

A SURVEY OF THE ATTITUDES, PERCEPTIONS, AND PRACTICES
OF EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION STAFF
REGARDING PARENT INVOLVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the parent involvement attitudes and practices of early care and education teachers. A sample of 171 early care and education teachers rated the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with 25 statements regarding general attitudes of parent involvement, as well as family and teacher and/or center obligations in creating family-school partnerships. Teachers were also asked to indicate the frequency in which they engaged in 9 specified activities that could be used to engage families in their young child's education. The surveyed teachers were from 31 early care and education centers that were participants in a quality improvement initiative designed to improve the school readiness of the children they serve. Fifteen of the 31 centers received additional services from a family engagement specialist, who worked to increase parent involvement at the centers and to strengthen family-school partnerships. Results indicated that, overall, the teachers reported positive views about parent involvement and the families they served. They recognized the benefits of family-school partnerships for

young children. The teachers reported feeling that it was an important part of their job to involve all families and that all families had strengths and abilities that could be used to help their children get ready for kindergarten. Modest differences were found in the responses between teachers who had received assistance from family engagement specialists and those who had not, with teachers who were part of the intervention indicating stronger support from their directors and center and being more likely to talk to families about concerns. All of the teachers surveyed reported using a wide variety of strategies to engage families, with teachers in the intervention group using parent workshops and newsletters more often than the non-intervention group. Slight but significant differences were found on some of the survey questions related to teacher characteristics, such as hours worked at the center per week and age of children taught. With increased emphasis being placed on quality improvement in early care and education, it is important to know how those being asked to implement possibly new and demanding changes in practice feel about and respond to what is being asked of them. Efforts to support them should be effective and responsive to their current views and practices.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The field of early care and education, often called child care or daycare, is frequently characterized by teachers with minimal training, which can result in a significant mismatch between the preparation and compensation of the typical early childhood professional and the growing expectations of parents and policy makers (National Research Council [NRC], 2001). The NRC states that teachers of young children are being asked to accomplish an increasing number of duties, including working collaboratively with families.

When early care and education centers or schools begin the work of examining and improving upon their ability to form successful family-school partnerships as part of an overall move toward quality improvement they must first start by assessing the present strengths and weaknesses of the current practices and attitudes that exist in their environment (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). This starting point allows educational environments to formulate a plan for improvement or maintenance based on specific knowledge of their staff's current practices and beliefs.

Research about teachers' attitudes regarding parent involvement and family-school partnerships has largely focused on elementary, middle, and high school teachers (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Jones, White, Aeby, & Benson, 1997; McBride, 1991; Pelco, & Ries, 1999). While quality improvement initiatives in early care and education often mandate the implementation of parent involvement strategies and the improvement of family-school relationships and partnerships, little is known about how those teachers working in early care and education feel about the worthiness of those goals (Keystone

Stars Child Care Quality Initiative, 2004; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2005).

It is not clear how these teachers conceive of the respective roles of teachers and families in the process of parent involvement or whether or not they understand the collaborative nature of successful family-school partnerships. For this study, the term *parent involvement* is used to represent a construct that involves the contributions of both families and schools to act in ways that support children's learning and development (Epstein, 1985; Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 1995). Within this working definition, both families and schools have obligations to form successful family-school partnerships. Epstein (1987) conceptualizes parent involvement as a complex, multifaceted construct that explains the roles that both families and schools have in supporting children's learning and development, which leads to a more comprehensive definition of parent involvement. The six-part framework is based primarily on elementary and secondary educational settings, though many of the descriptions are relevant to early care and education centers. The construct presented here reflects Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) description of parent involvement as a dynamic process that occurs over time through the contributions of both families and schools. This more comprehensive definition of parent involvement involves six types, or aspects, of parent involvement, including: (1) the basic obligations of families, (2) the basic obligations of schools, (3) involvement at school, (4) learning at home, (5) decision making, governance, and advocacy, and (6) collaborating with the community. This study generally focuses on the first four types of parent involvement, with the overall guiding principle being that both

families and early care and education center staff are charged with responsibilities and duties to foster successful parent involvement.

With an increased emphasis on quality improvement in early care and education, it is important to know how those being asked to implement possibly new and demanding changes in practice feel about and respond to what is being asked of them. Efforts to support them should be effective and responsive to their current views and practices.

The Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and practices of one group of early care and education teachers regarding the concept of parent involvement and to determine the effectiveness of family engagement specialists to positively affect teacher attitudes and practices. Survey questions sought to reveal general attitudes regarding parent involvement, as well as the staff's beliefs regarding the respective responsibilities and capabilities of teachers, centers, and families and the activities that they personally use to involve parents. Factors and characteristics that may affect a teacher's reported attitudes and practices related to forming family-school partnerships were also examined.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The specific research questions addressed by this study are as follows:

Question 1: Do the teachers who work in centers that received technical assistance from family engagement specialists feel differently about parent involvement than the teachers who did not receive the additional support? Also, did those teachers who received additional support report using more or different strategies to engage parents and to work to create family-school partnerships than those who did not?

It was hypothesized that teachers who work in centers that received parent engagement technical assistance would have more positive attitudes towards both the idea of parent involvement and their families' abilities to be effective partners in their child's education than teachers who work in centers that did not receive the assistance. It was also hypothesized that these teachers would agree more with the notion that teachers and centers should act in ways that reach out to and include families in their children's early education. It was further hypothesized that teachers who work in centers receiving this type of technical assistance would report using a greater number of strategies intended to create family-school partnerships than teachers who work in centers that did not receive the assistance. Although an intervention similar to the one in this study was not found in the existing literature, previous research suggests that training and workshops increased not only teachers' knowledge and comfort level about engaging parents but also their beliefs in the ability of families to help teach their children and be effective partners in their education (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Morris & Taylor, 1998).

Question 2: Is there a relationship between teacher characteristics- including level of education, the number of hours worked each week, the number of years worked at their respective centers, and the number of years worked in early care and education- and the reported attitudes of teachers towards parent involvement? Is there a relationship between the age of the children that they teach and the reported attitudes of teachers toward parent involvement? It was hypothesized that teachers who have more formal education would report having more positive attitudes about parent involvement and families' ability to be effective partners in their child's education. It was further hypothesized that teachers who have more formal education would have stronger and

more positive attitudes regarding the teacher's and center's ability and responsibility to partner effectively with families. These hypotheses are based on the research that cites education as being an effective tool in both developing teacher support of and knowledge about parent involvement and increasing their beliefs in families' competencies to help their children learn (Garinger & McBride, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Morris & Taylor, 1998). It was further hypothesized that teachers of older children would have more positive attitudes regarding parent involvement than their co-workers who care for younger children. The majority of the existing literature focuses on teachers of elementary, middle, and high school students (Michael, Arnold, Magliocca, & Miller 1992; Pelco & Ries, 1999); within this research, teachers of younger children were more willing to attempt to engage parents in collaborative relationships and to report contacting more families via a larger number of strategies than their counterparts who teach older students. It seems logical that, as the children in early care and education centers get closer to moving on from the center and starting kindergarten, the teachers may begin to act in ways that are similar to their counterparts who teach young elementary school children. It was hypothesized that teachers who have more experience working in early care and education would have more positive attitudes regarding parent involvement and will work to involve parents more than their co-workers who are newer to the field. Previous research indicates that this can be true, especially if the centers that they work at are known for strong parent engagement practices (Garinger & McBride, 1995).

Question 3: Does a relationship exist between a classroom's level of quality, as measured by the Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scale or the Early Childhood

Environment Rating Scale, and the attitudes of its teachers regarding parent involvement?

It was hypothesized that teachers who teach in higher quality classrooms would have more positive attitudes about parent involvement. It was hypothesized that these teachers would also have stronger and more positive attitudes regarding the teacher's and center's ability and responsibility to partner effectively with families. These hypotheses were based on the idea that measures of quality often cluster together. While only a single measure on each assessment tool mentions families, both commitment to parent involvement and having a high quality classroom and center are standards of excellence in early care and education. Quality improvement initiatives and national accreditation programs recognize effective family-school partnerships as indicators of quality care (Keystone Stars Child Care Quality Initiative, 2004; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2005). Previous research (Ghazvini & Readdick, 1994; Endsley, Minich, & Zhou, 1993) also indicates a link between quality care and parent involvement attitudes and practices.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the relevant literature includes the following: (1) the conceptualization of the various aspects of parent involvement, its inclusion in definitions of quality care, and its benefits to children's education, (2) the factors that influence families' and educators' involvement in creating family-school partnerships, and (3) the strategies that are commonly used to engage families and those that have been found to be helpful in fostering parent involvement.

Parent Involvement

Epstein (1987) conceptualizes parent involvement as a complex, multifaceted construct that explains the roles that both families and schools have in supporting children's learning and development. That construct reflects Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) description of parent involvement as a dynamic process that occurs over time through the contributions of both families and schools. Epstein's (1987) six-part framework is based primarily on elementary and secondary educational settings, though many of the descriptions are relevant to early care and education centers, and is as follows:

Type 1: **Basic obligations of families:** Families are responsible for providing positive home conditions that prepare children for learning. These responsibilities include providing for the child's health and safety, developing parenting skills that promote development, and supporting their child's efforts in school.

Type 2: **Basic obligations of schools:** Schools are responsible for communicating with families regarding both the school program and their child's progress within it. These

types of communication may include written notices, phone calls, visits, progress reports, and conferences. When relevant, schools should also inform parents about the curriculum, special programs or activities, and other opportunities available for students.

Type 3: Involvement at school: This type of involvement generally falls into one of two types. The first includes those parents and other volunteers who assist teachers, administrators, and children in classrooms or other areas of the school. The second refers to those families who support their children at school by attending student performances and other events.

Type 4: Learning at home: Schools and teachers support families in their efforts to monitor and assist children in learning activities at home. Such activities may support specific classroom learning experiences or enrich general learning. Schools help parents understand how to help their child at each developmental level.

Type 5: Decision making, governance, and advocacy: In this type of involvement, parents take steps to become leaders and advocates for their children. Parents may serve on parent boards or advisory councils in the school or in the community. Schools may be needed to enhance parents' decision-making and communication skills in order for them to be effective in their roles and to be considered as true partners.

Type 6: Collaborating with community: Schools make parents aware of the various resources and opportunities that are available to them in the community. Some examples of these resources are early intervention services, recreational programs, and cultural celebrations.

In summary, when schools are committed to forming comprehensive partnerships with families, they help parents to do the following: to build home conditions for learning;

to communicate with the school; to become a productive presence at the school; to support and motivate learning and development; to contribute to decision making processes that affect the schools and their children; and to involve themselves in the community. These types of involvement help families and schools fulfill their shared responsibilities for children's learning and development.

Parent Involvement and Quality Care

Family involvement in education has been identified as a beneficial factor in young children's learning (National Research Council, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Standards of quality care and education for young children, therefore, have come to include the idea of parent involvement as a necessary component. The NRC recommends that early care and education programs build collaborative relationships with families to develop supportive learning environments both at home and at school (2001).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is the world's largest organization working on behalf of young children. A major part of its efforts to improve early education experiences and outcomes for children is through its accreditation process for child care programs that are committed to meeting national standards of quality. Among its requirements for accreditation is a demonstrated understanding of the importance of working with the families they serve. Early care and education programs desiring NAEYC accreditation must establish and maintain collaborative relationships with families that are sensitive to family composition, language, and culture (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2005).

Keystone STARS is a Pennsylvania quality improvement initiative designed to recognize and reward caregivers and centers that exceed state health and safety licensing requirements. Child care providers are awarded a rating of quality, from STAR One to STAR Four, based on their attainment of specific quality performance standards. One aspect of performance on which programs are evaluated is their efforts in supporting families. A center cannot advance its rating without working to create partnerships with families. At the highest level, centers must coordinate at least two annual group activities involving parental or family participation, as well as offer parents at least one group parent education activity, such as hosting an expert speaker on child development. In addition, centers must offer parents an individual meeting to provide information regarding a child transitioning to another classroom or educational setting, along with two other parent conferences and written information about the individual child's developmental progress (Keystone Stars Child Care Quality Initiative, 2004). Both of these organizations recognize the importance of forming family-school partnerships and reward centers that strive to meet these goals.

Beyond these standards and government recommendations, research in the field also demonstrates a link between quality early care and education environments and parent involvement. High quality centers, as measured by the Environment Rating Scales, engage in more two-way communication with parents and disseminate larger amounts of written information to parents (Ghazvini & Readdick, 1994). Centers of high quality provide healthy and safe environments for children, and directors of such programs report elevated levels of parent communication and involvement (Endsley, Minich, & Zhou, 1993).

Evidence of Benefits

Frede (1998) theorizes that a collaborative relationship between families and schools furthers two goals: to help parents in their interactions with their children and to help teachers better understand the child, which should lead to more effective teaching in the classroom. Collaboration with families assists teachers in understanding the contexts in which a child functions on a daily basis, the parent's hopes and goals for the child, and the values of the child's and family's culture. Linking the various support systems that affect children can impact positively on their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Carlisle and colleagues (2005) note that, as children see their parents and teachers interacting in friendly and cooperative ways, they internalize the message that school is a place that is valued by their families.

Epstein (1991) conceptualizes this interrelatedness of the school, family, and community in a framework entitled Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence. This theory is based on the notion that three spheres of influence- community, families, and schools- overlap with one another and contribute to a child's learning, growth, and development. This model has both an internal and an external structure. The external structure consists of the community, family, and school spheres, which move together or apart depending on a number of factors. One factor is time, including such characteristics as the age and grade level of the child and the social conditions common to the given time period. The other factors include the experiences, philosophy, and practices of the families, schools, and communities. The internal structure, which is linked to the external structure, is composed of the interpersonal communication and relationships that

occur within each sphere. Examples of these include parent-child interactions and teacher-parent interactions.

A developing line of research in this area seeks to discover exactly which parent engagement practices relate to specific improved outcomes for children. Partnership behavior between schools and families can be described as seeking and sharing information about a child and his or her experiences. In one study, frequent partnership behaviors between mothers and their child-care providers were related to caregiver-child interactions that were more sensitive, supportive, and stimulating and mother-child interactions that were more supportive, respectful of a child's autonomy, and cognitively stimulating, as well as less hostile (Owen, Ware, & Barfoot, 2000). In addition to improved adult-child interactions, centers whose directors encourage parent involvement are more likely to provide a setting that positively develops children's relationships with each other (Endsley, Minich, & Zhou, 1993).

A study by Fantuzzo and colleagues (2004) describes several different parent involvement strategies that have a positive effect on learning and behavior. Home-based involvement activities, such as reading to a child at home, asking about school, and providing a place for educational activities, are related to an increase in motivation and attention/persistence as children approach learning tasks. These same children also show higher levels of receptive vocabulary and lower levels of classroom behavior problems. Talking about a child's progress with his or her parent and discussing ways to promote learning at home are examples of home-school conferencing. Such behaviors are also significantly related to low classroom conduct problems and positive approaches to learning. A final type of involvement, called school-based involvement, involves such

practices as parents volunteering in the classroom or serving as chaperones on field trips. School-based involvement is also related to lower conduct problems in the classroom. While all types of involvement demonstrate some connections with improved outcomes for children, home-based involvement proved to be the most powerful impact on a child's behavior in this study.

Elementary school teachers in one study emphasized the important of parents becoming active participants in their child's education as early as possible (Lawson, 2003). They noted the importance of the early years to a child's development and the benefits to working with families who have already come to understand, through early education experiences, the importance of their role in partnering with schools.

Influences on Families' Involvement

Attempts to explain families' lack of involvement in their children's education have often focused on a deficit model, where this lack of participation is related to a weakness or characteristic within the family. Deficit perspectives depict inactive parents as incompetent and unable to help their children because they speak a different language, work long hours away from home, belong to different ethnic groups, or are just not interested (Delgado-Gaitain, 1991). Mothers respond to these claims, saying that the major obstacle to their involvement is competing demands on their time and emphatically argue that it is not due to a lack of interest or energy (Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Clark, & Peay, 2001). It is important that the school both acknowledges the personal factors, such as work schedule, the family's culture, or prior educational experiences, that may influence a parent's decision to become involved and reacts accordingly (Carlisle, Stanley, & Kemple, 2005). A family's cultural background may

influence how they choose to become involved and what they consider to be appropriate ways to participate. Some families, based on their personal cultural experiences, may believe that it is disrespectful to communicate with teachers and see such interactions as questioning the abilities of their child's teacher (Coleman & Churchill, 1997). In addition, parents who have had their own negative experiences in school may be hesitant to become involved in their child's schooling (Carlisle, Stanley, & Kemple, 2005).

While schools and centers may want to be quick to blame families when parent involvement does not occur, they must also recognize the role that they play in the process and the ways in which they reach out to and accommodate families and their needs. For example, a large percentage of parents from one study reported that they experienced no informational exchange at all with caregivers (Ghazvini & Readdick, 1994). Teachers from another study maintained a school-centric view of parent involvement (Lawson, 2003). They defined parent involvement as a means for parents and families to cooperate and acquiesce to the needs of the school as defined by the teachers. These teachers talked about the need for parents to become involved both at school, in such roles as hall monitor or field trip chaperone, and at home, by checking homework and talking about what the child is learning in school. The teachers did note the positive child developmental outcomes that could possibly result from this type of involvement, but they were more concerned with the idea that this type of participation made their jobs easier. The restricted types of parent involvement mentioned by these teachers are not inclusive and sensitive to the needs of all families. When the teachers were asked about strategies that could make the school environment more welcoming to families, such as by hosting meals and offering incentives for participation, the teachers

resisted, saying that parents should be intrinsically interested in their children's education and should not have to be bribed. Although there may be some merit to that belief, rigidity on the part of schools does not help them to provide the best possible education for children by actively reaching out to all families.

Deficit theories ignore the role that teachers and schools can play in engaging families through techniques and strategies that meet their needs. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) attempted to move beyond status variables to help explain the following: parents' decisions to become involved, their choice of involvement forms, and the effects of their involvement on student outcomes. They suggest that parents become involved in their child's education for three reasons: (1) their personal construction of the parental role; (2) their personal sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school; and (3) their reaction to the opportunities and demand characteristics presented by both their children and their children's schools. In addition, Dauber and Epstein (1993) found that the strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement, both at home and at school, are the specific programs and teacher practices utilized by schools that encourage and guide parent involvement. For example, families were more likely to become involved in their child's education if they believed that school practices helped them become more knowledgeable in important areas, such as reading activities and homework monitoring. These practices held true regardless of family factors, including income and ethnic or educational background.

These factors stress the fact that the school and its members must not be passive participants in parent engagement efforts or expect families to merely conform to their ideas. It is the responsibility of the school or early care and education center to

continually monitor its practices and to recruit and support teachers who share their priorities to actively engage families. Knopf and Swift (2008) summarize this belief by noting that, in acknowledging the changing needs of families, early childhood programs need to provide essential supports for families that enable them to be a part of important involvement efforts and to seek and create diverse pathways to allow for family involvement to occur.

Role of Centers and Staff in Forming Partnerships

NAEYC (1995) standards state that it is the responsibility of teachers and centers to actively seek parental involvement and to establish a partnership with children's families. Centers must move beyond traditional models of parent involvement where one-way, school to family communication dominates, and parents are expected to come and receive what is offered without being able to provide their own input. Such traditional views fail to acknowledge all the ways that families foster their children's development and limit the ways in which the relationships between parents and families are examined (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Strategies that use two-way communication and give both sides a forum to listen and talk are key in establishing collaborative relationships (Bernhard, Lefebvre, Kilbride, & Lunge, 1998). Schools and early care and education centers must recognize the diversity of the families they serve and realize that parent involvement strategies are not a "one size fits all" practice. They must work creatively to discover those techniques that are a match for their families (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

Endsley and colleagues (1993) found that higher amounts of formal communication on the part of the school were linked to increased participation in the

school on the part of the family. In addition, teachers' perceptions of the families' abilities to contribute to the collaborative process of forming family-school partnerships became more positive following a higher number of interactions. In turn, these resulting positive views about the family make it more likely that teachers will seek to involve parents in future efforts (Endsley, Minish, & Zhou, 1993; Michael, Arnold, Magliocca, & Miller 1992).

Center directors have the ability to influence the attitudes and practices of their staff. Directors who encourage formal involvement activities tend to have staff that engage in more informal conversations with parents (Endsley, Minish, & Zhou, 1993). The culture of a center or school affects those that work there, as the longer teachers work at educational environments known for strong parent engagement practices, the more frequently they contact parents (Garinger & McBride, 1995).

Influences of Teachers' and Schools' Involvement

As a corollary to the theory set forth by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), Pelco and Ries (1999) theorize that teachers are more likely to actively involve families in their students' education when they (1) construe their professional role to include collaboration with families, (2) believe they possess the skills and knowledge necessary to involve families in the educational process, and (3) perceive opportunities, invitations, or demands from their students, their students' families, their schools' administration, and/or the community for such efforts. Knopf and Swift (2008) emphasize that teachers must first embrace the notion that family involvement is important and then actively work to set the stage for meaningful interactions with families by shifting their practices, if necessary.

Teachers may be resistant to reaching out to all families when they have not come to view it as part of their role as a teacher (Lawson, 2003). The majority of the teachers interviewed by Lawson in this study did not conceptualize their professional role as including active efforts to entice all parents to become involved. They reported their professional identities as being deeply rooted within the classroom and resented the additional demands that were being asked of them by the school to improve family-school partnerships.

Some teachers report having sufficient time to work on parent involvement strategies (Pelco & Ries, 1999), but others say that a lack of time is a barrier to their efforts (Bruneau, Ruttan, & Dunlap, 1995; McBride, 1991). Teachers are in agreement in saying that they lack sufficient knowledge and understanding of how to implement parent involvement strategies and that they would benefit from additional training (Bruneau, Ruttan, & Dunlap, 1995; McBride, 1991; Pelco & Ries, 1999).

Teacher Attitudes

For this study, the construct of teacher attitudes summarized by Jones and colleagues will be used (Jones, White, Aeby, & Benson, 1997). According to the researchers, teacher attitudes can be defined as a teacher's emotional response in support of or against parent involvement. Existing research focuses primarily on the attitudes of elementary, middle, and upper school teachers. Epstein and Dauber (1991) investigated the parent involvement attitudes of 171 elementary and middle school teachers who worked in inner city-schools. These schools were described as being in economically and educationally disadvantaged neighborhoods and were just starting a three-year initiative designed to improve parent involvement programs and practices. Teachers in this study

reported strong, positive attitudes about parent involvement. Their responses indicated strong agreement and little variation in overall attitudes. Reported attitudes were more positive for teachers who taught in self-contained classrooms and for those who perceived high support for parent involvement from their colleagues and students' parents.

Jones and colleagues (1997) conducted a study using Epstein and Salinas' (1993) survey entitled "School and Family Partnerships: Survey of Teachers in Elementary and Middle Grades." They surveyed the parent involvement attitudes of 92 first-, second-, and third-grade teachers. The schools where these teachers worked were part of a model program designed to make the transition from Head Start into the early grades as smooth and successful as possible for children at risk for academic failure. Teachers' reported attitudes about family and community involvement in education that were highly positive, as were their views of family strengths. They unanimously agreed that parent involvement is necessary for a good school and that parent involvement can help them best teach their students. Their overall responses indicated strong support for Epstein's model of parent involvement, which considers obligations on the part of the school and family.

Pelco and Ries (1999) investigated teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and involvement in family-school partnerships using a sample of teachers who taught children ranging from 4 to 18 years of age. The teachers reported positive attitudes regarding parent involvement. They agreed upon the importance of parent involvement in general and also its necessity for maintaining a quality educational environment and for leading to the most effective methods of teaching children. These teachers further

reported that they felt support from colleagues and administrators for their efforts in the area of family collaboration and that all families had some strengths that could be tapped to support students' education.

When looking at specific skill development, teachers indicated that parent involvement can be highly effective in teaching children to read (Bruneau, Ruttan, & Dunlap, 1995). Specifically, the teachers mentioned that it was important for parents to model the act of reading, to communicate the importance of literacy, and to read with their children at home. They stated that reading with a child at home helped those children learn to enjoy reading and to encourage them to read on their own.

McBride (1991) examined the parent involvement attitudes of 271 undergraduate early childhood education majors, 89% of whom were student teaching during the semester that the data were collected. Again, the overall attitudes regarding parent involvement were highly positive. These respondents agreed most with statements about the school's responsibility to share information and communicate with each family and each family's responsibility to provide appropriate home conditions that help prepare children for learning. The future teachers surveyed in this study viewed traditional types of parent involvement, such as helping on class field trips, as more appropriate than non-traditional types, such as checking attendance.

In another study examining the attitudes of preservice teachers, Morris and Taylor (1998) used pre- and post-measures to examine the extent to which selected course experiences influenced the respondents' attitudes and feelings of competence about involving parents in their children's education. Pre-test measures suggested that the students felt somewhat comfortable with their general knowledge about parent

involvement and their ability to make a difference in the lives of their students.

Following the course, the students reported making the most gains in their ability to facilitate family involvement programs.

The existing literature involving populations of elementary, middle, and upper school teachers suggest positive and supportive attitudes regarding the concept of parent involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Jones, White, Aeby, & Benson, 1997; Pelco & Ries, 1999). Similar to teachers who had already entered the field, preservice teachers also reported positive attitudes about parent involvement (McBride, 1991; Morris & Taylor, 1998).

The overwhelmingly positive attitudes about parent involvement in the literature are encouraging, and it is hoped that these supportive beliefs will extend downward to teachers of the youngest children; however, the parent involvement attitudes of teachers of preschoolers, toddlers, and infants in typical early care and education centers are not adequately represented in the literature. When the attitudes of this population of teachers are studied, the focus is often narrow and does not focus on the concept as a whole or their role in it. Ghazvini and Readdick (1994) surveyed early care and education teachers to discover which types of communication they thought were most important to foster the development of each child. The results of their survey indicated that teachers held equally strong, positive beliefs about the value of one-way (school to home), two-way (school and home communication exchanges), and three-way (exchanges between school, home, and a community resource) communication patterns. In another study, early care and education teachers reported positive attitudes about parents sharing information with them about their children (Powell & Stremmel, 1987). They reported that this

information was useful to them as teachers. Specifically, they stated that learning information about the child from the family could help them improve their interactions with the child and develop inferences about causes of behavior. In addition, the teachers reported that talking and interacting with families helped them to monitor parents' perceptions about the child care program and staff and to develop and strengthen their understanding of parents.

Teachers' Perceptions of Families

The majority of teachers believe that parents give only weak support to family-school collaboration efforts and further report that parents do not want to be more involved in their children's education than they already are (Pelco & Ries, 1999). When asked who they expect to have more involvement in their children's education, pre-service elementary education teachers expected that only mothers, parents of younger children, and more educated parents will be significantly involved (McBride, 1991). On a positive note, teachers across all levels (elementary, middle, and high school) reported feeling that every family has some strengths that can be used to increase their child's success in school and that all parents can learn ways to help children with schoolwork at home (Pelco & Ries, 1999).

The findings of Bruneau and colleagues (1995) illustrate a struggle that exists for many teachers when considering parent involvement. The pre-kindergarten through fourth grade teachers in their study reported that they could learn a great deal from parents about their children, including the children's likes and dislikes, the children's medical histories, the family's personal living situation and history, the culture and values of the family, and the learning resources available to the child in the home. These

teachers viewed all of these pieces of information as being helpful in teaching the child. However, a majority of the teachers reported negative views of families. They stated that families did not have time to be involved, did not want to be involved, negatively judged them as teachers, and came to the school with an adversarial attitude. When viewed through Epstein's (1987) definition of parent involvement, these teachers seem to be suggesting that parents are not meeting their basic obligations. However, it is unknown whether these reported beliefs of the teachers are valid or not.

Despite reported concerns about families' willingness to support their children's education, parents and other caregivers in the home indicate that they are supplying home educational activities to their children (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1994). The NCES conducted a National Household Education Survey that asked families about a number of variables related to their children's early education experiences. The nationally representative subsample of families reported that they provided a variety of home learning opportunities for their preschool children. Specifically, they reported that activities related to reading and watching educational television occurred several times each week.

Relationship Between Attitudes and Behavior

Established research in the area of parent involvement and family engagement suggests that there is a relationship between teachers' reported attitudes and their actual behaviors. The more teachers value parent involvement, the more they report communicating with parents through a variety of strategies (Endsley, Minish, & Zhou, 1993; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Early childhood education staff report using specific strategies of communication that they personally value more often than any others

(Ghazvini & Readdick, 1994). Positive attitudes about parent involvement help teachers to be more inclusive in their practices, as such teachers have more success in involving “hard to reach” parents, including working parents, less educated parents, single parents, parents of older students, young parents, parents new to the school, and other adults with whom children live (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). With regards to specific practices, teachers with more positive attitudes toward parent involvement place more importance than other teachers on such practices as holding conferences with all students’ parents, communicating with parents about school programs, and providing parents with both good and bad reports about students’ progress (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

The previous studies support the idea that teachers’ parent involvement attitudes influence their practices. In a related area of study, Ho and colleagues (2002) used a two-part scale, entitled The Family-Centered Elementary School Practices Scale, to survey elementary school teachers, kindergarten through fifth grade, regarding family-centered practices. On one scale, the teachers were asked to choose one of five statements that best described typical practices at their school. On a second scale, the teachers were instructed to choose the statement that best described ideal family-centered practices. Three factors emerged from the survey results. The first factor, called the Positive Relating with Families Factor, contained items such as personal empowerment, friendliness and support, responsiveness, and understanding of the family. The second factor, called Partnering with Families Factor, contained items such as teamwork, educational activities at home, and family advocacy. The final factor was called the Family-Focused Approaches Factor and contained items dealing with the school’s philosophy of focusing on family needs and concerns and services that were offered to

families. On each of the factors, the teachers reported significantly different responses between the two scales, with answers on the ideal score falling higher than on the typical scale. The results suggested that these elementary school teachers valued family-centered practices and viewed their current practices as less family-centered than they would ideally desire.

Teacher Characteristics

Teacher characteristics also seem to influence the ways in which teachers approach parent involvement. One of the most influential teacher characteristics appears to be the ages and/or grade level taught by the teacher. Specifically, teachers of younger students are more willing to attempt to engage parents in collaborative relationships, and they report contacting a larger percentage of their students' families using a greater variety of strategies than their counterparts who teach older students (Michael, Arnold, Magliocca, & Miller 1992; Pelco & Ries, 1999).

Upper level teachers place little value on strategies that could be used to contact parents, and these teachers report that they rarely use such strategies (Pelco & Ries, 1999). Also, communication between middle or high school teachers and families, as compared to elementary teachers and families, is often relegated to discussing mostly problems or troubles (Pelco & Ries, 1999). Consistent with these findings regarding age, but more applicable to the early care and education setting, is research that suggests that conversations occur more frequently between teachers and parents of younger children (infants/toddlers) than those of older children (preschoolers) (Endsley & Minish, 1991). Regardless of the age of their students, teachers of lower ability students have less positive views of family strengths. However, this effect may be somewhat mediated by a

match in racial background between teachers and families (Jones, White, Aeby, & Benson, 1997).

Education

Teacher education has also been found to be related to parent involvement beliefs and practices (Garinger & McBride, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Morris & Taylor, 1998). Morris and Taylor (1998) found that participating in a relevant college level course positively influenced future educators' perceptions of their comfort and competence levels in planning and implementing family involvement programs. Post-test measures indicated that students made significant progress in areas where they had, prior to the course, lacked related skills and knowledge.

Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues (2002) designed an in-service program containing modules of instruction for elementary and middle school teachers that addressed various aspects of parent involvement, including coping with obstacles, communicating with parents, addressing perceptions of parents, working with hard to reach parents, and planning and enacting strategies. At the conclusion of the in-service training, participating teachers were found, in comparison to a control group, to have increased their sense of teaching efficacy- including their ability to engage families- and their belief about parents' efficacy to help their children learn. In addition, teachers with higher levels of formalized education reported feeling more positively about parent involvement in learning activities at home; they believed it was important to provide information to parents on how to help their children with specific skills to facilitate these home learning activities (Garinger & McBride, 1995). Therefore, teacher education that

is specifically designed to enhance professionals' beliefs, skills, and strategies related to parent involvement has been proven to be effective.

Strategies of Involvement

A number of strategies to involve parents and develop family-school partnerships have been mentioned and examined in the research, including progress reports, newsletters, parent handbooks, posted information on bulletin boards, notes on child's behavior, informal conversations, scheduled conferences, phone contacts, meetings, open houses/orientations, children's programs/family social affairs, observations of program by parents, and asking family members to be classroom volunteers or chaperones on field trips (Bruneau, Ruttan, & Dunlap, 1995; Endsley, Minish, & Zhou, 1993; Garinger & McBride, 1995). Advances in technology have recently started to influence the ways in which some teachers and schools have supplemented their efforts to communicate with families. Strategies mentioned in the literature include electronic mail, websites, webcams, camcorders, and digital cameras (Bauch, 1997; Stephens, 2004). Electronic mail gives parents and teachers the opportunity to communicate at convenient times. Group emails from teachers to families can be used to highlight classroom activities. However, electronic mail should not be considered a primary means of communication, as it cannot be assumed that all families have continuous access to a computer (Knopf & Swick, 2008). Digital cameras allow teachers to capture learning experiences as they occur in the classroom, and on-site printing options provide visual feedback to families, often on the very same day that the activity occurs (Stephens, 2004). This strategy may be especially effective at early care and education centers, as families usually come into

the schools on a daily basis. Also, younger children may be less able to verbally share with their families what they are doing during their school day.

Bauch (1997) described a specific telephone voice messaging system that enables schools to share information about a variety of topics, including daily classroom activities, curriculum, and special announcements. In this system, teachers record a two-minute message that can be accessed by families by having them call a specific number from any phone at any time. The messages can be used to include positive news from the classroom, explanations of content and concepts from classroom activities, specific homework assignments, and suggestions for parents. These systems can also work in reverse by making automated calls to registered family telephone numbers to share information such as reminders about a parent meeting, emergency information, and schedule changes. Descriptions of these new ways of communicating with families consistently emphasize the importance of face-to-face communication and that technology should be used in addition to a variety of other strategies. As with any method used to engage families, the needs and resources of the families served by a particular school should be examined to determine the appropriateness of these technological strategies, as well as the resources and capabilities of the schools.

Ghazvini and Readdick (1994) outlined a framework into which many communication strategies of parent involvement may fall. They described one-way communication as being from school to home and including such things as a parent reading information on a parent bulletin board, a parent receiving a newsletter, and a parent seeing a calendar of daily activities planned for the children. Two-way communication exists between home and school; examples of this type of communication

include teachers talking with a parent at drop-off or pick-up times, a parent attending a parent-teacher conference, and a parent going on a field trip or attending a special event. Three-way communication describes those types of communication that occur between school, home, and a community resource. One example of this type of communication is the center, at the parent's request, contacting an agency such as early intervention or a medical professional.

Bruneau and colleagues (1995) asked teachers enrolled in a graduate level education course to describe the typical ways that they communicated with families. The age of the students taught by the teachers in this study ranged from pre-kindergarten to fourth grade. The most commonly used strategies that were reported were parent volunteers- including chaperoning on field trips, serving as a guest lecturer, and assisting in classroom learning centers- and newsletters, ranging in distribution frequency from weekly to several times each year. Other reported strategies included informal face-to-face conversations, phone conversations, personal notes, home-school journals, and conferences. One teacher reported an ambitious and creative style, stating that she used "as many strategies as there are children," signifying the uniqueness of each family and their needs.

Interviews with 16 directors of licensed early care and education centers yielded a variety of strategies that were used by at least one of the centers to involve parents (Endsley, Minish, & Zhou, 1993). The researchers divided the reported strategies into two groups: parent involvement strategies that involved primarily communication and parent involvement strategies that involved primarily parent participation. The communication strategies include the following: parent meetings, scheduled conferences,

open houses or orientations, children's programs, family social affairs, observation of program by parents, parent handbook, notes on child's behavior, newsletters or announcements, phone contact, and posted information on bulletin boards. The participation strategies were as follows: parents as volunteers for group work or individual activities with children, parents as volunteers for field trips, parents as volunteers for holiday celebrations and parties, parent fund raising, parent work days, parent collection of "junk," donations, and involvement of parents in decisions concerning center functioning.

One study examined the types of communication that were used to disseminate specific types of information (Garinger & McBride, 1995). The researchers found that contacts regarding administrative issues, behavioral issues, accidents, children's developmental progress, and snack or materials to be sent to school were done mostly by notes. Contacts about health issues were done significantly more by phone, and contacts about volunteering were done significantly more in person. Overall, parent involvement contacts were conducted almost exclusively by note, with only 6% of the contacts occurring by phone and 12% of the contacts occurring in person. The researchers note the potential problems in such a delivery system, as it cannot be assumed that all families are able to read and understand printed materials that are distributed to them. They suggest that one way to rectify the situation is to ask parents which technique would work best for them.

The use of strategies may also differ based on the age of the students in the classroom. In one study, teachers in elementary schools reported significantly higher usage of specific strategies, including informal notes, telephone calls, and parent-teacher

conferences, than their middle-school counterparts (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Further, two types of programs, those that encourage classroom volunteers and those that involve parents in their children's learning activities at home, were more prevalent in elementary school than in middle schools.

Different strategies may appeal to different families as a result of their personal beliefs, strengths, and needs. One hypothesis states that parents may be encouraged to become more involved if the strategies move in a hierarchy from them being less involved, such as being a participant at a children's performance, to them becoming more involved, such as supporting a child's learning efforts at home (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Fathers of preschoolers were found to be more likely to participate in communication practices that were initiated by the school, as opposed to the home; were a school visit, rather than a letter or phone call; and pertained to the child more often than it discussed a family issue (Rimm-Kauffman & Zhang, 2005). An example of such a communication strategy is a parent-teacher conference.

Christenson and colleagues (1997) surveyed both families and school psychologists to understand their respective perspectives regarding specific parent involvement activities. Parents were asked to choose, from the listed activities, the ones that they thought schools should offer and that they would access and utilize. The most popular strategies with families included those that provided information to parents about the functioning of the school, including how grades are earned, scheduling, and homework; structuring children's learning at home; understanding child development and supporting their child's social-emotional development; existing community resources to support the needs of children and families; and meeting and consulting with school

psychologists on ways to improve the behavior and development of their children. School psychologists examined the same list of activities and rated the feasibility of implementing such strategies in their schools. The findings indicated that families and school psychologists demonstrated a high degree of similarity in the ways in which they ranked the specific activities. The school psychologists surveyed indicated that activities that were most preferred by families were able to be implemented in their schools in a reasonable amount of time, demonstrating a shared vision for parent involvement.

There may also be some predictive ability in knowing what parent involvement strategies already exist at a given school (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). This finding, based on Epstein's (1987) definition of parent involvement, is based on the definition falling within a loosely defined hierarchy, with, for example, Type 2 involvement (basic obligations of schools) typically coming before Type 4 involvement (involvement in learning activities at home). Following that example, some assumptions can be made that schools who are conducting programs to involve parents in learning activities at home are more likely to be involved in the other, earlier types of parent involvement.

Purpose of the Current Study

Family involvement in education has been identified as a beneficial factor in young children's learning (National Research Council, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). This study will survey a population of educators- teachers in early care and education centers- that has not been extensively examined in the existing parent involvement research. They are a group from which government standards and requirements for quality care are asking a great deal with regard to knowledge and commitment to improvement. As researchers and practitioners seek to discover ways of

improving outcomes for young children, it is important to understand the population that may be directly responsible for carrying out these initiatives and interventions.

Early conceptualizations of parent involvement described a relationship where the school held the majority of the decision making power; and, to be considered involved, families had little choice but to fit into the role that schools laid out for them. Such practices did not make an effort to reach out to all families and were not inclusive. The current study is driven by a more comprehensive definition of parent involvement that is becoming increasingly popular in the field, in which both center staff and families have obligations to fulfill that will lead to greater participation by all. The current study expands on the existing parent involvement literature within the field of education by focusing on a specific group of early care and education staff. It serves as a preliminary investigation to gauge the current attitudes and practices of that group of early care and education staff regarding parent involvement and to examine the effectiveness of one type of intervention service to positively affect the attitudes and practices of one group of the sample of teachers.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Early Care and Education Centers

The early care and education centers that participated in this study were part of a community-wide quality improvement initiative. The initiative was created to address the problem of the growing number of children in the area who, for a variety of reasons, were not experiencing successful kindergarten years. The concept of school readiness has been interpreted in many different ways by early childhood and elementary teachers and administrators; national, state, and local policy makers; and families (Kagan, 1992). Some educators and schools take a nativist, or maturational, perspective on school readiness, with the idea of being ready for school focusing on a child's maturity and skill level. In such a perspective, the burden of proof that a child is ready for school rests solely with the child and may be determined by such things as his or her performance on readiness tests and in the kindergarten classroom (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1990). This quality improvement initiative took a wider, more comprehensive view of school readiness, as defined by the National Educational Goals Panel (2001). Using their working definition, three key areas of school readiness emerge: (1) readiness in children, including physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, language development, cognition and general knowledge, and approaches to learning; (2) readiness of schools, including smooth transitions between home and school and continuity between early care programs and elementary schools; and (3) family and community supports, including access to high quality pre-school programs, parents who devote time each day to helping their children learn, and

the support and training necessary to do this. One part of the program, recognizing that children benefit when their early education experiences are of high quality, devoted its resources to improving the quality of early care and education centers. The 31 centers that participated in the quality improvement initiative served approximately 2,500 young children.

Participation in the quality improvement program was gained through an extensive admissions process. The program sought to primarily serve early care and education centers that are located in a major Northeastern United States city. Programs located in low-income neighborhoods in two surrounding counties were also eligible, although no more than 20% of the centers were to be from outside of the city. A total of 318 initial outreach letters were sent, along with application materials and an invitation to attend an applicant outreach meeting in each center's area, to early care and education centers that both met the location criteria and enrolled at least 50 children. The centers were identified from the state Department of Public Welfare licensing list. A total of 74 completed applications were returned for consideration for admission into the initiative. Centers that served at least 75 children automatically received a site visit from the admissions committee, which was composed of representatives from the agencies that would eventually provide each of the quality improvement supports. For centers that served fewer than 50 children, preference was given to those centers where more than 50% of the enrolled children received subsidized care or to those centers that predominately served ethnic, racial, or language minority families. The centers had to agree to have their directors attend quarterly directors' meetings and to cooperate with periodic independent observations and ratings of their programs through the Early

Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised (ECERS-R) (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998) and the Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 1990). A total of 45 centers received site visits, which was the next step in the admissions process. The site visits involved touring the facilities; meeting with the director and the board, when applicable; informally observing classrooms; and reviewing submitted lesson plans. Following the site visit part of the admission process, 31 centers were selected for inclusion in the initiative. These centers were judged to be able to work efficiently with the quality improvement agencies and to make significant quality improvements within the 3-year time frame. All of the selected centers received technical assistance in the area of program quality and business practices. Just under half of the centers (15 out of 31) in the initiative also received parent engagement support for the final two years of the initiative. Each center also received a set amount of money to help in reaching its quality improvement goals over the three-year period of the initiative. For approval, the money had to be directly related to a specific aspect of quality improvement and could be used for such things as bringing in special speakers for trainings and workshops for parents and staff, making building renovations, and purchasing classroom toys and materials.

The specialists assigned to work on improving the overall program quality of the centers were called mentors. The work schedule of the mentors was such that each center received on-site services for about four hours each week; approximately four additional hours each week were spent on off-site work for each center. The mentors focused their efforts on a variety of topics related to quality improvement, including teacher-child interactions, health and safety practices, room arrangement, staff qualifications, and

developmentally appropriate practices. They suggested appropriate materials and toys for the centers to purchase and worked with the center directors to create attainable goals for improvement.

All of the centers also received consultative services in the area of business practices. These services were offered to the centers for an average of eight hours each month and included such assistance as recruiting and retaining quality staff members, marketing the centers' services to the community to maximize enrollment, creating a workable budget, and implementing cost-saving measures, such as maximizing staffing schedules and reducing energy usage.

Fifteen of the 31 child care centers that participated in the quality improvement initiative received additional technical assistance from family engagement specialists. This researcher worked as a family engagement specialist for 5 of the 15 centers. The general purpose of having these specialists was to increase parent involvement and strengthen family-school partnerships. The assignment of the family engagement specialists to the centers was not random. The selection process began by sending introductory letters to each of the already selected 31 child care centers. The letters requested that the center directors call the supervisor of the family engagement specialist program to schedule an additional site visit if they were interested in receiving the services. Twenty-eight centers in the initiative demonstrated an interest in this service, and 15 centers from this group were selected.

The supervisor of the family engagement specialist program conducted site visits to the interested centers for the purpose of interviewing their directors. The semi-structured interview was designed to determine each center's need for assistance from a

family engagement specialist. The interview focused on two main areas. First, the directors were asked if there was a staff member at the center who served as the champion, or coordinator, for parent involvement efforts. This role was often filled by an assistant director, if such a position existed at the center. In a limited number of centers, individuals serving in a social work role devoted much of their work time to parent involvement activities. None of the centers that were selected to receive support from family engagement specialists employed such a person. Second, the directors were asked about already existing practices or activities at the center that served to involve parents. Examples of these practices and activities included such things as holding open houses, maintaining parent organizations, conducting parent-teacher conferences, distributing a parent handbook to newly enrolled families, and sharing child development information with families. Centers received a point for each activity or practice that was already established at the center, as well as five points for having a parent involvement champion at the center. The 15 centers that received the lowest point totals were offered services from family engagement specialists; all of the centers accepted this initial offer of support. In this way, preference for receiving family engagement support was given to those centers that first demonstrated an interest in the service, which 28 of the 31 centers did, and were then deemed to be in high need of this type of service as they had either no or limited existing supports for their parent involvement efforts.

Family engagement services were designed to increase parent interest in school readiness; to empower parents in advancing the school readiness of their children through skill development, training, and support; and to encourage and improve communication between families and centers. Numerous types of strategies were used to support the

directors' and teachers' efforts in meeting parent engagement goals. The types of strategies that were implemented at a center were dependent on a number of factors, including center characteristics, such as its building size, the number of families it served, the language and culture of the center, the turnover rate of the staff, and the preferences and goals of the director. The strategies that were used generally fell into one of two categories, direct and indirect. A direct strategy provided services directly to a family. An example of such a strategy would be a conversation between a family engagement specialist and a family member about some topic of child development. In this case, the family received the information directly from the family engagement specialist. An indirect, or systems, strategy affected the larger system, typically the child care center. This type of strategy did not usually include a direct contact of a family by the parent engagement specialist. An example of such a strategy would be a teacher training session conducted by the specialist that provided teachers with techniques to include families as volunteers in their classrooms. The work schedule of the parent engagement specialists was such that each center received on-site services for about four hours each week and also off-site services for an additional four hours each week; the centers received the services for 2 years. On-site time was spent in a variety of ways, including talking and consulting with parents and staff, setting up resources for parents and staff, conducting staff and parent trainings and workshops, and reviewing progress and goals. Off-site time was also spent in a variety of ways, including researching strategies and techniques, completing relevant paperwork, accessing resources to distribute to families and staff, and creating materials to be used in the centers.

Participants

A survey was distributed to teachers of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers at the 31 early care and education centers that were part of the quality improvement initiative. Each staff member had previously received an identification number for data collection purposes for other assessment aspects of the initiative. The numbers were retained to maintain subject confidentiality. The survey was distributed to 197 teachers from 31 different centers, and 171 usable surveys were returned. Eighty-nine of the teachers worked in early care and education centers that received technical support in the area of family engagement and 82 of the teachers worked in centers that did not receive that type of technical assistance. Of the surveys that were not returned, 17 belonged to teachers from centers that did not receive assistance from family engagement specialists and nine belonged to teachers from centers that did receive the assistance. Surveys were received from each of the 31 centers that participated in the initiative. The number of surveys received from each center ranged from three to seven, with an average of 5.5 surveys received from each center.

Materials

Teacher Demographic Survey

All teachers completed a short demographic survey designed to gather information on a number of variables, including the age of the children that they cared for, their overall years of teaching experience, their amount of time at their current child care centers, gender, race/ethnicity, and highest level of education attained.

Survey of Teacher Attitudes and Practices

The survey used in this study, which can be found in Appendix B, was created by the researcher, as appropriate measures that addressed all areas of the study, including attitudes and practices, for the given population were not located in the existing literature. Surveys used in the existing literature were often too narrow in focus (Endsley, Minish, & Zhou, 1993; Ghazvini & Readdick, 1994; Ware, Barfoot, Rusher, & Owen, 1995), designed for families to complete (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000), or were relevant only to families and teachers with connections to early intervention. An unpublished scale, the Family-Oriented Practices Scale, again only asked for input from families. Other surveys assumed that a center considered itself to be a family-centered environment and sought to discover how well their practices matched that belief. The centers in this study did not claim to be family-centered and were part of a quality improvement initiative.

Specific aspects of these surveys may have been helpful, but to shorten the time involvement for teacher participants, a new survey was created that asked only about those specific areas of interest to the present study. The most relevant of the located surveys was created by Epstein and Salinas (1993). The survey is entitled “School and Family Partnerships: Survey of Teachers in Elementary and Middle Grades” and corresponds with the six types of parent involvement theorized by Epstein (1987). The survey tapped into many of the areas of this study but was designed for elementary, middle, and upper school teachers and consisted of over 100 items. A closely adapted survey from Garinger and McBride (1995) was equally lengthy and created for teachers

of preschool through third grade students. Several of the items on the survey used in this study were adapted from items from the Epstein and Salinas survey.

The survey used in this study contained 25 Likert item questions and included items such as “parent involvement is necessary for a good center,” “teachers should work hard to involve the families of all of their students,” and “all parents are able to learn ways to help improve their child’s school readiness.” Of the 25 Likert item questions, five of the questions were designed to measure general attitudes regarding parent involvement, eight of the questions to measure family obligations, and ten of the questions to measure teacher and/or center obligations. The remaining two items asked respondents to choose reasons why parents might not become involved. These areas were chosen to address through the survey because they describe a more comprehensive view of parent involvement that charges both educators and families with being active participants. Four-point items were chosen so that the participants would be required to indicate some degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement. Such a design is consistent with the arrangement of Epstein and Salinas’ (1993) scale, which is used in many of the reviewed studies. The last items asked respondents to indicate the frequency with which they engage in nine specified activities that teachers might use to help children and their families, such as having conversations with families, writing progress reports, or conducting parent-teacher conferences.

Validity of the survey was determined by a panel of six experts from various areas related to early childhood education and parent involvement. The experts were a Ph.D. level professor of Education, a Ph.D. level professor of Psychology with research interests in childcare, a Ph.D. level school psychologist, a Master’s level early childhood

curriculum specialist who was also a former early care and education center director, a Master's level practitioner who delivered support services to parents of children in early care and education centers, and another Master's level practitioner of parent support services who is also a former center director. Each specialist was asked to consider the relevance and clarity of each item. In addition, the survey was presented to and discussed with eleven early care and education teachers. These teachers worked at a preschool in the same geographical area as the study participants but were not connected with the quality improvement initiative or any of the involved centers. Any items that were reported as difficult to understand, ambiguous, or inconsistent were either revised or eliminated.

Instructions on the survey asked respondents to consider the terms *parent involvement* and *family-school partnerships* as meaning all the ways that families and early care and education centers can work together to help children. They were told that their answers would help to provide a better understanding of what caregivers in early care and education centers think and do about involving parents in the education of their young children. A further note clarifies that, in the survey, the words *parent(s)* and *family* refer to those adults who are the caregivers for a child in the home.

Environment Rating Scales

The Environment Rating Scales have items to evaluate physical environment, basic care, curriculum, interaction, schedule and program structure, and parent and staff education in early care and education centers. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised (ECERS-R) is used to assess classrooms serving children two and a half years of age and older (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer (1998). The Infant Toddler

Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) is used to assess classrooms serving children two and a half years of age and younger (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 1990). ITERS and ECERS-R scales were used to assess all of the classrooms in all of the centers that were part of this quality improvement initiative. These evaluations took place every six months and were conducted by trained observers from an outside agency that was not affiliated with the centers. Observations from the final time all of the centers were observed and scored for the initiative were used in this study as a measure of quality of the centers. The scales have been shown to be both reliable and valid (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998). The sample for interrater reliability and internal consistency studies included 30 infant/toddler classes in 30 early care and education centers that were chosen to represent a wide variety of quality of environments. Two observers independently rated each class on the ITERS during a single visit. For the test-retest reliability, 18 of those classes were visited again 3 to 4 weeks later by one of the original observers. The Spearman correlation coefficient for interrater reliability on the overall scale was .84, and the subscale coefficients ranged from .58 to .89. The Spearman correlation coefficient for test-retest reliability on the overall scale was .79, and ranged from .58 to .76 for the individual subscales. For the measure of internal consistency, the Cronbach's Alpha score on the overall scale was .83.

Criterion validity was assessed by comparing categorizations of infant/toddler programs as high or low quality using ITERS scores and expert evaluations. A total of 12 classrooms were included, resulting in an overall agreement rate of 83% between the expert evaluations and the ITERS scores. An item-by-item comparison of the ITERS with seven other widely used instruments for assessing the quality of infant/toddler programs was conducted as one measure of content validity. Overall, an average of 82%

of the ITERS items was included in the other instruments, and an average of 75% of the items on the other instruments was covered in the ITERS. In addition, five nationally recognized experts rated the importance of each ITERS item for the provision of high-quality programs for infants and toddlers, using a 1 (low) to 5 (high) scale. The overall mean rating was 4.3.

The ECERS-R manual states that it is a slight revision of the well-known and established original scale, which has a long history of research demonstrating the predictive validity of the scale. Interrater reliability was established in a sample of 21 classrooms, equally distributed among high, medium, and low scoring rooms from an initial observation. Overall, the ECERS-R is reliable at the indicator and item level and at the level of the total score. The percentage of agreement across the full 470 indicators is 86.1%. Subscale internal consistencies range from .71 to .88 with a total scale internal consistency of .92, which indicates that the subscales and total scales can be considered to form reasonable levels of internal agreement providing support for them as separate constructs.

Procedure

The surveys were distributed to 197 teachers in the 31 centers that were part of the quality improvement initiative. Fieldworkers employed by the university that was evaluating the project delivered the surveys to each center. Programs were called two days later to schedule a pick-up time. The majority of the centers elected to have their teachers complete the surveys during staff meetings. This method of completion led to a strong return rate, as it eliminated the necessity of remembering to hand the survey in at a later time. The return rate was about 87%.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Data Analytic Strategy

Following completion of the data entry phase of this study, all data were visually inspected for accuracy, and no potential problems emerged. Data were entered into SPSS Version 15.0 for Windows. Depending on the type of variable (continuous or discrete), means, standard deviations, *N*s, and percentages were produced for each variable using SPSS Procedures Frequencies or Descriptives. Results are organized as follows: (a) descriptive data for all of the variables, and (b) inferential analyses examining the relationships between independent and dependent variables and answering the research questions.

Descriptive Statistics

Categorical Variables

Frequencies (*n*) and percentages (%) for the categorical variables, including gender, race/ethnicity, age level taught, and education level are presented below in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Frequencies (N) and Percentages (%) for the Categorical Variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N^a</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N^b</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender				
Female	79	88.8	69	84.1
Male	1	1.1	0	0
Did Not Report	9	10.1	13	15.9
Race				
Black/African-American	29	32.6	24	29.3
Hispanic/Latino/Chicano	21	24.0	15	18.3
Caucasian/White	12	13.5	20	24.4
Asian/Asian American	7	7.9	3	3.7
Biracial/Multicultural/Other	2	2.2	4	4.9
Did Not Report	18	20.2	16	19.5
Age of Children in Classroom				
Infants	9	10.1	11	13.4
Young Toddlers (1-year-olds)	10	11.2	10	12.2
Older Toddlers (2-year-olds)	17	19.1	15	18.3

Table 4.1 (*Continued*)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N^a</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N^b</i>	<i>%</i>
Young Preschoolers (3-year-olds)	20	22.5	18	22.0
Older Preschoolers (4- and 5-year-olds)	33	37.1	28	34.1
Education Level				
Some High School	0	0	1	1.2
High School Diploma/GED	21	23.6	16	19.5
CDA Credential ^c	23	25.8	25	30.5
Associate's Degree	23	25.8	17	20.7
Bachelor's Degree	17	19.1	16	19.5
Master's Degree	5	5.6	7	8.5

^aThese numbers represent the teachers from the centers that received assistance from the family engagement specialists.

^b These numbers represent the teachers from the centers that did not receive assistance from the family engagement specialists.

^cThe Child Development Associate (CDA) is a certification awarded to individuals upon completion of coursework, assessment, and performance reviews to prove their competence to work with young children. To be eligible to complete CDA work, an individual is required to have a GED or high school diploma, and the CDA is considered to be a step above a high school diploma but not as advanced as an Associate's Degree.

A total of 171 cases were available for analysis for the 25 survey questions. The majority of the sample (68%, $n = 117$) reported working forty hours each week in early

care and education, while ten percent ($n = 17$) reported working more than forty hours each week. The final 22% ($n = 37$) reported working less than forty hours each week, with the most common response in that group being those ($n = 14$) that reported working thirty-five hours each week. Nearly equal percentages of teachers had worked in child care for a maximum of five years (22%, $n = 38$) and for between six and ten years (23%, $n = 39$). Thirteen percent ($n = 22$) had worked in child care for a length of time between eleven and fifteen years, while another 10% ($n = 17$) had worked in child care for a length of time between sixteen and twenty years. Finally, about 11% ($n = 20$) reported more than twenty-one years of overall working experience in child care. Twenty-one percent ($n = 35$) of the teachers did not report how long they had been working in child care. More than half of the teachers (53%, $n = 91$) had worked at their current child care center for five years or less. Sixteen percent ($n = 28$) had worked at their current child care center between six and ten years. Smaller percentages had worked at their current centers for more than ten years. Seventeen percent ($n = 29$) of the teachers did not indicate how long they had been working at their current place of employment.

Frequency data were examined to discover the types of strategies that teachers in this sample used to involve the parents of the children they teach. A table showing the reported frequency of each strategy can be found in Appendix C. Teachers reported that engaging in conversations with families was the most frequently utilized parent involvement strategy, with 93% ($n = 159$) of teachers indicating that they had conversations with families on a daily basis. An additional seven percent ($n = 12$) of the sample reported speaking with families once or twice each week. Parent information

boards were the second most utilized parent engagement strategy. Seventy-six percent ($n = 127$) of teachers indicated that this was a technique that was used every day.

In addition to conversations and parent information boards, teachers also reported communicating with families through written reports. These types of reports may have described a particular child's behavior or activities during the school day. Fifty-five percent ($n = 92$) of teachers report using this strategy to share information with families on a daily basis; an additional 29% ($n = 48$) of respondents indicated that they utilized written reports once or twice each week.

A majority of the teachers reported that they also used newsletters to communicate with families. Sixty-six percent ($n = 109$) of the teachers indicated that they produced newsletters to share with families one time each month. Another strategy that was reportedly typically utilized once each month was the distribution of parenting information to families. Thirty-four percent ($n = 50$) of the teachers shared this type of information monthly.

Sixty-eight percent ($n = 117$) of the respondents reported conducting parent-teacher conferences with their students' families twice per year. An accompanying practice may be the distribution of written reports of children's progress, as 56% ($n = 94$) of the teachers reported that they distribute this type of communication to families two times each year.

The use of parent workshops varied across teachers and centers. Twenty-nine percent ($n = 45$) of the sample indicated that parent workshops are conducted on a monthly basis. An equal number and percentage of teachers reported that parent

workshops are never used as a strategy to engage parents. Twenty-one percent ($n = 32$) of respondents stated that parent workshops are held twice per year. Finally, center-wide events that include parents were used by 37% ($n = 60$) of the respondents twice per year and by 27% ($n = 43$) of the respondents once per month.

Continuous Variables

Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for each of the survey questions are shown in Table 4.2, below.

Table 4.2

Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Each Survey Question

<i>Question</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Parent involvement can help teachers be more effective with more children	3.67	.56
Teachers should receive recognition for time spent on parent involvement activities	3.28	.64
Children develop best when their families and teachers work together	3.82	.40
Teachers can learn things from parents that will help them teacher their young children	3.68	.48
Parent involvement is necessary for a good center	3.68	.47
Teachers need additional training or workshops to learn ways to involve parents in their child's education	3.34	.59
Parent involvement is an important goal for the director of the center in which I work	3.40	.68
The director of this center supports my efforts to involve parents in their child's education	3.37	.72
This center finds new and unique ways to involve parents in their young children's education	3.14	.78
Teachers should work hard to involve the families of all their students	3.44	.57
Teachers have enough time to involve parents in useful and important ways	2.80	.76
When I talk with parents, it is usually about problems or challenges	2.80	.84
I consider it an important part of my job to involve parents in their young child's education	3.58	.58

Table 4.2 (*Continued*)

<i>Question</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
When centers and families are not able to work together, it is usually the fault of the center	1.96	.79
When centers and families are not able to work together, it is usually the fault of the teacher	1.78	.69
Every family has some strengths that could be used to help a child get ready for kindergarten	3.32	.57
Most parents know what to do to prepare their children for success in kindergarten	2.34	.74
Parents at this center work together with the teachers to help their child learn and develop	2.98	.69
When parents do not become involved in their child's early education, it is usually because they have too many other demands in their lives	2.75	.76
When parents do not become involved in their child's early education, it is usually because they feel that it is the center's job alone to prepare their child for kindergarten	2.67	.77
Parents at this center want to be involved in their child's early education	2.95	.64
Parents at this center are interested in learning about ways that they can help their children learn and get ready for kindergarten	2.96	.66
Parents at this center understand the importance of the early years (ages birth to 5) to a child's education	2.87	.68
All parents are able to learn ways to help improve their child's school readiness	3.19	.62
When schools and families are not able to work together, it is usually the fault of the family	2.17	.69

Note: Likert-scale scores were as follows: 1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Agree 4=Strongly Agree

The teachers tended to respond in similar ways to the 25 Likert scale questions that assessed their attitudes regarding the teacher's and center's role in parent involvement, the family's role in parent involvement, and parent involvement in general. On only seven of the questions did 20% or more of the teachers have a differing overall

view, when grouping together strongly disagree and disagree into one category and agree and strongly agree into another, than the rest of the group. The frequencies of the response options for each of the survey questions are shown in Table 4.3, below. Those items marked with an asterisk are those in which there was a 20% or greater discrepancy between those who generally agreed or disagreed with the statement.

Table 4.3

Frequency Distribution for Each Survey Question

<i>Question</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SA</i>
Parent involvement can help teachers be more effective with more children	2	2	46	121
Teachers should receive recognition for time spent on parent involvement activities	1	14	92	64
Children develop best when their families and teachers work together	0	1	28	142
Teachers can learn things from parents that will help them teach their young children	0	1	52	118
Parent involvement is necessary for a good center	0	0	55	116
Teachers need additional training or workshops to learn ways to involve parents in their child's education	1	7	96	67
Parent involvement is an important goal for the director of the center in which I work	4	7	77	83
The director of this center supports my efforts to involve parents in their child's education	6	6	77	82
This center finds new and unique ways to involve parents in their young children's education	6	23	83	59
Teachers should work hard to involve the families of all their students	0	7	82	82
Teachers have enough time to involve parents in useful and important ways *	5	55	81	30
When I talk with parents, it is usually about problems or challenges *	14	38	87	32
I consider it an important part of my job to involve parents in their young child's education	2	2	61	106
When centers and families are not able to work together, it is usually the fault of the center	47	92	23	9
When centers and families are not able to work together, it is usually the fault of the teacher	58	97	11	5

Table 4.3 (*Continued*)

<i>Question</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SA</i>
Parents at this center work together with the teachers to help their child learn and develop	5	27	106	33
When parents do not become involved in their child's early education, it is usually because they have too many other demands in their lives *	9	48	90	24
When parents do not become involved in their child's early education, it is usually because they feel that it is the center's job alone to prepare their child for kindergarten *	11	55	84	21
Parents at this center want to be involved in their child's early education	4	27	114	26
Parents at this center are interested in learning about ways that they can help their children learn and get ready for kindergarten	3	31	106	31
Parents at this center understand the importance of the early years (ages birth to 5) to a child's education *	6	34	108	23
All parents are able to learn ways to help improve their child's school readiness	1	16	103	51
When schools and families are not able to work together, it is usually the fault of the family *	20	110	33	8
Every family has some strength that could be used to help a child get ready for kindergarten	1	6	102	62
Most parents know what to do to prepare their children for success in kindergarten *	17	89	55	10

Inferential Analyses

Described below are the research questions posed by the current study, followed by an explanation of the statistical analysis used to investigate each question and whether or not the original hypothesis was supported.

The items on the survey were constructed to fit into three general categories. First, several items asked teachers to report on their general attitudes towards parent involvement. A second cluster attempted to examine teachers' views regarding teacher or center obligations in reaching out to and involving parents. A third cluster attempted to examine teachers' views of families and their ability to be effective partners in their child's education. A factor analysis was conducted, but these three clear factors did not emerge. Because of the results of the factor analysis, survey responses were examined on an individual question basis.

Research Question One

Will the teachers who worked in centers that received technical assistance from family engagement specialists report feeling differently about parent involvement than those teachers who did not receive the additional support? Also, will those teachers who received additional support report using more or different strategies to engage parents and to work to create school-family partnerships than those who did not?

A MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) was performed to determine whether teachers who received additional support in the area of family engagement reported different attitudes than teachers who did not receive the assistance. A MANOVA was used to correct for multiple comparisons. The Wilks' Lambda multivariate test of overall differences among groups was modestly but statistically significant ($p = .032$). There were significant mean differences on five survey questions between the teachers who received additional support in the area of parent engagement and those who did not.

Teachers working in centers that received technical assistance in the area of family engagement ($M = 3.54$) reported feeling more supported by their directors in their efforts to engage parents than did teachers working in centers that did not receive this service ($M = 3.09$, $t(169) = -3.870$, $p < .01$). They ($M = 3.48$) also reported that parent involvement was more of a priority for their director than teachers who had not received parent involvement technical assistance ($M = 3.21$, $t(169) = -2.365$, $p < .05$). Teachers in centers who received technical assistance in the area of parent involvement ($M = 3.26$) agreed with the statement that their center found new or unique ways to involve parents in their young child's education more than their counterparts who had not received the technical assistance ($M = 2.89$, $t(169) = -2.897$, $p < .01$). Teachers who had received this technical assistance ($M = 3.32$) felt more positively about all parents' abilities to learn ways to help improve their child's readiness for school than teachers who did not ($M = 3.06$, $t(169) = -2.558$, $p < .05$). Finally, teachers working in centers that had received family engagement technical assistance ($M = 2.89$) reported that their conversations with families usually involved talking about problems and challenges, as opposed to other topics, more than teachers who did not receive this assistance ($M = 2.52$, $t(169) = -2.698$, $p < .01$).

A MANOVA was also performed to determine whether or not teachers who received additional support in the area of parent engagement reported using more or different strategies to engage families than teachers who did not receive the assistance. The Wilks' Lambda multivariate test of overall differences among groups was, again, modestly but statistically significant ($p = .045$). There was a significant difference noted on two specific types of strategies, newsletters ($p < .05$) and parent workshops ($p < .05$),

with teachers who had received technical assistance in the area of family engagement using these strategies more often. Teachers who had received the technical assistance reported using newsletters to communicate and share information with families approximately one time each month ($M = 4.18$). Teachers who had not received the technical assistance reported using newsletters approximately two times each year ($M = 3.65$). Teachers who had received the technical assistance reported holding workshops for families approximately two times each year ($M = 2.98$), while teachers who had not received the technical assistance reported holding workshops approximately once a year ($M = 2.46$). There were no differences between the groups regarding the use of conversations, written reports, parent information boards, parent-teacher conferences, written progress reports, information to families on parenting, and center-wide events that include families. The research hypothesis was, in part, supported.

Research Question Two

Will teacher characteristics- including level of education, the number of hours worked each week, and the number of years worked at their respective centers and in early care and education overall- affect the reported attitudes of teachers towards parent involvement? Will the age of the children that they teach affect the reported attitudes of teachers toward parent involvement?

In an attempt to identify the influence of specific teacher characteristics on their attitudes regarding parent involvement, a Pearson correlation was carried out on several teacher demographics and their responses on each of the 25 survey questions. A Pearson correlation was also conducted on the age of the children in each classroom, examining the relationship between responses on the survey questions and the age of the children

cared for by each teacher. To correct for the multiple correlations that were being carried out, the alpha level was dropped to .01.

Analysis suggested that teachers who worked more hours each week agreed more with the statements that said that children develop best when their teachers and families work together ($r = .25, p < .01$) and that parent involvement is necessary for a good center ($r = .27, p < .01$). There were no significant correlations found between any of the survey questions and the number of years that each teacher had worked overall in early care and education or at their respective centers. Using an alpha level of .01, no significant correlations were found between reported levels of education and the answers provided by these teachers to the survey questions.

Analyses revealed significant correlations between the age of the students in a teacher's class and attitudes about parent involvement on 2 of the 25 questions. Teachers of older students felt more positively about the strengths of all families to contribute in some way to their child's school readiness ($r = .23, p < .01$) and the necessity of parent involvement for a quality center ($r = .20, p < .01$). It should be noted that, although these reported correlations between teacher attitudes and teacher demographics and classroom characteristics were significant, the strength of these relationships was modest. Parts of the research hypothesis were supported.

Research Question Three

Will a relationship exist between a classroom's level of quality, as measured by the Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scale or the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, and the attitudes of its teachers regarding parent involvement?

A Pearson correlation was carried out on the responses to the survey questions and the scores from either the ITERS or ECERS-R. No significant correlations were revealed between a classroom's level of quality, as measured by the ITERS or ECERS-R, and the teachers' attitudes regarding the various aspects of parent involvement and parent involvement in general. The hypothesis was not supported.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The present study was a small-scale effort to answer three specific research questions. The discussion of the findings of this project proceeds in the following manner: (a) conclusions and general discussion of the research questions, (b) limitations and directions for future research, and (c) the implications for the practice of school psychology.

Conclusions and General Discussion

Teachers' overall reported attitudes regarding parent involvement and family-school partnerships were positive. They agreed that parent involvement is necessary for a good center and that children develop best when families and teachers work together. The teachers recognized the important role that parents can play by reporting that they can learn things from parents that will help them teach their children and that parent involvement can help teachers be more effective with more children. The early care and education teachers in this sample held similar views as the elementary, middle, and upper school teacher populations from the existing research (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Jones, White, Aeby, & Benson, 1997; McBride, 1991; Morris & Taylor, 1998; Pelco & Ries, 1999).

The majority of the teachers strongly agreed that involving parents in their child's education is an important part of their job. This finding is positive, in that research states that teachers are more likely to actively involve families in their students' education when they view the practice as part of their professional role (Pelco & Ries, 1999). In addition, teachers reported feeling supported by their respective directors in their parent

involvement efforts and believing that parent involvement is an important goal for their directors. Center directors have the ability to influence the attitudes and practices of their staff, so it is encouraging that teachers sensed the importance of parent involvement to their directors (Endsley, Minish, & Zhou, 1993; Garinger & McBride, 1995). Although the teachers believed that they should work hard to involve the families of all their students, 35% of the teachers felt that they did not have ample time to involve parent in useful and important ways. Consistent with the existing literature, the early care and education teachers in this sample also felt that they could benefit from additional training or workshops to learn new ways to involve parents in their young children's education (Bruneau, Ruttan, & Dunlap, 1995; McBride, 1991; Pelco & Ries, 1999). Time and a lack of training may be a barrier for some of these teachers in involving families. Despite these factors, these teachers reported attitudes that suggest they are working to meet the basic obligations of schools, as described in Epstein's (1987) definition of parent involvement, and understanding the importance of their role in creating successful family-school partnerships.

Overall, the early care and education teachers in this study reported favorable attitudes about families; these attitudes tended to be more positive than the reported attitudes from the teachers in the existing literature (McBride, 1991; Pelco & Ries, 1999). The teachers reported feeling confident about the ability of all families to learn ways to foster their children's skills and development and agreed that all families have some strengths that can be used to get their children ready for school. When asked specifically about the parents at their respective centers, the teachers agreed that parents at their centers want to be involved in their children's education and that the families work

together with the teachers to help their children learn and develop. The teachers believed that the parents at their respective centers are interested in learning about ways that they can help their children learn and get ready for kindergarten, but a majority of the teachers reported believing that most parents do not know what to do to prepare their children for kindergarten.

When examining the reported strategies used by teachers to engage with families, a wide variety of strategies was indicated as being frequently used. All of the presented strategies were reportedly used, at least some of the time, in all of the centers, including conversations with families, parent information boards, parenting information to families, parent-teacher conferences, and written reports of children's progress. The wide range of strategies that was used is also encouraging, in that it is more likely that all families will have access to at least one strategy that meets their preference or comfort level. Parent involvement can be thought of as a cyclical process, as the more that center staff formally communicate with parents, the more parents participate in the center and the more highly teachers think of parents' ability to contribute to a collaborative process. In turn, these results make it more likely that teachers will seek to involve parents in future efforts (Endsley, Minish, & Zhou, 1993; Michael, Arnold, Magliocca, & Miller 1992). The reported positive attitudes regarding parent involvement and the frequent communication through a variety of strategies reflect a link that has also been found in other studies (Endsley, Minish, & Zhou, 1993; Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

The first question investigated by this study was to determine whether or not providing early care and education teachers with technical assistance in the area of family engagement affected their attitudes and practices related to parent involvement. Findings

were mixed, but some of the data suggest that the service was effective. Statistical analyses indicated that the responses of teachers who had received help and support from family engagement specialists were different from those who had not.

Teachers in centers who had received the additional family engagement support felt more supported by their directors in their efforts to involve parents. Further, they believed that parent involvement was a priority for their director and that their centers found new and unique ways to involve families. Family engagement specialists spent much of their time in the center meeting and brainstorming with center directors, and it is encouraging to see that the directors' positive views about parent involvement were perceived by their staff. Teachers in these centers were also more likely to agree that all families have the ability to learn ways to help improve their child's readiness for school. These responses help to demonstrate a stronger understanding and commitment by these teachers, when compared to the group who did not receive the intervention, to the four components of parent involvement frequently discussed in this project- basic obligations of families, basic obligations of schools, involvement at school, and learning at home.

Finally, teachers who had received support from family engagement specialists reported that most of their conversations with families involved talking about problems and challenges, which can be an uncomfortable situation. Although it is important to share both successes and challenges with families, it is possible that these teachers felt confident enough in their skills to effectively communicate with families, even about difficult issues. These types of conversations, when done well, can help families and teachers come together as problem solvers, which may ultimately lead to the best outcome for the child.

Regarding the use of specific techniques and strategies to engage parents, teachers in centers that received the additional technical assistance held more parent workshops and distributed more newsletters to families. The family engagement specialists, who worked for outside agencies, had personal and professional connections in the field of early care and education that made it easier for them to access outside resources, such as qualified speakers for workshops. Considering that many of these centers were lacking even basic supplies, the family engagement specialists were also able to access supplies, such as functioning copy machines, large amounts of paper, and computers with software, that not all center staff had regular access to in order to create materials, such as newsletters. Overall, the practice of using family engagement specialists did serve to positively affect the attitudes and practices of centers and their staff. This finding is consistent with the existing literature, which states that attitudes and practices can be changed through education (Garinger & McBride, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Morris & Taylor, 1998).

Research question two focused on the relationship between teacher characteristics and the reported attitudes and beliefs of those teachers regarding parent involvement. Again, findings were mixed, but some of the data suggest that certain teacher characteristics may be related to specific attitudes. Teachers who worked the most hours each week at their centers indicated a stronger belief in the importance of parent involvement for a good center than teachers who worked fewer hours each week. They also recognized that children develop best when teachers and families work together. It is encouraging that these teachers, with whom parents may have the most contacts, hold these positive beliefs regarding parent involvement. Noting the link between attitudes

and practices in the literature (Endsley, Minish, & Zhou, 1993; Epstein & Dauber, 1991), it is likely that these teachers may have acted in ways that fulfilled the basic obligations of schools to work to involve parents.

There was no relationship found between reported attitudes and beliefs and the length of time that an individual had worked in early care and education or at their respective centers. There was also no relationship found in this study between a teacher's level of completed education and his or her reported beliefs regarding parent involvement. Overall, the educational level of this sample was low, with only about 25% of the teachers having received a Bachelor's or Master's Degree. While education was not a relevant factor in reported parent involvement beliefs, receiving technical assistance in the area of family engagement was shown to make some difference in the reported beliefs. The existing literature highlights the ways that education, through both degree granting programs and specific courses or in-service programs, can enhance aspects of parent involvement beliefs (Garinger & McBride, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Morris & Taylor, 1998).

This question also examined the relationship between reported attitudes and beliefs regarding parent involvement and the age of the children in the teachers' classrooms. Again, aspects of the hypothesis were confirmed. Teachers of older children had a more positive view of families than their co-workers who taught younger children, in that they reported a stronger recognition that every family has some strengths that can help their child get ready for kindergarten. These same teachers also more strongly agreed that parent involvement is necessary for a good center. These findings suggest that the teachers held beliefs that, in part, matched beliefs of their colleagues who taught

in lower elementary grades (Michael, Arnold, Magliocca, & Miller, 1992; Pelco & Ries, 1999).

Research question three focused on the relationship between overall level of classroom quality, as measured by the ITERS or ECERS-R, and reported attitudes regarding parent involvement. The hypothesis, which suggested that teachers who work in higher quality classrooms would have more positive attitudes about parent involvement and the teacher's and center's ability and responsibility to partner effectively with families, was not supported. This finding is inconsistent with the existing literature (Endsley, Minich, & Zhou, 1993; Ghazvini & Readdick, 1994). There are possible explanations for this difference. The centers described in the research were well-established centers, with routinized parent involvement strategies and practices, while many of the centers in this study were just getting started in their efforts. The centers in this study had acknowledged needs in many areas and were part of a quality improvement initiative. The specific measure of quality used in this study examined a wide range of criteria, including physical environment and classroom materials, that was not directly related to parent involvement. Although scores are tabulated on a classroom basis, some specific parts of the scores are based on center characteristics. Although a teacher may report having certain attitudes and beliefs, center resources and other characteristics influence the score that a classroom could obtain.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

The conclusions drawn must be regarded in light of the current study's limitations. There are limitations related to the population of this study and the location where this survey was completed, which do not allow for generalization of the results to the entire

population of early care and education teachers. Also, because completion of this survey was voluntary, it is possible that those who completed and returned the surveys have different types of answers than the total sample population, despite the high response rate. The sample for this study was drawn from one very specific area in one state in the Northeast. The survey was distributed to a convenience sample of teachers who were part of a quality improvement initiative that was not random.

Further, within the sample, the assignment of centers to receive the services of a family engagement specialist, the major intervention examined in this study, was not random. Center directors had to indicate an interest in possibly receiving the service, which may indicate that they already valued the importance of parent engagement more than the three center directors that did not indicate an interest in the service. This factor is important, in that research has consistently shown that directors can influence the attitudes and practices of their staff (Endsley, Minish, & Zhou, 1993; Garinger & McBride, 1995). Ultimately, preference was given to those centers that were deemed to be in high need of this type of service based on information shared during a semi-structured interview. This may indicate that, despite the director's show of support for parent involvement, the center likely had less practices in place to start with. Because no official pre-intervention measures of parent involvement attitudes or practices were used, it is not known to what extent the relatively positive attitudes towards families and parent involvement, as well as the reported strategies that were used, were present prior to the initiative.

The exact effect of the family engagement specialists is further clouded by the fact that the quality improvement mentors, in the absence of a family engagement

specialist at their respective centers, may have focused their efforts on improving family-school partnerships. The entire quality improvement initiative was labor intensive and required a great deal of resources, making its exact replication difficult. Future research could examine the effect of family engagement specialists working alone in centers without the other aspects of the program, especially with a similar teacher population. This teacher sample did not possess a great deal of formal education, particularly when compared to the requirements for school-age teachers. Future research could examine the effectiveness of family engagement specialists to possibly assist in making up for the lack of formal education in furthering the quality related goal of improved family involvement. Finally, it is unknown if the attitudes and practices of the teachers changed, stayed the same, or improved following the removal of the family engagement specialists at the end of the program. Future research could examine the long-lasting effects of such an intervention.

This study examined a very specific subset of teachers and families. Overall, the sample of teachers was predominately female, racially diverse, and limited in formal education. The centers that they worked in were targeted, as they served families deemed to be facing challenges due to income levels or their status as ethnic, racial, or language minority families. Future research should examine a wider variety of teachers and families to see if this affects the reported beliefs and attitudes.

Additional limitations of this study include those that are typical to survey research. One weakness within this area concerns the validity and reliability of the responses that were obtained from the subjects. Surveys provide only general descriptors of what respondents say that they think or do about something. There were no

observations conducted to verify the reported claims of either practices or attitudes.

Future research may want to examine if a match exists between what teachers say they do and what they actually do in this area. There was also no information collected from the families to determine if what they experienced matched the claims of the teachers. In addition, there was no way of knowing the families' preferred means of contact, so it is unknown whether or not what the teachers reported doing was actually effective in building family-school partnerships. Again, future research may want to examine this match.

A major limitation of this study is the fact that the survey that was utilized was created by the researcher. Research-supported steps were taken to formulate a useful instrument, including grouping items into coherent categories, making items as brief as possible, using simple and direct language, including experts on the topic to gauge validity, and testing the questionnaire on individuals similar to the sample study; but, it is not a standardized or previously validated instrument. Responses to the survey items were generally uniform. Some of the items may have hinted at a desired response or allowed respondents to fall into response sets. Four-point items were utilized to require participants to indicate agreement or disagreement with a statement. However, such a design eliminated the presence of a neutral response, which could have led to participants indicating a response that they truly did not feel.

In addition, the quality improvement mentors and family engagement specialists, including this researcher, were well known and generally liked by center staff. It is possible that this relationship influenced their responses. Reactivity is a common threat to internal validity, and teachers may have responded in ways that they felt made their

family engagement specialists or mentors look competent and successful instead of indicating their true feelings and practices.

The terms parent involvement and family-school partnerships were defined for their respondents before they completed the survey. However, it is not certain if they adopted that definition in completing their responses or if they answered according to their own, preconceived notion of parent involvement. The entirety of the survey sought to lessen this confusion by explicitly asking about all parts of parent involvement using the concept of the given definition without specifically using the term parent involvement; but, the opportunity for confusion, vagueness, and misunderstanding remained.

Although 171 respondents completely answered all 25 of the first survey questions, the responses for reported strategies used dropped. The range of respondents for the specific strategies ranged from 145 to 171. It is possible that the teachers were confused by the layout of the questions and did not understand how to respond. They also may not have been completely familiar with the strategies listed and, as a result, felt uncomfortable indicating any response.

Implications for the Current Practice of School Psychology

School psychologists are in a unique role to help schools and parents facilitate collaborations that meet the needs of teachers, parents, and students (Pelco & Ries, 1999). School psychologists have training in child development, learning theory, and consultation that make them well suited to facilitate and encourage conversations and interactions between teachers and families. They collaborate with educators, parents, and other professionals and can help to create supportive learning environments for all students and to strengthen the relationships between home and school.

School psychologists should find the results of this study encouraging, as it seems to indicate that this specific population of early care and education teachers felt positively about parent involvement and the abilities of both themselves and the families they worked with to come together in meaningful ways to support children. In general, it is important that school psychologists know how the teachers that they work with feel about families and involving them in their child's education. In that way, school psychologists can take an active role in expanding the way that teachers conceive of their professional role when it comes to working with families. Trainings, workshops, and consultation can further that construction of the professional role by helping to improve teachers' sense of self-efficacy for working with families. These factors are believed to increase the likelihood that teachers will actively work to involve families in their students' education (Pelco & Ries, 1999).

In addition, when parents and school psychologists were surveyed about specific parent involvement activities, school psychologists indicated that the activities that were most preferred by families were able to be implemented in their schools in a reasonable amount of time, with proper training and preparations. This finding demonstrates a shared view of family involvement practices between families and school psychologists and forms a foundation from which to build upon in the schools (Christenson, Hurley, Sheridan, & Fenstermacher, 1997).

The majority of school psychologists do not work with the teachers and families of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. However, as the creation of school district pre-kindergarten programs in many states continues, school psychologists may see the age of children that they work with become younger. School psychologists who work with the

youngest children and their families and teachers, such as those that work in early intervention and preschool special education, have the unique opportunity to be part of the child's first exposure to formal education. The family is just beginning to conceive of its role as the caregiver of a student and as a contributor to a family-school partnership. This transition is not always an easy one for families or schools. Based on the knowledge that school psychologists have regarding teacher attitudes and practices related to involving families, they will be able to work to foster the most effective types of communication. School psychologists can serve to remind teachers that every family is unique and has strengths to offer.

Creating a link between the various support systems, namely school and home, that affect children can impact positively on their development. Consistency across settings increases the chances for success, whether the goal is learning or behavior change (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). New education regulations have highlighted the necessity to create positive behavior support plans for students whose behaviors negatively affect their learning. Too often, when talking about behavior problems, blame tends to shift from students to teacher to families, before coming around again to teachers (Miller, 1999). This shifting of blame can create tension and distrust and does not serve to help the child. Any information that can be discovered about teachers' attitudes and practices and used to support family-school partnerships during this process is helpful. Working to improve pro-social and learning related behaviors in the toddler and preschool years, with both the families and teachers of young children, can help to reduce the need for intervention later and to improve outcomes for schools, children, and families.

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APPENDIX A
TEACHER DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Please tell us a little bit about yourself-

1. How many hours a week do you now work in early care and education?
_____ hours

2. How long have you worked in child care?
_____ years

3. How long have you worked at this center?
_____ years

4. Are you female _____ or male _____?

5. How would you best describe your ethnicity?

- _____ Black, African-American
- _____ Hispanic, Latino/a, Chicano/a
- _____ Native American
- _____ White, Caucasian
- _____ Asian, Asian-American
- _____ Biracial or Multicultural
- _____ Other _____

6. What are the ages of the children in your classroom? Please check ONE response that best describes your class.

- _____ 6 weeks to 12 months (Infants)
- _____ 12 to 24 months (Young Toddlers)
- _____ 25 to 36 months (Older Toddlers)
- _____ 37 to 48 months (Younger Preschoolers)
- _____ 49 to 60 months + (Older Preschoolers)

7. What is the highest education level that you have completed?

- _____ Some high school or less
- _____ High School/GED
- _____ CDA credential
- _____ Associate's Degree
- _____ Bachelor's Degree
- _____ Master's Degree

APPENDIX B
SURVEY OF TEACHER ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

In the following questions, the terms *parent involvement* and *family-school partnerships* mean all the ways that families and early care and education centers can work together to help children. Your answers will help provide a better understanding of what caregivers in child care centers think and do about involving parents in the education of their young children. In this survey, the words *parent(s)* and *family* refer to those adults who are the caregivers for a child in the home.

I. The following questions ask for your ideas on different parts of parent involvement. Please CIRCLE the one choice for each item that best represents your opinion and experience.

**For the following questions, SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree;
A = Agree; and SA = Strongly Agree**

- | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|----|
| 1. Parent involvement can help teachers be more effective with more children. | SD | D | A | SA |
| 2. Teachers should receive recognition for time spent on parent involvement activities. | SD | D | A | SA |
| 3. Children develop best when their families and teachers work together. | SD | D | A | SA |
| 4. Teachers can learn things from parents that will help them teach their young children. | SD | D | A | SA |
| 5. Parent involvement is necessary for a good center. | SD | D | A | SA |
| 6. Teachers need additional training or workshops to learn ways to involve parents in their young child's education. | SD | D | A | SA |
| 7. Parent involvement is an important goal for the director in the center in which I work. | SD | D | A | SA |
| 8. The director of this center supports my efforts to involve parents in their child's education. | SD | D | A | SA |
| 9. This center finds new and unique ways to involve parents in their young children's education. | SD | D | A | SA |

10. Teachers should work hard to involve the families of all their students.	SD	D	A	SA
11. Teachers have enough time to involve parents in useful and important ways.	SD	D	A	SA
12. When I talk with parents, it is usually about problems or challenges.	SD	D	A	SA
13. I consider it an important part of my job to involve parents in their young child's education.	SD	D	A	SA
14. When centers and families are not able to work together, it is usually the fault of the center.	SD	D	A	SA
15. When centers and families are not able to work work together, it is usually the fault of the teacher.	SD	D	A	SA
16. Every family has some strengths that could be used to help a child get ready for kindergarten.	SD	D	A	SA
17. Most parents know what to do to prepare their children for success in kindergarten.	SD	D	A	SA
18. Parents at this center work together with the teachers to help their children learn and develop.	SD	D	A	SA
19. When parents do not become involved in their child's early education, it is usually because they have too many other demands in their lives.	SD	D	A	SA
20. When parents do not become involved in their child's early education, it is usually because they feel it is the center's job alone to prepare their child for kindergarten.	SD	D	A	SA
21. Parents at this center want to be involved in their child's early education.	SD	D	A	SA
22. Parents at this center are interested in learning about ways that they can help their children learn and get ready for kindergarten.	SD	D	A	SA

23. Parents at this center understand the importance of the early years (0 to 5) to a child's education. SD D A SA
24. All parents are able to learn ways to help improve their child's school readiness. SD D A SA
25. When schools and families are not able to work together, it is usually the fault of the teacher. SD D A SA
-

II. Teachers choose from many activities to help children and their families and to form family-school partnerships. Please place a CHECK MARK in the area that shows how frequently you or your center use the following practices. Please make only one mark for each listed activity.

	Daily	Once or twice each week	Two times each month	One time each month	Two times each year	One time each year	Never
Conversations with families							
Written reports (describing activities, behavior, etc)							
Parent information boards							
Parent-teacher conferences							
Written progress reports							
Information to families on parenting							
Newsletters							
Parent workshops							
Center-wide events that include parents							

Thank you very much for completing this survey!

APPENDIX C

Frequencies (N) for Each Strategy

	<i>Daily</i>	<i>Once or Twice Each Week</i>	<i>Two Times Each Month</i>	<i>One Time Each Month</i>	<i>Two Times Each Year</i>	<i>One Time Each Year</i>	<i>Never</i>
Conversations with Families	159	12	0	0	0	0	0
Written Reports (describing activities, behavior, etc.)	92	48	6	10	6	0	5
Parent Information Boards	127	19	3	16	0	0	3
Parent-Teacher Conferences	7	3	7	25	117	5	8
Written Progress Reports	28	8	7	16	94	4	10
Information to Families on Parenting	42	10	18	50	6	3	18
Newsletters	8	16	5	109	8	3	16
Parent Workshops	2	2	14	45	32	15	45
Center-Wide Events that Include Parents	12	2	16	43	60	16	10