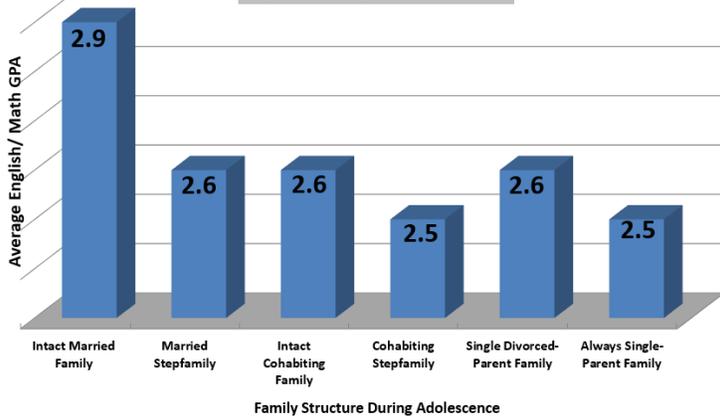


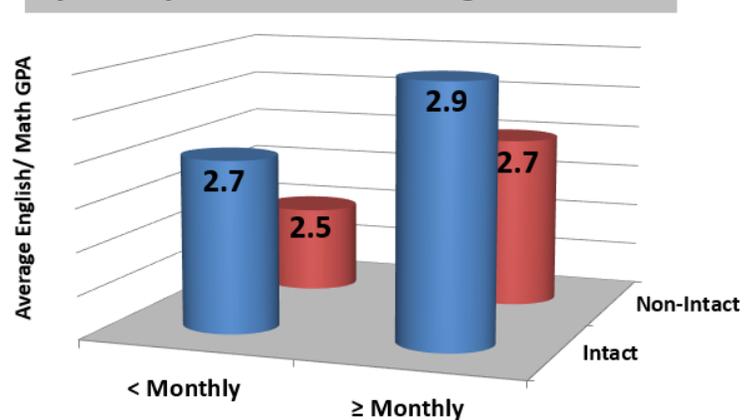
## School Performance in English and Math By Family Structure and Religious Practice

**Average GPA in English and Math (Combined)  
By Family Structure**



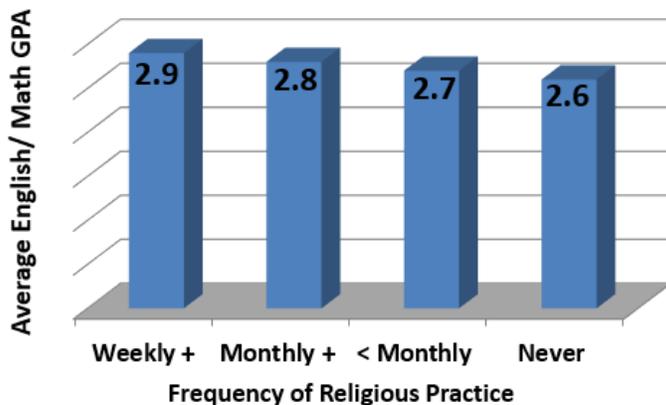
Source: Patrick Fagan, Kirk A. Johnson, and Jonathan Butcher, *A Portrait of Family and Religion in America*, The Heritage Foundation, 2006, chart 10, based on data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health.

**Average GPA in English and Math (Combined)  
By Family Structure and Religious Practice**



Source: Patrick Fagan, Kirk A. Johnson, and Jonathan Butcher, *A Portrait of Family and Religion in America*, The Heritage Foundation, 2006, chart 10, based on data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health.

**Average GPA in English and Math (Combined)  
By Religious Practice**



Source: Patrick Fagan, Kirk A. Johnson, and Jonathan Butcher, *A Portrait of Family and Religion in America*, The Heritage Foundation, 2006, chart 20, based on data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health.

*This 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.*

*These charts illustrate the educational performance of American high school students when viewed from the perspective of religious practice, family structure, and both combined. <sup>1</sup>*

## School Performance in English and Math by Family Structure and Religious Practice

**Family Structure:** Students who lived with their married biological parents carried the highest average combined grade point average (GPA) for English and Math (2.9). Those whose parents never married or who lived with cohabiting adults, only one of whom was a natural parent, had the lowest GPA (2.5). Slightly above that group were students living with stepparents, divorced parents, or both unmarried biological parents (2.6).

**Religious Practice:** Teenagers who attended religious activities weekly or more had the highest average combined GPA for English and Math (2.9). Those who never attended religious activities had the lowest (2.6). In between were those who attended a couple of times per month (2.8) and those who attended a few times a year (2.7).

**Family Structure and Religious Practice Combined:** Teenagers who lived in intact families that worshipped weekly scored a combined GPA of 2.9. Students who worshipped at least monthly but resided in families not headed by both biological parents scored a combined 2.7 GPA, as did students who lived in a family with both natural parents but who worshipped less than monthly. Those who were not living with both biological parents and who worshipped less than monthly had the lowest GPA (2.5).

**Related Insights from Other Studies:** Several other studies also reveal significant correlations among religious attendance, intact family structure, and educational performance.<sup>1</sup> Examining the National Educational Longitudinal Study, Jerry Trusty at Texas A&M University reported that the more often high school seniors participated in religious activities, the better their chances of having involved parents who recognized good grades, having a positive disposition toward academics and high expectations for their future, and spending additional time on homework.<sup>2</sup>

Chandra Muller and Christopher Ellison of the University of Texas at Austin concurred in their finding that adolescents who were religiously involved were more apt to relate that they have parents who place a high value on their education and that they are willing to talk more with their parents regarding their education.<sup>3</sup>

Having natural married parents to talk with about school made an even bigger difference, according to a study by Nan Astone of Johns Hopkins University and Sara McLanahan of Princeton University. Children living within intact families reported parents with higher

---

<sup>1</sup> The following findings are from [www.familyfacts.org](http://www.familyfacts.org).

<sup>2</sup> Jerry Trusty, "Relationship of High School Seniors' Religious Perceptions and Behavior to Educational, Career, and Leisure Variables," *Counseling and Values* 44 (1999): 30-40.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

educational expectations that were more likely to monitor their schoolwork than children of single parents or stepparents.<sup>4</sup>

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 indicated that although religious attendance had a greater impact than family structure on educational attainment, those who attended worship most frequently *and* lived in an intact family attained the most education.<sup>5</sup>

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

Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D.

*Patrick Fagan is the Director of the Marriage and Religion Research Institute*

---

<sup>4</sup> Nan M. Astone and Sara S. McLanahan, "Family Structure, Parental Practices, and High School Completion," *American Sociological Review* 56 (1991): 309-320.

<sup>5</sup> 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.