A recently published article by Judy Pfannenstiel, Ph.D., of Research and Training Associates, and Victoria Seitz, Ph.D., and Edward Zigler, Ph.D., of Yale University reports that parent participation in the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program has important effects on children’s school readiness and that PAT is “highly effective in helping impoverished parents prepare their children to enter school.” (p. 81).

The study involved 2,375 kindergarten children who were a part of the Missouri School Assessment Project, which was designed to collect information about the school readiness and pre-kindergarten experiences of children entering kindergarten. Participation was determined by randomly selecting public schools across Missouri.

After six weeks of school in the fall of 1998, teachers evaluated the knowledge, skills and behaviors of the kindergartners. Teachers were trained to use a 65-item rating scale to assess children’s school readiness in seven areas of development. Parents also completed surveys to provide background information about children’s health and health care, learning experiences at home, and participation in PAT, preschool, and child care services. PAT is offered free of charge through local school districts to all Missouri families with children ages 5 and under, and is a common early childhood experience for children in Missouri.

Results showed that parents who participated in PAT programs read to their children more often and were more likely to enroll their children in preschool, which, in turn, had positive effects on children’s school readiness scores. These results are not surprising, given that PAT stresses parent support of children’s early literacy through responsive parent-child interaction, shared book reading, and home literacy activities. PAT also focuses on the optimal development of the whole child as the foundation of school readiness.

The most powerful finding that emerged from the study was that the school readiness scores of children in high poverty schools who participated in PAT were equivalent to those of children at low poverty schools with no preschool enrichment (PAT or preschool). In addition, when children attending high poverty schools participated in both PAT and preschool, their scores were significantly higher than those of children in low poverty schools with no preschool enrichment (PAT or preschool).

Detailed results of the study are reported in Pfannenstiel, J. C., Seitz, V., & Zigler, E. (2002). Promoting school readiness: The role of the Parents as Teachers Program. *NHSA Dialog: A Research-to-Practice Journal for the Early Intervention Field*, 6, 71-86.