

Report of Parent Involvement Project Findings

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Teachers were recruited to participate in this parent involvement project. Families from 8 classrooms (5 Head Start classrooms and 3 Pre-kindergarten) agreed to participate. Teachers were asked to recruit willing parents and children, with the knowledge that children would be bringing home activities or ideas to increase parent involvement. The intervention occurred from mid-September through early December 2009.

Teachers recruited 83 parents to participate, with 54% the parents of female children and 46% the parents of male children. Fifty-nine percent of parents recruited are married, 30% are single parents, 6% are divorced, and 4% are currently separated. In terms of education level, 31% have a high school education or below, 50% have some college, and 19% have a college degree or higher. Before the intervention, parents rated their level of involvement in their child's education as 2.93 on a 4.0 scale (not at all, very little, quite a bit, too much). Parent involvement in this project ranged from one family in one classroom to 25 families in another classroom. As stated above, 83 families agreed to participate in the project. 2 families moved before or during the intervention, and 3 parents did not complete the posttest, for a final retention rate of 93%. See Table 1 for more detail.

Table 1. Number of parents involved in each classroom and number not completing project.

Classroom Number	Families beginning project	Families withdrawing from project	Families not completing the posttest
1	4	0	1
2	13	2	0
3	3	0	0
4	9	0	0
5	14	0	0
6	14	0	1
7	1	0	0
8	25	0	1

Parents were asked how they were involved in their child's education at the beginning of the 10 week intervention. Responses given are tallied in Table 2 and indicate that parents are mostly involved with helping their children around reading, learning the alphabet, working on numbers, counting, shapes, and colors, and helping children with homework. Parents also spend time talking to children about their time at school.

Table 2. Parents' responses of their involvement in children's education.

In what ways are you involved in your child's education?	Number responding
Reading to/with my child	26
Working on numbers, counting, shapes, colors, and/or puzzles	29
Helping with things child needs to learn/Homework help	18
Work on alphabet	12
Talk about what child did in school	10
Visit school/volunteer	9
Go to school meetings/activities/conferences	6
Educational activities	6
Play with child	5
PTA/parent-teacher communication	5
Build relationships with teacher	4
Check child's work	4
Practice writing child's name	3
Field trips	3
Learning songs/singing	3
Teaching social skills	2
Allowing child to help with house tasks	2
Sending projects to school	1
Doing exercises with child	1
Go on nature walks	1
Go over address and birthday	1
Teach child how to draw	1
Take child fishing	1

Parents were also asked how they would like to be involved in their children's education, and the most common responses were any way possible/whatever the teacher recommends and work in the classroom. See Table 3 for further information.

Table 3. Parents’ responses of how they would like to be involved in their children’s education.

How else would you like to be involved in your child’s education?	Number responding
Any way possible/whatever teacher recommends	17
Volunteer in classroom	11
Not sure	4
Field trips	3
Work with child on what teacher is working on in class	3
Extra activities	2
Help with homework	2
More activities—the activity boxes from 3K Pea-cok* program were excellent (*local school district program for 3 year-old children with their parents)	2
Learning skills such as ABC’s and writing name	1

During the intervention, teachers sent home one activity each week for 10 weeks. The researchers randomly assigned students to groups so that they could investigate parents’ participation in different types of activities sent home by teachers. This method of assignment prevented bias such as asking parents who always comply to participate in the more intensive activities. Three different types of activities were sent home:

Level 1 activities were suggestions. The 10 activities assigned were interactive and ranged from a sticker suggestion of an activity to a classroom door-sign. There was no requirement of returning any evidence of activity completion and all activities could be completed with resources in their home.

Level 2 activities included suggestions with prompts. They were sometimes the same suggestion as the level one activities but provided resources to work with or some form of follow-through record. Five of the 10 activities suggested returning them to the program as evidence of completion. Staff did not do any follow-ups seeking the items be returned. Again the tasks required no additional resources from the family to complete. The activities ranged from stamped craft sticks for counting, to a body part checklist with stickers.

Level 3 activities were shared manipulatives for parents/families to use. 8 of the 10 resources were set up as a lending library and 2 activities were resources given to the family. There was a blend of resources provided. The Learning Games and Book Bag are resources available for purchase. Other activities were assembled for the research project such as the *Monkeys On the Bed* activity bag.

At the end of the 10 week study parents were asked how many times and how long they spent doing each activity. In general, parents spent around 20-30 minutes each time doing the more popular activities. Those are activities that parents did more often with their children as well. As can be seen in Table 4, overall, parents spent more time in Level 3 activities than other activities, but parents also spent more time in some Level 2 activities than Level 1 activities.

Table 4. Time (in minutes) parents were involved in activities with children, by level of intensity.

Variable	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
How long did you spend doing Activity 1?	19.00	22.53	26.67
How many times did you work on Activity 1?	2.75	2.69	3.21
How long did you spend doing Activity 2?	19.00	16.17	21.09
How many times did you work on Activity 2?	2.83	1.87	2.87*
How long did you spend doing Activity 3?	5.88	20.78#	24.58+
How many times did you work on Activity 3?	.88	2.62#	3.17+
How long did you spend doing Activity 4?	11.04	16.75	18.70+
How many times did you work on Activity 4?	1.71	2.15	2.26
How long did you spend doing Activity 5?	9.41	20.52#	18.42+
How many times did you work on Activity 5?	.75	2.04#	2.05+
How long did you spend doing Activity 6?	11.74	16.62	29.58+*
How many times did you work on Activity 6?	2.57	2.22	2.46
How long did you spend doing Activity 7?	18.44	24.15	27.60+
How many times did you work on Activity 7?	2.96	3.27	3.68
How long did you spend doing Activity 8?	14.20	19.31	22.27
How many times did you work on Activity 8?	1.96	2.48	3.41+
How long did you spend doing Activity 9?	12.20	13.59	18.75+
How many times did you work on Activity 9?	2.52	1.96	1.91
How long did you spend doing Activity 10?	18.52#	8.70	21.19*
How many times did you work on Activity 10?	2.57#	1.04	2.24*
How many people worked with your child on activities?	2.04	1.93	2.56+*
How many total activities did you do with your child?	6.44	7.33	8.24+

Group 1: 23-25 respondents **Group 2:** 20-27 respondents **Group 3:** 21-25 respondents

+: means that group 3 is statistically different from group 1 (+ symbol is next to group that is favored).

#: means that group 2 is statistically different from group 1 (# symbol is next to group that is favored).

*: means that group 3 is statistically different from group 2. (*symbol is next to group that is favored).

Note: Because this was an exploratory project, any differences at $p < .10$ were included.

After the 10 weeks of involving parents through activities that teachers sent home with their pre-k children, teachers were asked about the involvement of parents and students. Teachers consistently rated Level 2 and 3 parents and students as the most involved (see Table 5).

Table 5. Teachers' ratings of involvement of parents and students.

Question asked:	Mean (1=not at all; 2=very little; 3=neutral; 4=somewhat interested; 5=very interested)	Standard deviation
How involved were Level 1 parents?	3.64	.93
How involved were Level 1 students?	3.54	1.05
How involved were Level 2 parents?	4.38	.51
How involved were Level 2 students?	4.45	.52
How involved were Level 3 parents?	4.62	.65
How involved were Level 3 students?	4.58	.67

Teachers were asked to indicate which strategies they felt were effective in engaging families. Their results are indicated in Table 5. As can be seen by Table 6, teachers consistently felt that Level 3 activities, and to a lesser extent, Level 2 activities, were effective in engaging families. However, it is also important to note that some Level 1 activities, which consisted of only suggested activities, were perceived to be effective in engaging parents.

Table 6. Effectiveness of activities in engaging families, by level.

Topic	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Body parts	.78	.78	.78
Reading	.44	.22	.67
Shapes	.00	.67	.89
Numbers and counting	.56	.56	.78
Hide and Seek	.00	.33	.67
Colors	.56	.44	.56
Monkeys on the bed	.67	.89	.78
Numbers/counting/puzzles	.00	.56	.67
Name spelling	.00	.44	.56
Calendar activity	.00	.11	.67

If the results of Tables 4 and 5 are compared, one can see that teachers' impressions of the activities' abilities to engage parents are often reflected in the amount of time that parents spent actually engaging in the activities, indicating that overall, teachers' impressions were confirmed by parents' behavior.

Teachers were also asked how challenging maintaining and inventorying the game parts of the Level 3 activities was to them. Teachers indicated that it was perhaps a little bit of an issue (1.62 on a 4 point scale from not an issue to a serious challenge), with one teacher saying she had to ask some families every day to bring back the supplies, another saying that parents only needed a couple of reminders, and another saying she just had to stay on top of families who hadn't returned the materials. When teachers were asked how difficult the process of sharing the materials was, they indicated that it was perhaps a little bit of an issue (1.58 on a 4 point scale from not an issue to a serious challenge), with teachers commenting that the rotation of materials worked well and if resources were not returned on time it was a problem. When asked if they would continue using the materials from the project with families, teachers strongly indicated that they would (2.87 on a 3.0 point scale). One teacher commented that it is a good involvement resource; another said the materials may become part of the parent resource room, and another said she would probably use the activities on family involvement days. All teachers said that the activities were easy to use. Teachers also seemed to believe that the parent involvement project provided more interactions with families involved (2.33 on a 3 point scale).

When asked what worked well in the process of involving parents, teachers responded that notes home with stickers on children, having parents choose to be involved, activities that used less outside resources, letters and discussions with parents, daily contact with parents, and talking one on one helped involve parents. When asked what they would change about the process of involving families, teachers would ask for written feedback about every activity, offer parents to be able to participate at any time, hold a parent involvement classroom session, and ask about the ability level of the children on the initial survey. When teachers were asked what additional materials would support their efforts to involve families, they noted that having take home information for parents on how to work with students or activities to do, have more activities that don't contain a lot of outside materials (such as having parents and children find different shapes at home), having a special parent involvement classroom session, having an early newsletter and follow-up during the sign-up process, and having hands on activities for parents to do with their children would be helpful.

When teachers were asked how involved parents are in their children's education, they clearly thought they are quite involved (2.87 on a 3 point scale). When asked how they are typically involved, teachers said home visits, conferences, field trips, volunteering in the room, school activities, listening to ideas during conferences to

help their child learn concepts, working with children on homework, participating on Policy council and committees, and communicating with teachers when they pick up or drop off their children. When asked how else they would like parents to be involved, teachers said volunteering in the classroom, asking more questions on how to help their children, working with children at home, reading to their children, spending one on one time with their children, visiting the classroom more, encouraging children's skills at home, and seeing that teachers are educators not babysitters.

Parent comments on the posttest were rich with positive feedback. Following are samples of some of the responses:

"This was a great way to get children/parents involved. My son was happy to bring something home every Wednesday". Level 3 participant

"It brought all of us together to do fun activities. ... Thank-You!" Level 3 participant

"I love spending time with _____. I just need more time ☺" Level 1 participant

"Thanks for letting us be part of this project." Level 3 participant

"It was interesting to see the improvements..." Level 1 participant

"Being held accountable (turning something) made us work harder on it." Level 2 comment

"I like doing the kits...they are fun to do and they help us ... " Level 3 family

They seem to enjoy the game packets the most." Level 3 parent

Only 3 families responded that they did not wish to continue receiving the activities. Those families were receiving level 1 and 2 activities---all from level 3 wished to continue getting resources.

Returned activities and even the pre/post tests carried parent communication asking for information in regards to specific and general development concerns.

Conclusions and Recommendations

When teachers sent activities or suggestions home with children, parents often spent some time completing the activities. However, when teachers sent resources home with specific instruction for how parents should complete them (as in Level 3 activities), parents responded by spending a greater amount of time engaged in the activities with their children, and by doing them several times. When asked how they would like to be involved in their children's education, seventeen said in any way possible or whatever the teacher wanted them to do. Likewise, when teachers were asked how they would like parents to be involved in their children's education, their responses focused on having parents help their children with skills at home.

It is apparent that teachers and parents have similar requests: parents practicing and building skills at home with their children. Without giving parents guidance on what might be useful to practice at home, parents may practice skills that aren't useful for the child's progress. However, if teachers clearly state their expectations and give parents concrete suggestions with resources to work with for helping their children succeed; many of the parents in this project would be likely to assist. Theoretically these families would be assisting teachers in their difficult task of educating young children. Teachers have little time for one-on-one interaction with children; parents have the time, and with instruction, could be excellent tutors for children. The results of this project indicate that such practice may indeed help students to increase their learning, and is a strong recommendation from this project.