across the state have worked hard to improve their School Performance Scores, with varied results. If schools are to be rewarded for improvements and punished for lack thereof, it would seem only just and appropriate that they all begin on a level playing field. Many researchers, including Marchant, Paulson, and Rothlisberg (2001), Griffen (2002), Dimitrov (1999), and Biddle (1997), have shown that this is not the case, citing different environments in terms of poverty, ethnicity, and gender. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of family structure on three different measures of academic achievement: District Performance scores (DPS), Iowa Indices, and LEAP21 Indices. Data pertaining to family structure, education, environment, and schools were collected from two major sources: Census2000 and from the Louisiana Department of Education. The data were analyzed using Pearson  $r$  and Stepwise Multiple Regression analyses. The results indicated that both with and without covariates, neighborhood family structure is a predictor of achievement. Six types of family structure were found to be significant predictors of achievement without covariates. With covariates of education, environment, and school factors were used, two family types were found to be significant predictors of achievement. First, when a school district has a large number of married couple headed households with own children under 6 and 6-17, DPS, LEAP21 and Iowa scores are significantly higher. Second, when a district has a large number of single male householders with own children aged under 6 and 6-17, both DPS and Iowa scores are significantly lower. Other factors also are significant predictors of achievement, including School Improvement Index, District Responsibility Index, proportion of students within a district who are enrolled in private elementary or high schools, Certified Teachers Index, and median income. In order to improve scores, schools need to address not only curricula, but also demographic variables.