PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EARLY LEARNING
CENTER AT TIFFANY CREEK ELEMENTARY

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to assess the current level of parental involvement in a four-year-old kindergarten program in a public elementary school. Research has shown that parental involvement in children's schooling has a dramatic effect on children's academic achievement (Henderson & Berla 1995; National PTA 1997; US Department of Education 1997). The benefits of effective parental involvement programs reach beyond the child to the parents and schools as well. When parents are involved in their children's schooling, parents show increased self-confidence in parenting and are more knowledgeable about how to help their child with learning at home. When teachers and parents connect, teachers reap the benefits as well. Teachers who involve parents become better teachers and devote more time to teaching. Schools that work well with families have improved teacher morale.

This research looked at a sample of parents whose children were enrolled in a four-year-kindergarten program and assessed their parental involvement attitudes and parental engagement behaviors at home and at school. The parents were asked to complete a survey regarding their attitudes and behaviors toward parent involvement. The surveys were then scored calculating the means, standard deviation, and rank order. In addition, T tests, ANOVA, and the Student-Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Test were used to determine if any significant differences existed based on gender, age, family structure, level of education, and employment status.

The results of the study revealed that parents' attitudes toward parental involvement were positive. At home, parents most performed behaviors closely tied to the classroom, such as asking their children about school projects and activities and reading notes/papers in their child's folder. The behavior that parents performed most at school was attending school functions, such as family nights and classroom parties, while volunteering in their children's classroom was performed less often.

Using T tests and ANOV, significant differences were found in all demographic categories of the study. In regard to gender, males' attitudes toward parental involvement were not as positive as females' attitudes. Males engaged in parental involvement behaviors less often than females did. Age of the parent was found to make a difference in both their attitudes and behaviors toward literacy activities. Parents that were single/remarried/separated had more positive attitudes towards not wanting their children to miss school and in their belief that

the teacher makes the biggest influence on their child's success in school than married parents. In this study, two-parent families volunteered in their children's classrooms more often than single/separated/remarried parents. Better educated parents read to their children more often and had higher expectations for their children attending college or vocational school. Parents employed full time felt that their work somewhat interfered with them spending quality time with their children. Those employed part time and unemployed reported less conflict with work-family balance conflicts. The results of the average score in the behaviors section of the survey, showed that parents employed full time engage in parental involvement activities less frequently than unemployed or those working part time.

The challenge with parental involvement can be getting school personnel to recognize the value in the putting time and effort into collaborations with parents. This study concluded with recommendations for school personnel on how to improve and enhance parental involvement in their schools based on the findings in this study. Suggestions included improving teacher training in the area of parental involvement, getting teachers to recognize and value the work that parents do at home, and working to eliminate as many barriers to parental involvement as possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

"Early interventionists have recognized for many years that the most powerful, efficient, and effective system for making a lasting difference in the life of a child has always been the family" (Gage & Workman, 1994, p. 74). Schools often recognize this, but teachers all too frequently get discouraged and do not spend the needed energy to establish and nurture partnerships with parents.

Parental involvement can simply be categorized in two ways: parental engagement in school activities *at school* and parental engagement in school activities *at home*. Traditionally, parental engagement in school activities has included such activities as volunteering in the classroom, communicating with the teacher, and participating in parent-teacher conferences (McBride, 1999). Parental engagement at home may look differently from one family to another, but may included "actively organizing and monitoring the child's time, helping with homework, discussing school matters with the child, and...reading to and being read to by their children" (Finn, 1998, p. 20).

All of those involved (teacher, parent, and child) in home-school partnerships stand to gain from the relationship that is created between the school and the family. In a study of nine kindergarten children who seemed headed for reading difficulties in first grade, Goldenberg concluded that "the earlier in a child's school career his/her parents become involved, and that involvement is sustained, the bigger the payoff" (cited in Eldridge, 2001, p. 65).

Parental involvement benefits children both academically and in their behaviors and feelings about school. Several studies have indicated an increase in reading

achievement as a benefit to children (Cohn-Vargas & Grose, 1998; Eldridge, 2001; Finn, 1998). "Additionally, children of parents who are more involved have a more positive attitude about school, improved attendance, and show better homework habits than do children whose families are less involved" (Eldridge, 2001, p. 65).

Parents who become involved in their child's schooling can benefit significantly from the experience. Involved parents report that they feel they should help their child at home, that they understand more about what the child is being taught, that they know more about the school program, and that they support and encourage their child's school work (Eldridge, 2001).

Benefits of home-school partnerships extend to the teachers as well. When teachers take the time to involve parents in the classroom, they gain a better understanding of the family's situation and a deeper respect for parents' time and their abilities to help their child (Eldridge, 2001). When this occurs, teachers are then better able to help parents in their role as their child's primary teacher.

There is a significant amount of research to support parental involvement, citing many benefits for those involved. However, there are many barriers that can sabotage parental involvement efforts. Gestwicki (1996) pointed out several barriers or reasons why parents do not get involved in their child's schooling. Some include the fear of criticism and failure. Parents are afraid of being criticized or are afraid they just do not know what their child is learning so they choose not to get involved. Parents may also fear the differences in their lifestyle or values from that of the teacher causing them to not be involved. Parents may not get involved because of negative feelings they have about school as a child. These feelings cause them uneasiness and discomfort in the school

setting, therefore they avoid participating or becoming involved. There are many reasons why parents choose to be involved or choose not to be involved. Barriers to parental involvement will be discussed more fully in chapter two of this study. When barriers are lifted, it is the researcher's experience as an elementary classroom teacher that effective home-school partnerships can exist.

At a time when student achievement is critical and high stakes assessments are in place, it is necessary for schools to look at all avenues for improvement. Today, schools are spending hours and hours on textbook adoption, aligning curriculum to the state standards, and preparing students for success on the state assessments. School districts across the nation are looking for ways to improve programming for the students they serve in an effort to raise student achievement and tests scores. However, many schools fail to look outside the school setting for ways to bolster student achievement, and if they do, little effort is put toward strengthening home-school partnerships. "Extensive research reviews find that the home environment is among the most important influences on academic performance" (Finn, 1998, p. 20).

It is the researcher's intent then to examine more closely the parents' attitudes as well as level of participation regarding parental involvement in the Early Learning Center program. It is not the researcher's intent to study the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement because much of the assessment in the Early Learning Center is subjective and difficult to measure. Ultimately it is the researcher's intent to improve parental involvement in the Early Learning Center so that student achievement can be measured at a more age appropriate level, such as first grade.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to assess the current level of parental involvement in the Early Learning Center at Tiffany Creek Elementary in the Boyceville Community School District. Data will be collected from the parents of children in the Early Learning Center during the spring semester of 2002 via a survey measuring their attitudes and behaviors toward parental involvement.

Research Questions

There are several questions the researcher wishes to address:

1. What are the parental attitudes toward parental involvement?

2. What parental engagement behaviors do parents perform at home and school?

3. What are the differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on gender?

4. What are the differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on age?

5. What are the differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on family structure?

6. What are the differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on highest level of education completed?

7.   What are the differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on employment status?

Definition of Terms

To better understand this study, the following terms need to be defined:

Discovery Kits - thematic learning backpacks that include such things as puzzles, books, and toys that can be checked out by students for the purpose of improving interaction with the family.

Families Enjoying School Together - a parenting outreach program at Tiffany Creek Elementary that is offered to Early Learning Center families.

Parental involvement - the partnership between school and home for the purpose of maximizing educational goals of the child. Parental involvement may physically, occur at school, at home, or in both settings.

Readiness - the preparedness of children to meet the social, emotional, and academic goals of formal schooling.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed that the parents responded to the survey honestly. It is assumed that the parents who completed the survey were representative of all parents of children enrolled in the Early Learning Center during the 2000 to 2002 school years.

Limitations

The researcher has identified several limitations in this study. They are:

1. Parents of children enrolled in the Early Learning Center during the 2000-2001 school years may have a difficult time remembering specifics about their involvement.

2. Parents may feel pressure to respond to the survey the "correct" way.

3. Involvement level may not solely be a result of parental attitudes; other factors, such as work schedules and household responsibilities may interfere with parental involvement.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will begin by explaining what home-school partnerships are, focusing on two types of parental involvement. The benefits created by effective home-school partnerships will then be discussed, followed by the barriers to parental involvement programs. In addition, research regarding the extent to which parents are involved in their children's schooling will be presented, specifically looking at differences in gender, age, family structure, employment status and levels of education completed. This chapter will conclude by offering suggestions for improving home-school partnerships according to the latest research.

> Home-school partnerships command a lot of attention these days. The federal government has issued documents to help schools organize participation programs. Major reform efforts and educational interventions list parental involvement as an important ingredient. Scholarly writing on the topic abounds, and various publications offer guidance to schools or describe exemplary programs. (Finn, 1998, p. 20)

Research shows a strong correlation between student achievement and parental involvement (Cohn-Vargas & Grose, 1988; Eldridge, 2001; Finn, 1998). Schools recognize this, but teachers all too frequently get discouraged and do not spend the needed energy to establish and nurture partnerships with parents.

Defining Home-School Partnerships

Parental involvement can simply be categorized in two ways: parental

engagement in school activities *at school* and parental engagement in school activities *at home*. The two are differentiated by the setting in which the involvement occurs. McBride (1999) described school-based involvement in this way:

Traditionally, school based involvement has encompassed a variety of activities such as volunteering in the classroom, participating in parent-teacher conferences…communications with the teacher via phone or written means, assisting with fundraising and special events, and participating on advisory boards. Essentially, parents have been invited and welcomed to be involved in the *established structure* of a program for their child. (p. 62)

Parental engagement at home may look differently from one family to another, but may include "actively organizing and monitoring the child's time, helping with homework, discussing school matters with the child, and reading to and being read to by their children" (Finn, 1998, p. 20). Others define parental engagement at home somewhat differently, placing emphasis on helping parents improve their parenting skills so that children come to school better prepared (Yap & Enoki, cited in Caplan, Hall, Lubin, & Fleming, 1997). Other home-based parental involvement programs focus on activities that parents can do with their children at home or on a teacher's visit to the child's home that promote social and academic growth of the child (Brown, 1989). The debate does not become whether school-based or home-based parental involvement is more beneficial. According to Snodgrass (1991), parental involvement plays a critical role in children's academic success, whether the interaction occurs at home or at school. "The classroom does not take the place of the home environment. Each plays a critical role in affecting children's potential for success in school" (Snodgrass, 1991, p. 87). In

summarizing the research on parental involvement, Bechler states that "it becomes clear that extensive, substantial, and convincing evidence suggests that parents play a crucial role in both the home and school environments with respect to facilitating the development of intelligence, achievement, and competence in their children" (cited in Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 30).

Benefits of Parental Involvement

As stated earlier, all of those involved (teacher, parent, and child) benefit from collaboration between home and school. The National Parent Teacher Association (1997) believes there are "profound and comprehensive benefits for students, families, and schools, when parents and family members become participants in their children's education and their lives" (p. 7).

Benefits for Children

Parental involvement benefits children both academically and in their behaviors and feelings about school. According to Epstein, children of parents who are involved have a more positive attitude about school, improved attendance, and show better homework habits than do children whose families are less involved (cited in Eldridge, 2001). In addition, Dye found that parents who are actively involved in school reported an "increase in mutual respect and closer personal relations with their children" (cited in Snodgrass, 1991, p. 84). When children saw their parents and teachers working together, they felt less divided between home and school and "they see their family valued by the teacher" (Epstein, cited in Eldridge, 2001, p. 65). With involved parents, students are more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in post secondary education (Henderson & Berla, 1995). In addition, children of involved parents "exhibit fewer

behavior problems then children whose parents are involved" (US Department of Education, 2001, p.2).

Parental involvement has a powerful influence on the educational outcomes for children. When parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, the parent's level of education, ethnic/racial background, or the parent's occupation (National Parent Teacher Association, 1997). Epstein (1990) defines achievement broadly, "including test scores, schoolwork, the persistence of students in school, and the general development of attitudes and behaviors that characterize "successful students" (p. 110). Children from low-income families and diverse cultural backgrounds approach the grades and test scores expected for middle-class children and they are more likely to take advantage of a full range of educational opportunities after graduating from high school (Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 1).

Several studies (Rich & Jones, 1977, cited in Epstein, 1990; Cohn-Vargas & Grose, 1998; Eldridge, 2001; Finn, 1998) have indicated an increase in reading achievement as a benefit to children when parents participate in and encourage their children while reading. In a study of nine kindergarten children who seemed headed for reading difficulties in first grade, Goldenberg concluded that "the earlier in a child's school career his/her parents become involved, and that involvement is sustained, the bigger the payoff" (cited in Eldridge, 2001, p. 65).

Teachers in Oakland, CA discovered the benefits of home-school partnerships when they piloted a Home-School Connections project in their classrooms (Cohn-Vargas & Grose, 1998). During this study, parents were encouraged to visit the classrooms and communicate with the teachers by phone (Cohn-Vargas & Grose, 1998).

Activities included frequent information updates, via phone and mail, family

homework projects that encouraged reading at home, and a series of family

seminars on such topics as homework help and reading. Although it is difficult to

assess the direct impact of this close family connection, students in the pilot

classrooms had some of the highest reading scores in the school. (Cohn-Vargas &

Grose, 1998, p. 45)

"Extensive research reviews find that the home is among the most powerful

and important influences on academic performance" (Wang, Wang, Haertel, & Walberg,

cited in Finn, 1998, p. 20). Parents, who are involved with their children, whether it be

through talking and playing with their children, or monitoring and assisting with

homework, make a significant difference in their children's lives.

Benefits for Family

The benefits of parental involvement reach beyond the children. Parents

who become involved in their child's schooling can benefit significantly from the

experience. "Parents involved with school in parent-related activities show increased

self-confidence in parenting, more knowledge of child development, and an expanded

understanding of the home as an environment for learning" (Eldridge, 2001, p. 66). As a

result of this, parents are better able to or more willing to help their children at home.

One of the most significant benefits to parents partnering with schools is that

"teachers report a greater understanding of parents, their challenges, and their cultural

heritage when parents are committed to parental involvement" (Wallace, 2002, p. 36).

With a better understanding of a family's situation, teachers are more likely to be

supportive of the parents and less likely to be judgmental.

When parents are involved with their children's education, "the teachers they work with have higher opinions of them as parents and higher expectations of their children" (Henderson & Berla, 1995, p.1). As a result, parents show more confidence about themselves as parents as well as more confidence to help their children learn at home (Henderson & Berla, 1995). Furthermore, when parents become involved, they often enroll in classes to continue to their own education (Henderson & Berla, 1995).

"Additionally, involved parents show an increased appreciation for the teacher's merits and abilities and are more likely to view positively a teacher's interpersonal skills" (Eldridge, 2001, p. 66). When parents view the teacher positively, the involvement is likely to increase, which in turn benefits the student.

Benefits For Teachers

Programs that are designed to involve parents benefit the teacher as well. Teachers who are committed to parental involvement tend to reap significant benefits in terms of parental perceptions of their merits. "A teacher who involves parents in children's learning is more likely to report a greater understanding of families' cultures, an increased appreciation for parental interest in helping their children, and a deeper respect for parents' time and abilities" (Eldridge, 2001, p. 66).

When parents and teachers connect, both will see significant and lasting effects in their appreciation and understanding of each other's efforts (Eldridge, 2001). The National Parent Teacher Association (1997) found that teachers who involve parents receive higher ratings in their teaching abilities by parents. When parents perceive the teacher positively, there is more support from the family. "Furthermore, if increased parental involvement creates the perception that the school is more effective, it is likely

that student achievement will increase" (Caplan, Choy & Whitmore; 1997, cited in Caplan et al., 2002, p.1).

Additionally, schools that work well with families have improved teacher morale. Bechler (1984) found these schools to have "teachers that become more proficient in their professional activities, devote more time to teaching, experiment more, and develop a more student-oriented approach" while teaching (cited in Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 30). When this occurs, students benefit as a result.

"The evidence is beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life" (Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 1). The reason schools must "find time to work closely with parents is that doing so helps teachers teach better, parents parent better, and children develop and learn better" (Greenberg, 1989, p.74).

Barriers to Home-School Partnerships

There are several barriers that prevent effective home-school connections from happening in many schools across our nation. Most of these barriers involve the school and the parents. In the researcher's experience as an elementary classroom teacher, children have always enjoyed their parents' involvement and have, in fact, shown much enthusiasm for it.

One barrier to home-school connections is the lack of knowledge and training teachers have regarding parental involvement. "Most educational leaders believe that parent involvement does matter and is important" (Greenberg, 1989, p. 61). However, many teachers feel uncomfortable and awkward around parents and have had little

training on how to overcome their feelings, let alone truly support and encourage home-school partnerships.

"Despite the strong evidence supporting the importance of home-school collaborations, prospective teachers receive little training, information, or experience working with parents. Surprisingly few in-service programs have been designed to support teachers in expanding or improving their parent involvement efforts" (Brand, 1996, p. 76). Greenberg (1989) agrees that one of the biggest problems with parent involvement is teacher training. Today, families include two-parent families, single-parent families, teen parents, blended families, grandparents raising grandchildren, foster families, and same sex parents. "Other lifestyle factors include dual-career couples, disabilities, employment/unemployment, and income levels" (Kieff and Wellhousen, 2000, p.20). They stated that "very, very few of them (teacher training institutions) give teachers the amount of history, theory, practice, and sophisticated guidance they need to enable them to work with *all* kinds of parents…How can teachers be expected to do expertly that which they have scarcely been taught to do at all?"

Another barrier that prevents parents from becoming involved is the parents' attitudes and feelings regarding their involvement in their children's schooling, such as how to help, how important being involved with their children is, and how these feelings affect their involvement as a parent. Many parents do not fully understand how valuable and important their interactions with their children are. Parents also don't feel they have the ability to truly help their children academically. "Many parents express a belief that their assistance is not needed by the schools or teachers" (Eldridge, 2001, p. 66). "Well designed school opportunities and incentives for parent involvement may have only

limited success if they do not also address parents' ideas about their role in children's education and their self efficacy for helping their children succeed in school" (Powell, 1998, p. 64). Clark (1983) found that children succeed in school more often when the home is emotionally supportive, when parents provide reassurance when their child encounters failure, and when parents accept responsibility for assisting their children (cited in Finn, 1998). Barriers are created when homes and parents do not closely resemble these ideas.

The reason some families don't become more involved in schools stems in part from parental perceptions of school.

Menacker, Hurwitz, and Weldon (1998) reporting on home-school relations in inner-city schools, noted that most of the adults in these families had had unsuccessful or negative school experiences themselves, which contribute to their perception of the school as unresponsive.   (cited in Eldridge, 2001, p. 66)

School Climate can also be a barrier to parental involvement. In her article titled How Customer-Friendly Is Your School?, Chambers (1998) stated that the school environment says a lot about the school-the way schools look, sound, and smell communicates to those who visit the school. She reminded school personnel that in today's competitive environment, schools' success depends on how well they serve the customer. Chambers refers to the customer as "anyone who interacts with the school" (1998, p. 33).

The school climate has a profound effect on how involved parents are in the school.

A positive school climate, measured by the parents' assessment of discipline in

their children's classrooms and schools, whether students and teachers respect

each other, how welcoming the schools are, and how easy schools make it for

parents to be involved, is significantly associated with high father and mother

involvement in their children's schools. (US Department of Education, 1997, p.

viii)

This report also found that the more positive the school climate was, the more highly

involved mothers were, but school climate only slightly affects fathers' high involvement

(US Department of Education, 1997).

The timing of home-school connections often create a barrier to parental

involvement as well. "Time constraints and work schedules of parents have been found

to be problems in involvement efforts" (Eldridge, 2001, p. 67). Studies from the Families

and Work Institute (2002) show that more women are in the workforce and the vast

majority (eighty-five percent) of workers have day-to-day family responsibilities at

home. Involvement may occur more at home because "working parents may be less

visible and active in school activities during the day" (Rich, 1987, p. 37).

According to Epstein, "single mothers and mothers who work outside the home

were less likely to come to the school building than other parents, but were more likely to

spend time with their children at home to help them on school activities" (cited in

Epstein, 1990, p. 109). Programs offering home visits are more successful in involving

low-income families than programs requiring those parents to visit the school (National

PTA, 1997). Schools that provide home-school connections that are flexible in nature,

such as evening events and home visits, increase the likelihood that families will be involved.

"Family circumstances also need to be addressed in attempts to remove barriers to participation in meetings" (Powell, 1998, p. 64). Schools that do not take into account childcare arrangements and transportation barriers, for example, experience less parental involvement in home-school partnerships, especially with low-income families. In a recent study in twelve Baltimore schools, parental involvement increased by ten percent when a high level of support (transportation to workshop, child care, meals and two meeting times) was offered to families. "It appeared that the additional ten percent was a higher-risk group as measured by children's reading achievement and teacher ratings of the home educational environment" (Powell, 1998, p. 64).

It is likely that there are other barriers to effective home-school partnerships. It is important for schools to identify as many potential barriers as possible so that the barriers may be eliminated in hopes of creating stronger partnerships with the families it serves.

Parental Involvement Based on Age

Waiting to have a baby until later in life is likely to affect parents' attitudes and behaviors, and in turn, the baby's development (Berk, 1991). Berk (1991) believes that "since older mothers are economically better off and have had more experience in nonparenting roles, they may be better able to invest in parenting"(p. 572). A study conducted by Ragozin and her colleagues (1982) found that "the more stable life circumstances and emotional maturity of older mothers seemed to help them cope with the stress of caring for their preterm baby" (cited in Berk, 1991). Mothers in this study reported more involvement in caregiving responsibilities as well.

Garrison et al (1997) assessed sixty-nine families in which mothers had their first child after the age of thirty-five and found that, with few exceptions, parents who delayed childbearing were more satisfied and less stressed and reported better functioning than mothers who conceived early. (cited in Hamner & Turner, 2001, p. 8)

In addition, Heath's research (1994) comparing father-child relationships of late-time and on-time fathers "concluded that late parenthood may be beneficial for children and their fathers" (cited in Hamner & Turner, 2001, p. 9). Late-time fathers were found to have higher expectations for their children's behavior, to be more nurturant toward their children and to spend more time in leisure activities with their children (Hamner & Turner, 2001).

Several studies indicated that young mothers do not fare as well in the parenting role as older mothers (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn & Chase-Lansdale 1989, cited in Cole & Cole, 1996; Child Trends, 2002). "In 1999, the youngest parents (ages 18 to 24) were less likely to be highly involved in their children's schools than were older parents" (Child Trends, 2002, p. 32). "Six percent of fathers ages eighteen to twenty-four were highly involved compared to thirty-two percent of fathers ages forty-five to sixty-five" (Child Trends, 2002, p. 32). Furstenberg and his colleagues'

research has shown that children of unmarried teenage mothers are at a developmental disadvantage…because young mothers tend to be less equipped emotionally to be competent parents… are less prepared to bring up children and have little interest in doing so. (Cole & Cole, 1996, p. 438)

It is difficult to specify age of childbearing as a sole reason for low levels of

involvement of young parents because often other factors such as poverty and low levels of education are associated with it. However, findings suggest that positive development for children and increased parent involvement may occur from delaying parenthood until a later age (Berk, 1991).

<u>Parental Involvement Based on Family Structure</u>

"Due to the prevalence of divorce and non-marital childbearing in the United States, nearly half of all children are likely to spend at least part of their childhood living apart from one or both of their biological parents" (US Department of Education, 2001, p. 1). Research consistently finds that children living in nontraditional families "do less well in school and experience more behavior problems than children living with both their own parents" (Zill 1996; McLanahan & Sandefur 1994; Lee 1993; cited in US Department of Education, 2001, p. 1). Traditional families are those that have two-biological-parents or two adoptive parents, while nontraditional families are categorized by being "a stepparent family, single-parent family or non-parent guardian family" (US Department of Education, 2001, p 4). Examining parent involvement patterns among varying family structures may help explain why children in nontraditional families tend to do "less well" and experience more difficulty in school (US Department of Education, 2001).

<u>Traditional Families</u>

Of all family types, two-parent families are the most involved in their children's school. It is important to note, however, that mothers in two-parent families are more involved in with their children than fathers. Results from a US Department of Education study (2001) revealed "mothers in two-biological-parent families tend to be highly

involved in their children's schools" (p. 25), while several studies have shown that fathers in two-parent families tend to be less involved than mothers (Nord, Brimhall & West 1997; Thomson, McLanahan & Curtin 1992; cited in US Department of Education, 2001).   In fact, fathers in two-parent families show relatively low levels of involvement in their children's schooling (US Department of Education, 1997).   Thirty percent of fathers in two-parent families shown high levels of involvement in their children's schooling, while forty-three percent of fathers in two-parent families had low levels of involvement (US Department of Education, 1997). Sixty-eight percent of mothers in two-parent families, on the other hand, showed high levels of involvement, while only twelve percent had low levels of involvement (US Department of Education, 1997).

There may be several reasons why mothers' and fathers' involvement in two-parent families vary so drastically.

> Fathers have traditionally been the primary breadwinners. Even in today's culture of working mothers and fathers, the mother is more likely to take time from her daily schedule to be more involved in the educational programs of the family's children. (US Department of Education, 1997, cited in Turbiville, Umbarger and Guthrie, 2000, p. 50)

Many fathers may not have the flexibility of being available during school hours. Therefore, opportunities for involvement in the evening or weekends might increase their involvement (US Department of Education, 1997, p. 78). Often parents in two-parent families divide up their responsibilities to best meet the needs of their households, leaving mothers to tend to the children's care and schooling. According to Turbiville, Umbarger and Guthrie (2000), "fathers consistently report less ability to meet with

educational providers or teams than do mothers" (p. 50). Another reason may be that fathers report that educators often ignore them (Galinsky, 2001). Fathers also report that when both parents are present, the mother is the focus of attention and the schools call the mother more often to participate in activities (Galinsky, 2001). Downey (1994) indicated another reason for the involvement differences between mothers and fathers in two-parent families, stating "fathers may be more likely to invest economic resources, while mothers may be more likely to invest interpersonal resources in their children" (cited in US Department of Education, 2001, p. 12). "Although married fathers spend less time with children than employed married mothers do on both workdays and days off work, the time fathers spend with their children has increased substantially over the past twenty years" (Families and Work Institute, 2002, p. 5).

Nontraditional Families

The US Department of Education (2001) found that family structure plays a role in how involved parents are in their children's schooling. "Students living in nontraditional families are significantly less likely than students living in traditional families to have parents with high levels of involvement in their schools" (US Department of Education, 2001, p. 19).

Single-Parent Families

Today more parents are raising their children eighteen and under alone than ever before. "Nearly one in five employed parents is single, and more workers are raising children alone today than workers did twenty years ago" (Families and Work Institute, 2002, p. 5).

In a US Department of Education study (2001), about half of all single parents were highly involved in their children's schooling while approximately one-fourth of all single parents displayed low levels of involvement. In single-parent families, fathers heading father-only families show levels of involvement that is similar to mothers in mother-only families (US Department of Education, 2001). "Furthermore, the involvement of mothers and fathers in single-parent families, though lower than that of mothers in two-parent families, is more similar to that of mother in two-parent families than it is to fathers in two-parent families" (US Department of Education, 2001, p. 12). Rich (1987) concurs with this study finding that single parents talk with teachers as frequently as do other parents and are as equally likely to spend time on homework as parents from two-parent families. As mentioned previously, Rich (1987) stated that single, working parents may be less visible in the schools during the day, but "make significant efforts to maintain close contact with teachers and schools" (p. 37). In contrast with mothers in two-parent families, Rich (1987) noted that single, white mothers who were unemployed "help in school less" (p. 40). Studies indicate single fathers, on the other hand, are more likely to participate in school activities than fathers in two-parent families. A US Department of Education (1997) survey found that fifty-five percent of fathers in two-parent families attended at least one general school meeting compared to sixty-eight percent of fathers in single-parent families" (US Department of Education, 1997, p. 17). In conclusion, "single mothers and fathers are involved in their children's schooling and their involvement is associated with better school outcomes for their children" (US Department of Education, 2001, p. 55).

<u>Nonresident Mothers and Fathers</u>

"Nonresident mothers are more likely than nonresident fathers to maintain contact with their children and to be involved in their children's school" (US Department of Education, 2001, p. 55). "About twenty-eight percent of students living in stepfather families have had no contact with their nonresidential father in the past year, and neither have twenty-one percent of students living in mother-only families" (US Department of Education, 2001, p. 41). "A small percent of students with nonresident mothers have not seen them at all in the past year" (US Department of Education, 2001, p. 41). There are many factors that influence whether nonresident parents maintain contact with their children.

> Employment status, levels of education, age at birth of the child, the character relationship with resident parent, the geographic proximity to the child, and the presence of a step-parent in the residential home all affect the likelihood as well as the frequency of visitation and phone or letter contact. (Child Trends, 2002, p. 36)

One factor that influences nonresident parents' involvement with their children is stepparents, yet stepparents are not as likely to be involved in their step-children's schooling either. A US Department of Education study (2001) found that "stepparents tend to be less involved than biological parents in their children's schools" (p. 54). Forty-eight percent of students living in stepfather families and fifty percent of students living in stepmother families are highly involved parents, while sixty-two percent of students living with both their biological parents have parents who are highly involved in

their schools (US Department of Education, 2001). Forty percent of students in stepmother families have a stepmother with low levels of involvement in schools and sixty-two percent of students in stepfather families have a stepfather with low levels of involvement (US Department of Education, 2001, p. 24).

Sadly, "both contact and involvement data together indicate that students in stepfather families are particularly unlikely to have a father of any type involved in their schools" (US Department of Education, 2001, p. 42). The majority of nonresident fathers who maintain contact with their children are not involved in their children's schools" (US Department of Education, 2001, p. 42). According to Pleck (1999), "almost half of all divorced fathers have not seen their children in the past year…and the increase in the proportion of men who never marry also indicates decreasing family involvement" (p. 27). It is important to note "children do better in school when their fathers are involved in their schools, regardless of whether their fathers live with them" (US Department of Education, 1997, p. 77).

According to a US Department of Education study (2001), students living with neither biological parent are the least likely to have parents or guardians who are highly involved in their schools and are the most likely to have parent figures with low levels of involvement.

Although the level of parents' school involvement varies by whether they are biological parents or stepparents and whether they live in two-biological-parent families, single-parent families, or stepparents families, parents' school involvement still seems to make a difference in students' school experiences. (US Department of Education, 2001, p. vi)

<u>Parental Involvement Based on Level of Education</u>

The parents' level of education can affect the level of parents' involvement with their children. According to Stevenson and Baker, "parents with more education are more involved in school activities" (cited in Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 130). Studies indicate that the more education a parent has, the more likely they are to be highly involved in their children's schooling (Those who said they have done three or more of the following activities were said to be highly involved: attend a general meeting, attend a parent-teacher conference, attend a school or class event and volunteer at school.) (US Department of Education, 1997, p. 111). Parents with a Bachelor's Degree were found to be nearly four times as involved as parents with less than a high school education (US Department of Education, 1997, p. 111). Reese, Goldenberge, Loucky, & Gallimore (1989) found that mothers and fathers who assisted with their children's literacy development tended to have more education than those who did not (cited in Ortiz, 2002, p. 1). Laosa also attributed parent-child early literacy practices to increased years of parents' formal education (cited in Ortiz, 2002, p. 1). Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean & Hofferth (2001) concur with these findings. In their study on fathers' involvement, they found that children whose fathers have some college education are more involved with their children than fathers who do not have any college education. "Most notably, fathers with some post secondary education spent about half an hour more on weekdays with children on achievement-related activities and seventeen minutes more on social activities than did those without postsecondary education" (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean & Hofferth, 2001, p.148).

It is important to understand why some less-educated parents cannot or do not want to become involved in their children's education. Less educated parents report that they know what to do with their children, but "not how to translate the information into useful family practices to help manage and monitor" their children's education (Baker & Stevenson, cited in Henderson & Berla, 1990, p. 107).

"When parents are left on their own, the typical pattern continues to be more involvement by better educated parents and higher achievement of their children" (Baker & Stevenson 1986; Coleman 1987; Entwisle, Alexander, Cadigan, & Pallas 1986; Lareau 1987; cited in Epstein, 1990, p. 106). However, if parents are given encouragement and guidance from teachers, a parents' educational background has little effect on children's success. Baker & Stevenson found that "if mothers become highly involved in school activities, mothers with less formal education can have as much positive impact as do highly educated mothers" (cited in Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 130).

Parent Involvement Based on Employment Status

The United States workforce has changed dramatically in recent decades. More women have entered the workforce. A U.S. Census Bureau report found that in 2000, fifty-five percent of new mothers were in the workforce (Fox, 2002). "Less than seven percent of American families are traditional (husband as sole wage-earner, wife and children at home)" (Ceridian Performance Partners, 2002). "Among full-time employees living in dual-earner households, seventy-five percent have partners who also work full-time" (Families and Work Institute, 2002, p. 5). There has also been an increase in the number of single working parents-"nearly one in five employed parents is single, and

more workers are raising children alone today than workers did 20 years ago" (Families and Work Institute, 2002).

With these dramatic changes in the employment status of families, it is important to consider how these changes have or do affect the time parents spend with their children. "The time mothers spend with their children has remained about the same despite an increase in the average hours mother spend at work" (Families and Work Institute, 2002, p. 2). Bianchi (2000), a sociologist at the University of Maryland, compared mothers' time with children in 1998 with data collected for 1965 and found that even though many more American women with children have gone off to work in recent decades, today's mothers report spending about as much time—an average of five-and-one-half hours a day—with their children as mothers did in 1965. As a result of the increase of mothers in the workforce, studies show that fathers in two-parent families are spending more time with their children than years ago-approximately an hour more per day than they did in 1965 (Bianchi 2000; Pleck 1999). Because of the sharing of responsibilities between both parents, "children appear to spend somewhat more time with their employed parents than children twenty years ago did" (Families and Work Institute, 2002).

According to a National Center for Education Statistics study, mothers who are employed outside the home less than thirty-five hours per week show the highest level of involvement in their children's schooling, more than mothers who are looking for work and mothers who are unemployed (US Department of Education, 1997, p.111). Fifty-two percent of mothers who work thirty-five or more hours per week are highly involved in their children's schooling. When mothers were not in the labor force, fathers'

involvement was at its lowest. Fathers' involvement was highest when mothers worked less than 35 hours per week. When considering fathers' employment, fathers were most involved when they worked thirty-five or less hours per week and were least involved when they were unemployed (US Department of Education, 1997, p.112).

"Several studies have reported that fathers who have more stressful jobs tend to spend more hours at work and are less involved with their children (Nock & Kingson, 1988; cited in Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean & Hofferth, 2001, p. 138).   In a study titled, Children's Time With Fathers in Intact Families, Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean and Hofferth (2001) examined children's involvement with their fathers and found fathers' income and work hours to have a significant negative effect on their involvement with a child, but mother's work hours and earnings do not. "For every hour a father is at work, there is an associated one-minute decrease in time a child spent with him on weekdays (mostly in play and companionship activities). Mothers' weekly work hours and wages, on the other hand, do not have the same impact" (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean & Hofferth, 2001, p. 148). Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean & Hofferth (2001) also concluded that there is a positive relationship between a mothers' contribution to the family's income and the amount of time fathers spend with their children. "Children with a mother who contributes to half or more of the total family income spend 48 minutes more with their fathers than do children with a mother who contributes less than a quarter of the total family income" (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean & Hofferth, 2001, p. 148).

Suggestions For Improving Home-School Partnerships

"The picture is coming into focus. The benefits of effective collaborations and how to do them are well documented across all age ranges of schooling. Still they are not

in widespread practice" (Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 18). "It is indeed a rare public school district that does all it might to include, even entice, parents" (Greenberg, 1989, p. 72). In order for effective home-school partnerships to flourish, it is important for schools to look for ways to improve their partnerships with parents.

On the list for improvements should be the school climate.

First and foremost, a teacher should create a classroom climate that is open and accepting of parents and is based on a partnership approach. In this way the barriers of parental reluctance and awkwardness are lowered, and those parents who know the school to be unresponsive can begin to experience the classroom in another way. (Eldridge, 2001, p. 67)

McDill, Leo & Meyers, in their research on educational climates suggest that "principals ought to be welcoming parents and letting them know how the school is run and explain to them its policies and programs" (cited in Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 87). They also suggest that the school be "converted into a community resource that offers adults a center for community activities, for instruction in practical subjects as well as leisure-time activities" (cited in Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 87). Chambers (1998) offers several ideas when considering school climate. Simple ideas, such as a visible main entrance sign, halls that display students' work, and newsletters that are easy to read, all contribute to a school climate that is more inviting. Research shows that when the school climate is more inviting, parental involvement is improved (US Department of Education, 1997, p. viii).

Another critical step in improving home-school partnerships is through enhanced teacher training. More universities and school districts need to be better training teachers

on parental involvement concepts so that home-school connections are natural for teachers.

The currently weak attention to teachers'demonstrated skills in relating to parents must be strengthened in professional education and state certification requirements. It appears that, among the many competencies required for effective work with parents, special emphasis should be given to skills in learning and appreciating the perspectives of families. (Powell, 1998, p. 66).

Once teachers have received adequate training on home-school connections, it is necessary for teachers to be given the opportunity to incorporate this knowledge. Principals need to "ensure that staff have at least a little time to make into active practices high-minded statements about the importance to children of parent presence in education" (Greenberg, 1989, p. 72). This can be done by building time for extensive parent teamwork into teachers' schedules or by hiring supplementary staff specializing in various kinds of parent and family work (Greenberg, 1998).

Another important consideration that may help improve home-school partnerships is the concept of what home-school partnerships "look like". "Teachers pay more attention to students whose parents are involved in school" (Finn, 1998, p. 23) and hold parents who are involved at school in higher regard. Often, educators dismiss the work that families do at home with their children-forgetting that the "home environment is among the most important influences on academic performance" (Finn, 1998, p. 20). One suggestion for improvement, then, is for educators to begin to recognize and acknowledge parents for the work they do at home. Educators need to understand the "the most powerful form of parent involvement has the parent actively involved with the

child at home in all ways that relate to optimal learning and growing" (Gage &

Workman, 1994, p. 77).

Once educators recognize how powerful the home is to children's success in

school, there is more that they can do to help improve home-school partnerships.

Research indicates that educators need to be telling parents about how important their

parenting role is and how much of what they do with their children at home affects their

achievement in the classroom. "Many parents feel they lack, or do lack, the skills to

guide their children's reading or schoolwork" (Finn, 1998, p. 22). When teachers

involve parents in learning activities at home, positive and significant changes occur

(Epstein, cited in Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 61). "Gains come not only for children

whose parents make a regular practice of helping them, but also for children whose

parents have been encouraged by their teachers to help them" (Epstein, cited in

Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 61). Supporting and encouraging parents in their role as

their child's first teacher is vital to their children's success in school.

The important task of involving families in the education of children is

challenging and difficult. "Family involvement strategies will not be effective until they

create true connections between the child's home and the classroom" (Kieff and

Wellhousen, 2000, p.20). Because today's families varying greatly in their structure,

lifestyle, and cultural beliefs and practices, "teachers must know well the families of the

children they are working with to plan and provide varied, flexible family involvement

opportunities that are sensitive to a variety of circumstances" (Kieff and Wellhousen,

2000, p. 20). When teachers become familiar with the families of the children they serve,

they can "select and modify strategies to create parent involvement programs free of barriers" (Kieff & Wellhousen, 2000, p. 20).

<u>Summary</u>

Parent involvement is a topic that most agree on: when parents are involved in their children's schooling, children's achievement improves. Defining parent involvement may not be quite as simple. This study explored the topic of parental involvement and focused its definition not on *where* the involvement was occurring, recognizing that parents can be involved both at school and in the home, but on *what* the parents were doing.

The benefits of having parents involved in their children's schooling touch the children, the parents, and the schools. The review of literature revealed time and time again that students achieve more, are more likely to stay in school, and have more positive attitudes toward school when they have parents who are involved in their education. Parents who are involved show increased self-confidence in parenting, are more knowledgeable of child development, and are more willing to help their children learn. In addition, they are more appreciative of the teachers and schools when they are involved in their children's schooling. Schools benefit from parents' involvement as well. When parents are involved, teachers understand families more and have an increased respect for them. Schools with parents who are involved have improved teacher morale and have teachers who devote more time to teaching. Effectively engaging parents and families in the education of their children has proven to be beneficial for everyone involved.

In order to be effective, parent involvement programs limit the barriers that may be created when collaborating between home and school. The review of literature

addressed several barriers to effective home-school partnerships, such as lack of training by school personnel, attitudes and perceptions of parents, school climate, timing, and family circumstances. Removing as many barriers as possible and reflecting on the specific needs of students and their families will increase the likelihood of having home-school partnerships that flourish.

When studying the extent to which parents are involved in their children's schooling, it is important to consider such factors as gender, age, family structure, employment status and level of education. Although men's involvement is increasing, women continue to be more involved with their children than men. Of all men, fathers in father-only families have the highest levels of involvement with their children. When considering age of the parents, research indicated that parents that are older show better parenting skills, are more ready and eager to parent, and are more involved with their children than younger parents. With regard to family structure, children in two-parent families have parents that show high levels of involvement. In general though, it is the mothers in two-parent families that are the more involved parent. Single parents in mother-only or father-only families show levels of involvement that is similar to, but not equal to, mothers in two-parent families. Stepparents tend to show lower levels of involvement, with stepfathers being the least involved of stepparents. Children living in homes with non-residential parents or guardians have parents with the lowest levels of involvement of all parent types. When focusing on employment status, mothers show the highest levels of involvement when they work thirty-five or less hours per week. Fathers are most involved when they work thirty-five or less hours per week and are least involved when mothers are unemployed. Employment status affects the level of

involvement of school activities at school, but not necessarily involvement at home. Working mothers were as likely to be involved in school-related activities at home as non-working mothers, whether they were in two-parents families or single-parent families. Lastly, regarding parents' level of education and involvement, parents with a higher level of education were more likely to be involved with their children. However, the review of literature revealed that if teachers worked closely with parents, parental involvement at home was likely to increase regardless of the parents' educational level.

The last section of the review of literature focused on improving home-school partnerships. It is important for schools to consider the climate that exists in their buildings. Parental involvement increases in a school with a positive school climate. Training for teachers in the area of parent involvement is essential to improving home-school partnerships. When schools become sensitive to the diversity of families and reduce the number of activities that welcome only one kind of parent to participate, effective home school partnerships will be created.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

<u>Introduction</u>

This chapter will describe the subjects under study and how they were selected for inclusion in this study. In addition, the instrument developed for this study will be discussed. Data collection and analysis procedures will then be presented. The chapter will conclude with some of the methodological limitations.

<u>Selection and Description of the Sample</u>

The subjects for this study were parents of children enrolled in the Early Learning Center at Tiffany Creek Elementary in Boyceville, Wisconsin, during the 2000-2002 school years. The population consisted of 146 subjects, male and female. The population was reduced in size because there were six parents of twins and four parents with children enrolled in the Early Learning Center during the 2000-2001 school and during the 2001-2002 school year. These parents each completed one survey for their entire experience, not one for each year they had a child attending the Early Learning Center.

<u>Instrumentation</u>

The survey used in this study was developed by the researcher for the sole purpose of this study. The survey contained three sections. The first section was titled General Information and included six questions regarding gender, age, number of children living in the home, family structure, employment status, and level of education. The second section of the survey included thirty statements in which the subjects were asked to rate their attitudes toward parental involvement, specifically these subscales:

communication with the teacher, involvement in school activities, and attitudes toward promoting learning or readiness at home. A Likert scale (ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 9- strongly agree) was used to rate the responses. In the third section of the survey, the subjects were asked to respond to 20 questions regarding the frequency of their behaviors associated with parental involvement within the given subscales. Again, a Likert scale (ranging from 1-never to 7-frequently) was used to rate the responses.

Because this instrument was developed for this study alone, no measures of validity or reliability have been documented. Prior to being given to the subjects, three other individuals were given this survey, testing it for clarity, readability, and ambiguity. The information gathered from this process was used by the researcher to make corrections and improve its readability. The cover letter and survey can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection

Permission was sought from the School Board, Superintendent of Schools and Elementary Principal in the Boyceville Community School District to survey the parents of Early Learning Center students. See Appendix B.

Once permission was granted, the parents of children attending the Early Learning Center during the 2001-2002 school year were given the survey at a Kindergarten Informational Meeting held at Tiffany Creek Elementary in May 2002. The researcher invited both mothers and fathers to complete the survey, independent of one another. An explanation and consent form was given to the parents explaining the purpose of the study. The researcher exited the room, and those who voluntarily participated in the study

completed the survey. A collection box was available for parents to return the completed survey in.

Parents of children enrolled in the Early Learning Center during the 2001-2002 school year who were unable to attend the Kindergarten Informational Meeting and parents of children enrolled in the Early Learning Center during the 2000-2001 school year received the cover letter and survey via their child's take-home folder. A self addressed stamped envelope was attached to the survey for return mailing. The subjects were given one week to complete and return the survey. The parents who voluntarily participated in the study returned their survey by mail to the Tiffany Creek Elementary Office. The researcher received the surveys in her staff mailbox. A total of 90 out of 147 surveys were received from the parents. The return rate is 61%.

Data Analysis

The survey used in this study (see Appendix A) was specially designed to assess parents'attitudes and behaviors toward involvement in their four-year-old-kindergarten children's lives. Section I of the survey, General Information, recorded gender, age, number of children living in the household, family structure, educational level, and employment status. Section II of the survey, titled Attitudes, consisted of 30 items and section III of the survey, titled Behaviors, consisted of 20 items. The Likert Scale response format was used in Section II and III. In Section II, a scale ranging from 1(disagree strongly) to 9(strongly agree) was used. Section III used a scale ranging from 1(never) to 7(frequently).

The responses of the survey were analyzed by the University Of Wisconsin, Stout Computer User Support Services. All appropriate descriptive statistics were run on the

data collected from the survey; frequency counts and valid percents were used on Section

II and III. In addition, the mean (x=average score of the participants), standard

deviations (SD=distance from the mean of participant's score), and rank order of

importance were calculated. To analyze the population, ANOV and the Student-

Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Test were used to answer the research questions.

Limitations

This methodology has several limitations identified by the researcher including:

1. The survey used has not been tested for validity or reliability.

2. The subjects may have responded how they thought the researcher wanted

them to answer.

3. Delivery home and return of the survey was dependent on the child.

4. Questions and statements on the survey may be leading.

5. The scores given on the survey may not accurately define the attitudes of the

parents.

This chapter has discussed methodology for the research study. The following

chapter will include the survey results and a discussion of the findings. The last chapter

will summarize the study, draw conclusions from the results of the study, and give future

recommendations.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Discussions

This chapter will present the results of the survey and a discussion of these results. The demographic findings of the participants will be presented. The data collected in Section II and III were analyzed and discussed for the total population in reference to the research questions under investigation.

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic information from Section I of the survey is presented in Table 1 through 6. The following is an overview of each demographic area: gender, age, number of children, family structure, employment status, and level of education.

Gender

Respondents were asked to indicate their gender. For all respondents, 32 (35.6%) were males and 58 (64.4%) were females. See Table 1.

Table 1: Gender

Gender	Frequency	Valid Percent
Female	58	64.4
Male	32	34.6
Total	90	100.0

Age

In the survey, the age of the respondents was divided into six categories. Thirty-six of the respondents (40.0%) were 31-35 years old, twenty-eight of the respondents

(31.1 %) were 26-30 years old, nine of the respondents (10.0%) were 36-40 years old,

seven of the respondents (7.8%) were 41-45 years old, seven of the respondents (7.8%)

were 20-25 years old, and 3 of the respondents (3.3%) were 46 or older. Table 2 presents

the results.

Table 2: Age Range

Age Level		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
20-25 years old	7	7.8
26-30 years old	28	31.1
31-35 years old	36	40.0
36-40 years old	9	10.0
41-45 years old	7	7.8
46 or older	3	3.3
Total	90	100.0

Number of Children

Respondents were asked to indicate the number of children living in the home.

The majority of respondents (n= 51, 61.4%) had two children. Eighteen respondents

(21.7%) had three children, six respondents (7.2%) had one child, three respondents

(3.6%) had four children, three respondents (3.6%) had five children, and two

respondents (2.4%) had six children. See Table 3.

Table 3: Number of Children

Number of Children		
	Frequency	Valid percent
1 child	6	7.2
2 children	51	61.4
3 children	18	21.7
4 children	3	3.6
5 children	3	3.6
6 children	2	2.4
Missing	7	missing
Total	90	100.0

<u>Family Structure</u>

Respondents were asked to indicate their family structure. The majority of the respondents (n=78, 86.7%) were living in a two-parent household. Seven of the respondents (7.8%) were single, four of the respondents (4.4%) were remarried, and one respondent (1.1%) was separated. See Table 4.

Table 4: Family Structure

Family Structure	Frequency	Valid Percent
Single parent	7	7.8
Two parent	78	86.7
"Remarried"	4	4.4
Separated	1	1.1
Total	90	100.0

<u>Employment Status</u>

Respondents were asked to indicate their employment status. Over half the respondents (n= 58, 65.2%) worked fulltime. Twenty-one of the respondents (23.6%) worked part-time and ten of the respondents (11.2%) were unemployed. See Table 5.

Table 5: Employment Status

Employment Status	Frequency	Valid Percent
Fulltime	58	65.2
Part time	21	23.6
Unemployed	10	11.2
Missing	1	Missing
Total	90	100.0

<u>Level of Education</u>

Table 6 reflects respondents' level of education. Approximately one-third of the respondents (n=31, 34.4%) graduated from high school. Twenty-nine of the respondents

(32.2%) had some college, twelve respondents (13.3%) had an Associate's Degree, ten

respondents (11.1%) were college graduates, six respondents (6.7%) had some high

school, and two respondents (2.2%) held a Master's Degree. See Table 6.

Table 6: Level of Education

Level of Education		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
some high school	6	6.7
high school	31	34.4
some college	29	32.2
2-yr. college degree	12	13.3
4-yr. college degree	10	11.1
Master's degree	2	2.2
Total	90	100.0

Attitudes

Section II in the survey, Attitudes, was designed to answer research question 1:

What are the parental attitudes towards parental involvement? The thirty attitude

statements were rated using a Likert Scale ranging from 1 to 9: 1=disagree strongly,

3=disagree, 5=undecided, 7=agree, and 9=agree strongly. Of the thirty attitude

statements, the respondents agreed (x=8.33 to 6.10) with twenty-nine of them. The only

statement that respondents disagreed (x=3.61) with was the statement "Children can learn

as much from a good TV show as they can from a good book".

The respondents were most positive about item 14-"I will be disappointed if my

child does not graduate from high school.", item 18-"At parent-teacher conferences, I feel

confident and comfortable enough to ask questions and make comments regarding my

child.", and item 19-"I enjoy attending my child's school activities, such as concerts,

FEST, and special classroom activities." Item 10 was written as a reversal stating, "I do

not care if my child misses school." The respondents responded positively toward not

wanting their child to miss school, leaving this item with a mean of 8.31. See Table 7.

Table 7: Attitudes

Attitude Item	n	x	S.D.	Order
14. I will be disappointed if my child does not graduate from high school.	90	8.33	1.82	1
18. At parent-teacher conferences, I feel confident and comfortable enough to ask questions and make comments regarding my child.	89	8.33	1.06	1
10. I don't care if my child misses school.	90	8.31	1.47	3
19. I enjoy attending my child's school activities, such as concert, FEST and special classroom activities.	89	8.31	1.12	3
3. I don't need to spend a lot of time with my child in order for him/her to succeed in school.	90	8.26	1.43	5
1. The Early Learning Center is important to my child's future success in school.	90	8.17	1.11	6
26. My child's school is friendly and inviting.	88	8.15	1.09	7
20. To be successful in school, children need to have many experiences with toys, books, and games at an early age.	89	8.10	1.50	8
5. My child's teacher makes an effort to communicate with me about the positive things my child does.	90	8.03	1.31	9
22. I am too stressed out and busy to talk to my child about his/her day at school.	89	8.03	1.68	9
28. I leave parent-teacher conferences feeling my time was well spent.	88	7.98	1.06	11
7. I'd rather not be involved in school activities.	90	7.84	1.42	12
15. If my child has a problem at school, I would rather the teacher deal with it than get me involved.	89	7.71	1.74	13
12. My child's success in school is dependent on my involvement.	90	7.63	1.49	14
27. School functions are a place for me to meet other families.	88	7.63	1.44	14
11. I work too much to spend quality time with my child.	90	7.62	2.05	16
17. I enjoy reading to my child.	89	7.6	1.66	17

8. Volunteering in my child's school is a way to show my child I care.	90	7.59	1.84	18
21. The time I spend with my child doing Discovery Kits is beneficial.	89	7.53	1.6	19
25. Missing school will negatively affect my child's progress in school.	87	7.52	1.82	20
30. I would volunteer at school if I had more time.	86	7.37	1.74	21
24. My child's teacher makes an effort to communicate with me about the negative things my child does at school.	88	7.35	1.41	22
4. I expect my child to go to college or vocational school.	90	7.34	1.89	23
29. The teacher makes the biggest influence on my child's success in school.	88	7.26	1.47	24
9. Having the teacher visit my home before school helped ease my child's worries.	78	6.88	2.11	25
16. The Discovery Kits are a good way to keep track of how my child is doing with preschool skills.	88	6.88	1.82	25
23. Overall, my memories of school are positive.	89	6.75	1.85	27
2. I disliked school as a child.	89	6.43	2.14	28
13. The teacher makes the biggest influence on my child's success in school.	90	6.10	2.09	29
6. Children can learn as much from a good TV show as they can from a good book.	90	3.61	2.21	30

Behaviors

Section III in the survey, was designed to answer research question 2: What parental engagement behaviors do parents perform at home and at school? The twenty behavior questions were rated on a Likert scale ranging from never to frequently: 1=never, 3=seldom, 5=sometimes, 7=frequently.

The behaviors that the respondents engaged in most often were praising their child for his/her efforts (question # 7, x=6.71), asking their child about school projects and activities (question # 2, x=6.6), and reading notes/papers in their child's take-home folder (question #16, x=6.48). The respondents sometimes communicated with their

child's teacher through take-home folders (question # 13, x=5.5), talked to their child's

teacher (question #1,x=5.47), controlled the amount of time their child's spends watching

TV (question #6, x=5.22), and read materials that offer parenting tips (question #20,

x=5.06). The behaviors that parents engaged in least were allowing their child to miss

school for absences other than illness or family emergencies (question 14, x=2.07),

volunteering in their child's classroom (question 11, x=3.23), and visiting the public

library (question 10, x=3.77). See Table 8.

Table 8: Behaviors

Behaviors	n	x	S.D.	Order
7. Praise your child for his/her efforts?	90	6.71	.52	1
2. Ask your child about school projects and activities?	90	6.6	.87	2
16. Read notes/papers in your child's take-home folder?	90	6.48	1.17	3
17. See that your child goes to bed at a regular time?	90	6.13	1.21	4
12. Spend one-on-one time with your child?	89	6.11	.99	5
18. Play games with your child?	90	6.07	.95	6
5. Talk to your child about how important school is?	90	5.99	1.03	7
4. Attend school functions (FEST, field trips, classroom parties)?	90	5.78	1.42	8
3. Read to your child?	90	5.67	1.32	9
15. Complete the Discovery Kits with your child?	89	5.6	1.69	10
19. Read the school newsletter?	90	5.56	1.81	11
13. Communicate with your child's teacher through take-home folders?	90	5.5	1.66	12
1. Talk to your child's teacher?	90	5.47	1.37	13
6. Control the amount of time your child spends watching TV?	90	5.22	1.45	14
20. Read materials that offer parenting tips?	90	5.06	1.74	15
8. Drop-off or pick-up your child from school?	90	4.8	2.01	16
9. Call you child's teacher if you have a question or concern?	87	4.74	1.99	17

10. Visit the public library?	90	3.77	2.03	18
11. Volunteer in your child's classroom?	90	3.23	1.94	19
14. Allow your child to miss school for absences other than illnesses or family emergencies?	90	2.07	1.32	20

Significant Differences in Parental Attitudes and Behaviors Based on Gender

Research question three intended to investigate whether or not a difference in parental attitudes and behaviors existed based on gender. Using a T-test, there were significant differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on gender.

Attitudes

The T test results on Section II Parent Attitudes showed a significant difference at the .001 level based on gender. Males scored significantly lower (x=7.1971) than females (x=7.6596).   The T test also found significant differences in specific items within Section II: Parent Attitudes. There was a significant difference at the .05 probability level on the attitude item 2, "I disliked school as a child." This item was written as a reversal. Males' mean score was significantly lower (x=5.78) than females (x=6.79), indicating that males liked school as a child less than females did. Females scored significantly higher (x=8.22) on attitude item 7, "I'd rather not be involved in school activities" than males (x=7.16), a significant difference at the .01 level. This item was written as a reversal, with mean scores indicating that females would rather be involved in school activities than males. There was a significant difference at the .05 level on item 8, "Volunteering in my child's school is a way to show my child I care." Males' score was significantly lower (x=7.03) than females (x= 7.90). Item 11, "I work too much to spend quality time with my child." was written as a reversal.   A significant difference at the .05 level was found on this item, with males scoring lower (x=6.97) than

females (x=7.98), indicating that males feel they have less quality time with their children than do females. A significant difference at the .001 level was found in attitude item 17, "I enjoy reading to my child." Males' mean score was significantly lower (x=6.77) than females (x=8.03). The T test showed a significant difference at .05 level on item 19, "I enjoy attending my child's school activities, such as concerts, FEST, and special classroom activities." Males mean score was significantly lower (x=7.94) than females (x=8.52). A significant difference at the .05 level was detected on item 27, "School functions are a place for me to meet other families," with males having a mean score of 7.16 and females a score of 7.88. On item 29, "I know how to help my child with school readiness at home," males scored significantly lower (x=6.68) than females (7.58), indicating a significant difference at the .01 level. There was a significant difference at the .05 level on item 30, "I would volunteer at school if I had more time." Females scored significantly higher (x=7.69) than males (x=6.81).

Table 9: Significant Differences on Parental Attitudes Based on Gender

Item	Male n=32		Female n=58		T	Prob
	x	S.D.	x	S.D.		
2. I disliked school as a child	5.78	2.30	6.79	1.98	-2.176	.05
7. I'd rather not be involved in school activities.	7.16	1.72	8.22	1.06	-3.186	.01
8. Volunteering in my child's school is a way to show my child I care.	7.03	1.87	7.9	1.76	-2.178	.05
11. I work too much to spend quality time with my child.	6.97	2.51	7.98	1.67	-2.050	.05

17. I enjoy reading to my child.	6.77	1.78	8.03	1.43	-3.634	.001
19. I enjoy attending my child's school activities, such as concerts, FEST and special classroom activities.	7.94	1.26	8.52	1.00	-2.388	.05
27. School functions are a place for me to meet other families.	7.16	1.70	7.88	1.23	-2.279	.05
29. I know how to help my child with school readiness at home.	6.68	1.54	7.58	1.35	-2.851	.01
30. I would volunteer at school if I had more time.	6.81	1.80	7.69	1.64	-2.317	.05
Average Score Section II: Parent Attitudes	7.1971	.6991	7.6596	.5922	-3.282	.001

Behaviors

The T test results on Section III: Parent Behaviors showed a significant

difference at the .001 level based on gender. Males scored significantly lower (x=4.8047)

than females (x=5.6145).   The T test also found significant differences in specific items

within Section III: Parent Behaviors. There was a significant difference at the .05

probability level on the behavior item 3, "Read to your child." Males' mean score was

significantly lower (x=5.00) than females (x=6.03). A significant difference at the.01

level was found in behavior item 4, "Attend school functions (FEST, field trips, class

parties?". Males' score was significantly lower (x=5.13) than females (x=6.14). Females

scored significantly higher (x=5.33) on behavior item 9, "Call you child's teacher if you

have a question or concern?" than males (x=3.72), a significant difference at the.001

level. The T test showed a significant difference at the .01 level on item 10, "Visit the

public library?". Males' mean score (x=2.94) was significantly lower than females

(x=4.22). There was a significant difference at the .001 level on item 11, "Volunteer in

your child's classroom?". Again, males scored significantly lower (x=2.22) than females

(x=3.79). On item 13, "Communicate with your child's teacher through take-home

folders", males scored significantly lower (x=4.53) than females (x=6.03), indicating a

significant difference at the .001 level. Females scored significantly higher (x=5.88) than

males (x=5.09) on behavior item 15, "Complete the Discovery Kits *with* your child?", a

significant difference at the .05 level. There was a significant difference at the .01 level

on item 16, "Read notes/papers in your child's take-home folder?". Males scored

significantly lower (x=5.84) than females (x=6.83). The T test showed a significant

difference at the .001 level on item 19, "Read the school newsletter?". Males' mean

score (x=4.5) was significantly lower than females' mean score (x=6.14). A significant

difference at the .001 level was found on item 20, "Read materials that offer parenting

tips?", with males mean score significantly lower (x=4.03) than females (x=5.62). See

Table 10.

Table 10: Significant Differences on Parental Behaviors Based on Gender

Item	Male n=32		Female n=58		T	Prob
	x	S.D.	x	S.D.		
3. Read to your child?	5.00	1.41	6.03	1.11	-3.837	.001
4. Attend school functions (FEST,field trips, class parties)?	5.13	1.72	6.14	1.08	-3.020	.01
9. Call your child's teacher if you have a question or concern?	3.72	2.17	5.33	1.62	-3.638	.001
10. Visit the public library?	2.94	1.88	4.22	1.97	-3.008	.01
11. Volunteer in your child's classroom?	2.22	1.45	3.79	1.95	-3.987	.001
13. Communicate with your child's teacher through take-home folders?						

	4.53	1.90	6.03	1.24	-4.025	.001
15. Complete the Discovery Kits with your child?	5.09	1.78	5.88	1.58	-2.140	.05
16. Read notes/papers in your child's take-home folder?	5.84	1.57	6.83	.68	-3.379	.01
19. Read the school newsletter?	4.5	1.90	6.14	1.47	-4.228	.001
20. Read materials that offer parenting tips?	4.03	1.93	5.62	1.35	-4.142	.001
Average Score Section III: Parent Behaviors	4.8047	.8700	5.6145	.5719	-5.316	.001

Significant Differences in Parental Attitudes and Behaviors Based on Age

Research question four intended to investigate whether or not a difference in parental attitudes and behaviors existed based on age. The ANOV results found significant differences in two of the attitude items. Using the ANOV, there was a significant difference at the .05 level on item 17, "I enjoy reading to my child." Also, the Student-Newman-Keuls Range Test detected a significant difference at the .05 level between those 36 or older (x=8.44), those 30 or younger (x=7.49), and those 31-35 years old (x=7.28). The ANOV results showed a significant difference at the .05 level on item 27, "School functions are a place for me to meet other families." However, the Student-Newman-Keuls Range Test could not detect where the differences occurred for this item.

On behavior item 10, "Visit the public library?", the ANOV found significant difference at the .05 level based on age. Using the Student-Newman-Keuls Range Test, those 36 or older (x=4.74) were significantly different at the .05 level from those 31-35 years old (x=3.83) and those 30 and younger (x=3.17). See Table 11.

Table 11: ANOV Results with Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Test

of Parental Attitudes and Behaviors by Age

Item	30 or younger n=35		31-35 years n=36		36 or older n=19		F Ratio	Prob
	x	S.D.	x	S.D.	x	S.D.		
17. I enjoy reading to my child.	7.49	1.52	7.28	1.95	8.44	.92	3.234	.05
27. School functions are a place for me to meet other families.	7.91	1.07	7.17	1.81	8.00	.94	3.264	.05
10. Visit the public library?	3.17	1.87	3.83	2.04	4.74	2.00	3.946	.05

Significant Differences in Parental Attitudes and Behaviors

Based on Family Structure

Attitudes

Research question five intended to investigate whether or not a difference in parental attitudes and behaviors existed based on family structure. The T test results showed that there are significant differences in parent attitudes and behaviors based on family structure. There was a significant difference at the .001 probability level on attitude item 10, "I don't care if my child misses school." This item was written as a reversal. Two parent families scored significantly lower (x=8.22) than single/remarried/separated families (x=8.92), indicating that parents do care if their child misses school. A significant difference at .05 level was found on item 13, "The teacher makes the biggest influence on my child's success in school." Single/remarried/separated parents score was significantly higher (x=7.50) than two parent families (x= 5.88). See Table 12.

Table 12: Significant Differences in Parental Attitudes Based on Family Structure

Item	Two Parent n=78		Sing/remar/separ n=12		T	Prob
	x	S.D.	x	S.D.		
10. I don't care if my child misses school.	8.22	1.56	8.92	.29	-3.578	.001
13. The teacher makes the biggest influence on my child's success in school.	5.88	2.04	7.50	1.93	-2.565	.05

Behaviors

Using a T test, significant differences were found in three of the Parent Behavior items. A significant at the .05 probability level was found on item 5, "Talk to your child about how important school is?", with two parent families having a mean score of 5.90 and single/remarried/separated families having a mean score of 6.58. There was a significant difference at the .05 level on item 7, "Praise your child for his/her efforts?". Single/remarried/separated families scored significantly higher (x=6.92) than two parent families (x=6.68). The T test showed a significant difference at the .05 level on item 11, "Volunteer in your child's classroom?". Single/remarried/separated families scored significantly lower (x=2.17) than two parents families (x=3.40). See Table 13.

Table 13: Significant Differences in Parental Behaviors Based on Family Structure

Item	Two Parent n=78		Sing/remar/separ n=12		T	Prob
	x	S.D.	x	S.D.		
5. Talk to your child about how important school is?	5.90	1.05	6.58	.67	-2.186	.05
7. Praise your child for his/her efforts?	6.68	.55	6.92	.29	-2.285	.05
11. Volunteer in your child's classroom?	3.40	1.96	2.17	1.40	2.087	.05

Significant Differences in Parent Attitudes and Behaviors

Based on Level of Education

Research question six intended to investigate whether or not a difference in parental attitudes and behaviors existed based on level of education. Using the ANOV, there was a significant difference at the .05 level on attitude item 4, "I expect my child to go to college." Also, the Student Newman=-Keuls Range Test showed a significant difference at the .05 level between those with a 2-year/4-year/Master's degree (x=8.00), those with high school or less (x=7.51) and those with some college (x=6.59). Parents with a 2-year, 4-year or Master's Degree scored significantly higher than parents with some college or less concerning "expecting their child to go to college". On behavior item 3, "Read to your child?", a significant difference at the .05 level was detected using the Student-Newman-Keuls Range Test. Those with a 2-year/4-year/Master's Degree scored significantly higher (x=6.17) than those with some college (x=5.79) and those with high school or less (x=5.24). See Table 14.

The ANOV results did detect some trends regarding level of education. On attitude item 12, "My child's success in school is dependent on my involvement", those who held a 2-year/4-year/Master's Degree scored significantly higher (x=8.21) then those with some college (x=7.45) and those with high school or less (x=7.41). The ANOV results detected a trend on attitude item 23, "Overall my memories of school are positive". Those with a 2-year/4-year/Master's Degree scored significantly higher (x=7.30) than those with some college (x=6.17) and high school or less (x=6.86).

Table 14: ANOV Results with Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Test

of Parental Attitudes and Behaviors by Level of Education

Item	2yr/4yr/Master n=24		Some college n=29		High school n=37		F Ratio	Prob
	x	S.D.	x	S.D.	x	S.D.		
4. I expect my child to go to college or vocational school.	8.00	1.38	6.59	2.37	7.51	1.56	4.232	.05
3. Read to your child?	6.17	1.13	5.79	1.11	5.24	1.46	4.043	.05

Significant Differences in Parental Attitudes and Behaviors Based

on Employment Status

Attitudes

Research question seven intended to investigate whether or not a difference in parental attitudes and behaviors existed based on employment status. The ANOV results on Section II: Parent Attitudes, there was a significant difference at the .05 level on item 11, "I work too much to spend quality time with my child." However, using the Student-Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Test, no differences in parental attitudes could be detected among the three employment categories of full time, part time, and unemployed. See Table 15.

Table 15: ANOV Results with Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Test

of Parent Attitudes by Employment Status

Item	Full time n=58		Part time n=21		Unemploy n=10		F Ratio	Prob
	x	S.D.	x	S.D.	x	S.D.		
11. I work too much to spend quality time with my child.	**7.14**	**2.35**	**8.48**	**.87**	**8.50**	**.85**	**4.675**	**.05**

<u>Behaviors</u>

The ANOV results on Section III: Parent Behaviors showed a significant difference at the .001 level based on employment status. Using the Student-Newman-Keuls Multiple Comparison Test, those employed full time (x=5.1049) were significantly different at the .05 level from part time (X=5.7011) and unemployed (x= 5.7734).

On items within Section III: Parent Behaviors, the ANOV found eight significant differences at the .05 and .01 levels based on employment. However, for items 4, "Attend school functions (FEST, field trips, and classroom parties)?", 9, "Call your child's teacher if you have a question or concern?", 10, "Visit the public library?", 11, "Volunteer in your child's classroom?", and 13, "Communicate with your child's teacher through take-home folders?", the Student-Newman-Keuls could not detect where the differences occurred. The Student-Newman-Keuls Range Test showed a significant difference at the .05 level on behavior item 8, "Drop off or pick up your child from school?" between those who are employed full time (x=4.36), part time (x=5.19), and unemployed (x=6.40). Parents who are unemployed scored significantly higher then parents who work full time and parents who work part time concerning "dropping off or picking up their child from school". See Table 16.

Table 16: ANOV Results with Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Test

of Parent Behaviors by Employment Status

Item	Full time n=58		Part time n=21		Unemploy n=10		F Ratio	Prob
	x	S.D.	x	S.D.	x	S.D.		
4. Attend school functions (FEST, field trips, classroom parties)?	5.47	1.60	6.33	.73	6.40	.84	4.210	.05
8. Drop-off or pick-up your child from school?	4.36	2.11	5.19	1.69	6.40	.97	5.379	.01
9. Call your child's teacher if you have a question or concern?	4.32	2.01	5.50	1.70	5.56	1.94	3.698	.05
10. Visit the public library?	3.22	1.88	4.67	2.06	4.7	1.70	5.865	.01
11. Volunteer in your child's classroom?	2.74	1.78	4.14	2.01	4.00	1.89	5.454	.01
13. Communicate with your child's teacher through take-home folders?	5.07	1.82	6.29	.96	6.20	.92	5.707	.01
16. Read notes/papers in your child's take-home folder?	6.24	1.39	6.95	.22	6.90	.32	3.728	.05
Average Score Section III: Parent Behaviors	5.1049	.8177	5.7011	.6036	5.7734	.4898	7.044	.001

DISCUSSION

This study focused on the attitudes and behaviors of parents with children enrolled in a four-year-old-kindergarten. Demographic characteristics were investigated to determine their effects on the variables. Information was gathered from a survey with 30 attitude items and 20 behavior items administered in May of 2002 to 114 parents.

Section I of the survey provided a description of the sample population who participated in the study. Frequency counts and percentages were tabulated on Section I. Section II, attitude statements, was developed to measure parents' attitudes toward being involved in their children's schooling. Section III, Behaviors, was designed to measure the level of parents' involvement with their children in typical home-school involvement situations. T tests and Anov were run on the data to calculate any significant findings.

Gender

Some of the most significant findings of the study related to gender. This study found that males are not overly confident (x=6.68) with knowing how to help their child with school readiness at home (Attitude item 29). This finding is consistent with research conducted by Finn. According to Finn (1998), "many parents feel they lack, or do lack, the skills to guide their children's reading and schoolwork" (p. 22). Fathers in this study somewhat agreed that work interferes with their involvement with their children (Attitude item 11, "I work too much to spend quality time with my child." (x=6.97) & Attitude item 30, "I would volunteer at school if I had more time." (x=6.81)). This finding was upheld in a study conducted by the US Department of Education (1997), which stated that fathers are socialized to be the breadwinners, while mothers are more likely to be involved in school functions. In regard to males overall memories of school, males in

this study were undecided (x=5.78) about whether or not their experiences were positive. In general, the fathers enjoyed attending school functions (Attitude item 19) and wanted to be involved in school activities (Attitude item 7). This is somewhat contradictory of research presented in Chapter II. Menacker, Hurwitz & Weber (1998), found that when adults have unsuccessful or negative school experiences they often viewed the school as unresponsive and choose not to become involved. In this study, males' memories of school (x=5.78) did not appear to affect their attitudes toward being involved in their children's schooling (item 7, x=7.16, item 17, x=6.77 and item 19, x=7.94).

Results from the T test concluded that females in this study were clearly more involved with their children than males, which is consistent with the research from Chapter II. Studies from the Families and Work Institute showed that although males are more involved with their children today than they were twenty years ago, they continue to be less involved with their children than females (Families and Work Institute, 2002). This is evidenced by the fact that male participants in this study seldom visited the library (x=2.94) and were less likely to volunteer in the classroom (x=2.22). When looking specifically at communicating with the teacher, males seldom (x=3.72) called their child's teacher if there was a question or a concern, sometimes (x=4.53) communicated with the teacher through take-home folders, and sometimes (x=5.84) read notes/papers in their child's take-home folder. Factors as to why this is so are not precisely known. However, Galinsky's (2001) research on parent involvement may provide some explanation. In Galinsky's research fathers reported that teachers often ignore them and when both parents are present, the mother is the focus of attention. Galinsky (2001) reported that fathers also felt that schools call the mother more often to

participate in activities. Educators need to make an effort to reach fathers, to make them feel included and valued as part of the educational team.

Age

ANOV results as well as results from the Student-Newman-Kuels Multiple Range Test detected a significant difference at the .05 level on attitude item 17, "I enjoy reading to my child" among those 36 or older (x=8.44), those 30 or younger (x=7.49), and those 31-35 years old (x=7.28). These findings are consistent with previous research presented in Chapter II. Garrison (1997) found that mothers who delayed childbearing "were more satisfied, less stressed and reported better functioning than mothers who conceived early" (cited in Hamner & Turner, 2001, p. 8). In addition, Heath (1994) found that late-time fathers tended to be more nurturant and spent more time with their children than on-time fathers (cited in Hamner & Turner, 2001).

Family Structure

Results from the T test on family structure revealed an interesting finding regarding parents' perceptions of the importance of their involvement. Single/remarried/separated parents scored significantly higher (x=7.50) than two-parent families (x=5.88) on item 13, "The teacher makes the biggest influence on my child's success in school." This finding matched much of the research on parent perceptions presented in Chapter II. Previous research indicated that parents do not fully understand how valuable and important their interactions with their children are. Parents often believed their help was not needed by the school (Eldridge, 2001). However, the review of literature found that students succeed in school more often when parents accept

responsibility for assisting their children (Clark, cited in Finn, 1998). Much work needs to be done with educating parents on the value of their interactions with their children.

The research presented in Chapter II consistently found that children from nontraditional families are "significantly less likely than students living in traditional families to have parents with high levels of involvement in their schools" (US Department of Education, 2001, p. 19). The findings from item 11, "Volunteer in your child's classroom?" proved this research to be true, but few other differences based on family structure could be delineated. Participants in the study from nontraditional families volunteered significantly less (x=2.17) than parents in traditional families (x=3.40), but parents from nontraditional families talked to their children about the importance of school more often (x=6.58) than parents from traditional families (x= 5.90). Rich's (1987) research on parental involvement concluded that parents in nontraditional families, namely single parents, may be less visible in the schools during day hours, but "make significant efforts to maintain close contact with teachers and schools" (p. 37). Rich's research findings accurately describe results found in this study. In this study, no differences based on family structure could be found on items relating to communicating with the teacher. The findings indicate there appears to be a difference in parental attitudes and behaviors based on family structure.

Level of Education

Results of this study match the research presented in the review of literature regarding level of education. The review of literature indicated that the more education a parent has, the more likely they are to be highly involved in their children's schooling (US Department of Education, 1997). In addition, "Reese, Goldenberge, Loucky and

Gallimore (1989) found that parents who helped their children with literacy development tended to have more education than those who did not" (cited in Ortiz, 2002, p.1). This study found that parents with a 2-year/4-year/Master's Degree (x=6.17) read to their children more often than parents with some college (x=5.79) and parents with high school or less (x=5.24). There appears to be a difference in parental attitudes and behaviors based on level of education.

<u>Employment Status</u>

When studying the ANOV results regarding employment status, the only item in which differences could be detected using the Student-Newman-Kuels Multiple Range Test was item 8, "Drop-off or pick-up your child from school?". Not surprising, parents who were unemployed engaged in this behavior more often than working parents. This did not yield any significant findings in relation to the research previously presented other than it is consistent with Rich's (1987) research that working parents will be less visible during the school day.

The research presented in Chapter II stated that mothers and fathers who work thirty-five or less hours per week were more likely to be highly involved in their children's schooling. The ANOV found eight significant differences at the .05 and .01 levels based on employment. However for items 4, 9, 10,11, and 13 the Student-Newman-Kuels Multiple Range Test could not detect where the differences occurred.

This chapter examined the data analysis and provided discussion on the data analysis. Chapter V will draw conclusions from the findings and offer recommendations for further research. The chapter will conclude with educational implications of the investigation.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The final chapter of this study will begin by summarizing the methodology and findings. Conclusions from the findings will then be presented, followed by recommendations for future research. The chapter will conclude by addressing the educational implications of the investigation.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to assess the current level of parental involvement in the Early Learning Center at Tiffany Creek Elementary in the Boyceville Community School District. The survey included sections on parental attitudes and behaviors regarding involvement with communicating with the teacher, promoting learning or readiness at home, and involvement in school activities at school. The independent variables were gender, age, number of children, family structure, level of education, and employment status.

Methods and Procedures

The survey was administered in May 2002. The population was drawn, by cluster sampling, from parents of children enrolled in the Early Learning Center at Tiffany Creek Elementary in the Boyceville Community School District during the 2000-2002 school years. The sample group of 147 subjects received a letter and a survey (see Appendix A) at a Kindergarten Informational Meeting or via their child's take-home folder requesting their participation. There were a total of 90 surveys returned. This constitutes a 61% return rate.

Section I of the survey, General Information, recorded gender, age, number of children, family structure, level of education, and employment status. Section II of the survey, Attitudes, consisted of thirty items that parents were asked to respond to using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 9 (agree strongly). The statements were developed to include a variety of typical situations using three subscales: communication with the teacher, promoting learning or readiness at home, and involvement in school activities at school. Section III, Behaviors, included 20 items in which parents rated using a Likert scale ranging from 1(never) to 5 (frequently). Parents were asked to rate their level of involvement in the twenty activities. The behaviors were developed using three subscales: communication with the teacher, promoting learning or readiness at home, and involvement in school activities at home.

Data Analysis

The University of Wisconsin, Stout Computer User Support Services, analyzed the responses of the survey. Frequency counts and percentages were tabulated for Section I and II. Additionally, the mean, standard deviation, and rank order were computed. T tests, ANOV, and the Student-Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Test was conducted as well. The independent variables included gender, age, family structure, level of education, and employment status of the participants.

The findings in Section I based on the analysis of data showed that 35.6% (n=32) of the participants were male and 64.4% (n= 58) were female. Of the ninety participants, fifty-eight were 31 years or older (61.1%) and thirty-five (38.9%) were thirty years old or younger. The majority of families were two-parent families (n=78, 86.7%), while twelve parents (13.3%) were either separated, single or remarried parents. Thirty-seven of the

parents had some high school/high school diploma, twenty-nine had some college courses and twenty-four held a 2-year/4-year/Master's Degree. Sixty-five percent of the participants worked full time, twenty-three percent worked part time, and 11% were unemployed.

<u>Findings</u>

Research Question 1: What are the parental attitudes towards parental involvement?

After calculating the mean and standard deviation, results of the thirty attitude items showed that the participants scored every item positively, except one. The only item that the participants disagreed (x=3.61) with was item 6, "Children can learn as much from a good TV show as they can from a good book." The participants were most positive about attending and contributing in parent-teacher conferences, attending their children's school functions and not wanting their children to miss school.

Research question 2: What parental engagement behaviors do parents perform at home and at school?

After calculating the mean and standard deviation, results of the twenty behavior items showed that the parental engagement behaviors participants performed *most at home* were praising their child for his/her efforts (x=6.71), asking their child about school projects and activities (x=6.6), and reading notes/papers in their child's take-home folder (x=6.48). The behaviors participants performed *least at home* were visiting the public library (x=3.77) and reading materials that offered parenting tips (x=5.06). The parental engagement behavior participants performed *most at school* was attending school functions, such as FEST, field trips, and classroom parties, (x=5.78). The parental

engagement behavior participants performed *least at school* was "volunteering in their child's classroom" (x=3.23).

Research Question 3: What are the differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on gender?

Results of the T tests concluded that there were significant difference in parental attitudes and behaviors based on gender. Males scored significantly lower than females on the average of Section II, Attitudes. Significant differences were found in attitude items regarding their desire to be involved as well as their memories of school and on volunteering in their children's school. Males' behaviors were found be significantly lower than females on the average in Section II. Significant differences were found in behavior items regarding communicating with the teacher, involvement in literacy activities at home, and participating in involvement activities at school, such as volunteering in their child's classroom and attending school functions.

Research Question 4: What are the differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on age?

Age of the parent was found to make a difference in parental attitudes and behaviors. The Student-Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Test found that older parents enjoyed participating in literacy activities more than younger parents and they encouraged literacy experiences at home by visiting the public library more often than younger parents did.

Research Question 5: What are the differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on family structure?

Results from the T test computing significant differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on family structure concluded that significant differences did exist. Single/remarried/separated parents scored significantly higher than two-parent families in not wanting their child to miss school and in believing that teacher makes the biggest influence on their child's success in school. Two-parent families were found to volunteer in their child's classroom more often than other parents. However, nontraditional families were found to praise their children and talk about the importance of school more often than two-parent families.

Research Question 6: What are the differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on highest level of education completed?

The Student-Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Test showed significant differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on level of education. Parents who completing higher level of education read to their children more than parents with lower levels of education. In addition, parents who held a 2-year/4-year/Master's Degree had higher expectations of their child attending college or vocational school than did parents with some college or high school and less.

Research Question 7: What are the differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on employment status?

ANOV and the Student-Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Test was used to calculate significant differences of parental attitudes and behaviors by employment status. Parents employed full time agreed that work somewhat interfered with them spending quality time with their children, while those employed part time and those unemployed were less likely to report that work interfered with the quality of time they

spend with their children. After calculation on the average score of Section III,

Behaviors, the Student-Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Test found significant differences

among parents employed full time, part time, and unemployed. Employed parents scored

significantly lower on the average score in Section III, Behaviors. The ANOV found

eight significant differences. However the Student-Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Test

could not detect where the differences occurred on seven of the eight items. Unemployed

parents dropped-off or picked-up their children from school more often than parents

employed full time and part time. The results indicated differences in parental attitudes

and behaviors exist based on employment status.

Conclusions

   There are conclusions that need to be presented as a result of the data reported in

Chapter IV. They will be discussed according to the research questions outlined in

Chapter I.

Research Question 1: What are the parental attitudes towards parental involvement?

   The attitudes of parents in this study were positive. Results reflect that the fact

the parents feel positive about communicating with the teacher, promoting learning or

readiness at home, and being involved in school activities at school.

Research Question 2: What parental engagement behaviors do parents perform at home
and at school?

   At home, parents most often perform behaviors closely tied to the classroom, such

as asking their children about school projects/activities and reading notes/papers in their

child's folder. Parents read to their children and visited the library on their own less

often. The behaviors that parents performed most at school was attending school

functions, such as family nights and classroom parties, while volunteering in their child's classroom was performed less often.

Research Question 3: What are the differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on gender?

This study found that males' attitudes toward parental involvement were not as positive as females' attitudes toward parental involvement. Males engaged in parental involvement behaviors less often than females did.

Research Question 4: What are the differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on age?

Age of the parent was found to make a difference in both their attitudes and behaviors toward literacy activities.

Research Question 5: What are the differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on family structure?

Single/remarried/separated parents felt stronger than married parents about not wanting their children to miss school and in their belief that the teacher makes the biggest influence on their child's success in school. Two-parent families volunteered in their child's classroom more often than single/remarried/separated parents.

Research Question 6: What are the differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on level of education completed?

Better educated parents read to their children more often and had higher expectations of their children attending college or vocational school.

Research Question 7: What are the parental attitudes and behaviors based on employment status?

Parents employed full time felt that their job somewhat interfered with them spending quality time with their children. However, parents who were unemployed or employed part time reported less conflict with work-family balance. The results of the average score in Section III, Behaviors, showed that parents employed full time engaged in the parental involvement behaviors less frequently then unemployed parents or those working part time.

Recommendations for Future Research

In studying the demographic information, the majority of the parents were married. The population had several non-resident parents that did participate in the study. Looking back, the research would contact the non-resident parents personally, instead of relying on custodial parents to get the information to the them. It is the researcher's belief this would have given the study a better balance in the independent variables of family structure and gender. In all other demographic categories reported, the sample was diverse.

In looking at the survey, the researcher would have phrased all items positively, making it easier to understand the items for calculating purposes. The researcher would change or omit some of the items from the survey, for example, attitude item 9, "Having the teacher visit my home before school eased my child's worries about school." This item would be omitted because not all participants had experience with the item and therefore could not give an opinion on it. The researcher would change behavior item 19 to "Read the classroom newsletter?" so that the results are more beneficial to the researcher's program.

Recommendations for Teachers

The review of literature proves that parental involvement is necessary and effective in helping children achieve more. The challenge continues to be to convince parents and school personnel that the time and energy put into creating and nurturing home-school partnerships is worth it. The following considerations are intended for school personnel so that their future collaborations with parents might be more effective.

Top on the list of suggestions is improving teacher training in the area of parental involvement. The review of literature found that teachers receive very little training on how to work with parents. Few schools provide inservice training to their staff on collaborations with parents. Yet the expectation is that teacher will partner with parents and will do it well. The truth is, teachers need adequate training first on how important parental involvement is, on what impact parental involvement has on those involved and ideas on how to create and nurture partnerships with parents. Collaborating with parents does not come naturally for all teachers, therefore universities and schools need to do a better job of training teachers. It would be beneficial for teachers to read journal articles relating to parental involvement if the training they have received is not sufficient.

Teachers need to look at parent involvement through a new lens. That is, they need to recognize the work that families do at home, behind the scenes, and value that work. Teachers must move beyond believing that parental involvement only occurs at school and recognize the home as the most powerful place for learning.

In addition, school personnel must recognize how influential the school climate can be on parental involvement. School personnel should consider studying the climate

that exists in their schools. The review of literature found that positive school climate effects how involved some parents are in their children's schooling.

The research presented in Chapter II found that parents know that working with their children on school related activities is important, but lack confidence and knowledge on how to help. This study supported this research. On the list of recommendations, is the fact that teachers need to be teachers of children, but also teachers of parents. It is important for school personnel to assist parents in their job as their child's first teacher, by becoming a resource to parents.

Another suggestion for teachers is to reduce the number of barriers to improve parental involvement. This study found that high on the priority list for employed parents is attending school functions, but they can not do this if activities occur only during the day. It is important for educators to consider other ways that working parents can be involved in the classroom that can occur outside of school hours. Often teachers believe that parents do not attend school functions because it is not a priority to them. This idea must change in order for home-school partnerships to flourish. Teachers need to be sensitive to the types of families they serve and schedule activities accordingly. Barriers, such as timing and childcare, can easily be removed if teachers make an effort to do so. When schools become sensitive to the diversity of families and reduce the number of activities that welcome only one kind of parent to participate, effective home-school partnerships will be created.

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APPENDIX A

Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s),

Attached is a questionnaire regarding parental involvement in the Early Learning Center. It is our goal in the Early Learning Center to effectively involve parents in our program. Please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire. For some of you, completing this questionnaire will require thinking back to last year-complete the questionnaire to the best of your recollection.

The information gathered will help me complete a requirement in my master's degree program, but *more importantly* will help improve parent programming in the Early Learning Center. For this reason, it is important that you answer the questions honestly. The questionnaires are not coded in any way, so you are guaranteed complete confidentiality.

I am enclosing two questionnaires. Both parents/guardians, where applicable, should complete a separate questionnaire. **Please return the questionnaire to your child's teacher in the attached envelope by THURSDAY, MAY 23rd**. If you choose not to participate, simply send the questionnaire back empty. Please read the consent form below.

Thank you for your time. It is greatly appreciated. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Keri Peterson

Keri Peterson
ELC Teacher

Consent Form

I understand that by returning this questionnaire, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of the study and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand the potential benefits that might be realized from the successful completion of the study. I am aware that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that only minimal identifiers are necessary and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study will be respected with no coersion or prejudice.

Note: Questions or concerns about the research study should be addressed to Keri Peterson, the researcher at 643-4331, est. 159, or Dr. Karen Zimmerman, the research advisor at 232-2530. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Subjects in Research, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone (715) 232-1126.

Parent Involvement Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a study to explore parental involvement in the Early Learning Center. **DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE.** The questionnaire is completely confidential. Please answer all questions to the best of your ability.

Section I. General Information

1. Gender: _____Male   _____Female

2. Age:
_____20-25 yrs.   _____31-35 yrs.   _____41-45 yrs.
_____26-30 yrs.   _____36-40 yrs.   _____Over 46 yrs.

3. Number of children living in your household?_____

4. Family Structure:
_____Single parent family
_____Two parent family
_____"Remarried" family
_____Other, please describe_____

5. Please indicate the <u>highest level of education you have completed</u>.
_____Some high school
_____High school
_____Some college courses
_____Two year college degree
_____Four year college degree
_____Master's degree or beyond

7. Employment Status:
_____Full time
_____Part time
_____Unemployed

Section I: Attitudes

Indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement below by selecting a number from 1 to 9. If you agree strongly with the statement, enter a 9 in the blank. Enter a 1 in the blank if you disagree strongly with the statement and enter a 5 is you are undecided about the statement.

Consider each statement carefully, but make your choices as rapidly as you can. There are no wrong or right answers. The best responses are your personal opinions. Remember to answer all of the questions.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Disagree Strongly		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Agree Strongly

_____1. The Early Learning Center is important to my child's future success in school.

_____2. I disliked school as a child.

_____3. I don't need to spend a lot of time with my child in order for him/her to succeed in school.

_____4. I expect my child to go to college or vocational school.

_____5. My child's teacher makes an effort to communicate with me about positive things my child does.

_____6. Children can learn as much from a good TV show as they can from a good book.

_____7. I'd rather not be involved in school activities.

_____8. Volunteering in my child's school is a way to show my child I care.

_____9. Having the teacher visit my home before school helped ease my child's worries about school.

_____10. I don't care if my child misses school.

_____11. I work too much to spend quality time with my child.

_____12. My child's success in school is dependent on my involvement.

_____13. The teacher makes the biggest influence on my child's success in school.

_____14. I will be disappointed if my child does not graduate from high school.

Section II: Behaviors

Please read each statement below and mark the response that applies to how often you engage the behavior. Please mark only <u>one</u> response.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Frequently

How frequently do you:

_____1. Talk to your child's teacher?

_____2. Ask your child about school projects and activities?

_____3. Read to your child?

_____4. Attend school functions (FEST, field trips, classroom parties)?

_____5. Talk to your child about how important school is?

_____6. Control the amount of time your child spends watching TV?

_____7. Praise your child for his/her efforts?

_____8. Drop-off or pick- up your child from school?

_____9. Call your child's teacher if you have a question or concern?

_____10. Visit the public library?

_____11. Volunteer in your child's classroom?

_____12. Spend one-on-one time with your child?

_____13. Communicate with your child's teacher through take-home folders?

_____14. Allow your child to miss school for absences other than illnesses or family emergencies?

_____15. Complete the Discovery Kit activities *with* your child?

_____16. Read notes/papers in your child's take-home folder?

_____17. See that your child goes to bed at a regular time?

_____18. Play games with your child?

_____19. Read the school newsletter?

_____20. Read materials that offer parenting tips?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Disagree Strongly		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Agree Strongly

_____15. If my child has a problem at school, I would rather have the teacher deal with it than get me involved.

_____16. The Discovery Kits are a good way for me to keep track of how my child is doing with preschool skills.

_____17. I enjoy reading to my child.

_____18. At parent-teacher conferences, I feel confident and comfortable enough to ask questions and make comments regarding my child.

_____19. I enjoy attending my child's school activities, such as concerts, FEST and special classroom activities.

_____20. To be successful in school, children need to have many experiences with toys, books and games at an early age.

_____21. The time I spend with my child doing the Discovery Kits is beneficial.

_____22. I am too stressed out and busy to talk to my child about his/her day at school.

_____23. Overall, my memories of school are positive.

_____24. My child's teacher makes an effort to communicate with me about negative things my child does at school.

_____25. Missing school will negatively affect my child's progress in school.

_____26. My child's school is friendly and inviting.

_____27. School functions are a place for me to meet other families.

_____28. I leave parent-teacher conferences feeling my time was well spent.

_____29. I know how to help my child with school readiness at home.

_____30. I would volunteer at school if I had more time.

APPENDIX B

To: Bruce & Del

From: Keri Peterson

Re: Parent Involvement Questionnaire for the ELC

Date: May 13, 2002

As you may know I am working to complete my Master's Degree from Stout in the area of Early Childhood. My thesis topic is parental involvement. I have developed a questionnaire (attached) regarding parental involvement in the Early Learning Center at Tiffany Creek.

It is my hope to gather feedback from the parents of children in the ELC in order to improve and strengthen our outreach programming. I am most interested in how well we are doing in involving both mothers and fathers in our program. In order to gain the most feedback as possible, a questionnaire will be given to BOTH mothers and fathers, independent of one another.

With your permission, I would like to invite parents to complete the questionnaire at our last F.E.S.T. on May 21st. Because I would like a larger sample, I am including parents of children from the 2000-2001 school year (current kindergarteners) as well. Their surveys would be sent home in the children's take-home folders with a cover letter and a SASE to return to me at school. I will be paying for the copies and postage personally.

Ideally, I'd like to get the current kindergarten parents' surveys sent home by Thursday, May 16th. Is it possible to hear from you by then?

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Keri Peterson