Family-School Partnerships in Prekindergarten At-Risk Programs: An Exploratory Study

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The Impact of Home Visitation vs. Family Center Models

With an increasing number of families characterized by single-parent households, reconstituted or blended families, foster homes, extended families, with relatives, or in a variety of other family situations, early childhood programs are serving preschool and kindergarten students from more diverse backgrounds (Epstein, 1988; Powell, 1989). The challenge for family support professionals working in early childhood settings is to restructure their program policies and practices to reflect the new realities of the diverse backgrounds of the children being served. In addition, a number of states and local public school systems are offering programs for preschool aged children from economically disadvantaged and high-risk backgrounds (Karweit, 1993). As a result, educators are increasingly being called upon to develop appropriate ways of working with children and families from cultural and linguistic backgrounds that are different from their own (Powell, 1989).

In addition to these changes in family structure, parents, educators, and policymakers are all asserting the value of positive home-school partnerships. In a recent national survey, 95% of public school parents indicated that it is very important to encourage families to take a more active part in educating their children (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1993). Along with the polls of public opinion on the importance of involving families in children's education, studies have consistently indicated that active parental involvement in elementary school settings can have a positive impact on all aspects of a child's school

performance (Connors & Epstein, 1995; Henderson, 1987; Powell, 1989).

Support for this emphasis on parental involvement in early childhood settings is limited (Taylor & Machida, 1994). For example, since its inception in the mid-1960s, Head Start programs have been required to include a parental involvement component (Brush, Gaidurgis, & Best, 1993), yet only 5 of the 76 studies included in the Head Start synthesis Project meta-analysis addressed the impact of such involvement (McKey, Condelli, Ganson, Barrett, McConkey, & Plantz, 1985). These 5 studies provide limited support for the view that a positive relationship exists between parental involvement in Head Start and children's cognitive development. Two more recent studies add to this limited support base for parental involvement in early childhood programs. In a large-scale longitudinal study of inner-city minority children identified as being at risk for later school failure, Reynolds (1991, 1992) found that parental involvement in kindergarten programs had both direct and indirect impacts on student achievement in math and reading one and two years later. Similarly, Taylor and Machida (1994) found that active parental involvement in Head Start programs led to improved classroom behaviors and higher learning skills at the end of the school year.

In spite of limited empirical support, a belief in the value of positive home-school partnerships has moved early childhood programs toward including parent involvement activities as an important component of their programs. In addition, local school systems that offer prekindergarten programs for children from economically disadvantaged and "high-risk" backgrounds are typically required to include a family/parent involvement component in order to receive state funds (Karweit, 1993). The increasing numbers of states and local public school systems offering prekindergarten programs for children identified as being at-risk for later school failure and the emphasis on the importance of including a parent involvement component present challenges to family support and early childhood professionals. Reynolds (1992), McLoyd (1990), Comer (1988), and others have argued that low-income families face many problems (e.g., financial distress, psychological stress, etc.) that make parental involvement less likely to occur in school settings. The same holds true for early childhood programs. Powell (1993) suggests that little is known about which parental involvement strategies are most effective in meeting the needs of the diverse groups of families being served by early childhood programs and what barriers may be limiting their implementation.

In order to reach out to parents from diverse backgrounds, schools need to offer a broad range of options to families. Adding a home visitation component of parent involvement initiatives has been one way of supporting families that might be too distrustful or uncomfortable with center-based programs. Research conducted by Robert and Wasik (1990) indicates there are more than 4,000 home visiting programs currently in the US. The most frequently identified purpose of these home visitation programs was to promote children's development (e.g., physical, cognitive, social-emotional, etc.) and to provide

general support for families to enhance parenting skills.

Recently, early childhood educators have begun to express interest in home visitation and the opportunities this approach provides to work with individuals within a family context, and to understand more about the life situation of children and families. This interest in home visitation programs, however, is not new. Home visiting programs have existed in the US since the 1890s in a variety of forms in health, education, and social support programs (Gomby, Larson, Lewit, & Behrman, 1993). Home visiting has been utilized as a means to enhance children's cognitive and social development, particularly in early intervention programs established in the 1960s and 1970s for children with special needs (Powell, 1990). Head Start programs also used home visitation to provide educational and social services to children and families (Zigler & Freedman, 1987).

The ultimate goal of most programs that utilize home visitation is to promote child and parent outcomes. Historically, the emphasis of involving parents in home visiting programs has been on teaching parenting skills with the assumption that desirable changes in parents would contribute to children's developmental outcomes. More recently, however, there has been an equal emphasis on child and adult outcomes. That is, home visiting programs also seek to improve parental outcomes such as adult literacy, parenting competency, and job training (Powell, 1993a). Home visiting services play an important role in helping families coping with poverty and social isolation by building a bridge between families and needed resources. These services can also help families understand their feelings and become more capable in their lives (Halpern, 1993).

Despite the historical and recent interest in home visiting programs, there is limited research evidence regarding the effectiveness of this approach (Powell, 1990). Findings from such studies are mixed. In addition, home visiting programs vary in their goals, assumptions, content, and staffing (Powell, 1993a). Most studies on the impact of programs that utilize home visitation examine the developmental outcomes of children with special needs in early intervention programs. For example, based on their longitudinal study comparing the cost-effectiveness of a center-based, low parent involvement intervention and a home parent training intervention program for preschool children with moderate speech disorders, Eiserman, Weber, and McCoun (1992, 1995) report a general comparability between the two program models. Although their results did not show the superiority of one type of program over another, findings did indicate the need to offer various options to families in the programs. These authors suggest that different types of interventions may be beneficial for different groups of children and families. In a similar cost-benefit analysis study that compared home-based and center-based interventions, Barnett, Escobar, and Ravsten (1988) found that home-based intervention programs were more efficient than center-based interventions

in terms of children's language improvement.

These studies examined the impact of home-based vs. center-based intervention programs on children's developmental outcomes. There is limited empirical data that examines the impact of different models of program delivery on the various types of parental involvement activities in early childhood settings. The purpose of the current exploratory study was to empirically examine the various ways in which parents become involved in state-funded prekindergarten programs for children identified as being at-risk for later school failure, and to identify patterns of parental participation that occur in response to the different models of home-school partnership initiatives (i.e., home visitation vs. center-based models).

The concept of parental involvement has been a primary cornerstone of efforts by state and local school systems in implementing prekindergarten programs for children at risk for later school failure. A major problem with many of these efforts has been the inconsistency and lack of coherence in how parental involvement is defined (Reynolds, 1992). In this study, the concept of parent involvement was defined in terms of Epstein's (1987) model of parent involvement. Epstein's (1987) typology breaks down the concept of parent involvement into five categories: Type 1: Basic Obligations of Parents (e.g., building positive home environments that foster learning and development of children); Type 2: Basic Obligations of Schools (e.g., communicating with parents about program expectations, children's progress, and evaluations); Type 3: Parent Involvement at School (e.g., volunteering in classrooms to help teachers, students, and other parents); Type 4: Parent Involvement in Learning and Developmental Activities at Home (e.g., providing information and ideas to parents about how to interact with children to help them with reading activities, learning packets); and Type 5: Parent Involvement in Governance and Advocacy (e.g., including parents in school decisions, advisory councils, and parent-teacher organizations).

Although originally used in work with elementary and secondary schools, this model has been found to be applicable in guiding the development of comprehensive parental involvement components of public school prekindergarten programs for children at risk for later school failure (Epstein, 1992). It is also reflective of the move by many states and locally funded school-based prekindergarten programs toward providing comprehensive services as they attempt to meet the needs of children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds (Powell, 1993).

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the various ways in which parents become involved in state-funded prekindergarten programs for children identified as being at-risk for later school failure. Unlike most studies which examine the impact of parental involvement on the developmental outcome of the children, the focus of the current investigation was to collect descriptive data on the impact of different models of program delivery (a

home visitation versus family center model) on the various types of parental involvement activities implemented and patterns of parental involvement that occur. The following research questions were used to guide data collection: 1) What types of parent involvement and home-school partnership initiatives are planned and implemented? 2) How do the different models of parental involvement initiatives (home visitation versus family center model) influence the nature and method of the initiatives, who initiated them, and the frequency and proportion of family members of enrolled children who had contact with school staff members? 3) What are the factors that encourage and facilitate parent involvement in prekindergarten at-risk programs?

Participants

The target populations for this exploratory study were 21 teachers at two state-funded prekindergarten at-risk programs in neighboring Midwestern public school systems. Both programs enroll children ages three and four that come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These children have been identified as being at-risk for later school failure based on a combination of the poverty level status of their families along with other risk factors such as teen parents, foster parents, single parent households, and limited education of the parents. These programs provide a variety of comprehensive services such as preschool classes, parent education and support groups, adult education classes, and family resource centers for enrolled children and their families. Both programs are funded by the State Board of Education and are similar to each other in all aspects (e.g., funding base, criteria for enrollment, services provided to enrolled children and their families, staff training and backgrounds, and families being served) except for the models used to facilitate parent involvement and home-school partnerships. The close proximity of the location of the two programs (i.e., communities that share common boundaries) helped in facilitating the data collection process and ensured similar populations being served by both prekindergarten programs.

One program uses a home visitation model to establish home-school partnerships while the other utilizes a family center model for parental involvement initiatives. Teachers in the program involving home visitation make home visits one day per week to families of enrolled children. The second program utilizes a family center model which offers various parent involvement services that encourage families to be involved at school.

Data Collection/Measures

All seven teachers at the home visitation program and all 14 teachers at the family center model participated in data collection procedures for the study. The primary method used in data collection for the current study was

the gathering of information on the various parental involvement strategies implemented by school personnel and the patterns of parental participation that occur in response to the different types of home-school partnership initiatives. Detailed information was collected in thirteen two-week segments during the 1996/97 academic year for all parent involvement activities and contacts teachers had at both prekindergarten at-risk programs. The majority of the information collected was already required in one form or another by the State Board of Education, but not at the level of detail needed for the current study. Based on information gained from a pilot study, a data-recording sheet was developed for the teachers to use in tracking all initiatives involving family members. On this sheet teachers would record information for each contact they had with a parent and/or family member. The types of information recorded for each contact included the method of contact (i.e., phone, school visit, home visit, note, other), the nature/focus of the contact (i.e., developmental progress, behavior, health issues, materials request, volunteer request, administrative, classroom visit, learning & developmental activities, relationship building, parent support, advocacy/advisory, and other), who initiated the contact (i.e., school, family/home), and who was contacted (i.e., parent, relative). Data recorded on these sheets reflected a continuum of parent involvement contacts teachers had (e.g., one-on-one parent/teacher conferences to family members attending a school open house event).

To simplify the data collection process and ensure greater consistency of data, teachers at both program sites were trained in how to use the data recording sheets at the beginning of the academic year in which parent involvement data was collected. Once trained, teachers used the data recording sheets to track their parent involvement contacts as opposed to the contact logs normally required by the State Board of Education. A four-week period of time was used to allow teachers to become comfortable with the data recording sheets before actual data for the study was collected. During this time, research assistants visited each teacher on a weekly basis to review information recorded on their sheets, to clarify ambiguous information recorded, to identify potential problem areas, and to answer any questions the teachers may have had. Once the four-week training and familiarization period had been completed, parent involvement data for the study was collected at both sites in thirteen consecutive two-week segments. Research assistants held biweekly meetings with each teacher at the end of each two-week period to review and collect the data recording sheets, clarify any ambiguous information, and answer any possible questions. At the end of the 26-week data collection period, each teacher received a $250 stipend as partial compensation for the extra time required to assist in this data collection process.

At the beginning of the academic year in which parent involvement data was collected, teachers at both sites completed a packet of questionnaires that included items on demographic backgrounds, attitudinal measures on

parent involvement in early childhood settings, and open-ended questions. Demographic items in the questionnaires included the teacher's age, educational background, years in the profession, and number of parent involvement courses taken as an undergraduate and graduate.

An adapted version of the General Attitudes Toward Parent Involvement (GATPI; Garinger & McBride, 1995) scale was used to assess teachers' attitudes toward parent involvement in early childhood programs. The adapted version of the GATPI asked teachers to respond to 13 items along a five-point Likert type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = no opinion; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree). Sample items from this measure include, "Parent involvement can help teachers be more effective with students." and "Teachers cannot take the time to involve parents in meaningful ways." Positively and negatively worded items were included in the GATPI in order to prevent a response bias. Internal consistency on this measure was moderately high, with an alpha of .68.

Three open-ended questions were included in the questionnaires completed by all teachers. These questions asked teachers to identify what they considered to be the benefit of encouraging parent involvement in early childhood programs, the barriers that limit the amount of parent involvement, and those factors that would facilitate parent involvement in prekindergarten at-risk programs. All responses were categorized according to themes that emerged for each question. To ensure reliability in the construction of themes and coding of response items, two members of the research team independently reviewed responses from the questionnaires and identified themes that emerged. Identification of themes and coding of responses completed individually were then compared. Discrepancies in the identified themes and coding of items were highlighted, with responses being reviewed and discussed until a consensus was reached on the coding. The level of agreement on the initial coding of responses was .71.

Results

Means and standard deviations were computed on each of the demographic measures, as well as scores on the General Attitudes Toward Parent Involvement measure (see Table 1). Due to the exploratory nature of the study being reported on as well as the relatively small sample size (i.e., 14 teachers at the family center based model and 7 at the home visitation model), p values of .10 or less were used to determine whether significant differences existed in all analyses conducted. Scores on the GATPI suggest that teachers at both programs held fairly positive viewpoints of parent involvement in general. Independent means t-tests revealed no significant differences between teachers in the family center model and those in the home visitation model on any of the demographic variables, as well as scores on the General

Attitudes Toward Parent Involvement measures. These findings indicate that teachers at both sites had similar backgrounds in terms of their education and teaching experience, and that both groups held similar attitudes toward parent involvement in general.

Information from the data recording sheets for each of the 13 two-week periods was collapsed to provide a composite picture of the parent involvement contacts teachers had during this 26-week period. Proportions of contacts were used for each of the major coding categories (i.e., method of contact, nature/focus of contact, who initiated contact, who was contacted) to provide a descriptive picture of different types of home-school partnership initiatives that were planned and implemented, and patterns of parent involvement that occurred in response to the different home-school partnership initiatives (see Table 2). Proportional scores were used due to the unequal number of teachers in the home visitation program and center-based models, as well as the resulting difference in the total number of parent involvement contacts over the 26-week period.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations—Demographics and Attitudinal Measures

Variable	Center-Based Model[a]		Home Visit Model[b]	
	M	SD	M	SD
Teacher's Age	32.86	8.98	34.00	12.08
Teacher's Education[c]	2.64	.63	2.43	.79
Years in Profession	9.36	7.75	9.86	8.03
Parent Involvement Courses—Undergraduate	.93	.99	.86	.90
Parent Involvement Courses—Graduate	1.14	1.10	.57	.53
General Attitudes Toward Parent Involvement Scale	56.14	4.55	57.14	2.48

[a] n = 14
[b] n = 7
[c] 1 = high school diploma, 2 = BS, 3 = MS/MEd, 4 = EdS, 5 = Ph.D./EdD

Responses to the open-ended questions that asked what teachers con-sidered as the benefits of encouraging parent involvement in early childhood programs, barriers that limit the amount of parent involvement, and factors that would facilitate parent involvement in prekindergarten at-risk programs were categorized according to the themes that emerged. The proportion of

Table 2. Proportion of Parent Involvement Contacts by Category

Contact Category	Center-Based Model	Home Visit Model	t^a
Method of Contact			
phone	.19	.20	-.26
school visit	.29	.35	1.40
home visit	.13	.01	-7.18***
note	.49	.32	2.31**
Nature of Contact			
developmental			
progress	.21	.16	1.01
behavioral issues	.03	.03	-.56
health issues	.08	.03	3.00***
material requests	.01	.01	.88
volunteer requests	.03	.06	-2.32**
administrative	.41	.48	-1.16
classroom visits	.01	.04	-2.98**
learning activities	.05	.10	-1.53
relationship building	.11	.06	2.17**
parent support	.01	.02	-1.57
other	.04	.01	2.20*
Who Initiatied Contact			
school	.32	.47	-2.13**
family/home	.67	.52	2.13**

Research Question 2

How do the different models of parental involvement initiatives (a home visitation versus family center model) influence the nature and method of the initiatives, which initiated them, and the frequency and proportion of family members of enrolled children who had contact with school staff members? In order to address the second research question, independent means t-tests were conducted on the proportional scores for the various types of parental involvement activities implemented. Due to the small number of participants and exploratory nature of the study, statistical significance was set at $p < .10$. Analyses revealed several significant differences in the two different programs in terms of the patterns of parent involvement. Significant differences in the method of contact emerged. Obviously, teachers in the program that utilized a home visitation component reported a significantly higher proportion of parent

contacts via home visits than teachers in the center-based model (t = -7.18, p<.01). Teachers in the family center model used "written notes" significantly more as a means to contact families than teachers in the home visitation model (t = 2.31, p< .05). Several significant differences were revealed in terms of the nature of contact made in the two different program models as well. Results indicated that families who have children enrolled in the home visitation model volunteered significantly more (t = -2.33, p < .05) in school events including accompanying children on field trips, bringing in snacks, and helping with in-class activities. These families also visited classrooms significantly more than the families of children enrolled in the family center model (t = -2.98, p< .01). Significant differences between the two types of programs were revealed in two other categories of nature of contact. More contacts related to health issues (t = 3.00, p< .01) and relationship building (t = 2.17, p< .05) were made between teachers and families in the family center based model compared to those in the home visitation model.

Analyses also revealed significant differences in terms of who initiated contacts between school and families at the two sites. Findings indicated that teachers in the home visitation program initiated a significantly higher proportion of contacts with families than the teachers in the family center program (t = -2.13, p < .05). In contrast, families in the family center model initiated a significantly higher proportion of the contacts with schools than those in the home visitation programs (t = 2.13, p < .05). These findings suggest that different models of parental involvement initiatives (a home visitation versus family center model) may influence the method used for parent involvement contacts, nature of these contacts, and patterns of parental involvement that occur in response to the types of home-school partnership initiatives.

Research Question 3

What are the factors that encourage and facilitate parent involvement in prekindergarten at-risk programs? In order to address the third research question, three open-ended questions were asked of teachers at both sites. These questions asked teachers to identify what they consider as the benefits of encouraging parent involvement in early childhood programs, the barriers that limit the amount of parent involvement, and those factors that would facilitate parent involvement in prekindergarten at-risk programs. As mentioned above, the percentage of the teachers (i.e., proportion) who gave responses to each of the major themes was used due to the unequal number of teachers in the home visitation and family center models and the resulting difference in the total number of responses.

Teachers at both sites (86% of the teachers in the home visitation program and 57% of the teachers in the family center program) identified the major benefit of involving parents as empowerment and increased level of parent

responsibility. In addition, teachers in the home visitation program viewed support and encouragement for children's learning (71%) and improved learning at school (57%) as the major benefits of parent involvement. Forty-three percent of the teachers in the family center model indicated that the major benefits of involving parents include conveying to children that school is important. Thirty-six percent also identified better understanding of children on teachers' part as a benefit of parent involvement.

In terms of the barriers that limit the amount of parent involvement in early childhood programs, parents' work schedule and lack of time (57% of the teachers in the home visitation program and 50% of the teachers in the family center program) emerged as the biggest barrier at both sites. At the same time, analyses revealed several differences between teachers in the two programs regarding what they saw as barriers to parent participation. Forty-two percent of the teachers in the home visitation program saw multiple stressors under which families live and parents' negative past school experience as major barriers to parent involvement. Twenty-nine percent of these teachers also identified work overloads on the part of school personnel as a barrier. In contrast, 36% of the teachers in the family center model identified a lack of transportation and logistical constraints (i.e., disconnected telephones, messages not reaching home from school) as barriers to parent involvement, while 29% identified parents' lack of interest or perceived importance of home-school partnerships as a factor that limits parent participation. Twenty-one percent of these teachers also saw parents' lack of comfort and negative past school experience as a barrier. Only one teacher in the home visitation program saw lack of transportation and logistical constraints as factors that limit parents' ability to become involved with the program.

When asked to identify those factors that would encourage and facilitate parent involvement in early childhood programs, most teachers expressed the need for dedicated time for parent involvement activities (e.g., "free up time for teachers to contact parents," "allow 1 day per week for planning and implementation of parent involvement activities"). In addition, 43% of the teachers in the program that utilized home visitation indicated that dedicating staff members for parent involvement activities (e.g., employing family support staff to work with families, hiring assistants so that teachers have more time to contact families) would facilitate parent involvement. At the same time, 36% of the teachers in the center based model identified the need to sponsor parent involvement activities (e.g., "provide a variety of opportunities for parents to become involved," "provide parent education on importance of involvement") in order to encourage and facilitate parental involvement.

Discussion

As early childhood programs move toward offering programs for children

from low income and high-risk backgrounds and as the field of education acknowledges the importance of involving parents in their children's educational process, it is important to be aware of the different types of home-school partnership initiatives that effectively meet the needs of diverse groups of families. Data from this exploratory study provide information on the impact of a home visitation versus family center model of home-school partnership initiatives utilized in prekindergarten programs for children identified as being at-risk for later school failure. Despite the small number of participants and the exploratory nature of the study, analysis of the data has revealed significantly different patterns of parental involvement that occur in response to the different types of initiatives implemented by school personnel.

Findings from the exploratory analyses revealed that the most frequently used methods of contact in both programs were written notes sent to homes and families coming to schools. The most frequent foci of contacts at prekindergarten programs were regarding administrative work and children's developmental progress. From these results, it could be concluded that a relatively large proportion of parent involvement activities are geared toward maintaining the ongoing functions of the program (e.g., administrative work such as making appointments for parent-teacher conferences, asking parents to return permission slips for fieldtrips) and children's developmental outcomes (e.g., discussing a child's social development, school readiness). Similarities found in both programs may be reflective of the similar educational backgrounds and teaching experiences of the teachers in both schools, as well as very similar populations (i.e., children and families in neighboring communities) being served.

Although exploratory in nature, the results from this study are encouraging for continued research aimed at identifying factors that encourage and facilitate positive home-school partnerships that effectively meet the needs of diverse groups of families. Several significant differences between the two programs were identified in terms of the method and nature of parent involvement contacts. Teachers in the home visitation program made a significantly higher proportion of parent contacts through home visitation than those in the center based model. Although teachers at both programs frequently used written notes as a means to contact families, teachers in the family center model used notes significantly more than teachers in the home visitation program. These findings provide an indication that families in the home visitation program have more chances to meet with teachers. These families also volunteered significantly more in school events and visited classrooms significantly more than the families of children enrolled in the family center model. Although direct causal relationships cannot be assumed, these findings suggest that the home visitation component of the program helped parents feel more comfortable to actively involve themselves in the education-related activities.

Findings also indicated that significantly more contacts focused on relation-

ship building were made between teachers and families in the family center based model compared to those in the home visitation model. One possible explanation for this difference revolves around the nature of home visitation programs. Teachers in this program regularly visit families of enrolled children in their homes (a minimum of four times for each child's family during the school year). It can be assumed that these teachers are able to build and maintain rapport with family members as a result of these home visits, thus freeing them to focus on other issues when having contact and/or interacting with them. Teachers in the family center model on the other hand do not have these continuous opportunities for relationship building, and thus must spend time on this issue as part of most contacts with families.

Significant differences emerged between the two programs when exploring who initiated parental involvement contacts. Teachers in the home visitation program initiated a significantly higher proportion of contacts with families than teachers in the family center program. This suggests that teachers in the home visitation program reach out to families more than those in the other program. In contrast, parents in the family center model initiated a significantly higher proportion of the contacts with teachers than parents in the home visitation program. It was beyond the scope of this study to explore whether all families had equal chances of contacts with schools. It could be assumed that when teachers reach out to families, they would make efforts to provide all the families with somewhat equal opportunities of contacts with schools. However, when families initiate contacts more than teachers, it is more likely that only selected and/or motivated families would initiate contacts. Future research in this area will need to explore whether all families have similar contacts with schools and what types of home-school partnership initiatives lead to different outcomes.

Findings from the open-ended items on the questionnaire indicated that teachers at both sites saw the major benefits of involving parents as empowerment and increased level of parent responsibility. It is worth noting that a majority of the teachers considered "parent outcomes" rather than "child outcomes" as being the primary benefactor of parent involvement in early childhood programs. These findings are in line with the recent trend of putting the emphasis of parent involvement on desirable adult outcomes as well as children's developmental outcomes. At the same time, many teachers also saw support and encouragement for children's learning, and conveying to children that school is important as benefits. This indicates that children's learning and developmental outcomes are still considered as an important focus of parent involvement. Teachers also noted improved learning at school and better understanding of children on teachers' part as benefits of parent involvement. These findings indicate that teachers not only see the benefits for parents and children, but also the benefits schools experience (e.g., improved learning) from positive home-school partnerships. This indicates teachers

believe that all parties involved (parents, children, and school) benefit from such partnerships.

Teachers at both sites identified parents' work schedule and lack of time as the most significant barrier to parent involvement. This finding is consistent with earlier research on the barriers to parent involvement in early childhood programs (McBride & Lin, 1996). It indicates that teachers consider the major barriers to parent involvement lies within families rather than schools. Parents' lack of comfort and negative past school experience were also identified as common barriers. These findings support Epstein's (1987) life-course perspective of home-school partnerships in which prior experience and philosophies of families and schools are identified as factors that either push together or pull apart home-school partnerships.

Along with these common barriers to parent involvement identified by both teacher groups, there were differences worth noting. A relatively large pro-portion of teachers in the center based model saw a lack of transportation and logistical constraints (i.e., disconnected telephones, messages not reaching home from school) as major barriers to parent involvement, whereas only one teacher in the home visitation program identified such barriers. One possible explanation for this would be that teachers in the home visitation program did not see logistical constraints as barriers because they are able to visit families in their homes when there are problems such as disconnected phones. It might be a possible indication that home visitation has a potential to provide a way for parents to be involved even when logistical constraints may otherwise prevent such activities. Another difference which emerged was that a larger proportion of teachers in the home visitation program saw work overload on the part of school personnel as being a barrier to parent involvement. The home visitation component of the program may have added more work for these teachers even though they had one day per week for home visitation. Future research is needed which explores the costs (e.g., time, financial, etc.) and benefits of a home visitation model when compared to a center-based model, and possible ways to overcome and/or reduce these costs.

Finally, in terms of the factors that would encourage and facilitate parent involvement in early childhood programs, teachers at both sites identified the need for more dedicated time for planning and implementation of parent involvement activities. Most teachers expressed the need for setting aside time (i.e., one day per week) that would allow them to make more contacts with families. In addition, teachers at both sites indicated the need to have staff members whose primary job responsibility is developing parent involve-ment initiatives as a means overcoming many of the barriers to such involve-ment.

Due to the exploratory nature of the study and small sample size, general-izing the results to other programs implemented with other populations should be done with caution. However, the results from this study are encouraging

for continued research and program development work in this area. In addition to the suggestions mentioned above, future studies will need to explore the impact of different types of home-school partnership initiatives on child outcomes and investigate what aspects of the initiatives lead to different outcomes.

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