

The Influences of Overparenting on Teachers: Perspectives from Middle and High School Teachers in an Independent School

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Abstract

This case study focused on middle school and high school teachers in an independent school to explore their perceptions of how overparenting influenced them in the classroom. A qualitative case study was conducted within an independent school in the southeast United States. Eleven middle school and high school teachers, which represented 52% of the full-time faculty at the school, participated in an online questionnaire and follow-up interviews regarding their experiences with overparenting. Findings revealed three themes: (a) teachers overwhelmingly associated parent–teacher interactions with conflict and confrontation, (b) teachers perceived overparenting influences teacher autonomy by forcing teachers to set boundaries, and (c) teachers experienced increased workloads. This study provides insight into how overparenting influences teachers, which may help teachers, administrators, and future educators prepare for this type of parent–teacher interaction.

Key Words: overparenting, teachers, middle schools, high schools, independent, private secondary school, boundaries, autonomy, workload, helicopter, lawnmower, overprotective parenting, educator perspective, parent involvement

Introduction

Overparenting, while occurring between parents and their children, has the potential to influence the school environment and, specifically, teachers.

Overparenting may be intrusive, overcontrolling, overly assertive, and developmentally inappropriate parental involvement or behavior to advocate for a child's success, remove obstacles or difficulties, and ensure happiness, success, and well-being (Jiao & Segrin, 2023; Segrin et al., 2012; Segrin et al. 2020; Yaffe et al., 2024). Overparenting includes overprotective, overcontrolling, or overpressuring parental behaviors. Researchers have found variations in overparenting, as well as a variety of modern terms, including helicopter parenting (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Segrin et al., 2020), intrusive parenting (Taylor et al., 2013), overprotective parenting (Spokas & Heimberg, 2009; Ungar, 2009), lawnmower parenting (Locke et al., 2012; Segrin et al., 2012), and overparenting (Jiao & Segrin, 2023; Locke et al., 2012; Segrin et al., 2012; Yaffe et al., 2024). This case study seeks to explore the concept of overparenting from a teacher perspective.

Overparenting is linked to exceedingly high and unrealistic parental academic expectations, criticism of children and teachers, and feelings of entitlement on the part of the parent and the child (Fletcher et al., 2020). Feelings of entitlement are related to decreased student engagement inside and outside of class, decreased academic compliance, and increased perceptions of inappropriate or offensive faculty behavior (Fletcher et al., 2020; Knepp, 2016; Kopp & Finney, 2013). This sense of entitlement from overparenting can cause parents to challenge and criticize teachers (Dor & Mentzer, 2019; Fletcher et al., 2020). Interactions between teachers and parents can be sources of conflict, causing teachers to be reluctant to initiate communication and leading teachers to alter behaviors and minimize contact with parents (Dor & Mentzer, 2019; Frolova et al., 2019). Overparenting may leave teachers feeling helpless and insecure due to decreased authority and loss of autonomy (Dor & Mentzer, 2019). Effective communication between parents and teachers helps establish a healthy and positive partnership between school and home and requires equity, consideration, and trust (Holmes et al., 2020; Palts & Harro-Loit, 2015).

Overparenting in Schools

The complex concept of overparenting varies depending on the parent's behaviors and the child's age (Leung & Busiol, 2016). Some behaviors are appropriate for young children, and the same behaviors are inappropriate as the child enters adolescence and young adulthood (Leung & Busiol, 2016; Padilla-Walker et al., 2019; Yaffe et al., 2024). Studies on overparenting have focused on developmental outcomes of mainly undergraduate students, with little research on the impacts of overparenting on adolescents (Leung & Busiol, 2016; Moilanen & Manuel, 2019; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020; Steele & McKinney, 2019). Researchers have examined college student perceptions

of parental involvement when assessing overparenting rather than adolescent or teacher experiences (Padilla-Walker et al., 2019; Rote et al., 2020). Studies have also examined how overparenting impacts the relationship between college students and instructors and the expectation of parent and instructor communication (Frey & Tatum, 2016). However, research into the perceptions of teachers and the expectations of parent and teacher communication with overparenting is lacking.

Overparenting represents a shift in parenting trends; as educators encounter more aggressive forms of parent involvement and communication, these encounters result in teachers feeling uncomfortable, undervalued, and unappreciated (Herman & Reinke, 2017). Researchers acknowledge the importance of parent involvement in schools, resulting in better grades, higher test scores, less substance abuse, and better education outcomes (Jensen & Minke, 2017; Wong et al., 2018). Researchers assert that elementary and middle school teachers appreciate parent involvement when it is balanced, includes polite communication, and works toward the student's common good (Padilla-Walker et al., 2019; Schiffrin et al., 2015). Parental involvement in schools also facilitates learning and engagement and makes children aware of parental expectations (Wong et al., 2018), although parent engagement is sometimes underutilized in secondary school settings (Jensen & Minke, 2017). Such parent-teacher interactions may result in a beneficial parent-teacher relationship (Padilla-Walker et al., 2019).

However, parenting trends have shifted, and today's parents are more influential in students' lives than ever before, academically, socially, and emotionally (Kriegbaum et al., 2016). Parents who overparent tend to aggressively insert themselves into various areas of the child's life, including education, social situations, sports, and careers (Davenport & Lloyd, 2017; Schiffrin et al., 2015). Overparenting is associated with extreme anxiety separation in parents (Brenning et al., 2017). Overparenting and separation anxiety lead parents to micromanage. Parents begin appearing on school and college campuses, becoming overinvolved in academics and athletics (Leung & Busiol, 2016; Padilla-Walker et al., 2019). Parents become intrusive in their children's lives, especially in education and future competitiveness (Leung & Busiol, 2016).

Researchers suggest overparenting occurs within a spectrum, with behaviors differing among parents. Some parents take care of their child's daily life regardless of age; some parents seek to provide a protective environment free from harm and risk; others closely track and monitor the whereabouts of their children. Aggressive overparenting in education environments results in parents attempting to solve any problems or difficulties the child might encounter. Parents often plan for their child's future regardless of the child's interests and

readiness. Parents complain to schools and organizations for the benefit of their child or request others offer special care and privileges to their child (Leung & Busiol, 2016). Overinvolved parents dictate what specific sports to play, clubs to join, or what friends to make (Davenport & Lloyd, 2017). Overparenting often results in intrusive and aggressive behavior on the part of the parents as they advocate for their child's success. Controlling parental behaviors interfere with the development of autonomy and the formation of a child's identity; this is most damaging to adolescents and young adults (Fletcher et al., 2020, Jiao & Segrin, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024).

Overparenting behaviors also differ in the area of focus, with parents placing more emphasis on specific areas. Some parents emphasize math, science, and classical music, while others emphasize sports (Chua, 2011). Overparenting leads parents to be demanding, uncompromising, and excessively aggressive (McCullough & McCullough, 2015). Researchers categorize overparenting behaviors that impact education environments as complainers, life planners, and privilege seekers. Complainers engage with teachers and administrators to gain benefits for the child; life planners closely monitor and control the child; privilege seekers request or demand special treatment for the child (Leung & Busiol, 2016). The desire to create a safe environment free from obstacles leads overinvolved parents to demand such things as grade changes, immediate conferences with teachers, or an unearned position on a sports team or in a play (Frey & Tatum, 2016; Gartmeier et al., 2016; Gerard & Booth, 2015).

Overparenting and Parent–Teacher Communication

Researchers have examined parent–teacher interactions and communication, but not specifically in relation to overparenting (Conus & Fahrni, 2019; Dor & Mentzer, 2019; Gates, 2020; Kirmaci, 2019). Studies of parent–teacher interactions examine its influence on students, possible causes of conflict, and best practices for parent–teacher communication; however, research does not explicitly examine the impact overparenting has on the parent–teacher relationship and the experiences of teachers (Padilla-Walker et al., 2019; Pillet-Shore, 2015; Schiffrin et al., 2015). When researchers do examine parent–teacher communication and interactions in conjunction with overparenting, it is from the parent's point of view, and research on the teacher's point of view is scarce (Cui et al., 2019; Patton, 2019).

Parent–teacher communication is a vital component of family–school collaboration and student academic performance (Dor & Menzer, 2019; Laho, 2019; Thompson et al., 2015). Parental involvement in schools and parent–teacher communication leads to an increase in parental understanding of child performance, lower learning stress, and provides more supportive family

interactions at home. Regular parent–teacher communication provides teachers with an increased understanding of children’s backgrounds and academic needs (Wong et al., 2018). Fostering positive parent–teacher communication lowers learning distress and enables cognitive and vocabulary development predicting early reading success. Parent involvement in education reduces the risk of substance abuse, suspension, or dropout and contributes to increased social–emotional competencies and academic achievement (Reinke et al., 2019).

Positive parent–teacher interactions and parent–teacher collaboration help establish a healthy partnership between the school and home (Bang, 2018; Palts & Harro-Loit, 2015). Children learn how to manage emotions and develop positive social relationships by watching their parents’ interactions and expressions of feelings (Wong et al., 2018). Establishing positive interactions requires trust, reciprocal communication, and formal and informal forms of communication to develop a parent–teacher partnership (Conus & Fahrni, 2019). Teachers must communicate a sense of shared responsibility for student success (Deslandes et al., 2015). Positive parent–teacher interactions benefit parents and teachers. Positive interactions improve school environments, teacher satisfaction, and parents’ attitudes towards school. Productive parent–teacher relationships encourage parents to cooperate with schools and teachers while motivating teachers to find innovative ways to instruct students (Almughamisi, 2020; Conus & Fahrni, 2020).

Dissatisfied parents have various ways to communicate with teachers, including coming into the classroom without notice, phone messages, emails, text messages, or going around the chain of command to the principal or district superintendent (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Herman & Reinke, 2017; Vincent, 2017). A lack of understanding of teacher and parent roles occurs when parents question teachers’ instructional capabilities and professionalism. Difficulties also arise when parents become overinvolved in a student’s academic growth or when parents and teachers have different opinions of a student’s capabilities (Deslandes et al., 2015; Kriegbaum et al., 2016). Researchers suggest the commercialization of education contributes to a blurring of parent and teacher roles. Viewing education as a product transforms the sociocultural attitudes of the school. Parents are considered the buyer and begin to view teachers as having little authority (Frolova et al., 2019). Differing opinions of teacher and parent roles and what constitutes proper, clear, and beneficial communication leads to miscommunication and misunderstandings (Hindin & Mueller, 2016; Nelson, 2018). A clear definition of roles facilitates positive, productive, and effective communication and proper communication expectations (Natale & Lubniewski, 2017).

Overparenting and Teacher Satisfaction

The aggressive and antagonistic parenting behaviors associated with overparenting contribute to teacher job dissatisfaction. They may also be why some educators leave the profession early in search of alternate careers (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Sartin et al., 2018; Vagi et al., 2019; Yorulmaz et al., 2017). Research shows new teachers are leaving the profession voluntarily at a rate between 20% and 50% over the first five years of teaching (Glazer, 2018; Sutcher et al., 2016). Research on current teachers even demonstrates that approximately 60% to 75% consider leaving the profession regularly (Marshall et al., 2022; Tompkins, 2023). Those that consider leaving cite issues with policies, student conduct, job demands, and a lack of support and resources (Oxley et al., 2024; Tompkins, 2023).

Negative parent–teacher relationships contribute to job dissatisfaction among teachers (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016). When examining the causes of teacher dissatisfaction, researchers have identified themes such as a lack of administrative and parental support, lack of autonomy in the classroom, and interference by overprotective parents (Doepke & Zilibotti, 2019; Gray & Taie, 2015). Feelings of frustration with parental interference, excessive face-to-face conferences, demanding emails, and phone calls and messages complaining about curriculum and teaching styles are causing teachers to leave the profession (Oakes et al., 2017). Principals report feeling frustrated and overwhelmed for similar reasons and leave the profession due to the aggressive behavior of helicopter parents, interference and unreasonable parent expectations, and time demands of parents (Levin & Bradley, 2019).

Teachers often feel they lack the appropriate tools to effectively engage with parents (Hindin & Mueller, 2016; Westergård, 2013). Teachers feel attacked and harassed by overparenting. Aggressive interactions with parents cause teachers to feel uncomfortable, undervalued, and unappreciated (Herman & Reinke, 2017). Parent–teacher interactions, especially conflicts, are marked by emotional perception. Conflicts are often a result of low levels of trust between parents and teachers in the area of education and underestimating the contributions of each other (Frolova et al., 2019). Although veteran teachers often feel confident communicating with overinvolved parents, new teachers may have difficulty forming positive relationships with helicopter parents (Santoro, 2015; Vagi et al., 2019; Yorulmaz et al., 2017). Further research is needed to explore overparenting in secondary schools from the teachers' perspective to assist teachers in preparing to handle potentially challenging situations and to improve teacher retention.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of middle and high school teachers in relation to overparenting and its influence on their classrooms. Studies exploring parent–teacher interactions regarding overparenting tend to focus on parent perceptions (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017; Hourii et al., 2019; Locke et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2018). Although these studies examine important aspects and outcomes of overparenting, they do not consider the perceptions of teachers who often must interact with overparenting within their classrooms. This research study sought to provide pertinent information that can be used to help improve communication and encourage positive interactions between parents and teachers, as well as help prepare future teachers for what they may experience in the classroom when dealing with parents. The researchers addressed the problem with the following research questions:

- RQ1. How do teachers perceive overparenting influences parent–teacher interactions?
 RQ2. How do teachers perceive overparenting influences teacher autonomy?

Methodology

We utilized a qualitative case study design to provide a holistic view of the perspectives of teachers regarding overparenting in an independent school. A qualitative study allowed for the exploration of a phenomenon that was difficult to measure and offered an avenue to acknowledge and listen to the voices of teachers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case study allowed for the in-depth examination of teachers' experiences and perceptions in a single independent school to better understand the phenomenon of overparenting from teachers' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Multiple data sources were collected, including documents, interviews, and open-ended questionnaires (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Documents such as the school profile and the National Association for Independent Schools' Data and Analysis for School Leadership (NAIS DASL) were used to gain information about school statistics such as enrollment information and tuition. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit 10 to 15 individuals teaching Grades 6 through 12 at an independent preK–12 school. Purposeful sampling allows a researcher to recruit participants who match the stated purpose for the research. For this study, participants had to be middle or high school teachers at the chosen independent school, had to self-report that they had experienced overparenting, and had to volunteer for participation in the study. All respondents who met these criteria were included as study participants.

Each participant first completed an open-ended questionnaire containing questions regarding teacher experiences and perspectives using Qualtrics, an online software that allows users to create surveys and questionnaires that can be answered by participants. The online questionnaire consisted of eight open-ended questions to gather additional information on the participants and determine if they experienced overparenting in the classroom, descriptions of those experiences, and how the participants defined overparenting (see Appendix A). Semi-structured interviews were conducted in-person or virtually using an interview protocol to provide the researcher with additional insight and understanding of the data. Participants answered open-ended questions about their experiences and perceptions of overparenting in the classroom. Since the interview was semi-structured, although an interview protocol guided the interview (see Appendix B), the primary researcher had flexibility to ask questions in a different order or use further probing questions as needed throughout the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The primary researcher used the interview to identify parent–teacher interactions that the participant considered examples of overparenting and how those interactions impacted the participant. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using Google Recorder. The primary researcher kept field notes and assigned each participant a number to protect their privacy.

The researchers utilized multiple data sources; the gathering of data from various sources increased the credibility and internal validity of the study through triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Utilizing data from questionnaires and interviews provided multiple descriptions of teacher experiences of overparenting, and the documents on the school itself provided context for the study. Researcher bias was identified and clarified to help the reader understand the researcher’s position within the inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is important to acknowledge that the primary researcher for this case study was a counselor at the school responsible for crisis intervention, small groups, and accommodations for students in preK–12 during the time of the research. She reported directly to the head of the school and had no members of faculty or staff that reported to her office, therefore, having no direct supervision of any participants nor any experience with the case study subject as she was not a teacher herself. To support the trustworthiness of the findings, the research conducted by the primary researcher was overseen by a secondary researcher who had no affiliation with the school. Finally, the researchers used member checking throughout the study to gather participant feedback to verify the accuracy of findings and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants were solicited to provide feedback on emerging results to reduce misinterpretation of participant experiences and limit researcher bias (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A holistic analysis of all data was conducted to identify themes and develop naturalistic generalizations to help individuals learn from the case and apply information to other similar cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Codes were developed using an in vivo method of coding using the program Dedoose (Dedoose, 2021); these codes were then grouped together to form the major themes that answered each research question. Data collection and analysis continued until the data reached a point of saturation, where no new information was being discovered in the data analysis process. Member checking was also used to verify the established themes and results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Context of the Setting and Participants

The independent school was purposefully selected for this case study and was located in the southeast United States. The selected independent school was one of 52 National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) members in its state. NAIS members must have 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, be governed by an independent board of trustees, be fully accredited by an approved organization, demonstrate a commitment to diversity, and agree in spirit with the NAIS Principles of Good Practice (NAIS, 2020). The city where the school was located was home to a little over 200,000 people. Almost 30% of the population is under the age of 18, and about 45% of students from kindergarten through Grade 12 attend private schools (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a).

The school consisted of just under 400 students in grades preK–12 at the time of the study. The independent school population was 72% White and 28% people of color. The median household income in the city where the school was located was just under \$45,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b). The tuition of the selected independent school ranges from \$12,650 to \$17,725. Research suggests that overparenting is more likely to occur among upper-middle-class families, which made this independent school appropriate for the case study (Ulferts, 2020).

At the time of this research, the independent preK–12 school included 52 faculty members, 48 of whom were full-time. The faculty was comprised of 3.9% people of color. Half of the faculty had over 15 years of experience, and 65% of the administrators and faculty had earned advanced degrees. At the time of this research, there were 21 full-time middle and high school faculty members, and approximately half (52%) of those participated in the research study. Of the 11 participants in this study, there were 10 females and one male. Teaching experience among the participants ranged from 4 to 47 years; 7 of the 11 participants held graduate degrees, and two participants held a doctoral degree.

Results

From the data analysis, three themes emerged during coding that related directly to the research questions posed in the study. First, teachers felt that parent–teacher interactions exhibited overparenting and were often filled with conflict and confrontation. Second, teachers felt that overparenting required them to set clear boundaries in how they handled conflict with parents. Third, due to the presence of overparenting in their classrooms, teachers felt an increase in their workload to deal with the conflict caused by overparenting. Each of these themes is discussed in more detail in the following section including the use of direct quotes to illustrate the themes.

Conflict and Confrontation

When discussing teacher perceptions of overparenting and parent–teacher interactions, all participants overwhelmingly identified feelings of conflict and confrontation. According to participants, confrontations took place face to face in the classroom, as well as during conferences, emails, and phone conversations. When asked about parent–teacher interactions with overparenting in the classroom, Participant 7 emphasized the challenge of identifying parent and teacher roles—helping parents understand where the line of appropriate parent role ends and the teacher role begins. Participant 10 admitted at times feeling that parents “usurped the professional authority of the teacher.” This was apparent in teacher comments such as Participant 11 discussing parent overinvolvement with classwork, Participant 2’s concern about parents micro-managing all of their children’s academic obligations, hindering the learning process for the child and creating anxiety, and Participant 5’s description of parents taking charge of homework and responsibilities such as packing student books and bringing missing work to school. Participants shared examples of conflict and confrontation, such as parents asking for alternative assignments, questioning curriculum, questioning teacher education and experience, and disrupting classroom learning. Participant 5 went so far as to classify some parent–teacher interactions as combative, and multiple participants admitted to feeling personally attacked. Participant 2 reported,

A student made a poor grade, and when that happened, they [parent] contacted me every day. The student missed a homework assignment, and the parent came into my classroom, stood at the back of the classroom like this (participant crossed arms in front of body) until their daughter finished it.

Other participants shared similar experiences of aggression and confrontation with teachers. Participant 8 remarked, “The parent had a few run-ins with

other teachers, including an incident where she called and left a screaming voice-mail for another teacher and an administrator.” Another teacher, Participant 9, shared experiences of confrontation when parents interrupted class time:

I’m teaching, and I had a parent walk into my classroom, slam open my door, bring a homework assignment their child forgot, and then blamed me for ruining their day because they had to bring their child their homework, and I said, “No, that was your choice. You should allow the child to take a zero so they will learn responsibility,” and then the parent began to fuss and cuss at me and call me names.

Although participants had various years of experience working in multiple environments and with different age groups, each participant had at least one negative interaction with an overparenting parent and shared feelings of conflict and confrontation. When asked how often such interactions and confrontations take place, teachers reported answers such as “often at this specific school,” “at least once a week,” “at least one every year, more often two or three,” and “once or twice a month.” Eight of the participants acknowledged that working at an independent school was a unique experience regarding overparenting, often resulting in different expectations and more incidents of overparenting. These participants shared similar experiences in the private school setting with statements such as, “That was not the first time I’ve been attacked by a parent. It is unfortunately quite common, especially in private schools” (Participant 8).

Participants who discussed conflict and confrontation also shared concerns about the impact of such confrontation on students. As shared in interviews, participants believed students were embarrassed by parent behavior. Some students even apologized to teachers on behalf of their parents. Participants also identified the need for conflict resolution practices and experience dealing with overparenting parents and confrontation.

Participant responses suggested that teachers would prefer productive conversations that benefit the student and the ability to form a united front rather than an adversarial relationship with parents. The theme of conflict and confrontation was evident in both the questionnaire and interview responses. All participants identified conflict and confrontation as a universal experience of parent–teacher interactions with overparenting.

Setting Boundaries With Parents

All participants explained in either their interview or their questionnaire that overparenting forced them to set very clear boundaries and expectations. However, the setting and enforcing of boundaries looked very different for each

participant. For some participants, this meant involving the administration as an advocate or intermediary. At least four teachers mentioned referring parents directly to administrators when conflict occurred or, at minimum, having an administrator be present at parent–teacher meetings to discuss the conflict.

Other examples of boundaries set by teachers included providing clear policies and syllabi for students and parents. Having clear expectations, policies, and a syllabus at the beginning of the school year helped participants maintain healthy boundaries and avoid confusion. Participant 2 used the syllabus to allow herself to stand firm and be consistent. For some, boundaries meant limiting parent interactions and access to teachers, especially after hours. When discussing boundaries, Participant 8 commented, “It’s forced me to be very careful about the boundaries I set as far as when I do work and when I answer emails because otherwise, I don’t have time to reset.” Similarly, Participant 2 stated, “So professionally, you had to learn to set more boundaries with some of the parents and students; that’s been the biggest one.” The participant went on to explain that some parents go to different lengths to contact teachers and monitor student progress, commenting:

Several parents want direct access to all of the student’s [online] classroom material and content. Several parents will argue for credit if work is forgotten or turned in late. Parents want their child to switch lab groups for experiments so their child may be with their friends. Parents have found out my cell phone number and called me late at night to discuss their child’s grade.

Another participant explained the importance of having and maintaining boundaries. Participant 10 stated that teachers must “set boundaries for yourself and your students as much as is reasonable and healthy.” Participants admitted that boundaries have shifted in recent years due to the availability of technology and the increase in parents trying to communicate with them after hours. Participants acknowledged the need to have time for family and a life outside of school. Boundaries were a clear theme when discussing how participants perceive overparenting impacts teacher autonomy.

Increased Workload

According to participant responses in the questionnaires and interviews, overparenting requires additional time, preparation, and documentation. All participants mentioned how dealing with overparenting such as setting boundaries and expectations for parents resulted in more work and required more time to prepare for parent–teacher interactions. When preparing to communicate with parents, 10 of the 11 participants referred to more work that included

creating policies, writing emails, being proactive, and anticipating parent complaints. Participant 2 asserted that overparenting influences teacher autonomy and commented, “It’s changed some of the things that I do and how I communicate; I started sending out weekly emails about what was going on in the classroom.” Participant 11 acknowledged the additional work overparenting can cause and stated, “They can very much put a lot of extra work on you, and it does for me.” When discussing the additional work overparenting resulted in, Participant 7 mentioned the time, the data, and the frustration overparenting causes them. Participant 8 shared similar experiences with increased workload, explaining that when she has overinvolved parents, they take up a large portion of her time.

Six participants gave specific examples of overparenting resulting in not just additional time and work but also having to provide additional time and attention to some students that may not be provided to other students. For instance, Participant 6 shared, “I did have to make sure and check on her more than every other student in the class, kind of like an accommodation, like a check for understanding more than I would for all of the other students.” Overparenting required teachers to be proactive and anticipate parent needs and complaints, resulting in what Participant 3 referred to as more preventive rather than reactive work. To preempt any parent complaints, Participant 9 confessed to increasing email communication with parents. Overall, the participants felt an increased workload due to the necessary documentation that came with dealing with overparenting in their classrooms.

Discussion and Conclusions

Although there is extensive research on overparenting, studies often focus on identifying and defining overparenting. Research that focuses on the effects of overparenting revolves around young adults entering higher education and the impact of overparenting on child development and parents (Howard et al., 2019; Locke et al., 2016; Moilanen & Manuel, 2019). Some researchers have begun to explore overparenting in education settings; however, those studies focus on parent perception of parent–teacher interaction (Hampden-Thompson & Gailindo, 2017; Hourri et al., 2019; Locke et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2018). There is little information available on the impact overparenting has on teachers, especially from a teacher’s perspective. Therefore, findings from this study aimed to provide more insight into teacher experiences and provide information to assist in preparing future teachers and school personnel for family–school interactions (Kirmaci, 2019; Reinke et al., 2019; Smith & Sheridan, 2019).

Knowledge of parent–teacher interactions provides a better understanding of the influence overparenting has on classroom teachers and can help future teachers prepare for these interactions. In answer to the first research question posed in this study, participants overwhelmingly identified feelings of conflict and confrontation with parent–teacher interactions. Participants identified feeling defensive, distrusted, and insulted when describing such interactions. These feelings are in direct contrast to other research which demonstrates that feelings of equity, consideration, and trust are necessary to help establish positive and healthy partnerships between families and schools (Holmes et al., 2020; Palts & Harro-Loit, 2015).

Participants in the study associated feelings of conflict and confrontation when dealing with parents and described parent–teacher relationships as adversarial. Acknowledging teacher feelings of conflict and confrontation are important to the field of education. Previous studies have identified that the aggressive behaviors of overparenting, interference, unreasonable expectations, and time demands of parents are a factor in educators leaving the profession (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Participants in this study shared the need to have conflict resolution practices and experience to help with parent–teacher conflicts and confrontations. Insight into the teacher perceptions of how overparenting influences parent–teacher interactions can help school leaders identify areas of improvement in school environments and teacher preparation, including providing teachers with conflict resolution training. Understanding the teacher perception of parent–teacher interactions can help schools establish formal and informal forms of communication, identify parent and teacher roles, and work to build trust and positive communication between parents and teachers to develop a healthy partnership that can benefit students, parents, teachers, and schools.

Regarding the second research question, when discussing teacher perceptions of overparenting impacting teacher autonomy, participants identified the need to set boundaries and the increased workload that overparenting creates for teachers. The topic of boundaries occurred numerous times throughout interviews and questionnaires. Participants in the study stated that overparenting required clear boundaries to limit parent interactions and access to teachers, especially after hours. When discussing teacher autonomy, participants asserted that setting these boundaries and excessive communication with parents resulted in what participants identified as increased workloads.

Understanding the teacher experience is imperative when considering teacher satisfaction and retention. Research suggests that the most critical reasons teachers leave the field of education are dissatisfaction with administration, classroom autonomy, and intrusion on teacher time (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Participants in this study explained that overparenting forced them to set clear boundaries to preserve teacher autonomy. Research suggests loss of teacher autonomy and decreased authority can leave teachers feeling helpless and insecure (Dor & Mentzer, 2019). Participants explained the importance of maintaining healthy and reasonable boundaries, making time for family, and mentally resetting each day. Participants established boundaries in different ways, including using administration as an advocate, creating clear policies and syllabi, and limiting parent interactions and access, especially after hours.

Studies also show that increased availability of communication has led parents to raise their expectations of teacher communication and availability (Thompson et al., 2015). Participant comments supported this prior research, with teachers explaining that overparenting changed how many communicated with parents and students, requiring additional documentation and increased time spent preparing for communication. Participant responses also pointed to additional time and attention paid to certain students. The majority of participants indicated the extra workload was a result of trying to be proactive and anticipate parent needs and complaints. Past research supports these findings, suggesting that overparenting interrupts learning, takes teacher time and attention to manage issues, and requires adjustments to the curriculum (Garst & Gagnon, 2015). Studies also show that teachers often make exceptions or exemptions for students in order to prevent conflict with overparenting parents (Calarco, 2020). Findings from this study support such research, with some participants admitting to avoiding interactions with parents altogether. Acknowledging and understanding the unique experiences of middle and high school teachers with overparenting provides additional insight into the phenomenon of overparenting and its impact in an educational setting. Recognizing the need for boundaries and the additional workload overparenting can create may encourage school leaders to set additional policies for parent–teacher communication and provide support for teachers.

This study peered into the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding overparenting in the classroom. Participant responses raised several opportunities for future research into overparenting. Areas of future research could include duplicate case studies examining differences in perceptions in other independent schools across the United States, as well as further investigations on what factors might impact these perceptions of overparenting such as differences in diversity, tuition cost, or location. Case studies could also be conducted in public schools (perhaps especially in middle and higher income areas) to compare teacher perceptions of overparenting in public and independent schools. Studies could also be conducted in other countries to investigate experiences of overparenting globally.

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Appendix A. Middle and High School Teacher Experiences With Overparenting Questionnaire

Instructions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this questionnaire! Following are eight questions, which ask for information about your perceptions and experiences with overparenting in the classroom. While these topics are the focus of this study, I recognize that some of your answers may apply to related aspects of parent–teacher interactions and communication. Please include any information you believe is relevant to answering each question. Thank you again for your willingness to participate!

1. Name
2. How long have you been an educator?
3. Are you currently a full-time middle or high school teacher (Grades 6–12)? *Yes or no answer will suffice.*
4. What grade or grades do you teach?
5. Have you ever experienced challenging circumstances with parents? If so, please provide examples. *Some examples may include disagreements, difficulty with communication, or confusion of teacher and parent roles.*
6. How would you define overparenting in the classroom?
7. Have you ever experienced overparenting in the classroom? If so, please describe your experience of overparenting.
8. How often do you find yourself in overparenting situations?

Appendix B. Middle and High School Teacher Interview Protocol

Semistructured Interview Protocol

Date of interview:

Time of interview:

Place of interview:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

The purpose of this interview is to help explore the unique experiences of middle and high school teachers and their perceptions of parent interactions in relation to overparenting.

I will ask you a series of questions. If you are unclear on the question being asked, then please ask for clarification. You may choose to skip a question at any time.

The interview questions provide structure for our conversation. Feel free to include any information you consider to be pertinent to the study. I will write some notes as we proceed to recall what you stated. I will digitally record the interview so that I can review it later. I will transcribe the interview verbatim so that your statements are accurately represented and exact. All information I take from this interview will be strictly confidential. Recordings will be destroyed after the interview is transcribed. Additionally, you will be given a pseudo-name for the study.

Please take a moment to review the interview questions.

What questions do you have before we begin?

Interview Questions

1. Briefly describe when you began teaching and what led to your decision to do so.
2. What grades and courses are you currently teaching?
3. How would you describe overparenting?
4. Tell me about an interaction you have had with a parent where you felt the parent was overparenting.
5. How did that interaction impact you personally?
6. How did that interaction affect you professionally?
7. How did the interaction impact the way you engaged with the parent?
8. What other interactions can you describe that represent overparenting?
9. How did the interaction impact you personally?
10. How did the interaction affect you professionally?
11. How did the interaction impact the way you engaged with the parent?
12. How does overparenting influence parent–teacher interactions?
13. What professional advice would you offer teachers experiencing overparenting in the classroom?