

**Family Partnerships in an Integrated Preschool Setting:
Approaches for a Supportive Environment**



**A Capstone Project submitted for the degree of Master of Education:
Curriculum and Instruction**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. CAPSTONE PROJECT PROPOSAL..... 1

- Introduction..... 1
- Problem Statement..... 3
- Research Questions..... 4
- Methods..... 6
 - Introduction..... 6
 - Project Participants and Setting 7
 - Data Collection Tools 9
 - Validity and Reliability..... 12
 - Materials 12
 - Data Analysis 13
 - Questionnaires..... 14
 - Interviews..... 14
 - Community Site visits..... 15
 - Literature Review..... 15
 - Research Journal and Log..... 15
 - Timeline 16
 - Summary 17

II. LITERATURE REVIEW 18

- Introduction..... 18
- What is parent involvement? 18
- Individuals with Disabilities Act and Integration 19
- Empowerment..... 20
 - Knowledge and Skills 20
 - Appropriate Adaptation Time 21
 - Meaningful Participation 23
- Why are Family Partnerships Necessary?..... 24
 - Relationships Build Students 24
 - Involvement Creates Knowledge and Alleviates Stress 27
 - Connections Between Family Involvement and Student Success 28
- What Supports Do Parents Need From Schools? 31
 - Validate the Role of a Parent 31
 - Parent Support Through Communication..... 33
 - Listen to Parents..... 34
- What Obstacles Prevent Parent Involvement?..... 35
 - Family Structures 36
 - Cultural Differences..... 37
 - Teacher Attitudes 37
- Conclusion 38

III. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS	40
Introduction.....	40
Participants and Tools.....	41
Results.....	42
Questionnaires.....	43
Summary	50
Interviews.....	50
Interview Documentation.....	52
Interview #1- January 6, 2009	52
Interview #2- December 28, 2008	54
Interview #3- December 13, 2008	57
Common Themes and Trends from Interviews	60
Summary	61
Community Site Visits.....	62
Summary	63
Literature Review, Reflective Journaling and Logging.....	64
Summary	64
IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....	66
Introduction.....	66
Considerations for Strengthening the Study	72
Recommendations for Future Research and Next Steps.....	72
Final Summary and Conclusions	73
REFERENCES.....	76
APPENDICES.....	81
Appendix A:.....	82
Site Visits.....	82
Appendix B:.....	96
IRB Letter	97
Parent Interview Protocol	98
Questionnaire Protocol.....	99
Parent Interview Protocol Cover Letter	100
Questionnaire Protocol Cover Letter	101
Parent Interview Thank You Letter	102
Questionnaire Thank You Letter	103
Appendix C:.....	104
Interview Questions	105
Questionnaire #1	106
Questionnaire #2	107
Questionnaire #3	108
Questionnaire #4	109
Interview Reaction Form	111
Questionnaire Reaction Form	112

Appendix D:.....	113
Capstone Experience Logging Chart	114
Journal Documentation for Capstone Project	117

LIST OF TABLES

<TABLE 1: COMMUNITY SITE VISITS>

LIST OF FIGURES

<FIGURE 1: EPSTEIN’S THEORY OF OVERLAPPING SPHERES OF INFLUENCE>

<FIGURE 2: FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AND YOUNG CHILDRENS’ OUTCOMES>

<FIGURE 3: TYPES OF EXISTING SUPPORT SERVICES>

<FIGURE 4: HELPFULNESS OF EXISTING SUPPORT SERVICES>

<FIGURE 5: TYPES OF SUPPORT SERVICES RECEIVED DURING TRANSITION>

<FIGURE 6: HELPFULNESS OF SUPPORT SERVICES RECEIVED>

<FIGURE 7: TYPES OF HELPFUL SUPPORT SERVICES FROM ... PRESCHOOL>

<FIGURE 8: LEVEL OF SUPPORT SERVICES FROM COMMUNITY>

<FIGURE 9: DESIREABLE SUPPORT SERVICES FROM ... PRESCHOOL>

<FIGURE 10: LEVEL OF FUTURE SUPPORT SERVICES FROM COMMUNITY>

I. Capstone Project Proposal

Introduction

“Parents are the primary teachers and nurturers of their children. They provide appropriate environments and interactions that promote learning and help their children develop skills and values needed to become healthy and successful adults” (DiNatale, 2002, p. 90). Additionally, developmentally appropriate experiences in an educational setting can provide a child with unique opportunities to learn, grow, and build self-esteem. Together, parents and schools can become partners working together toward providing a child with a network of support.

Partnerships between school and families which begin during the early years of education are important. “Family involvement is critical to the success of young children in early learning environments and beyond” (Keyes, 2002, p.180). First meetings with parents, often the first personal connection that is made, sets the tone for the subsequent relationship making it critical to be aware of issues of cultural styles in conversation space and eye contact. Research suggests that the teachers’ “invitations to parents are also a critical factor in promoting more extensive parent involvement” (Keyes, 2002, p.184).

Keyes (2002) maintains, “what all good parent/teacher relationships have in common is the presence of mutual trust and respect” (p.184). Families come from a variety of cultures, ethnicities, abilities, disabilities, and belief systems. Hurt (2000) reminds us, “every child in my class leaves someone to come to school each day, and each child returns home to someone. I will fully know and teach that child only when I connect with that someone” (p. 88). Only when teachers and administrators welcome, respect and value family partnerships do parents feel supported. “Families then become

more comfortable and confident with their chosen early childhood setting and the children are more likely to do well” (Ball, 2007, p.2). Families with children who have special needs have many additional needs for support.

Preschools offer families of children with disabilities support given to all families, but their needs often go further. These families sometimes require more or different types of support, just as children with disabilities often require more or different types of classroom support than their typical classmates. While early care and education programs often stress creating learning environments in which all children belong, they also share the responsibility for creating a community in which all families belong.

My personal and professional background has led me to recognize the need for family support for children with disabilities. My daughter received special education services through an early intervention program. As an early childhood educator at ... Preschool for the past 6 years, I have been able to recognize the need for family support in our program, through everyday teaching and providing special education services to families of children who have a disability. Each day offers unique and wonderful experiences, and reminds me of the need to include families in every aspect of their child’s education. This research holds promise of strengthening the ... Preschool program and improving the lives for families of children with disabilities at my preschool and for all families in our community.

Although federal law mandates parental involvement in the special education process, such as in the development of the Individualized Education Program (IEP), there are additional strategies for supporting families of children with disabilities in inclusive settings that can be extremely useful. These strategies include coordinated planning

among early childhood and early intervention staff members, regular frequent communication between home and school, and the identification of useful community resources. “By working together, early childhood agencies and families can provide a coordinated, coherent support system that best serves families of children with disabilities. With a shared, supportive approach, inclusive developmentally appropriate programs can be a valuable resource to families” (Kaczmarek, 2007, p.28).

Problem Statement

The purpose of this research will be to investigate, collect data and review methods of supporting diverse families of preschoolers who receive special education services in an integrated preschool setting. The second purpose of this research will be to investigate ways to support parents through identifying their needs. It is important to encourage families to believe they can be key resources in their children’s education and to become actively involved in their community. When parents are involved, they have a better understanding of their role as their child’s primary educators. “Moreover, parents and teachers get to know and learn from each other, which results in children receiving more individual attention and curricula becoming more rich and varied” (DiNatale, 2002, p. 90). Parents and teachers can work together to improve a students’ educational experience. “There are strategies for supporting families of children with disabilities in inclusive settings that can be extremely useful. These strategies go beyond the requirements of the law to include deliberate, coordinated planning among early childhood and early intervention staff members, regular frequent communication between home and school, and the identification of useful community resources. Support

strategies can make a big difference in the lives of families of children with disabilities” (Kaczmarek, 2007, p.28-29).

A framework of six major types of involvement has evolved from many studies and from many years of work by educators and families in schools. The six steps identified in these studies include:

1. Help families establish home environments to support children as students.
2. Design effective forms for home/school communications.
3. Recruit and organize parent help and support.
4. Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home.
5. Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.
6. Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn & Van Voorhis, 2002, p.8-9).

These six steps will provide a framework for determining needs and appropriate supports for families of children with disabilities at ... Preschool.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research will be to investigate, collect data and review methods of supporting diverse families of preschoolers who receive special education services in an integrated preschool setting. Furthermore, this research will investigate ways to support parents through identifying their needs. Throughout my research I will

be focusing on the need for family support at ... Preschool, and gathering information from families, staff and students. The following questions will guide this process:

The first two research questions will identify available resources which currently exist for families who attend ... Preschool and for families residing in the ... area:

1. What do early education providers/agencies in the ... Region have in place to support families of preschoolers with special needs?
2. What methods are being used to support diverse families who have children attending ... Preschool?

The following two research questions will identify the specific needs of families of preschoolers who attend ... Preschool and receive special education services.

3. What do parents of children with a disability who attend ... Preschool identify as needs for supporting their children?
4. What supports can be put in place to create a voice and meet the needs of families of preschool aged children who receive special education services at ... Preschool?

Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this research will be to investigate methods of supporting diverse families of preschoolers who receive special education services in an integrated preschool setting. Furthermore, the second purpose of this research will be to investigate ways to support parents of preschool aged special needs children. Research and investigations will address the possibility of a family component to the program and collection of data will assess the needs of families who are involved in ... Preschool program.

The questions which will be addressed in the methods section of the research paper will reflect the questions which are part of the proposal statement. These questions include:

1. What do early childhood providers/agencies in the ... Region have in place to support families of preschoolers with special needs? Community site visits conducted in fall 2007-present will be used to answer this question.
2. What methods are being used to support diverse families who have children attending ... Preschool? A questionnaire will be given to eight families who attend ... Preschool.
3. What do parents of children with a disability who attend ... Preschool identify as needs for supporting their children? An interview will be conducted with 3 families who have attended ... Preschool in the past, present or are new to the program.
4. What supports can be put in place to create a voice and meet the needs of families of preschool aged children who receive special education services at

... Preschool? Through the composition of the literature review, reflective journaling and logging and peer review, this question will be addressed and ideas will be projected for further study.

The following methods section is divided into:

- Project Participants and Setting
- Data Collection Tools
- Materials
- Data Analysis
- Timeline
- Summary

... Preschool was established in 1990 and provides integrated educational opportunities for preschoolers in the ... area to typical and non-typical children ages 3-5. It currently has 127 students who attend half day sessions throughout the week. It is supported by the ... School District and its mission is to provide preschoolers with an exceptional educational experience as it meets the needs of a diverse population. As the program has grown steadily over the years, the need for family partnerships in creating a supportive environment for every student has become a necessary component.

Project Participants and Setting

The foundation for exploring the need for family partnerships in an integrated preschool setting at ... Preschool lies in consideration of the perspectives of eight families who are participating in a transitional playgroup before they enter ... Preschool. They will complete a series of questionnaires about their needs for support as they enter their identified child into the ... Preschool program. The questionnaire completion will take

place at ... Preschool during Saturday morning playgroup times which will occur four consecutive weeks in October and November, 2008.

Saturday morning playgroup has been constructed at ... Preschool as a pilot program to incorporate three year old children into the preschool program in a small group setting, providing a stable and welcoming environment for children and families. The group will consist of 8 preschoolers and their families. It will be a six week session held on consecutive Saturday mornings from October 18th to November 7th for one and one half hours each week. This pilot program will allow children to flourish and gain independence while building their self esteem as they enter the formal preschool setting. It will also allow families to feel connected to their childs' educational setting, begin building a trusting relationship with their childs' teacher and become a welcome partner in ensuring their childs' successful transition to ... Preschool.

Additionally, three families who are involved or have been involved in the ... Preschool program will be interviewed. These families will consist of: a family who has just begun attending the program, one who is currently established in the daily routine of the preschool, and another family who has transitioned into elementary school after attending ... Preschool several years ago. Home visits will be scheduled to conduct parent interviews. Multiple perspectives of families involved in different aspects of the program will provide rich data to investigate this research.

Information will be included in this research paper about community resources and agencies which currently exist that provide support services to families in the ... region who have a child with special needs. Site visits which were conducted from September 2007 to the present have provided rich information about what currently exists

in terms of support for identifies families in our community. Site visits conducted throughout the community have been a successful method of gathering data for the purpose of this research project.

Data Collection Tools

There will be several tools used to gather information during this research. Each tool will provide valuable data for this research. Data collected from each research tool will provide insight into the questions that guide this research project.

First, questionnaires will be given to eight families who are transitioning from early support services into the ... Preschool setting. Parents who are chosen to participate in completing the questionnaires will read and sign an IRB consent form and receive a Questionnaire Protocol to review (see Appendix A). As stated in Fink (2006), “Questionnaires are data gathering tools that are used to describe individual feelings or preferences. They compare or explain individual and societal knowledge, feelings, values, preferences, and behavior” (p.11). I will be using the information provided in the questionnaires to examine which methods are currently available and being used to support families who attend ... Preschool. There will be four questions exploring the existence and utilization of support services for families who have preschool aged children who are determined to have a disability (see Appendix C). Parents will receive a letter to thank them for their participation in the research conducted (see Appendix B).

Second, I will be conducting in-depth interviews with three families involved in different stages at ... Preschool. As stated in Seidman (2006), “at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the

meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). Conducting personal interviews with several families will provide insightful personal experiences and feelings which will provide an attempt at understanding the specific needs of each family, and what their hopes and fears may be. During the interviews the Interview Protocol format will be used (see Appendix B). I will be gathering information to assess the needs for this study as I meet with each family in their home or in the classroom, asking four specific questions (see Appendix C). Parents who participate in the interview will receive a thank you letter for assisting with this research report (see Appendix B).

Third, I will be including in this research paper observational data collected from community site visits to area agencies that provide support to families who have preschool aged children with special needs. Through observations and interviews with various community agencies and support services, I have collected valuable data. Field notes kept throughout this study include detailed descriptions of the community agency, and the services that it provides to families who receive support services from it (see Appendix A). Hendricks (2009) states, “observational data are the most important source of information in an action research study. It can help determine how the context of a setting can impact how an intervention is successful or unsuccessful” (p.90). These site visit documentations will provide valuable information about systems which are already put into place to support families in the ... region. I will be analyzing data collected from these visits to focus the inquiry on the existence and need for family support systems for the ... Region.

A thorough literature review will document current research and published materials which address the important issue of parent support in early childhood settings.

Johnson (2008) states, “a literature review helps tie your action research project to what others have said and done before you. You can use the insights of others to make your research more efficient and effective”(p.75). Using current literature to document existing research findings will provide opportunities to support statements and observations contained throughout the research study.

Finally, a research journal and log will be established, maintained and conclude at the end of April for the purpose of reporting on the research process. Johnson (2008) suggests that a research journal is used to record thoughts and observations related to all parts of the research. It can be used to describe each step of the research process and is an important source of information to use when trying to piece together the chronology of the research project (p.83). This will include entries depicting the procedures for organizing and reporting collection of data from parents of special needs students. Also included will be continued reflections on data received, reading from research methods books, class information and handouts, and consultation sessions with my advisor. Logging will include dates of classes attended, research conducted, procedures implemented as well as reflections throughout this study.

The method for data collection involves questionnaires, interviews, community site visits, literature review, research journaling and logging. Questions included in the questionnaires and interviews will revolve around the concepts addressed in my research purpose statement. The data gathered through the collection tools will be translated into meaningful documentation.

Validity and Reliability.

Triangulation is an important research concept that is incorporated in this study and demonstrated through acquisition of information from multiple data sources on the topic of family partnerships in an integrated preschool setting. Inquiry into this topic through questionnaires and interviews will tap the perspectives of parents of students with disabilities and their needs for support and provide validity. To address validity in this study, parents will have the opportunity to review the completed documentation from the interviews and questionnaires. I will show the research results and interpretations to my colleagues for peer review and analysis. The peer debriefing will provide alternative interpretations, help point out biases and assist in formulating new directions for ongoing study (Johnson, 2008, p.106).

Using multiple sources to gather information will provide credibility and reliability of the research conducted. Information synthesized from the literature review, and documentation from ongoing reflective journaling and logging throughout the course of this study will provide reliability. Validity and reliability will be ensured by using multiple data sources: questionnaires, interviews, community site visits, literature review, reflective journaling and logging and peer debriefing.

Materials

In order to gather information from questionnaires the researcher will use the Parent Questionnaire forms (see Appendix C). The researcher will be using the Interview Question sheet for parent interviews (see Appendix C). The researcher will be recording

the interview with a tape recorder and transcribing the verbal responses to be documented and interpreted. Data collected during community site visits will be included (see Appendix A) and used to document support systems which already exist in the ... Region.

Texts which will be used to collect and interpret data will be:

1. Fink, A. (2006). *How to conduct surveys: A step-by-step guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA:Sage.
2. Hendricks, ... (2009). *Improving schools through action research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
3. Johnson, A., (2008). *A short guide to action research. (3rd ed.)*. New York:Pearson.
4. Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press.

The researcher will provide parent volunteers who complete questionnaires and participate in interviews with bags containing educational materials that they can use at home with their child as a thank you gift for participating in the research gathering for the purpose of this investigation. Families will also receive a formal Thank You letter (see Appendix B). The researcher will be documenting data collection throughout the process by logging information, as well as using the journal to record thoughts, questions and reflections.

Data Analysis

The data analysis section will contain information gathered from five methods of research: questionnaires, interviews, site visits literature review and journaling. Each

method will provide valuable information for analysis. It will also give direction for further studies on parent/teacher partnerships in an integrated preschool setting.

First, questionnaires and interviews will provide information about improving the current program. Second, site visits will provide an opportunity to examine what currently exists in the community that provides support to families with special needs children. Third, literature review will provide insight into what the current thinking is of parent/teacher support systems. Reading about literature around this topic will lead to further investigation. Finally, journaling and logging will provide insight about our current thinking about parent/teacher involvement.

Questionnaires.

Information received through distribution of questionnaires will be reviewed. The answers to the questionnaires will be documented with close examination of the frequency of responses. There will be an analysis for each question, graphed and visually supported in the Results and Data Analysis section of the research report.

Interviews.

Notes recorded from each interview will be transcribed and collected data will be analyzed to identify common trends and themes. Results will be reported while referencing possible parallels to information from the literature review. The interviews will provide information about improving the current program. A summary of the results of the interviews including identifying emerging trends and themes will be included. Through the process of inquiry, ideas will be noted.

Community Site visits.

Information will be included in the data analysis section about community site visits. It is important to recognize the existence of support services which can be utilized by families of children with special needs. The information included in the documentation of site visits will be listed in a graph to allow for easy review and interpretation. Agency support services will also be included as future plans are made about meeting the needs of families who attend ... Preschool.

Literature Review.

The Literature Review section will provide insight into what current trends are occurring in the educational existence of parent/teacher support systems. Documentation of existing educational research will provide substantial evidence of studies and data being created through studies of this topic... Reading contemporary literature around this topic will lead to a further investigation of what can be accomplished to improve current parent/teacher relationships which exist at ... Preschool and in the ... Region.

Research Journal and Log.

The research journal and log will further provide a medium for reflection on information learned through reading, participation in ... State College Research Design course, and possible emerging themes and ideas for the research intended. Journaling and logging will provide insight about our current thinking about parent/teacher involvement. Hubbard and Power (1993) cites examples of what should be included in the research

journal and log. It can include: summaries and paraphrasing of anecdotal records, a listing of emerging patterns, data gathering methods and analysis, and next steps on the process for gathering research. The log will be used to organize systematically a record of the practices and procedures followed throughout the course of the Capstone Project. A thorough data analysis will be constructed using the five sources listed in this section of the research report: questionnaires, interviews, community site visits, literature review and research journaling and logging.

Timeline

- Step 1: Begin research journaling
- Step 2: Begin site visits to community area organizations for the purpose of gathering information about what is in place for family support in the ...
Region
- Step 3: Obtain ... IRB and school district approval (request permission from ... Elementary Principal, and ... Preschool Coordinator) to conduct interviews and invite parents to complete questionnaires
- Step 4: Select eight families for participation in the questionnaires and send questionnaires to families
- Step 5: Conduct in-depth interview with first family
- Step 6: Conduct in-depth interview with second family
- Step 7: Conduct in-depth interview with third family
- Step 8: Analyze data, write summaries and send thank you notes to research participants and professionals who assisted in the process

- Step 9: Give data analysis to peers for review
- Step 10: Complete Capstone project

Summary

Several methods of investigation to be utilized in order to collect data to provide insight on meaningful ways to support diverse families of preschoolers who receive special education services in an integrated preschool setting. Data will also be collected to provide insight on meaningful ways to support parents through identifying their needs. Through interpretation of data collected from questionnaires, in-depth interviewing, community site visits, literature review, research journaling and logging. The researcher will analyze the data collected and assess the needs for family support which can be facilitated at ... Preschool.

II. Literature Review

Introduction

The foundation for exploring approaches to family partnerships in an integrated preschool setting lies in a comprehensive analysis of professional literature and research studies. The purpose of this research is to investigate and review methods of supporting diverse families of preschoolers who receive special education services in an integrated preschool setting. Furthermore, this research will investigate ways to support parents through identifying their needs. The research will include the identification of available resources which currently exist for families of children who attend an integrated preschool, and also the identification of specific needs for support for families who have preschool aged children who receive special education services at the preschool level.

This literature review is divided into four sections. First, parent involvement will be defined. Second, the importance of parent involvement will be addressed. Third, the needs of parents will be identified. Finally, a spotlight on what prevents parent involvement in schools will be documented.

What is parent involvement?

Sheldon (2002) defines parent involvement in early childhood settings as, “parents’ (or grandparents’ or other adult guardians’) investment of resources in their children’s education” (as cited in Carlisle, Stanley and Kemple, 2005, p.155). Parent involvement in the educational aspect of his/her child with special needs can be crucial and must begin in the early years of education to encourage positive learning experiences for the student.

By age 3, children who are determined to have a disability transition from early intervention services to formalized preschool. This transition is often the first time that students are placed on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and attend a community supported preschool. Parents of children with special needs begin a long-term and often complicated relationship with his/her child's school district.

Parents need to know how to manage many responsibilities and successfully advocate for what his/her child needs, preferably while still maintaining a good working relationship with the school district. Parents are an integral part of the advocacy team which plans for how to successfully meet the students' specific learning goals. Decisions about Individualized Education Plans and placement are required to be made through a team process with everyone participating. A strong parent/teacher connection can benefit a child through this process, and parents who can become meaningful participants in their child's educational experiences help their children in many ways. Parent involvement is an important aspect of the overall success for a student. The following paragraphs will examine the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004, and address the current methods for empowering parents when integrating their children with special needs.

Individuals with Disabilities Act and Integration

The Individuals with Disabilities Act was enacted in 2004 to provide the most successful learning opportunities for every student. It addresses the importance of the family in promoting their child's growth and skill development. Harbin, Rous, Peeler & Schuster (2007) states "one of the primary goals of the act is to enhance the family's capacity to meet the special needs of their child." (p.145). Another goal of the Individuals

with Disabilities Act is to have families actively participate in the decisions regarding their child's services and service settings (Harbin et al., 2007, p.146). By examining the dynamics of learning and development of preschoolers, it has been determined that they can be successful learners alongside their typically developing peers with focus on their specific learning needs and accommodating to facilitate a positive learning environment. Empowering parents is an important aspect of parent-teacher partnership formation.

Empowerment

Families are important members of their child's educational team. For families to be successful, they must be empowered (Harbin et al, 2007, p. 146). In order to have a voice in the educational experience for their child, Rosenkoetter (2008) identifies three important aspects to consider: knowledge and skills, appropriate adaptation time, and meaningful participation. The following paragraphs will closely examine the importance of each of the three areas that provide families with empowerment.

Knowledge and Skills

The first aspect of empowering parents is to recognize their need to have sufficient knowledge and skills for meeting their child's unique needs. Parents must understand the issues surrounding their child's disability and become familiar with methods of accessing the least restrictive environment to best meet his/her educational requirements. They must have skills necessary to provide a home environment which provides stability, routine and an overall respect towards learning. There are many

documents that address and support this important aspect of parent involvement, as cited in the literature review section of this document.

For families must put their knowledge into action they must feel confident and competent. Blanchard, Gurka & Blackman (2006) state “they need to have a variety of parenting skills in order to help their child with routine activities, prevent or successfully address challenging behaviors, and promote adequate rest and nutrition. Families who have sufficient knowledge about their child’s condition, characteristics and developmental needs, legal processes and procedures, are more prepared and experience successful transitions to an education setting” (as cited in Harbin et al 2007, p. 148). Respect for the knowledge and values of families, as well as attention to family concerns related to their child with special needs and to the family’s well-being are common ingredients of a family centered approach frequently offered in a positive and welcoming educational setting. Having knowledge and skills as well as appropriate adaptation time is essential for successful parent empowerment.

Appropriate Adaptation Time

The second aspect of empowering parents is giving them time to adapt appropriately to their child’s placement. The transition from early intervention to formal preschool often means that the child is moving to a home-based therapeutic setting to a school. This may be the first time a child is away from their parent for an extended amount of time, and parents may begin to feel isolation and separation from their child’s education and home life. At this time, open communication between staff and families needs to begin. There also needs to be an invitation from the school to parents which

allow them to feel like they are a true partner in the learning process. This may be one of the biggest transition times for a family to experience, and time is necessary for adapting to the new change.

Rosenkoetter (2008) states, “families of young children often have many challenges. A child who is identified as having a disability adds many more responsibilities to the family. Recognize that this transition from early intervention to preschool is a process rather than an event”(pg. 2). This often happens simultaneously or just before a child’s third birthday. Once a child is determined to have special needs, an Individualized Education Plan is written and placement is determined.

This experience is often stressful, shocking, and is an uncertain time for families. They need time to process what is happening and to readjust their expectations and plans for the future. Taking time to acknowledge what is happening and allowing information to be processed is essential. As the child is placed in a formal preschool setting, families need time to adjust to the culture, structure and requirements of a program. It is important that the new or receiving program for these families recognize their need for time to adjust. It is equally important that families receive the supports they need during this important period in order to ensure a smooth transition (Harbin et al., 2007, p.144). Rosenkoetter (2008) emphasizes, “in order to help define services and supports for families, consideration must be given to short and long-term goals for the child. Most of all it is important to keep open lines of communication during this important time”(p. 2).

Having adequate knowledge and skills and allowing appropriate adaptation time are important aspects of successful parent-school partnerships. The third important area

is addressed which gives parental empowerment is having parents become meaningful participants in their child's educational plans.

Meaningful Participation

The third aspect for providing parents with empowerment is to provide parents with an understanding that they are meaningful participants in the decision making process for their child. Educational professional should encourage parents to visit the school frequently, communicating their apprehensions and goals for the future. In turn, parents should feel respected as they form essential partnerships with educational professionals. Rosenkoetter (2008) states, "the first experiences in formal school settings can start families and teachers off on a wonderful positive relationship which will ultimately benefit the child. Factors in a child's environment (for example, the extent to which parents were involved) influence child outcomes"(p. 2-3).

Several studies by Bailey et al, 1992; and McConnell et al, 1998, have come to the conclusion that, "most families want to be valued members of their child's advocacy team. They want to be able to help them succeed in school and in their future. Families want to be able to teach and play with their child in ways that help them learn, as well as feel safe, secure, confident and loved"(as cited in Harbin et al, 2007). In order for a parent/school partnership to be successful, families must feel like they are equal partners within the team, and that their ideas and contributions are worthwhile and respected. Their questions, concerns and contributions must be validated and appreciated. Above all, families are their child's first teachers and they are important members of the educational community. With the support of *The Individuals with Disabilities Act*

(2004), current trends for integrating children with special needs, and empowering families, parent involvement can be successful.

Why are Family Partnerships Necessary?

There is substantial evidence that family partnerships and impacts overall success of a student with special needs. The following sections will provide an overview of the importance of family partnerships for children with special needs and will be organized into three areas. First, family-school relationships build students' confidence and skills. Second, involvement creates knowledge and alleviates stress for families about their child's progress in school. Third, connections between family involvement and student success have been linked.

Relationships Build Students

Henderson and Mapp (2002) stated when programs and initiatives focus on building respectful and trusting relationships among school staff, families, and community members, they are more effective in creating and sustaining connections that support student achievement (as cited in Allen, 2007, p.7). Through creation of a welcoming environment, schools are beginning an important support system for the child.

Several researchers have found that trust in the teacher or caregiver significantly influences parents' perceptions of the quality of care their child is receiving (Mensing, French, Fuller & Kagan, 2000, p.40). Swick (2004) states, "the establishment of trust is built on consistent positive interactions between the parents and caregivers"(p. 291).

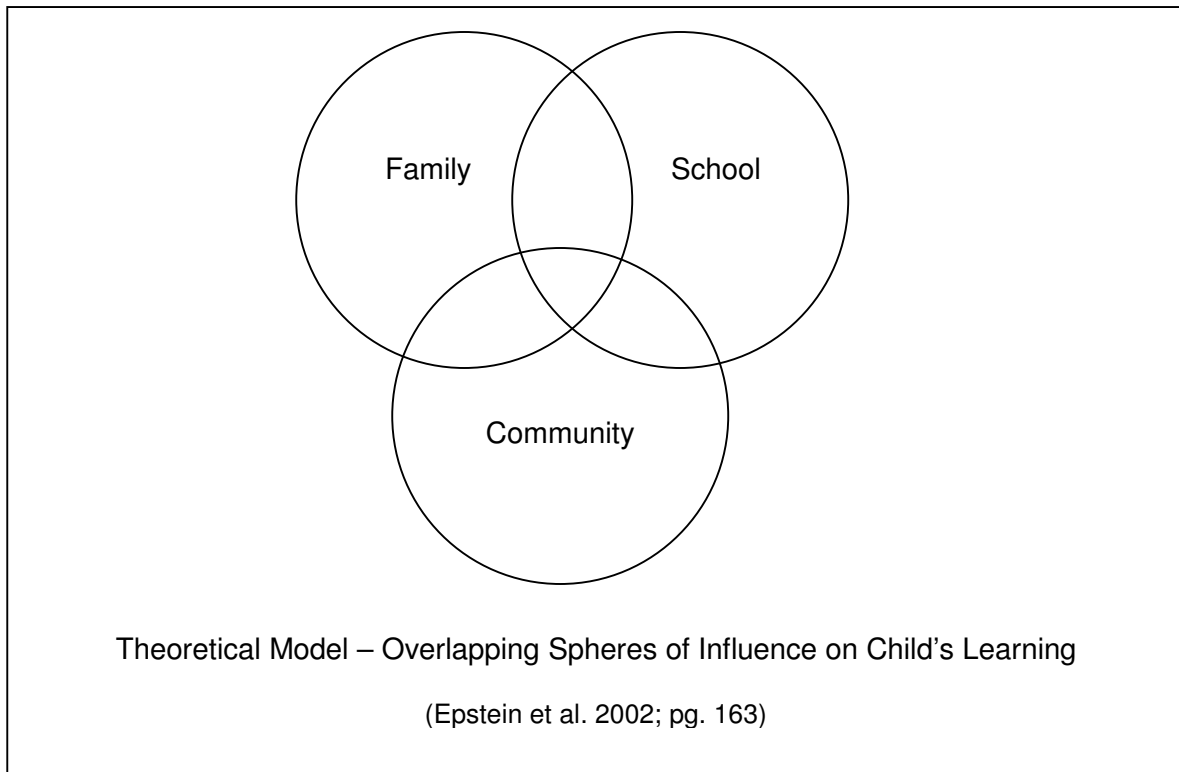
Some children succeed in school without much family involvement or despite family neglect or distress, particularly if the school has excellent academic and support programs. Teacher, relatives outside the immediate family, other families, and members of the community can provide important guidance and encouragement to these students. Boykin (1994) suggests “as support from school, family, and community accumulates, significantly more students feel secure and cared for, understand the goals of education, work to achieve their full potential, build positive attitudes and school behaviors and stay in school. The shared interest and investments of school, families, and communities create the conditions of caring that work to “over determine” the likelihood of student success”(as cited in Epstein et al, 2002, p.7).

Children are posited to be more successful when families participate as active partners in transition planning, are meaningfully involved in exploring options related to their child’s program, truly assist in the selection of placement settings and services for their child, advocate for their child’s needs and are able to communicate with professionals regarding the amount and type of help they desire for their family and their child with disabilities (Able-Boone, Sandall, Loughry & Frederick, 1990; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997,p.100). Rosenkoetter (2008) states, “positive teacher-child relationships and peer relationships appears to contribute to positive child outcomes, including making successful transitions”(p. 2).

Epstein (2002) states that there is ‘overlapping spheres of influence’ in a child’s education: the family and the school. (as shown in Figure 1). Within the family, the parents and whole family interact with the child. Within the school, the teachers and the whole school influence the child. Child’s academic and social development is enhanced

when these two spheres overlap. As cited in Xu and Gulosino (2006), Epstein's overlapping spheres theory corroborates earlier theoretical and empirical works by Eccles and Harold (1993), Pianta and Walsh (1996), Patrikakou and Weissber (2000), Gutman and Midgley (2000), on transition practices from home to school, focusing on 'process indicators' such as teacher-parent partnership to support children's learning and educational progress. These studies have demonstrated the importance of school practices and teacher characteristics that positively engage parents in the process of improving their children's academic performance in school.

Figure 1: Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence



Involvement Creates Knowledge and Alleviates Stress

The second statement which supports the necessity for parent involvement in early childhood settings is that it creates knowledge and alleviates stress for the family of a child with special needs.

Parents' involvement in their child's school experience can help ease young children's initial transition to school, and can help children to view schooling as connected to the familiar world of home. Carlisle, Stanley and Kemple (2005) state, "as children see their parents and teachers interact in cooperative and friendly ways, they hear the message that school is a place valued by their families. Family involvement can help to make the total fabric of a young child's life more seamless, safe, and supportive."(p. 159).

Transitioning to preschool becomes easier when families are armed with appropriate knowledge and understanding, not only about the structure and requirements of their child's program, but also about how the program will support their child's development and meet his/her needs (Harbin et al., 2007, p.148). Knowledge is power.

There is a growing body of research about the impact of home-school relationships to students' learning and their educational progress. Epstein et al. (1997) examined a family-school partnership program adopted by 80 Baltimore elementary schools and found significant achievement gains in reading, writing and mathematics. Izzo et al. (1999) found gains to children's performance from interactions between parents and teachers. Gutman and Midgley (2000) found that the combined effect of high parent involvement and high teacher support has a significant impact on middle school grades (as cited in Xu and Gulosino, 2006, p.347).

As cited in Xu and Gulosino (2006), Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2000) conducted a study through the National Center for Early Development and Learning. The study found a strong connection between teachers' active engagement to family –school contacts and parents' participation in their childrens' educational development. Henderson and Mapp (2002) reviewed a wide range of research-based information on school-initiated family involvement practices and found that a collaborative relationship between teachers and parents has a major impact on improving student achievement (p.346).

Xu and Gulosino (2006) states, “there have been numerous studies in recognizing school and teacher characteristics that encourage parental involvement. These characteristics are seen as important ‘process indicators’ which support a positive transition from home to kindergarten and the early grades of school” (Pianta and Kraft-Sayre, 2003; Pianta et al., 1999; Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 2000; Rimm-Kaufmann et al., 2000).

There is much evidence that parental knowledge alleviates stress and builds strong educational partnerships. The third reason for the importance of parental involvement in educational settings is that there is a connection between parent involvement and student success.

Connections Between Family Involvement and Student Success

As cited in Knopf and Swick (2006), “research has clearly shown that strong parent-teacher relationships lead to increased parental involvement.” (Ames, DeStefano, Watkins & Shelden, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lawson, 2003; Mann, 2006, p. 294). This has been shown to have a significant and lasting impact on

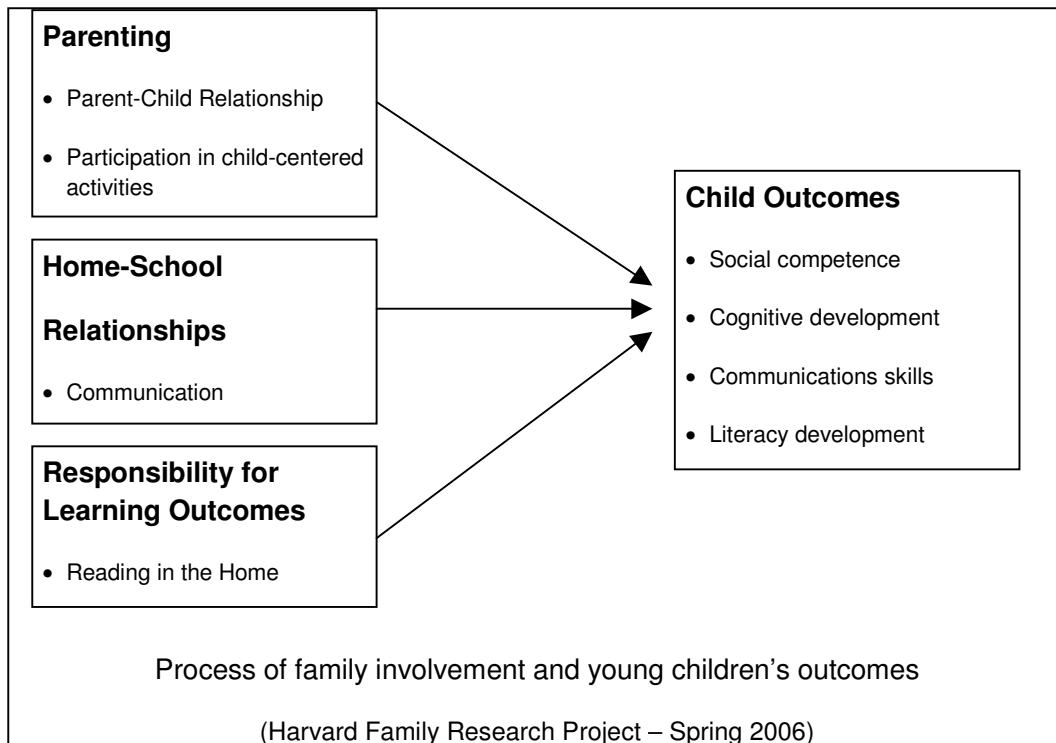
children's' academic achievement (as cited by Ryan, Adams, Gullota, Weissber & Happton ,1995).

Parental involvement leads to student achievement. An analysis of research by Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp (2002) stated, “programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children’s learning at home are linked to improved student achievement. The more families support their children’s learning and educational progress, both in quantity and over time, the more their children tend to do well in school and continue their education.”(p. 11). Furthermore, Allen (2007) contends, “families of all cultural backgrounds, education and income levels can, and often do, have a positive influence on their children’s learning. Family and community involvement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement.”(p.6).

Epstein et al. (2002) explains, “good partnerships withstand questions, conflicts, debates, and disagreements; provide structures and processes to solve problems; and are maintained-even strengthened-after differences have been resolved”(p. 12). Engaging teachers in the process of developing the teacher-parent partnership could provide the necessary buy-in for involving parents, and, with greater than expected results, boost actual student achievement (Xu and Gulosino, 2006, p. 362).

The Harvard Family Research Project studied the importance of families on a child’s educational experience. In Figure 2, *Family Involvement and Young Children’s Outcomes*, the process of family involvement as it relates to student outcomes are clearly illustrated. Parents are key factors when it comes to student success, especially in early childhood educational programs.

Figure 2: *Family Involvement and Young Childrens' Outcomes*



What Supports Do Parents Need From Schools?

The types of supports that parents need from schools in order to feel like a true partner in their child's educational experience are varied. Above all, parents need to know that their child is in a place which respects, nurtures and cares for their child.

In order for successful parent-teacher connections to occur, parents need several actions to take place which will make them feel like a partner. First, parents' roles must be validated. Second, parents want to have open communication lines between school and home. Third, parents want to be listened to.

Rosenkoetter (2008) stresses, "trust and respect towards families is essential. It is imperative to have open communication for families as their child makes the important transition into formal school. High quality childcare and teaching processes geared to the appropriate developmental level for each child is associated with higher academic achievement, better social outcomes and improved adjustment."(p. 3).

Validate the Role of a Parent

In order to give parents the recognition they need to support their child, their role must be validated. The following information addresses the need for validation of the role of a parent in the educational process.

Swick and Hooks (2005) found that, "parents of children with special needs wanted to be valued, to be sought out for feedback on how things were going with their child, and they valued having an important part to play in the parent-teacher partnership. They want a "role". Parents want their children in schools that care about them and their

children. Parents want respect and to be seen as an effective member of their child's education team.”(p. 12).

Knopf and Swick (2007) found that, “parents want to have a part in shaping the agenda for their child's future and want to see their ideas respected and used in creating quality care environments. They want competent early childhood professionals who deliver the services effectively and in ways that truly meet their needs. Parents want to be a part of a relationship that is collaborative and communicative and want a close relationship with early childhood professionals.”(p. 13).

Xu and Gulosino (2006) discovered, “a positive feeling about parents not only encourages teachers to establish a better teacher-parent partnership, but also boosts teacher morale in classroom teaching when parents are perceived as supportive”(p. 365).

Researchers have drawn the following conclusions:

- Just about all families care about their children, want them to succeed, and are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities so as to remain good partners in their children's education.
- Just about all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to go about building positive and productive programs and are consequently fearful about trying. This creates a “rhetoric rut,” in which educators are stuck, expressing support for partnerships without taking any action.
- Just about all students at all levels want their families to be more knowledgeable partners about schooling and are willing take active roles in assisting communications between home and school. However, students need

much better information and guidance than most now receive about how their schools vie partnerships and about how they can conduct important exchanges with their families about school activities, homework, and school decisions.

It is clear from the results synthesized from Ames, Khoju, and Watkins (1993), Baker and Stevenson (1986), Bauch (1988), Becker and Epstein (1982), Booth and Dunn (1996), Clark (1983), Dauber and Epstein (1993), Dornbusch and Ritter (1988), Eccles and Harold (1996), Epstein (1986, 1990), Epstein and Lee (1995), Epstein and Sanders (2000), Lareau (1989), and Scott-Jones (1995) that students, parents and professionals all want success for every student.

The research results above are important to be recognized because they indicate that caring communities can be built intentionally; that they include families that might not become involved on their own; and that, by their own reports, just about all families, students, and teachers believe that partnerships are important for helping students succeed across the grades.

Parent Support Through Communication

The second need for parents involves having open lines of communication with schools. Communication is an essential tool for building parent partnerships. Through communication, trusting relationships are built which ultimately affects a child in a positive manner. Parents need teachers and administrators to establish open lines of communication that facilitate the development of relationships that will enable sometime difficult conversations to take place. (Knopf and Swick, p. 291). Knopf and Swick (2007) also contend that, “parents want you to tell them about their child”(p.291). When

parents hear the teacher capture the child that they know, they feel reassured that their child is visible in her classroom-that the teacher actually sees and knows him or her-and they get the message that she really cares.

Carlisle, Stanley and Kemple (2005) suggest many ways for teachers and administrators to communicate effectively with parents. Something as simple as greeting families each day in the classroom, or inviting them to share stories about their child creates a welcoming atmosphere. Home journals, photo albums, video and audiotapes help families feel like a part of the classroom, especially for families who speak a different language, cannot come to school often, or lack reading skills. Offering an opportunity for a parent/teacher conference, meeting them in another location more convenient for them is helpful. Inviting families to purely fun events at school, and inviting parents to share their expertise on a subject makes school a fun and non-threatening environment. Including mothers, fathers and other family members to collaborate and share creates a welcoming school.”(as cited in Knopf and Swick, 2007, p. 291). All of these activities give families a sense of belonging which builds parent-teacher partnerships.

Listen to Parents

Parents want and need for educational professionals to listen to them. This is key to creating an effective partnership with parents. Epstein (1992); Lawson (2003); Swick (2004); and Knopf and Swick, (2007) have all come to the same conclusion, that too often, early childhood professionals assume they understand parent perspectives and that they have established meaningful relationships with the parent that they serve. Many

parents, however, indicate that they are rarely consulted on important issues regarding their child's schooling and the family-teacher relationship. Comer (2001) had indicated that parental involvement increases when teacher and staff are inviting and supportive in their relations with parents (as cited in Knopf and Swick, 2007, p. 292).

Parents want schools to consider the unique values and ideas that parents bring to an emerging relationship with their children's teachers. Swick and Hooks (2005) states the feelings of one parent, "teachers and administrators, listen to what parents are telling you. Let us try out our dreams. When our dreams don't work, help us find the place where it will work or help us set new dreams. Don't write us off our out of the educational process. Just because we have a child with special needs doesn't mean we should not be involved in his/her education. It doesn't mean this should not be a priority of ours."(p. 297).

What Obstacles Prevent Parent Involvement?

In order to pursue strategies for improving parent-teacher partnerships, a close examination of parental obstacles must be addressed.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1999) states, "parent involvement with educators is built on trust. Trust is based on a mutual respect which is not something one can imitate, but is something one must embody. It is maintained by respectful acts of individual"(as cited in Knopf and Swick, 2007, p. 298). Rosenkoetter (2008) cites, "although it has been proven that positive teacher-child relationships and peer relationships appears to contribute to positive child outcomes, including making successful transitions, unfortunately, it is not always happening"(p. 3).

There are several important factors to consider when examining the obstacles for parent-teacher involvement. First family structures play an important role in parent-teacher partnership. Second, cultural differences must be taken into account. Finally, attitudes of teachers play a tremendous role in making parents feel comfortable in the school setting.

Family Structures

Carlisle, Stanley and Kemple (2005) cited a 1996 study conducted by the National Household Education Surveys Program that found that parental involvement differs among various family structures(p.157). Nord and West (2001) reported, “according to the results of the survey, biological-parent families were found to be the most likely to be highly involved in their children’s education, followed by biological mothers in single parent families and then biological mother step-parent families. Stepmother were found to be the least likely to be highly involved”(p. 158).

Sheldon (2002) reported that, “research has found mothers who work full-time to be less involved in schools than other mothers. For parents with multiple children and for parents struggling with numerous household responsibilities, lack of available time also poses a major barrier to parental involvement (as cited in Carlisle, Stanley and Kemple, 2005, p. 157). Schools must make it a priority to address the specific needs and support all family structures. Family structure plays an important role, along with cultural differences and teacher attitudes.

Cultural Differences

Cultural differences can exist which prevent parent involvement. Educators must make an effort to research ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the students. Sometimes cultural differences can account for unexplained behavior of families. Carlisle, Stanley and Kemple (2005) suggested, “some cultures believe it to be disrespectful to communicate with teacher, fearing that such communication sends the message that parents are second guessing the teachers. Expectations may be different (experiences, customs and values) from those present in children’s homes”(p. 159).

Carlisle, Stanley and Kemple (2005) cites several examples of why parents aren’t involved in their child’s education. Limited English proficiency, previous negative attitudes toward school and the parent’s own educational experiences (previous negative attitudes) can influence parent involvement(p.157).

Finally, teacher attitudes are very powerful when attempting to improve overall partnerships between schools and families. The following paragraphs address the issues of how attitudes of teachers can affect parental involvement.

Teacher Attitudes

Jones et al (1997) states, “teacher attitudes can prevent family involvement. Some teachers are fearful of parents judging their methods or teaching style and may therefore erect boundaries to protect classroom climate. 90% of teachers responding to a survey on parental and family involvement agreed that parental involvement is vital to having a good school: however, 73% disagreed with the statement that “most parents know how to help their children”(as cited in Carlisle, Stanley and Kemple,2005,p.158).

Maintaining a strong teacher-parent partnership is found to have a significant impact on improving early childhood student performance. Epstein (2001) found that, “teacher-parent partnership can affect the way teachers think about teaching and can lead teachers to have specific conceptions of their tasks (i.e. improving academic outcomes)” (p.11).

A variety of strong feelings from teachers may cause them to not pursue involvement of families in their classrooms. Positive teacher attitudes are essential for building strong parent-teacher partnerships in an integrated early childhood setting. For reasons stated in this literature review, parents are important members of the educational team.

Conclusion

This literature review supports the need for parent-teacher partnerships in educational settings. The purpose of this research paper will be to investigate, collect data and review methods of supporting diverse families of preschoolers who receive special education services in an integrated preschool setting. Furthermore, this research will investigate ways to support parents through identifying their needs.

This literature review cited examples of the current theories and documents which support the important reasons for parent-school partnerships. Henderson and Mapp (2002) suggests that when teachers commit to increasing teacher-parent partnership, parents tend to be more positive about the teacher’s interpersonal skills, and to assess the teacher higher in overall teaching ability. Mapp (2002) also stresses that when teachers

are active in the organizing of a teacher-parent partnership, they are more likely to maintain the effort strongly and devotedly (as cited in Xu and Gulosino, 2006, p.347).

Henderson and Mapp (2002), after conducting a comprehensive review of the literature of teacher-parent involvement, explained that schools hold higher expectations of students whose parents collaborate with the teacher. When families buy-in to the ideas of teacher-parent partnership teachers learn more about students in their class and are better able to provide appropriate educational service for their students. Parents, in turn, become partners with teachers to shape important decisions that enhance their children's success (as cited in Xu and Gulosino, 2006, p.347).

By making successful efforts to reach out to parents, teacher/parent partnerships will lead to meaningful results that truly contribute to improving student outcomes for their children. There is a significant interaction between parental support and teacher behavior towards teacher –parent partnerships.

III. Results and Data Analysis

Introduction

The foundation for exploring approaches to family partnerships in an integrated preschool setting lies in a comprehensive analysis of professional literature and research studies. By reviewing the literature and research studies and collecting additional data, connections have been made which link theories to current practices. The purpose of this research paper is to investigate, collect data and review methods of supporting diverse families of preschoolers who receive special education services in an integrated preschool setting. Furthermore, the second purpose of this research is to investigate ways to support parents of preschool aged special needs children.

Throughout this research paper, the focus has been on the need for family support at ... Preschool. Information has been gathered from past literature and research studies, as well as relevant data from families of preschoolers who attend ... Preschool. The following research questions have guided this process:

1. What do early education providers/agencies in the ... Region have in place to support families of preschoolers with special needs?
2. What methods are being used to support diverse families who have children attending ... preschool?

The following two research questions identify the specific needs of families of preschoolers who attend ... Preschool and receive special education services.

3. What do parents of children with a disability who attend ... Preschool identify as needs for supporting their children?

4. What supports can be put in place to create a voice and meet the needs of families of preschool aged children who receive special education services at ... preschool?

The results of this research paper will be organized into four sections. Each section will show results of data collected to answer the four questions which guided the study. Data collection for each question is completed by using multiple perspectives including: questionnaires, interviews, community site visits, literature review, reflective journaling and logging.

Using multiple sources to gather information provides credibility and reliability of the research conducted. Validity in this study is ensured by using multiple data sources through triangulation. Peer and parent debriefing will add another component to support the reliability and validity of this study.

Participants and Tools

... Preschool, established in 1990 provides integrated educational opportunities for preschoolers, aged 3-5 in the ... area. The program serves typically developing children as well as children who have special needs. It is supported by the ... School District and its mission is to provide preschoolers with an exceptional educational experience as it meets the needs of a diverse population.

For the purpose of this research paper, eight families who have children transitioning into ... Preschool and currently receive special education services were given questionnaires. Additionally, three families of special needs children who either have children currently attending ... Preschool, or who have attended in the past,

participated in an in-depth interview. Multiple perspectives of families involved in different aspects of the program provided rich data to investigate this research.

Community site visits were conducted by the researcher. Finally, a thorough literature review, research journaling and logging completed the tools necessary to address the questions which guided this research.

Results

The results of this research paper are organized into four sections providing evidence of acquired data collected for the purpose of this research report. Each of the four sections cites the specific guiding question contained in this study, investigative tools which were utilized to obtain rich data, and a thorough data analysis which will support the findings from the investigation and data collection. The results will be organized into each of the following four sections:

1. Questionnaires
2. Interviews
3. Community Site Visits
4. Literature Review, Reflective Journaling and Logging, Peer Review

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were given to eight families who attended a Saturday morning playgroup in fall, 2008. Each family who attended the playgroup had a child diagnosed with a developmental delay who would be turning age three and attending ... Preschool in the near future, receiving special education services. Each of the eight families completed a series of questionnaires which were given to them each week during a four week playgroup experience. The information received from examining the data collected from the completed questionnaires was used to examine the guiding research question: *What methods are being used to support diverse families who have children attending ... Preschool?*

One of four sets questions was contained in the questionnaire was completed each week:

1. What support services and resources already exist outside of school for your family? Are support services helpful to you?
2. As you transition(ed) from early support services to an integrated preschool setting, what support services do you receive? Do you feel you receive enough support?
3. At this time, what supports would you identify as being helpful to receive from ... Preschool? Does this community provide enough support services for your family?
4. What support services and resources would you like to receive from ... Preschool in the future? Does this community provide any of these support services for your family?

The following information contains a report of data collected from the questionnaires, including interpretation and connections to supporting research data.

Figure 3: Types of Existing Support Services

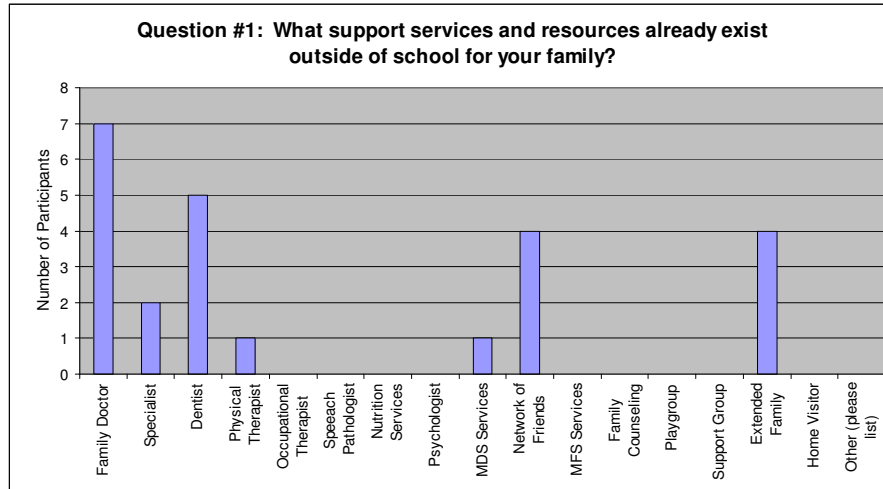
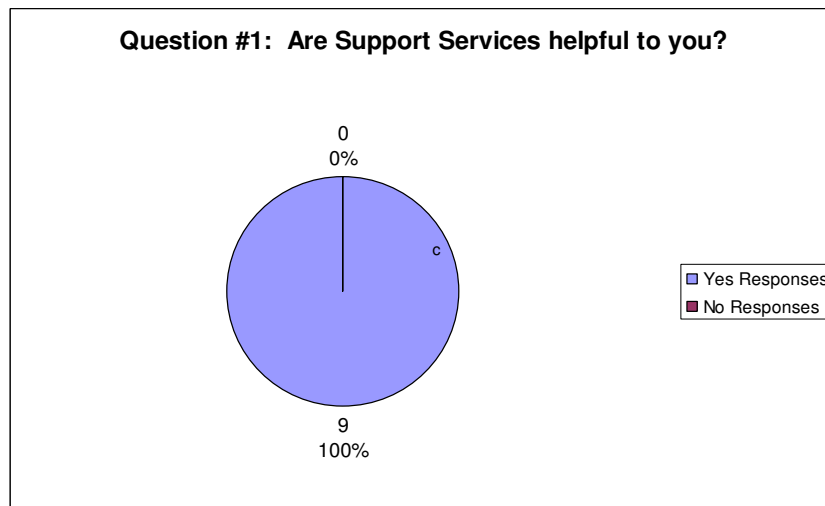


Figure 4: Helpfulness of Existing Support Services



Question #1 focused on support services and resources which already exist for each family before they enter ... Preschool. One hundred percent of families felt that support services were helpful to their family. The results from the questionnaires suggest that family doctors are an important support service for families as well as having

a network of friends and family. Although there are a number of supports listed in the questionnaire, the results reveal that families who completed the questionnaires do not participate in playgroups, and receive little specialized support services from the community. As cited in the literature review section of this research paper, Epstein (2002) states that “there is ‘overlapping spheres of influence’ in a child’s education: the family, the school and the community”(p.163). Interpretation of the results of the questionnaires suggest that community, family and school all play important roles for supporting preschoolers with special needs.

Figure 5: *Types of Support Services Received During Transition*

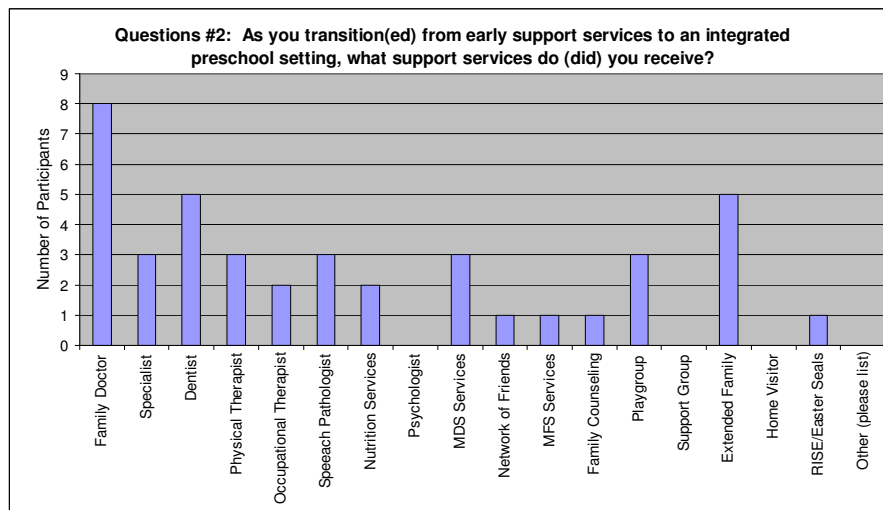
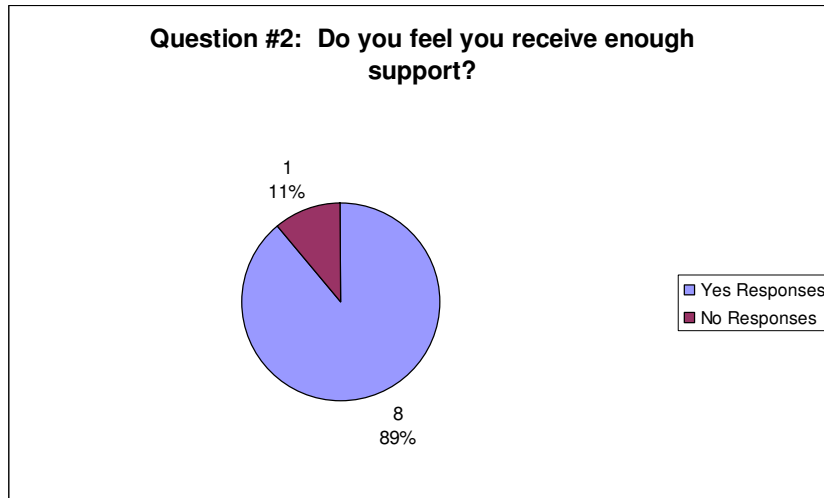


Figure 6: Helpfulness of Support Services Received



Question #2 focused on the support received from early support services as families transitioned to ... Preschool. It suggests that early support services provide a wide range of services for families of children with special needs. It also reveals that families received a greater amount of support services through their early support services rather than community supports, as shown in Figure 3. Seven out of eight families completing the questionnaire felt that early support services gave their family enough support. In order to provide ... Preschool families with a rich amount of support services, it can be determined that a close examination of early support services can be used as a reference.

Figure 7: Types of Helpful Support Services From ... Preschool

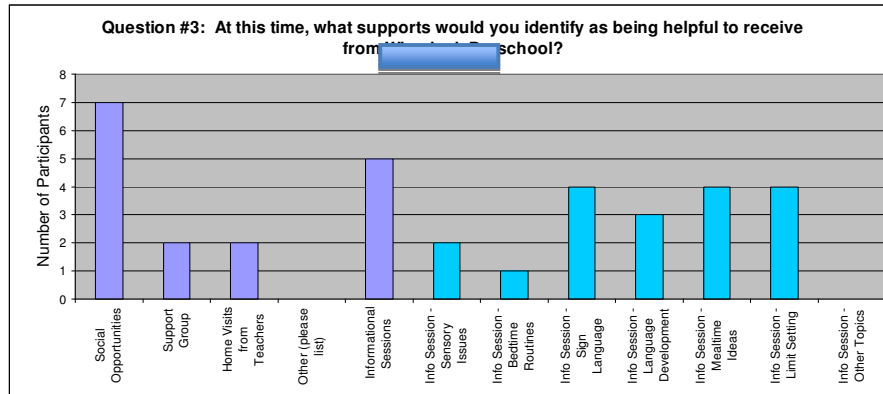
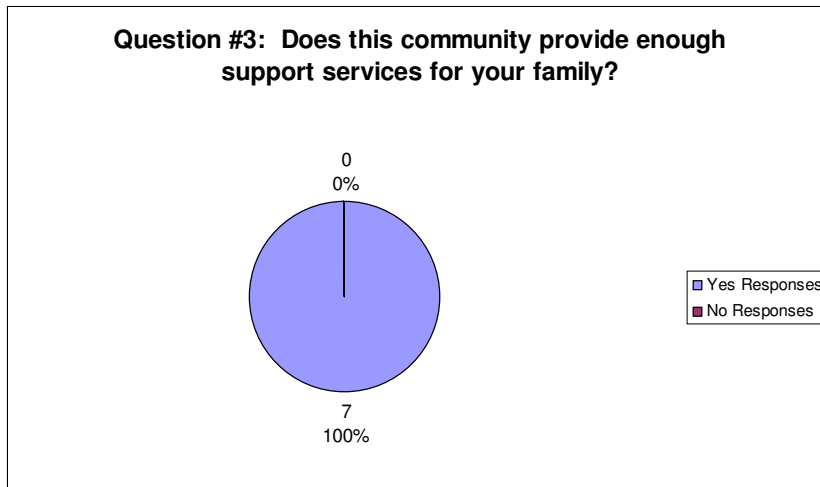


Figure 8: Level of Support Services From Community



Question #3 examined helpful support services that ... Preschool could provide. As shown in Figure 7, some families are interested in receiving a variety of supports for their families. Families answered that social opportunities would be helpful, as well as receiving educational support on specific topics. Eight families interviewed agreed that the community provides enough supports for their families. A possible link should be noted that the results of this questionnaire reveals a higher involvement level for receiving support for families from early support services and their child’s educational settings, rather than in the community. As stated by Able-Boone, Sandall, Loughry &

Frederick, 1990; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997, in the literature section of this research paper, “children are posited to be more successful when families participate as active partners in transition planning, are meaningfully involved in exploring options related to their child’s program, truly assist in the selection of placement settings and services for their child, advocate for their child’s needs and are able to communicate with professionals regarding the amount and type of help they desire for their family and their child with disabilities (p. 100). Families and their involvement are a necessary component of successful early childhood programs.

Figure 9: Desirable Support Services From ... Preschool

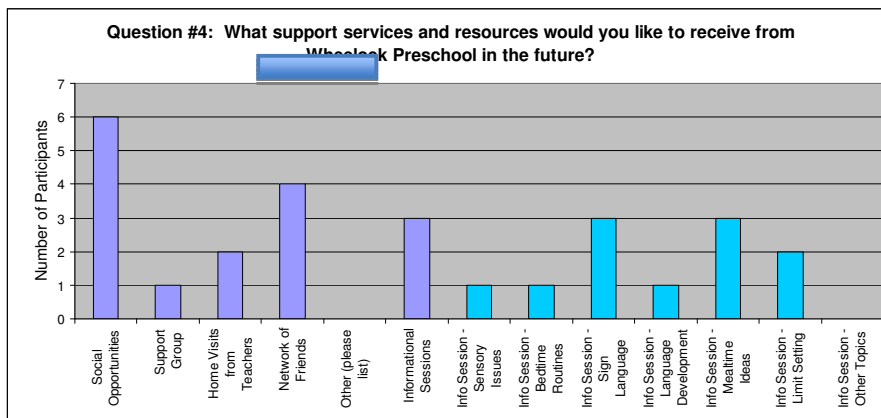
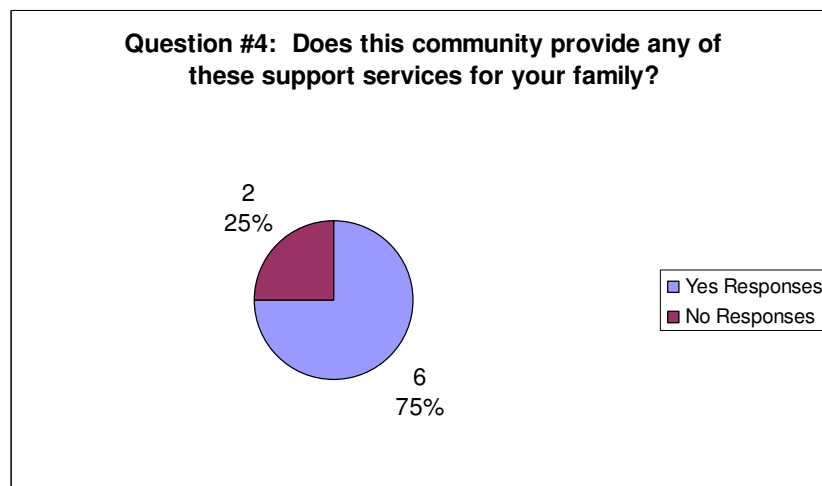


Figure 10: Level of Future Support Services From Community



Question #4 addresses the inquiry into what families would like to receive in terms of support from ... Preschool in the future. The results suggest that families want to feel connected to their child's educational setting, as well as to other families in the community. Support groups, home visits, networks of friends, informational sessions were all items which were listed as helpful by some of the families. This data collected supports research examined in the literature review section of this research paper. Rosenkoetter (2008) states, "the first experiences in formal school settings can start families and teachers off on a wonderful positive relationship which will ultimately benefit the child." (p.2-3).

Summary.

Questionnaires were a helpful tool for gathering data for the purpose of this research investigation. Interviews, community site visits, literature review, research journaling and logging further reveal pertinent data for closely examining the need for parent/teacher support systems.

Interviews

Three in-depth interviews were conducted for the purpose of closely examining the following guiding question: *What do parents of children with a disability who attend ... preschool identify as needs for supporting their children?* The families selected for the interviews were selected because they are each connected to ... Preschool in a unique way. Although each family has a child with a diagnosed developmental delay, they are at different stages of receiving family support and special education services from ... Preschool.

The first family has a preschool aged child who has just begun attending ... Preschool. The focus was to gather information from the family about transitioning to ... Preschool, the support they received and support which they think would be helpful to receive in the future.

The second family has a child who has attended the preschool for one year. This family gave an overall summary of the support they received in transition from an early support service to ... Preschool, and also what services they view as helpful while currently attending the program.

The third family has a child in grade 5 who attended ... Preschool many years ago. Having the voice of a family who has experienced early support services, ...

Preschool services and has transitioned into the formal elementary school was very important for the purpose of this study. It gave insight into the “big picture” of having a young child with special needs and the supports which are necessary for student success.

Multiple perspectives of families involved in different aspects of the program provided rich data to investigate this research. Four questions were used during the interview:

1. When was your child diagnosed with a disability?
2. As you transitioned from early support services to an integrated preschool setting, what supports did you receive from your child’s early intervention setting?
3. At this time, what supports would you identify as being helpful that your child received from ... Preschool?
4. What family supports would you like to receive from ... preschool in the future?

Interviews were conducted in a quiet, non-distracting environment and lasted for approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim after the interview was conducted. The notes were given to the participant to review to ensure reliability and validity. Collected data was analyzed to identify common trends and themes, and results are reported while referencing possible parallels to information from the literature review. The interviews provided rich data about the parents’ perspective of the need for improving the current program. Transcribed notes are included in this research paper, and identified emerging trends and themes are listed in this section.

Interview Documentation

Interview #1- January 6, 2009.

This interview was conducted in an empty classroom at ... Preschool on January 7, 2009. I interviewed a mother who has 4 year old twins (a girl and a boy) attending ... Preschool. Her son is diagnosed with a speech/language impairment, and her daughter is diagnosed with a speech/language impairment and a developmental delay including a health impairment. Cognitively, socially and developmentally, each child is progressing at their own rate and similarities are few.

1. When was/were your child(ren) diagnosed with a disability?

“The twins were carried full term and delivered at 38 weeks. I only gained 18 pounds during the pregnancy and had to take medication due to my own health conditions. I worried about not gaining enough weight, and taking medication but was reassured by my doctors there was nothing to be concerned about. The babies were born at healthy weights: girl (4.7 lbs.) and boy (5.4 lbs.). We were thrilled to have them because at one point in my life I was told I could never have children.”

“At age 18 months, my daughter had her first of many febrile seizures. Her temperature was only 100 degrees but quickly rose to 105. I brought her to the hospital and was told she was OK. We went home and over the next 6 months she had seizures with an ear infection every 2-3 weeks. At one point she was transported by helicopter to Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical center because of having 3 seizures in one day. She had surgery to insert ear tubes and since then there has been no seizure activity.”

“At the twins’ 2 year check up, our doctor referred us to RISE..for Baby and Family due to speech/language concerns. We as parents noticed a lack of language from both children, and didn’t know if it was because they had no other children to interact with, or if they had an actual impairment. The family doctor referred us to ... Developmental Services, and then they were introduced to RISE. RISE did a thorough evaluation and determined that both children had speech/language delays and that my daughter had a motor delay, possibly due to the recurrence of seizures in her early life.”

2. As you transitioned from early support services to an integrated preschool setting, what supports did you receive from your child’s early intervention setting?

“RISE was wonderful to us. The twins went to daycare there two days a week to get exposed to other children. Also, a speech pathologist visited our home once a week to give speech therapy. They were supportive and kind to our family. 6 months prior to the twins’ 3rd birthday, an arena evaluation took place with RISE and ... Preschool involved

to determine what services they would need as they turned 3. It was determined again they both had speech/language delays and my daughter had a motor delay. Because it was January and the Preschool was quite full, we were able to remain at RISE and received therapies from ... Preschool. I was impressed the way the two agencies worked together for the good of my children.”

3. At this time, what supports would you identify as being helpful that your child receives from ... Preschool?

“I like the fact that parents are welcome visitors in the classroom. It’s really important for me to know I can come in at any time to visit or just say “hello”. The teachers are kind and always available by phone or before or after school. ... School is across the street from where we live, and we don’t drive or have access to a car so it’s important to have the school nearby. I am happy with the therapists and the Community Preschool Team. Our family receives lots of support from the community to help us live everyday.”

4. What family supports would you like to receive from ... Preschool in the future?

“We are happy with the preschool and what we receive for our children. Ideas for future support would be: extended summer school (there’s lots of time off), playgroups for socialization of children and adults, home visits from teachers.

We receive support through many community outreach programs: WIC, Southwestern Community Services for fuel assistance, ... Housing Authority for assistance with rent, ... Community kitchen and the City Express bus system. I feel that ... has lots to offer in terms of supporting families who are struggling.”

The mother is obtaining a pamphlet which lists support services available to families in the ... region.

Interview #2- December 28, 2008.

This interview was conducted with a family who has a son who has attended ... Preschool from October 2007 to the present. I visited them at their home to interview them in a comfortable setting. He is diagnosed with neurofibromatosis with tibial displasia. His educational disabilities listed on his IEP are developmental delay, other health impairment and a speech/language delay.

1. When was your child diagnosed with a disability?

“During my pregnancy, markers from an ultrasound came back showing that the baby may have Downs Syndrome, or Cystic Fibrosis but further testing came back negative. I knew something was not right, but I tried not to worry too much.”

“Our son was born at full term, and all tests came back normal, that he was a typical baby with no medical considerations. We did notice that one of his legs was curved, but were reassured that it was normal from the birthing process, and not to worry.”

“At 2 months of age, I noticed some light brown spots on his body, one day he didn’t have any, then next day I counted 20. Being a nurse, I knew something was happening. I went online and Googled it. The spots were called ‘café au lait’ spots and it was a symptom of having a condition called neurofibromatosis. To have this condition, there is a criteria of having 5 out of 6 identifiers. My son had 5 out of the 6 conditions.”

“I went to the pediatrician for his 4 month check up, and the doctor stated all was fine. ‘What about the spots?’ I asked. Quickly, the doctor checked her reference books and said it could possibly be neurofibromatosis. I already knew it was so it was no surprise. She referred us to a genetics specialist and it took 2 months before we had an appointment. That time was scary and upsetting. By the time the appointment came, we were convinced of what the findings would be.”

“The doctor told us caringly and gently that he did in fact have neurofibromatosis, and we were far beyond hearing that news for the first time. All I wanted to know, is ‘what do we do about it? How can we help him? What does it all mean?’. The doctor was very harsh about the outcome, saying there is no cure, nothing can be done and our son will be profoundly disabled and helpless. What a shock it was, and we were devastated.”

Neurofibromatosis is a genetic condition where bones in the body are weak and can be curved and get tiny fractures with little movement. There is also a tendency to grow tumors throughout the body, usually non-cancerous. Neurofibromatosis can cause low muscle tone, fatigue, speech impairments. There is currently no treatment for the condition, other than braces to protect the bones. Presently, the child has a brace on one leg, the one that is curved.

“We were referred to RISE..for Baby and Family and received speech services once a week from age 6 months to age 3. During those years, we also learned that our son had a cleft palate, unnoticeable until doctors tried to take out his adenoids and put in ear tubes. Our son is a medical puzzle and we continue to discover new information about him.”

2. As you transitioned from early support services to an integrated preschool setting, what supports did you receive from your child’s early intervention setting?

“We received speech services once a week in our home. They also helped us with our son’s eating problems. Our son was breastfed only for the first 14 months of his life. He would gag and not be able to swallow foods. The early intervention team recommended a swallow study be done, and they had a specialist examine his inability to swallow properly.”

“RISE also referred us to a physical therapist in ... which could possible help our son with his complex medical needs. We found this person to be the most helpful for us.”

“At age 3, our son was enrolled at ... Preschool as a typical student, but they were monitoring his speech and large motor development. Educationally and cognitively, he was found to be in the typical range. Moving from early support services to preschool was confusing for us in many ways. We didn’t understand why our son receive services through RISE, but now was considered typical. We had conflicting information being given to us from his preschool and his other private therapist. We felt more supported from the early supports services than from ... Preschool therapists. He was happy, content and we were pleased with his classroom, teachers and friends so we didn’t dwell on negativity and we tried to get him services he needed in a confusing and conflicting time.”

3. At this time, what supports would you identify as being helpful that your child receives from ... Preschool?

“We are very happy to have our son attend ... Preschool, but it is very frustrating at the same time. Our son has a complex medical condition and no one who works with our son agrees on what therapies he should be receiving. I go between anger and confusion and worry quite a bit, and I don’t feel that the physical therapist at ... Preschool is doing everything she can do. She states that the only time she can provide physical therapy to a child is if he/she has a condition which prevents him/her from fully participating in the educational program. She doesn’t find this to be the case for our son and therefore, he receives no physical therapy at school. At home we work with him up to 2 hours a day, and he sees a private physical therapist once a week. The private physical therapists

seems to be more in tune to what's happening to our son's body and is giving us activities to build his strength and stamina. Why isn't this followed through at school?"

"We are pleased with our son's speech services at school, and having a great teacher is an important part of why he's at ... Preschool. Families are welcome anytime in the classroom and that is important for us. We enjoyed participating in the play group in fall 2008 and would like to participate in more family activities in the future. He is learning his ABC's and counting and enjoys playing and learning."

4. What family supports would you like to receive from ... Preschool in the future?

"The team needs to give parents reassurance. At our last IEP meeting, there was wrong information written in the health section. I want to know that everyone is taking the time to know my child's condition and keep current with what's happening with him. I would like more of an openness to alternative medicine and treatment. I feel that it is disregarded by some members of the team. We're trying to do what's best for our son, and we are trying alternative and standard medical treatments. I need to have more support and understanding with that."

"Communication is so important. I feel daily communication is great, but the Community Preschool Team is so big and busy I never know who knows what about my child. I want to be more involved and feel like a welcome member of my son's special education team."

Other ideas for family support:

Playgroup, parent support group, indoor bike riding group, parent-to-parent communication directory, workshop evenings, invite all therapists to educational meetings

Interview #3- December 13, 2008.

This interview was conducted with a family who had a son attend ... Preschool 2000-2002. I visited them at their home to interview them in a comfortable setting. He is currently in the 5th grade at ... Elementary School. He is diagnosed with cerebral palsy of unknown etiology and participates in the regular education classroom as well as the learning disabilities collaborative classroom at ...

1. When was your child diagnosed with a disability?

“At six months old, we began noticing something was different. He was not rolling over, did not sit up and was very stiff when he moved his arms and legs. We went to the pediatrician, and she recommended giving it some time. We waited until he was 9 months old, then a year. At 13 months old, we went to the pediatrician for his one year check up. At that time he still was not moving around, and was getting frustrated. He talked very little, but we taught him some sign language. I remember him signing ‘boo boo’ and pointing to his legs. We weren’t sure if his legs hurt, or if he was trying to communicate that his legs were broken. At this point we were worried. The pediatrician referred us to RISE...for Baby and Family. RISE came to our house and did a complete developmental evaluation. They found that our son was developmentally delayed, in several areas.”

“RISE began doing home visits once per week. We had a central contact person, who was a physical therapist. She maintained communication and gave us much needed therapies. We also pursued further medical evaluations at 13 months. After many visits, we were told our son is not a ‘clear cut case’ and no one could tell us exactly what was happening.”

2. As you transitioned from early support services to an integrated preschool setting, what supports did you receive from your child’s early intervention setting?

“Our central contact person at RISE helped us a lot. She kept us informed of what was happening and what was going to happen at our child turned 3 years old. Just before his third birthday, RISE did another formal evaluation on our son. We felt supported by the early intervention agency. They included us in the decisions which were being made for our son, and also explained to us what the special education procedures were. They also informed us of community resources (... Developmental Services, Southwestern Community Services, independent therapists) that could possibly help us with expenses and services that we would be needing. They encouraged us to pursue further medical testing on our son to determine a possible diagnosis, or treatment which could help him with his disabilities.”

3. At this time, what supports would you identify as being helpful that your child received from ... Preschool?

“Moving to the preschool setting went well. We were happy that our son could go to ‘school’ while he also received his much needed therapies (physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy). Our son began attending preschool in the summer of his third birthday, and it was a good experience. Our family felt like we ‘belonged’ and that the Community Preschool Team understood us as a family unit. It was wonderful that the preschool was contained inside our son’s elementary school, so that transitions could be kept at a minimum.”

“Our son formed a great relationship with his teachers and therapists. His physical therapist was very helpful. She did not baby our son and taught him to be independent. She also encouraged us to be there for our son when he needed assistance, but also to let him have as much independence as he could. Although many times our son was frustrated and angry, we all felt like we were doing the best for him by letting him try, fail many times but also succeed many times.”

4. What family supports would you like to receive from ... Preschool in the future?

“Looking back, we were so fortunate to have a great tutor for our son. They formed a wonderful relationship and it made us a little more relaxed about him going to school. It was also great that she followed him to kindergarten and continued to work with him. Not everyone has that experience but we wish they did.”

“IEP meetings were intimidating. We would sit at a large table with many people and get lots of information thrown at us. We needed time to process all of the information, and many times we felt rushed to sign documents which we didn’t understand fully. If we could have received information before the meeting, it would have been helpful.”

“We also had a difficult task of keeping track of medical records, community support services which were involved with our family, and outside therapists working with our son. Sometimes, we wished there was someone at the preschool who could help us stay organized, keeping track of our family that we were doing everything we should be doing for our son.”

“It’s hard to see into the future, and right now we feel like we’re stuck. We live in an inaccessible house, which means we have to do a lot of lifting. How big will he grow to? Will we be able to care for him as he grows? We don’t know how to ask for assistance. We receive little support from our families, so we have to rely on each other. Little things in the house can be difficult. For example, the door to the bathroom isn’t wide enough for the wheelchair, so we’ve had to take off the door. How do we give our son

respect and privacy, while keeping him safe and allowing him to be independent? It's always been a struggle, and it always will be, but our son gives us strength. Sometimes, we just can't hold him back!"

"Currently our son is participating in Jason's Dream Team softball league, the Paralympic Sled Hockey Team at UNH, and the NHESA program at Mt. Sunapee which allows our family to participate in the adaptive skiing program. He has been canoeing, waterskiing, rock climbing and tried out a Segway last weekend. Our son's disability does not hold him back, and as time has gone on, we have discovered that there's so much for him to participate in. We learn and grow as a family everyday."

"Someday, we hope to connect with other families like us. So far, with all the activities we have participated in, we haven't found a child similar to our son. Although he has many disabilities, he's very bright and strong willed. One of the biggest worries for us as parents is feeling isolated, alone, and worrying that our son will not be able to live an independent life. We want so much for him to grow, go to college, get married, be just like everyone else. We wonder, is it possible?"

Common Themes and Trends from Interviews

Social Interactions

- § Low income and at-risk families are well supported in this area
- § It is important to know where to go to get needed support
- § Confusion and worry are a constant in the lives of families
- § Interaction with other children is essential for developmentally delayed children to flourish
- § Families need to feel like welcome partners
- § Families of special needs children often feel isolated
- § Parents want to know their child has a bright future, that there's hope
- § Confusion and worry can be a constant in the lives of families

Medical Issues

- § Parents are usually the first ones to recognize “something isn't right” with their child
- § Health insurance is much needed for families with disabled children
- § There is a disparity between medical necessity of therapies as opposed to educational relevance
- § There is too much “wait time” for doctor's appointments
- § Families need acceptance when trying non-conventional and alternative medical practices
- § Many times, medical professionals do not address parents' worries and fears
- § Families are worried and health issues are constantly changing
- § Medical professionals don't always have clear cut answers

Educational Issues

- § Parent advocacy is essential for student success
- § Families want to feel connected to their child's daily life
- § Early intervention is important and needs to be solid as a first experience
- § There is often confusion at IEP meeting with parents feeling overwhelmed
- § Parents need assistance with organization of information they receive from various sources
- § Strong tutors, therapists and teachers are necessary
- § Income of families does not determine quality of care in this region
- § When agencies work together, it's a good thing
- § Local schools should all provide preschool

Classroom Ideas

- § Communication is essential
- § Team consensus is essential
- § Parents want to be a partner in their child's educational experience
- § Classroom teachers and environments are very important with making parents feel welcome
- § Families need and want to connect with their child's school setting

Summary.

Interviews were a successful way to gather pertinent information for the purpose of gathering information from families, focusing on the need for support. It provided rich data, personal experiences and unique perspectives to examine the needs of families in their own voices. There were many correlations between the statements made from families with the documented studies contained in this research paper. The interview responses suggested that support for families of preschoolers with special needs can be an important and much needed component of an educational setting. Rosenkoetter (2008) stresses, “trust and respect toward families is essential. It is imperative to have open communication for families as their child makes the important transition into formal school. High quality childcare and teaching processes geared to the appropriated developmental level for each child is associated with higher academic achievement, better social outcomes and improved adjustment” (p.3). Swick and Hooks (2005) found that, “parents of children with special needs wanted to be valued, to be sought out for feedback on how things were going with their child, and they valued having an important part to play in the parent-teacher partnership. They want a *role*”(p.12). After reviewing the documentation from parent interviews, a correlation can be made from personal experiences to existing research data.

Community Site Visits

Information is included in the data analysis section about community site visits.

Community site visits were conducted to answer the following guiding question: *What do early childhood providers/agencies in the ... Region have in place to support families of preschoolers with special needs?* Recognizing the need for family support requires an overall examination of what currently exists in our community to support families.

Information was collected from various educational settings and resource and referral agencies about support systems which currently exist in our community. Information gathered is located in Appendix A as well as the table listed in this section.

Table 1: Community Site Visits

Community Site Visits: A Closer Look at Family Support in the ... Region

Sites visited	Full Day Care	Part Time	Workshops for Families	Transportation	Parent Support Groups	Federal Funding (through DEA)	Integrated School	Social Opportunities for Families	Parent Handbook	CPR/First Aid Training for Families	Home Visitor	Playgroups
Austine School for Deaf	√		√	√	√	√		√	√			
Cheshire Medical Center CDC	√	√	√	√					√			
Fall Mountain Preschool		√	√				√	√				√
Great Beginnings	√		√					√	√			
... Daycare Center	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
... Head Start		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
... High		√						√	√			
... State College CDC	√	√	√				√	√	√			
Lily Garden	√	√	√					√	√			
Mount Caesar Preschool		√	√	√	√		√		√			
Rise... for Baby and Family	√	√	√			√	√	√	√		√	√
Orchard School	√	√	√				√	√	√			√
Sophia's Hearth		√	√		√	√		√				√
St. Joseph's Preschool	√	√						√	√			
Village Children's Center		√						√	√			
... Preschool		√	√	√		√	√	√	√			√

Summary.

Community site visits were conducted to closely examine existing support services which currently exist in the ... Region. Table 1 reveals data collected from community support agencies and educational establishments. The data reveals that there are a large number of support services which currently exist for families in the ... Region. Many agencies offer workshops for families, social opportunities and offer full and part-time childcare services. By collecting information from various sites, a table could be made which lists current support services for families. It is recognized that the ... Region has support services in place in agencies and schools. Communities play an important role in the overall support for families of young children. Research included in the literature section of this research paper states that caring communities can be built intentionally, and that partnerships are important for helping students succeed across the grades (Epstein and Sanders, 2000).

Literature Review, Reflective Journaling and Logging

The literature review section of this research paper provides insight into current trends that are occurring in a variety of educational parent/teacher support systems. By using the literature review, reflective journal and logging as a tool, the following guiding question was investigated: *What supports can be put in place to create a voice and meet the needs of families of preschool aged children who receive special education services at ... Preschool?* Documentation of existing educational research provides substantial evidence of studies and data being created through studies of this topic... Reading contemporary literature around the topic of parent/teacher support shows evidence of its implications, and supports data collected during this study.

The reflective journal provided a medium for reflection on information learned through reading, participation in the ... State College Research Design course, and possible emerging themes and ideas for the research intended. The log was used to systematically organize a record of the practices and procedures followed throughout the course of the Capstone Project.

Summary.

The foundation for exploring the need for family partnerships in an integrated preschool setting at ... preschool lies in consideration of the results of the data collected during this research report. Through everyday exposure to working with families at ... Preschool, the overarching theme which exists is that support is a necessary component of meeting the needs of the preschool aged child with special needs. Although a family support system currently exists, the need for improvement and refinement enlisted the guiding questions for the purpose of this research paper. The succinct questions allowed

an opportunity to deeply examine the unique and specific needs of parents of children with special needs who attend an integrated preschool setting.

Information obtained was gathered by using multiple perspectives: questionnaires, interviews, community site visits, literature review, reflective journaling and logging. Validity and reliability was further ensured through peer review and data interpretation review from participants involved in the research methods.

Throughout the study there were common themes which linked family connections to their child's school setting, and the overall success of each student. When families are welcome partners with their child's educational providers, the child benefits. Parents often feel overwhelmed in many ways and throughout this research, it was identified that parents of children with special needs can often feel isolated, confused and unsupported. Providing a welcome opportunity for them to be a welcome part of their child's educational experience can often relieve some of the anxiety they experience daily.

Conclusively, "parents are the primary teachers and nurturers of their children. They provide appropriate environments and interactions that promote learning and help their children develop skills and values needed to become healthy and successful adults" (DiNatale, 2002, p.90). Additionally, developmentally appropriate experiences in an educational setting can provide a child with unique opportunities to learn, grow, and build self-esteem. Together, parents and schools can become powerful partners working together toward providing a child with a network of support.

IV. Summary and Conclusion

Introduction

The foundation for exploring approaches to family partnerships in an integrated preschool setting lies in a comprehensive analysis of professional literature and research studies. By reviewing the literature and research studies and collecting additional data, connections have been made which link theories to current practices. The purpose of this research paper was to investigate, collect data and review existing methods of supporting diverse families of preschoolers who receive special education services in an integrated preschool setting. Furthermore, the second purpose of this research was to investigate new or improved ways to support parents of preschool aged special needs children.

Throughout this research paper, the focus has been on the need for family support at ... Preschool. Information has been gathered from past literature and research studies, as well as relevant data from families, staff and students who attend ... Preschool. The following research questions have guided this process:

1. What do early education providers/ agencies in the ... Region have in place to support families of preschoolers with special needs?
2. What methods are being used to support diverse families who have children attending ... preschool?

The following two research questions identify the specific needs of families of preschoolers who attend ... Preschool and receive special education services.

3. What do parents of children with a disability who attend ... Preschool identify as needs for supporting their children?

4. What supports can be put in place to create a voice and meet the needs of families of preschool aged children who receive special education services at ... preschool?

The following section is divided into four areas, each area connecting the findings from data analysis, and literature research to address each of the four guiding questions.

Research Question One:

What do early childhood providers/agencies in the ... Region have in place to support families of preschoolers with special needs?

To address this guiding question, community site visits were conducted from fall, 2007 to fall, 2008. Informal observations and interviews were conducted with staff members and agency workers involved in meeting the diverse needs of families with young children who have special needs. A summary was written and is included in Appendix A of this research paper.

Overall, this community has many services in place to meet the needs of families with children who have special needs. There are educational opportunities for integration into regular classrooms, special education support systems and agencies to help families through the often confusing maze of the special education system. Agencies provide respite care, counseling and support to families as well as connecting them to others of similar needs.

The community sites that are contained in this research paper provide support to families in many unique ways. As stated in the literature review section of this paper, parents need knowledge and skills, time to adapt to their unique situations, and be meaningful participants in their child's educational experiences and everyday lives

(Rosenkoetter, 2008). By providing support to families through schools, agencies and other networks, families can be successful and thrive.

Although there is the existence of a support network for families of children with special needs in the ... Region, there is still more that can be accomplished. Often, preschool ratios in the state of New Hampshire do not consider the needs of a child with a disability. Because of this, many schools struggle to meet the daily requirements of a student with special needs. There is also an exceptional need for high quality childcare in the ... Region. Although networks have been formed such as the Network for Children and Families, there has been little improvement in providing families with opportunities for high quality educational programs for their young child.

There is a need for families to connect. Support groups exist, but the need is much greater. Parents want to connect with others who are in the similar situations. Time for connecting with others is limited, programs are full. There is a need to expand support systems in the ... area for families of young children with special needs.

Research Question Two:

What methods are being used to support diverse families who have children attending ... preschool?

To address this question, questionnaires were given to eight families involved in a playgroup at ... Preschool during fall, 2008. The questionnaires allowed families to share what support services currently exist for their families and what they view as helpful support services.

The questionnaires gave valuable insight into the unique needs and services required for families of young children with special needs. Although many support services exist in the community and at ... Preschool, many families rely on extended

family and friends to help meet their needs. All participants in the questionnaires gave positive feedback on the Saturday morning playgroups they were invited to attend, and the need for more family social networks.

As stated in the literature review section of this research paper, Boykin (1994) suggests “as support from school, family, and community accumulates, significantly more students feel secure and cared for, understand the goals of education, work to achieve their full potential, build positive attitudes”. The shared interest and investments of school, families and communities create the conditions of caring that work to over determine the likelihood of student success (Epstein et al, 2002, p.7). The questionnaires supported the theory that families who feel connected to their child’s educational experiences often have children who enjoy their time spent at school and become successful, and confident learners.

Research Question Three:

What do parents of children with a disability who attend ... Preschool identify as needs for supporting their children?

To address this question, in-depth interviews were conducted with three families involved in different stages of attending ... Preschool. Each family shared their thoughts and insight into identification and needs for support for their families. There were several overarching themes shared throughout the interviews.

First, families often feel isolated. They are the families who do not usually get invited to social gatherings, or it may be too difficult for their child to attend something that is unstructured. They feel that there is no one else who understands their unique situations and often, medical professionals do not address their fears and worries along with the health needs of their child.

Second, families want to feel like they are an equal member of their child's educational team. Henderson and Mapp (2002) stated when programs and initiatives focus on building respectful and trusting relationships among school staff, families, and community members, they are more effective in creating and sustaining connections that support student achievement (as cited in Allen, 2007, p.7). Parents want knowledge, support and respect.

Finally, families worry about the future. They want to know if their child is going to be a productive member of society. They want reassurance that things will get better and that their fears are unsubstantiated. Although as educators we cannot see into the future, parents want reassurance and empathy as they try to cope, adjust and readjust to constantly changing situations.

Interviews provided much needed personal data to understand the unique needs of a family with a young child with special needs. Common themes and trends which emerged supported existing data which suggests that parents have a great need for support their child educational providers.

Research Question Four:

What supports can be put in place to create a voice and meet the needs of families of preschool aged children who receive special education services at ... Preschool?

To address this question review of existing literature, reflective journaling and logging were successful tools. After receiving much needed personal information about specific support needs from families, review of current literature, additional research reports and journaling assisted with finding possibilities for creating voices and meeting the needs of families of preschool aged children who receive special education services in an integrated preschool setting.

Although this question was addressed in this research report, there is ongoing work happening at ... Preschool. Currently, grant money has been given to continue to existence of Saturday morning playgroups to meet the diverse needs of families. Also, home visiting and progress meetings with families are being conducted to allow families to have a voice in their child's overall educational experiences. There is still much to be done, and through this research paper a new focus has been placed on the need for family support at ... Preschool.

Considerations for Strengthening the Study

Although this research study has been a successful tool to highlight the need for family support at ... Preschool, there is always a way to look at a situation in a deeper, more meaningful way. The research participants gave personal opinions and if time allowed, more participants would give a broad view on this topi...

Participants in the study were from a Southern New Hampshire integrated preschool. The results may have been different with a larger, more diverse cultural, and economic mix of families throughout the state, region and country. Voices from educators, students and administrators were not included in this study, but could provide valuable raw data for future study.

Being a preschool teacher at ... Preschool caused personal biases which were unavoidable. I selected participants which I knew would give me rich data, and also mostly positive. Parent involvement is my passion and may have caused assumptions and conclusions which were unsubstantiated through literature documentation. Validity and reliability could be compromised due to my selection of peer reviewers and professional contacts who gave feedback for the purpose of supporting this research paper.

Recommendations for Future Research and Next Steps

More study into the area of family support systems is needed. An in-depth study of families who have children with special needs can be studied in a variety of different methods. Often this population is hard to interview, because they are dealing with every day issues and cannot step back and examine their specific needs which may make their situations easier.

Future projects could include designing a website which could allow families to connect, express thoughts and insights and build support networks at their own pace. Educational providers could work towards establishing a system which supports parents through existing playgroups, home visits, workshops, support groups, community connections and medical liaisons. Possible opportunities to apply for future grants resulting from this research paper are a goal for the near future.

Final Summary and Conclusions

The foundation for exploring approaches to family partnerships in an integrated preschool setting lies in a comprehensive analysis of professional literature and research studies, as well as personal stories which are included in this research paper. The purpose of this research paper includes an investigation, collection of data and a review of methods of supporting diverse families of preschoolers who receive special education services in an integrated preschool setting. The second purpose of this research is an investigation of ways to support parents through identifying their needs. As stated by Kaczmarek (2007), “support strategies can make a big difference in the lives of families of children with disabilities”(p. 28-29).

Validity and reliability methods were used throughout this research paper. Triangulation is an important research concept that was incorporated in this study and demonstrated through acquisition of information from multiple data sources on the topic of family partnerships in an integrated preschool setting. Inquiry into this topic through questionnaires and interviews tapped the perspectives of parents of students with disabilities and their needs for support and provide validity. To address validity in this study, parents had the opportunity to review the completed documentation from the

interviews and questionnaires. The research results and interpretations were shown to my colleagues for peer review and analysis. The peer debriefing provided alternative interpretations, helped point out biases and assisted in formulating new directions for ongoing study (Johnson, 2008, p.106).

Using multiple sources to gather information provided credibility and reliability of the research conducted. Information synthesized from the literature review, and documentation from ongoing reflective journaling and logging throughout the course of this study provided reliability. Validity and reliability was ensured by using multiple data sources: questionnaires, interviews, community site visits, literature review, reflective journaling and logging and peer debriefing.

The research contained in this paper is a collection of data from various sources, ensuring validity and reliability, focusing on the importance of supporting families in integrated early childhood settings. First, questionnaires revealed information on what support services are available to families, and what support services they would like to have in place at ... Preschool. Second, interviews were a rich data source giving personal documentation of the struggles and successes of individual families as they meet the needs of their child with special needs. Third, community site visits made the link from school to families to communities, a recognized sphere of influence (Epstein, 2002). Fourth, a thorough literature review suggested that a family's need for connection to their child's educational setting is important. Schools should provide support, encouragement and partnership opportunities for families of all children. Finally, reflective journaling and logging helped synthesize information collected to make pertinent references about the need for family support in early childhood integrated preschool settings.

In conclusion, it can be stated that through establishing successful methods to reach out to parents, teacher/parent partnerships will lead to meaningful results that truly contribute to improving student outcomes for their children. There is a significant interaction between parental support, teacher/parent partnerships and the overall success and security of the young child with special needs. Parent participation and support are of critical importance for the overall educational experience of the ... Preschool student.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

Site Visits

Sites visited:

Austine School for the Deaf	05/12/07
Cheshire Medical Center Child Development Center	10/05/07
Fall Mountain Regional Children's Center	10/11/07
Great Beginnings Children's Center	01/11/07
... Daycare Center	11/09/07
... Head Start Preschool	11/06/07
... High School Cheshire Center Preschool	04/10/07
... State College Child Development Center	10/08/07
Lily Garden Children's Center	04/20/07
Mt. Caesar Preschool (SAU #38)	06/10/07
Rise....for Baby and Family	10/09/07
The Orchard School	03/10/07
Sophia's Hearth	02/11/08
St. Joseph Preschool	03/15/08
Village Children's Center	03/21/08

Service Agencies Interviewed:

Easter Seals	11/15/07
... Family Services	10/25/07
... Developmental Services	10/09/07
Rise....for Baby and Family	11/16/07

Board Meetings Attended:

... School District Board of Education monthly community meetings	09/18/07-03/08
Network for Children and Families (Board Member)	11/15/07-02/08

Workshops Attended:

Family Support: Creating a Voice Presented by ... Developmental Services and NH Family Council	11/08/07-11/10/07
Quality Early Childhood Education and the Impact on Families	11/16/07
Antioch University New England: Autism Expo and movie "Including Samuel"	03/27/08

Austine School for the Deaf

Brattleboro, Vermont

802-258-9500

Program Overview:

The Austine School for the Deaf supports students in grades Pre-K through grade 12. It is primarily a residential site, however, commuting students are also welcome. The Pre-K classroom is a preschool/kindergarten combined classroom which teaches students who have some degree of hearing loss to profound deafness. American Sign Language is taught and used, and all staff members are fluent signers. The Austine School is a microcosm which supports the deaf student and their families. It is a school which focuses on making connections in the deaf population, and connecting families with resources to help their children become successful learners.

Observation:

The Austine School is located on a hillside retreat above the city of Brattleboro, Vt.. It is composed of several brick buildings including a gymnasium, dormitories and a lower and upper school. The staff is friendly and energetic, and upon entering the school it was apparent to me that the school supports not only its student population, but provides welcome social opportunities for its families as well. Posters on the walls and photo albums show students and their families involved in the many activities offered by the school. Many students reside at the school, and leave to visit their homes Friday afternoons. They return to school by Monday morning. The class schedule allows this travel time and most of the main lessons are built around the premise that students will travel home on weekends.

Family Involvement:

The school provides lots of social opportunities for families. Potlucks, picnics, sports events, fund raisers and social events happen throughout the year. Staff at the school emphasize that when they accept a student, they request that families commit themselves to the program as well. Families are required to become proficient in American Sign Language. The Deaf Community is a unique group of citizens who share a language of their own and The Austine School provides great support to families who have a member with a mild to profound hearing loss.

Cheshire Medical Center Child Development Center

548 Court Street

..., NH 03431 354-5434

Deb Hunter-Director

Program Overview:

The Cheshire Medical Center Child Development Center is located on the grounds of the Cheshire Medical Center and provides childcare for children and grandchildren of employees of the hospital and clini... It provides childcare from 6:00am to 5:30pm for children ages 6 weeks to 12 years old. It is licensed for 119 children. Transportation is available to and from local schools. The center serves nutritious snacks and hot lunches.

Observations:

The Child Development Center was founded in 1992 by the Cheshire Medical Center. It receives funding from the Medical Center and tuition of the students. The building is large and new and as I drove up, I noticed many playgrounds full of lots of play structures, swings, a bike path and even a large boat. The building is secure with electronic security at the front door. The entrance is welcoming and I was greeted immediately and toured the center focusing on the older preschool classroom.

The preschool classroom was full of age appropriate interesting play centers. The sensory table had water, another sensory table had sand. Two large easels side by side were available for painting. A light up table with colorful building blocks and a large fish tank invited children to play. At the table, was a basket full of locks and keys, and puzzles. There was a wooden climbing structures providing a "hiding" spot for two students to read. There was a variety of soft, hard and natural blocks. Rugs and tile were on the floor. There was a kitchen area with a refrigerator, microwave and sink and a bathroom with a space for changing diapers when needed. Staff was facilitating play in different areas around the room.

Family Involvement:

Families are welcome anytime during the day (convenient to their work)

"Looping" occurs allowing families to bond with child's caregivers for the first three years. A bulletin board in the lobby focuses on a specific topic relevant to parenting and provides families with current news articles, papers and workshops in the ... area.

Fall Mountain Early Learning Center**134 FMRHS Road****Langdon, NH****835-6314****Tammy Vittum-Director****Program Overview:**

The Fall Mountain Early Learning Center is comprised of typically developing preschoolers and students with unique talents and challenges. There is a morning session for 3 year olds and afternoon session for 4-5 year olds. Throughout the preschool day, students receive necessary therapies and services as well as participate with their peers in the school day. The school follows the Fall Mountain School District calendar and is located on the grounds of the Fall Mountain Regional High School grounds. The program is funded by the Fall Mountain School District, as well as nominal tuition fees from typical students attending.

Observations:

Fall Mountain Regional High School is located in rural Langdon and as I drove up I noticed the working farm and sugar house on the high school grounds. The preschool is in a white building near the entrance to the high school. To the left of the building is a small, yet imaginative playground with a climbing structure, jungle gym, swings and a sand box. Inside, the classroom is large, organized and welcoming. Artwork by the children is displayed on the walls, which are decorated with a handprint border and country curtains. There is a large, rugged area for circle time, a book area, sensory tables and a housekeeping area. A large loft with a yellow slide is first to capture my curiosity. Therapy rooms for PT and speech are located in the perimeters of the classroom. There is a kitchen area with a refrigerator, sink and stove and a toileting area with multiple facilities.

Family Involvement:

A handbook is given to each family when they begin the program. A playgroup is available every Wednesday from 10:00-11:00am for children ages newborn to kindergarten age. There is a "Parents As Teachers" support group which supports parents of young children with home visits, child development education and practical solutions to questions parents may have. Parents are invited throughout the year to attend potluck dinners, holiday parties and field trips. A resource library is available to parents and there is a bulletin board of information pertinent to family issues.

Great Beginnings Childcare Center

Old Homestead Highway

Swanzy, NH

355-5269

Program Overview:

Great Beginnings Childcare Center is located in a large building near the airport in Swanzy. It provides childcare from 6:30am-5:30pm daily for children ages 6 weeks and above. There is ample parking and two playgrounds with large climbing structures, a sandbox and trees.

Observations:

The center is warm and children are happily playing. The rooms are small and there are several, which give it a “homey” feeling. There are two rooms upstairs for afterschool care or additional space for preschoolers, and a kitchen area and play area on the first floor. The director’s office is located off the kitchen. There is a separate building for infants and toddlers. Teachers wear slippers and are calmly facilitating play. Circle is a fun filled time with songs, fingerplays and a short guessing game.

Family Involvement:

Great Beginnings has a parent handbook for each family when they first arrive. Several parent events are scheduled throughout the year: a potluck dinner, caroling and holiday parties. Parents are welcome to visit anytime during the day.

Lily Garden Learning Center

Rt. 12

Westmoreland, NH

357-9399

Program Overview:

Lily Garden Learning Center provides full day care to children ages 6 weeks to 5 years old. The Center is located in an office park in Westmoreland on rt. 12, which is a busy commuting route to The program has recently received funding through the United Way, and undergone many staffing changes, including a new director as of September 2007. The philosophy is a “nature based” program, and much of it’s programming takes place outside on the playgrounds, or the nature trails located behind the school.

Observation:

The Lily Garden Learning Center is located on a very busy road, and its preschool playground is located close to route 12. There is a small pond and another playground for younger children on the way into the entrance to the building. Inside, the lobby is warm and inviting with soft lamps, and pictures of celebrations with families of the center. The preschool room is calm and soothing. All of the toys and equipment are made of natural materials, mostly wooden. There are baskets for storing toys, wooden tables and chairs, blocks, a climbing structure and shelves. There are plants and sticks hanging from the ceilings and window looking outside reveal the beginning of a nature trail. The children are happily playing and look comfortable in the soft lighting and large space.

Parent Involvement:

Lily Garden Learning Center has a parent board of directors which has recently gone through changes due to a new director. The center provides workshops for families, a newsletter, bulletin board and brochure for families. They also have family get togethers throughout the year such as potlucks, barbeques and open house evenings.

... Daycare Center

Wood Street

..., NH 352-2129

Director-Sara Secore

Program Overview:

... Daycare Center provides full time childcare to 85 students ages 6 weeks to kindergarten age, and 45 school aged children. They have two locations: Wood Street and ... Recreation Center (afterschool care). They are funded by the United Way, Childcare Development Fund, Title 20 and a sliding scale tuition fee. Fundraising is also a big part of their yearly budget. The center has one infant classroom, two toddler rooms, two preschool rooms and an afterschool program. The kitchen makes breakfast, snacks and hot lunches for the students. 70% of the ... Daycare population receives assistance from the state and scholarships are available to families in need.

Observations:

... Head Start is in an old school building on a quiet cul-de-sa... The playgrounds (on ... park and re... property) have recently been renovated and contain new, brightly colored equipment. The foyer contains a parent bulleting board containing pertinent information. The floors are wooden and the ceilings are high, providing an echo of childrens laughter and sounds of play when you enter the building. The preschool classrooms are filled with sunshine from the sun coming through the large windows. Toys are well used and inviting to the preschool children. As I visit, children are engaged in a craft project, while others play at the sensory table or imaginative play on the rug. Staff/child interactions are warm, quiet and calm.

Parent Involvement:

Director Sara Secore feels parent involvement is crucial for the success of her students. ... Daycare center provides a book and a birthday cake for each child on their birthday. They host free workshops with grant money received, allowing parents to learn about childcare topics. The center hosts family gatherings, community days (with pony rides) for fundraising, CPR and first aid training for parents, assign a KDCC representative to attend IEP meetings with families, offer the center as a meeting place for educational meetings, therapies et..., provide assistance and information about receiving social services in the ... Area.

... Headstart

School Street

..., NH

357-0129

Director-Vickie White

Program Overview:

... Headstart provides educational programming and family support to 72 children. Children must have an IEP, or meet financial criteria to attend. The program is located in a two story brick building which once was a ... elementary school. There are four preschool classrooms and a kitchen which provides hot breakfast, snacks and lunch to the students. Headstart is a federally funded program, and teaching guidelines and expectations are consistent throughout every classroom. Beyond the classroom there is a family advocate manager, home visitor and usually a case worker for each student. The program will be moving soon due to a sale of their location.

Observations:

Upon entering the building, I found a staff member who directed me to the director's office on the second floor. I was escorted to a preschool classroom and began my observation. The classroom had 18 children and 4 staff members. There was a large wooden loft area and lots of windows. There were tables where children worked on academic games and projects, as well as a workbench area, kitchen area, firefighter imaginative play area, books, easel and science discovery area. The teacher was observing children at play and directing them as they learned. Circle time was calming with singing, fingerplays and movement. The classroom bulletin boards had children's pictures and artwork. The bathroom was located in between two classrooms and was shared.

Parent Involvement:

Headstart does lots to support families. A family advocate worker and home visitor helps families work on goals such as: housing issues, employment searches and seeking social service agency assistance. There is a parent board (president, vice-president, treasurer, secretary) which meets once a month to focus on fund raising, and parent training opportunities. They serve family style meals, have a family bulletin board, and help children and families with daily living skills such as tooth brushing and choosing healthy meals and snacks.

... State College Child Development Center

229 Main Street

..., NH

358-2233

Director-Ellen Edge

Program Overview:

... State College Child Development Center provides childcare for children living in the ... community who are between the ages of 6 weeks to age 5 from 7:30am-5:30pm. The daily schedule is based on the ... academic calendar. Students who attend ... State College frequently participate in classrooms under the guidance of CDC staff members. The center is in the process of being accredited by the NAEY... The preschool is separated into older and younger aged children and each classroom can have up to 16 students.

Observations:

Upon entering, I immediately felt welcome. I was greeted by the director and noticed a table with information about the center and other brochures as well as a bulletin board full of pictures of a recent field trip. I was a welcome visitor to the younger preschool room and then the older classroom. Each classroom was calm and visually appealing. All toys were made of natural materials and countertops were organized and simple. Overhead lighting was made softer with material draped over it, and lamps were also around the room. There were sensory table areas, blocks, housekeeping, books, dramatic play areas, a large loft, tables, easels, puppets and a bunny! Simplicity, calm and soothing were words that filled my mind.

Parent Involvement:

Director Ellen Edge, shared the many ways that ... State College CDC involves families. Open House and Parent/teacher conferences are held 3 times per year. Assessment is done through portfolios, checklists and summary/narrative statements about each child. A family potluck picnic is held once a year. A “parent to parent” discussion group has just formed and they are looking into forming a parent board to assist with decision making processes for the childcare center. There is a monthly “Directors Newsletter”, and time for her to play guitar and sing with all the students in the center. A Family Handbook is given to each family yearly full of valuable information. Families are welcome to visit anytime, and there is also a lending library for parents. A brochure is full of center information.

... High School Cheshire Center Preschool

Arch Street

..., NH

352-0640

Director-Jen Antochiewicz

Program Overview:

The Cheshire Center Preschool provides morning programming Tuesday through Friday for 3-5 year old students who live in the ... community.

It is funded by the ... School District and also through nominal tuition fees. The preschool gives ... High School students who are taking classes in Early Childhood Education an opportunity for “hands on” teaching experiences. With the direction and guidance of Jane Graves, high school early childhood education teacher, preschoolers learn alongside high school students.

Observations:

The Cheshire Center Preschool is located inside ... High School Vocational area. The classroom is large and recently renovated. There is a large climbing structure, manipulative play area, several computers, organized arts and crafts area with clear bins, a housekeeping area, kitchen area with a refrigerator and stove and an area for circle time. Outside there are swings, a soft road area for riding bikes, a playhouse and a colorful climber. Off the preschool classroom is a full day infant/toddler childcare area and potty room. There is a low ratio of children to staff/students, and all children are happily playing. Many of the high school students are actively involved in play with the preschoolers and I notice that the preschoolers are eager to interact with them.

Parent Involvement:

A parent handbook is given to each family upon entering. A large white wipeoff board greets families each day with a question that they must answer with their child. Parent/teacher conferences are held two times per year, and high school students as well as preschool staff members keep a journal and portfolio of children’s work throughout the year. A newsletter is sent home monthly with a calendar of events throughout the year.

Mt. Caesar Preschool (SAU #38)

... Highway

Swanzy, NH

352-4797

Director: Cathy Croteau

Program Overview:

Mt. Caesar Preschool is supported by the ... School District to provide necessary therapies and early intervention services to children ages 3-5 with developmental delays. The Preschool also provides learning opportunities for typically developing students. It is located inside the Mt. Caesar Elementary School. Tuition for typically developing students is nominal with no charge for students who are on IEPs.

Observations:

The Mt. Caesar Preschool staff is warm and friendly upon entering. The classroom is narrow with a few windows, yet full of interesting toys and areas for learning. There is a bulletin board highlighting pictures of each student and their unique qualities. In the classroom there is a farm area, sensory table, housekeeping area, science area and quiet/reading area. The classroom is used part of the day for a preschool and also used for evaluations of community children to determine eligibility. Cathy Croteau, the preschool teacher is experienced and qualified to answer the many questions parents have as they enter a formal school setting in the preschool years.

Parent Involvement:

Parents are an integral part of the IEP process and are required to attend several meetings to determine eligibility for their child. They are welcome to volunteer in the classroom and help bring in snacks, chaperone field trips and meet for bi-yearly parent/teacher conferences. The school has Open House evenings for students in the school and attempt to form partnerships with students and their families at all grade levels.

Orchard School**114 Old Settlers Road****East Alstead, NH****835-2495****Program Overview:**

The Orchard School was founded in 1990, through the visions of three women, and is supported by the ongoing efforts of its families and the community. The center is dedicated to providing high quality education, family support and a meeting place for community activities. The school building was shaped by the efforts of the community that came together and gave of their time and energy to build it. The Orchard School provide several programs: a preschool and kindergarten, extended-care program, summer camps and art and cultural events.

Observations:

The program is situated in rural East Alstead, and is surrounded by an organic farm and an apple orchard. There is access to acres of woods, fields, a pond and nature trails. The school is two floors. The upper floor consists of a large kindergarten classroom and the lower level, two preschool classrooms. Each room is busy and exciting. Walls are full of children's creations and natural materials are present everywhere. Children play with large wooden blocks, natural wools and dolls, real tools and soft blankets. There are books, instruments, objects in jars for counting and playing with, music and movement opportunities. Children are dressed casually, as are staff members. The interests of the children are of first priority and there is a feeling of respect and celebration throughout the center. Children are happy and "in charge" clearly.

Parent Involvement:

Clearly the whole school's first priority is community. Parents helped to build the school and are a daily part of supporting it through tuition, fundraising, donating time and goods, and sharing their talents. There is a board of trustees comprised of the Co-Directors, parents and community members. Parental involvement is essential to the well-being of the school. Through classroom conferences, workdays, projects, parent groups and other activities, the efforts of the parents enrich the life of the school.

Rise.....for Baby and Family

Washington Street

..., NH

357-1395

Director-Toni Ellsworth

Program Overview:

Rise...for Baby and Family is an early intervention agency providing services to children from birth to age 3 who may have developmental delays or other health impairments that can interfere with natural child development. They provide in home therapy to children. They also have a playgroup which meets several days per week. Daycare is available for children requiring early intervention services and also accepts typically developing children. The program is funded through United Way, fundraising and grants.

Observations:

Rise...for Baby and Family is situated in an old Victorian house which once was the ... Children's Museum. It contains office and meeting areas, as well as a full-time childcare center. The area for full day care is small, yet warm and inviting. Teachers are actively engaged with students on the floor. Two times per week, playgroup occurs here, with special needs students joining in playing at the center. For two hours, teachers fill the classroom with activity, song and interactions geared to work on specific skills determined on each child's Individual Family Service Plan. The ultimate goal is for these experiences to give children extra opportunities to learn through play.

Parent Involvement:

Rise...for Baby and Family provides ongoing support for families. As children grow and are suspected of having a developmental delay, Rise works with families to determine what their needs may be. Therapists, home visitors and play groups are the beginning of making connections with families as they enter a formal educational setting when their children get older. They offer sign language classes, workshops on important family topics, offer respite services and opportunities for parents to connect with others who may have similar backgrounds. The main premise for Rise is to "meet families where they are". Many families may have a myriad of concerns about their child, or about another aspect of their life. Rise seeks to assist them in any way possible, with honor and respect.

Appendix B:

IRB Letters

Parent Interview Protocol

Questionnaire Protocol

Parent Interview Protocol Cover Letter

Questionnaire Protocol Cover Letter

Parent Interview Thank You Letter

Questionnaire Thank You Letter

IRB Letter

October 18, 2008

Dear ... Preschool Administrative Team,

As part of my graduate program at ... State College Master of Education: Instruction and Curriculum, I have designed an action research project. The purpose of this investigation is to investigate, collect data and review methods of supporting diverse families of preschoolers who receive special education services in an integrated preschool setting. Furthermore, the second purpose of this research will be to investigate ways to support parents through identifying their needs. The following questions will guide my study:

- What support services and resources outside of the school setting already exist for your family?
- As you transition from early support services to an integrated preschool setting, what supports do you currently receive from your child's early intervention setting?
- At this time, what supports would you identify as being helpful to receive from ... Preschool?
- What family supports would you like receive from ... Preschool in the future?

As part of my research I will be facilitating a playgroup at ... Preschool for transitioning families, for 4 consecutive weeks beginning Saturday, October 25th. During this time, I will be distributing questionnaires and will be inviting parents to answer one question per week. Participation in the playgroup and questionnaire is voluntary, and all answers to the questions will be anonymous. Names will not be included in my research project and questionnaires will be destroyed after interpretation of the responses.

Enclosed is a copy of the letter of consent that will go to the families participating in the playgroup and questionnaire. A copy of my research, thus far, is also available upon request. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

The results of this research will be written in a research report that will be presented to my ... State College faculty advisors and to my colleagues in a professional exhibition in May, 2009. Furthermore, my final research report will be made available to my colleagues at SAU ## upon request.

I look forward to facilitating the playgroup and distributing and collecting the questionnaire. I believe it will provide insight into considerations for future planning of early childhood education in our district.

Thank you for your willingness to allow me to conduct this study in your school.

...

I _____, Principal of ... Elementary School in ..., NH have read the informed consent letter for this study and give my consent to allow this study to take place under the conditions stated above.

Principal signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent Interview Protocol

...

... Preschool

...

..., NH #####

###-###-####

October 18, 2008

Dear Parents,

As part of my graduate program at ... State College Master of Education: Instruction and Curriculum, I have designed an action research project. The purpose of this investigation is to investigate, collect data and review methods of supporting diverse families of preschoolers who receive special education services in an integrated preschool setting. Furthermore, the second purpose of this research will be to investigate ways to support parents through identifying their needs. The following questions will guide my study:

- o When was your child diagnosed with a disability?
- o As you transitioned from early support services to an integrated preschool setting, what supports did you receive from your child’s early intervention setting?
- o At this time, what supports would you identify as being helpful that you received from ... Preschool?
- o What family supports would you like receive from ... Preschool in the future?

As part of my research I will be interviewing families who have a child who has received special education services from ... Preschool, or are currently receiving services from the preschool. Participation in the interview is voluntary, and all answers to the questions will be anonymous. Names will not be included in my research project and tapes will be destroyed after interpretation of the responses. You can choose to withdraw at any time, without prejudice by not participating in the interview.

The results of this research will be written in a research report that will be presented to my ... State College faculty advisors and to my colleagues in a professional exhibition in May, 2009. Furthermore, my final research report will be made available to my colleagues at SAU ## upon request.

I look forward to learning more about the need for support for families of young children. I believe that your insights will provide invaluable information that will help facilitate future planning of early childhood education in our district.

Please sign and return this page to ...

I _____, have read the informed consent letter for this study and give my consent to participate in this study under the conditions stated above.

Parent signature _____ Date: _____

Questionnaire Protocol

...
... Preschool
... Street
..., NH #####
###-###-####

October 18, 2008

Dear Parents,

As part of my graduate program at ... State College Master of Education: Instruction and Curriculum, I have designed an action research project. The purpose of this investigation is to investigate, collect data and review methods of supporting diverse families of preschoolers who receive special education services in an integrated preschool setting. Furthermore, the second purpose of this research will be to investigate ways to support parents through identifying their needs. The following questions will guide my study:

- o What support services and resources outside of the school setting already exist for your family?
- o As you transition from early support services to an integrated preschool setting, what supports do you currently receive from your child's early intervention setting?
- o At this time, what supports would you identify as being helpful to receive from ... Preschool?
- o What family supports would you like receive from ... Preschool in the future?

As part of my research I will be facilitating a playgroup at ... Preschool for transitioning families, for 4 consecutive weeks beginning Saturday, October 25th. During this time, I will be distributing questionnaires and will be inviting parents to answer one question per week. Participation in the questionnaire is voluntary, and all answers to the questions will be anonymous. Names will not be included in my research project and questionnaires will be destroyed after interpretation of the responses. You can choose to withdraw at any time, without prejudice by not completing the questionnaire.

The results of this research will be written in a research report that will be presented to my ... State College faculty advisors and to my colleagues in a professional exhibition in May, 2009. Furthermore, my final research report will be made available to my colleagues at SAU ## upon request.

I look forward to facilitating the playgroup and learning more about the need for support for families of young children. I believe your insights will provide invaluable information that will help facilitate future planning of early childhood education in our district.

Please sign and return this page to ...

I _____, have read the informed consent letter for this study and give my consent to participate in this study under the conditions stated above.

Parent signature _____ Date: _____

Parent Interview Protocol Cover Letter

“Welcome to my classroom and thank you again for taking the time to meet with me for an interview. I am a preschool teacher at ... Preschool and I would like to ask you four questions which address the subject of parent involvement in our school. You have read and signed a letter of informed consent indicating that you are willing to answer the four questions listed on the form. They will specifically address your personal experiences as you attend or have attended ... Preschool.”

“Do you have any questions? I would like to reassure you that no names will be used in the report that I write as a result of the information that I have collected during our interview. If this is a convenient time, I would like to begin asking you the questions and I will make every effort to keep a time limit to 30 minutes. Are you comfortable to begin?”

“The purpose of my project is to investigate, collect data and review methods of supporting diverse families of preschoolers who receive special education services from ... Preschool. The second purpose of this research is to investigate ways to support parents through identifying their needs. Each question will be directly related to the topic of family support.”

Questions

1. When was your child diagnosed with a disability?
2. As you transitioned from early support services to ... Preschool, what supports did you receive from your child’s early intervention setting?
3. At this time, what supports would you identify as being helpful that you received from ... Preschool?
4. What family supports would you like to receive from ... Preschool in the future?

At the end of 30 minutes or when responses have been completed, “Thank you once again for your time and willingness to answer questions regarding the topic of family support. I value the opinions and ideas that you have shared with me today.”

Sincerely,

...

... Preschool Teacher

Questionnaire Protocol Cover Letter

Welcome to our Saturday morning playgroup and thank you again for taking the time to attend this four week session with your child. I am ..., a preschool teacher at ... Preschool and I would like to ask you to fill out a questionnaire. There will be one question to answer each week, and it will be contained in an anonymous envelope. Each of the four questions will address the subject of parent involvement in our school. You have read and signed a letter of informed consent indicating that you are willing to answer the four questions listed on the form. They will specifically address your personal experiences as you attend or have attended ... Preschool.

I would like to reassure you that no names will be used in the report that I write as a result of the information that I will be collecting from the questionnaires.

The purpose of my project is to investigate, collect data and review methods of supporting diverse families of preschoolers who receive special education services from ... Preschool. The second purpose of this research is to investigate ways to support parents through identifying their needs. Each question will be directly related to the topic of family support.

Questions

1. What support services and resources outside of the school setting already exist for your family?
2. As you transition from early support services to an integrated preschool setting, what supports do you currently receive from your child's early intervention setting?
3. At this time, what supports would you identify as being helpful to receive from ... Preschool?
4. What family supports would you like to receive from ... Preschool in the future?

Thank you, again, for your cooperation and assistance by completing the weekly questionnaires. It will provide me with valuable information on the subject of supporting families in early childhood settings.

Sincerely,

... ..
... Preschool Teacher

Parent Interview Thank You Letter

January 24, 2009

Interview Participant

... Preschool

...

..., NH 03431

Dear

I would like to take this opportunity to offer my thanks to you for making the time to participate in my recent interview at ... Preschool. Your willingness to take the time to attend and share your perspectives regarding the topic of providing support to families in our preschool is greatly appreciated.

Your responses to my questions, insights into the needs of families and suggestions for growth and improvement in this area were helpful and inspiring to me. Your commitment to making a difference in the lives of children is evident and admirable. Thank you for your assistance and contribution to my Capstone Project.

Thanks once again.

Sincerely,

... ..

Preschool Teacher

... Preschool

...

Questionnaire Thank You Letter

January 24, 2009

Questionnaire Participant

... Preschool

...

..., NH 03431

Dear

I would like to take this opportunity to offer my thanks to you for making the time to participate in my recent family questionnaire given during the playgroup at ... Preschool. Your willingness to take the time to share your perspectives regarding the topic of providing support to families in our preschool is greatly appreciated.

Your responses to my questions, insights into the needs of families and suggestions for growth and improvement in this area were helpful and inspiring to me. Your commitment to making a difference in the lives of children is evident and admirable. Thank you for your assistance and contribution to my Capstone Project.

Thanks once again.

Sincerely,

... ..

Preschool Teacher

... Preschool

...

Appendix C:

Interview Questions

Questionnaires

Interview Reaction Form

Questionnaire Reaction Form

Interview Questions

1. When was your child diagnosed with a disability?
2. As you transitioned from early support services to ... Preschool, what supports did you receive from your child's early intervention setting?
3. At this time, what supports would you identify as being helpful that you received from ... Preschool?
4. What family supports would you like to receive from ... Preschool in the future?

Questionnaire #1

"I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble."-Helen Keller

"Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after another."-Walter Elliot

Question #1

What support services and resources already exist outside of school for your family? (check all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> family doctor | <input type="checkbox"/> MDS services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> specialist | <input type="checkbox"/> network of friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> dentist | <input type="checkbox"/> MFS services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> physical therapist | <input type="checkbox"/> family counseling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> occupational therapist | <input type="checkbox"/> playgroup |
| <input type="checkbox"/> speech pathologist | <input type="checkbox"/> support group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> nutrition services | <input type="checkbox"/> extended family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> psychologist | <input type="checkbox"/> home visitor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other: (list) | |

.....

Are support services helpful to you?	Yes	No
Do you feel you receive enough support?	Yes	No
Does this community provide enough support services for your family?	Yes	No

Comments and observations:

Questionnaire #2

“A mind stretched by new ideas never returns to it’s original dimensions.”

- Oliver Wendell Holmes

Question #2

As you transition(ed) from early support services to an integrated preschool setting, what support services do you receive? (check all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> family doctor | <input type="checkbox"/> MDS services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> specialist | <input type="checkbox"/> network of friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> dentist | <input type="checkbox"/> MFS services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> physical therapist | <input type="checkbox"/> family counseling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> occupational therapist | <input type="checkbox"/> playgroup |
| <input type="checkbox"/> speech pathologist | <input type="checkbox"/> support group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> nutrition services | <input type="checkbox"/> extended family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> psychologist | <input type="checkbox"/> home visitor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other: (list) | <input type="checkbox"/> RISE/Easter Seals |

.....
Are the support services helpful to you?

Yes No

Do you feel you receive(ed) enough support?

Yes No

Questionnaire #3

“Children are more likely to succeed-now and in the future-when schools and families are prepared for each other.”

-W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Question #3

At this time, what supports would you identify as being helpful to receive from ... Preschool?
(check all that apply)

social opportunities

support group

home visits from teachers

other: (list)

informational gatherings:

sensory issues

bedtime routines

sign language

language development

mealtime ideas

limit setting

other suggestions:

.....
Does this community provide enough support services for your family? Yes No

Comments and observations:

Questionnaire #4

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”

-Eleanor Roosevelt

Question #4

What support services and resources would you like to receive from ... Preschool in the future?
(check all that apply)

social opportunities

support group

home visits from teachers

network of friends

informational gatherings:

sensory issues

bedtime routines

sign language

language development

mealtime ideas

limit setting

other suggestions

other:

Comments and observations:

Parent Evaluation

... Preschool Playgroup

Fall 2008

	No			Yes
My child enjoyed the playgroup	1	2	3	4 5
There were enough activities provided	1	2	3	4 5
I enjoyed the playgroup	1	2	3	4 5
Saturday mornings were a good time to meet	1	2	3	4 5
The time of the playgroup was good	1	2	3	4 5
The information given to me was useful	1	2	3	4 5
My child made new friends	1	2	3	4 5
I talked and shared with other families	1	2	3	4 5
I would do it again, if offered	1	2	3	4 5
Overall, the playgroup went well	1	2	3	4 5



Additional comments and suggestions:

Interview Reaction Form

Facilitator Summary Sheet

Facilitator _____

Date _____

Tool _____

Reflection:

1. What were the main themes, issues, problems and questions you witnessed during this session?
2. Who was/were the participant(s)?
3. What were the main themes or issues raised?
4. What new hypothesis, speculations, guesses, or insights related to the purpose statement arose during the session?
5. What happened that was unexpected?
6. What was puzzling?
7. What new ideas were suggested for the creation of a parent support component?
8. Other comments, reactions and observations.

Questionnaire Reaction Form

Facilitator Summary Sheet

Facilitator_____

Date_____

Tool_____

Reflection:

1. What were the main themes, issues, problems and questions you experienced administering the questionnaires?
2. Who was/were the participant(s)?
3. What were the main themes or issues raised?
4. What new hypothesis, speculations, guesses, or insights related to the purpose statement arose during the session?
5. What happened that was unexpected?
6. What was puzzling?
7. What new ideas were suggested for the creation of a parent support component?
8. Other comments, reactions and observations.

Appendix D:

Logging Chart

Journal

Capstone Experience Logging Chart

Date	Amount of Time	Description of Activity
6/26/08	6.5 hours	Attended class: library intro, overview of capstone project and information about coursework
6/26/08	2 hours	Researched information from Mason Library, set up accounts in the system
6/27/08	1 hour	Went to Mason Library: gathered information for research project
6/27/08	6.5 hours	Attended class: formulated proposal, received feedback, received syllabus and assignments
6/29-7/6	1 hour each day	Read material on topic for proposal
7/8/08	4 hours	Began working on proposal, getting organized for paper to be written
7/9/08	4 hours	Worked on bibliography, title page and refined title
7/10/08	6 hours	Worked at Mason Library finding info for bibliography
7/11/08	1 hour	Worked on annotated bibliography. Lots of questions about APA format, called ...
7/12/08	2 hours	Worked on introduction paper and finished bibliography and annotated bibliography
7/13/08	2 hours	Began to write introduction, problem statement and 3 questions for research
7/15/08	3 hours	Wrote introduction and checked APA format for bibliography
7/16/08	2 hours	Finished rough draft of introduction, and annotated bibliography
7/26/2008	2 hours	Read through introduction, bibliography and title page and made final adjustments. Still unsure on APA format
7/30/2008	2 hours	Read article 2
7/31/2008	1.5 hours	Read article 4
8/01/2008	5 hours	Took online quizzes, posted comments on 3 articles and submitted to ... intro, bib and title page

Date	Amount of Time	Description of Activity
08/01-08/10	1 hour each day	Reviewed materials and investigated websites
08/11/08	4 hours	Finished quizzes, had trouble with step 9, emailed ..., waiting for reply, checked email finished comments and paragraphs in class discussion section
08/12-8/30/08	8 hours	Finished quizzes, reviewed proposal and read material for literature review
9/13/08	6 hours	Class at ..., got proposal returned and grade for summer. Worked on lit. review gathering info.
9/17-9/23/08	10 hour	Read and organized infor for literature review. Met with ..., got info on methodology
9/24-10/15	20 hours	Began writing lit review, reviewed info, wrote reference page, prepared permission letters.
10/20-10/30	10 hours	Read and synthesized lit review document, prepared IRB letters of consent for administrator and parents
10/31-11/02	5 hours	Organized questionnaire responses and began working on methods section
11/03-11/09	15 hour	Prepared methods section for review at meeting with ..., formulated questions for her about paper
11/09/08	1 hours	Meeting with Reviewed lit review and methods section and clarified course for methods of research for the paper
11/30/08	2 hours	Added suggestions from ... to paper and submitted them for review before class on Saturday 12/06
12/06/08	6 hours	All day class at Focused on research tools and shared data and documentation supporting research
12/08/08	3 hours	Made revisions to rough draft and submitted them to ... for fall semester approval
12/12/08	1 hour	Conducted first interview to parents asking them about support received through ... Preschool
12/29/08	1.5 hours	Conducted 2 nd interview to parent asking them about support received through ... Preschool
1/6/09	2 hours	Conducted 3 rd interview to parent asking them about support received through ... Preschool
1/10/09	4 hours	Transcribed tapes taken at interviews and recording observations, themes and trends

Date	Amount of Time	Description of Activity
1/22/09	6 hours	Class all day at Got information on crosswalk for research and talked to peers about questions and concerns
1/24/09	4 hours	Reviewed information and worked on paper
2/05/09-2/14/09	2 hours each day	Organized information and worked on interpreting results
2/20/09	6 hours	Completed portfolio, reviewing past classes and including them into report
3/1/09-3/07/09	10 hour	Prepared for last class, organized portfolio, made figures and added it to research report. Worked on conclusions
3/10/09	2 hours	Reread what I have already to see if it makes sense
3/16/09	5 hours	Checked bibliography and documentation of quotes.
3/21/09-3/22/09	12 hours	Worked all weekend, checking over paper, rewriting summary and final conclusions, and getting paper ready for peer review. Will have it done by April 2 nd for submission to
4/02/09	10 hours	Made revisions and sent it to ...
4/09/09	2 hours	Prepared for meeting and met with Will have to make a few corrections and revisions to paper.
4/18/09	8 hours	Made revisions for final paper to be given to Hopefully it is finished! Will get final OK, then print it into formal book.

Journal Documentation for Capstone Project

October 18, 2008-Our class met today and we turned in our final proposal statements, rough draft of literature review, and APA bibliographies. It was a lot of work thus far, but I feel each section gives me a better understanding of the big picture. It really helps to know that all of the classes I have taken have meshed with my capstone studies. It gives me a solid background to build my paper. Technically, I am struggling. APA is difficult for me, and also technology doesn't come easy for me. I have spent many hours trying to save and send documents, when I know others in class understand this process much better. I begin my playgroup this Sat. and will hand out some questionnaires which will move me into a different section of my research paper. I'm feeling overwhelmed right now but have faith it will all go smoothly.

October 25, 2008-I started my playgroup sessions which will meet at ... Preschool for 4 consecutive Saturdays from 9:00am to 10:30am. Although it was ... Pumpkinfest weekend, all families came to the playgroup and seemed excited to be here. The children were quite timid, and quiet and parents tended to stand and "watch" my circle and activities rather than participate, but my hope is each week we all will feel more comfortable. I really need another adult with me to help facilitate activities and snack. Next week, my para will help me. I gave out the first questionnaire and look forward to seeing how they are filled out.

November 1, 2008-Second playgroup. Another busy weekend, with Halloween last night, but 7 of 8 families are here. Gave out 2nd questionnaire. Parents and children seem more relaxed and are beginning to make connections. I feel good with extra help from my para. Session went well and questionnaires are filled out.

November 8, 2008-Third playgroup. Going very well and all are having fun. I have received nothing but positive feedback from this experience. I am very tired, however, working 6 days a week plus homework for ... plus family commitments.

November 10, 2008-Meeting with I feel it went well; although still feeling overwhelmed by the technology and size of document I have already. She gave good suggestions and I left feeling more clear about expectations and ways to state what I need to in the paper. I wish we had class more often because I feel like I need to be connected with others often, otherwise I doubt myself and my direction.

November 15, 2008-Last playgroup. I will be sad to see it end. Great experience for all, and I'm looking forward to my young students joining my class in January. We're going to look into them transitioning in De... now that they're used to coming to school. I also have received positive input from my colleagues and we are looking into having playgroups as a permanent part of the program. Exciting for me because parent involvement is my passion.

November 30, 2008-Worked on my final literature review to be handed in on Saturday and my methods rough draft. It is a lot of work, but I can see how it's all coming together. I think it is a strong paper thus far and look forward to feedback on Saturday. I have a lot of methods: questionnaires, interviews, community site visits, lit review, peer review, journaling. I want to be sure that it all comes together to support my research statement. Work is very busy right now with parent/teacher conferences, and I am also finishing up my semester project for my Teacher as Leader course. It will all calm down soon. Got word from ...I am on target for graduation May 2009 so I can see the light at the end of this tunnel.

December 6, 2008-class all day at Our first work session focused on designing research tools. It was helpful to look at other capstone projects and fill out the sheet narrowing down what our own focus will be and what tools we will need to gather specific information. Sharing information and resources with others in class is very helpful. I have lots of resources now. Tool construction is an important part of the overall picture. I will be making changes to my current capstone and turning it in to ... on Monday. So far, I have a final introduction, almost final lit. review and rough draft methods section. I have completed my forms for IRB, distributed and collected my 8 surveys and have my 3 interviews scheduled. My vision is to have all information gathered by the end of January, so I'll have plenty of time to interpret the information received and organize my paper.

Research tools to be used in my paper:

Survey 8 families entering the program.

Interview 3 families: one who had graduated into elementary grades, one current, one new to the program

Community site visits

Journaling

Literature Review

These 5 areas will give me a solid base for my writing.

December 8, 2008-turned in completed paper thus far, but came down with the flu, so it's not my best work. I will be working on it over the holidays, and having it ready for my meeting with ... on January 13th.

December 12, 2008-conducted my first interview with a family of a 5th grader who attended the preschool. I gathered lots of information about how being in preschool was helpful to the student and the family. I asked pertinent questions and allowed them to reflect upon several main areas of support services that they have received over the years. Some were very helpful, some were not. I wrote my overall thoughts on the interview sheets with common themes. Looking forward to 2 more interviews to gather more information.

December 29, 2008-Conducted 2nd interview with a mother of a child who has attended the preschool since fall 2007 to the present. I'm glad I got the chance to interview her, because all of her experiences with our preschool were not positive. She shared many areas for improvement and I was able to see things through a parents' perspective. An overlying theme in both interviews is that parents often feel isolated, and that the medical and educational teams don't quickly give them the needed answers. Overall, parents need to be reassured that their child is going to be OK. How do you do that at such a young age? How do we see into the future? How do we build that trusting relationship when lives and decisions are always changing?

Seeing a teacher on a daily basis and having a trusting relationship with them is important. Therapists often disagree on treatment and sometimes don't work together. How do we make this work more smoothly?

January 6, 2009-Conducted 3rd interview. I interviewed a mother of twins who joined our program in fall 2008. Both children have speech/language impairments and one of the twins has severe health impairments and a motor delay. This mother has been to many doctors and has been involved in early intervention services since their birth. She is well informed of the community services available to her family because of her children's disabilities and also because of her life situation. I find that families who are considered "at risk" due to low income, health impairments and high needs tend to know where/how to get what they need. It's the families somewhere in the middle that seem to need the most support from us. This family receives numerous supports from the community and because of that they are flourishing. Is this my bias?

January 10, 2009-Snow day at school which allowed me to examine my interview notes and write down some common themes. These include: families feel isolated, medical professionals don't always have clear cut answers, parent advocacy is essential for student success, families want to feel connected to their child's everyday life, early intervention experiences need to be solid and positive for building future trusting relationships, parents want to hear there's hope, parents need help with organization of information they receive from multiple sources, strong tutors, teachers and therapists are essential, confusion and worry can be a consuming feeling for families of special needs children.

Also, often medical professionals don't panic enough, parents need reassurance and acceptance when trying alternative methods of medical and educational procedures, parents are the first ones to sense "something isn't right" with their child, families need and want to connect with their child's educational setting, when agencies work together-it's a good thing for families, interaction with other children is essential for developmentally delayed children to flourish, income does not determine quality of care, it is important to know where to go to receive support.

Above all, health concerns cause stress on families. That is an idea that comes up again and again.

January 13, 2009-working on journal, interview documentation, and finishing up lit review and methods section for my meeting Tuesday.

January 15, 2009-synthesized information from interviews and questionnaires into the research paper. The interviews especially will provide me with rich data to include in my research findings. Questionnaires were helpful, but next time I would be more specific about questions and what my goal is. Most of the parents I selected were quite happy with the program and were eager to share all the "good" that we do. I would like to hear a little bit of "bad" to counter balance and allow more room for improvement.

January 20th The need for parent support exists. It is in the literature review, questionnaires, interviews and site visits. I have to organize the information in a way that makes sense and proves that family involvement is a necessary component of early childhood programs.

February 7th-Meeting with I'm ahead right now because I was able to complete the interviews quickly and receive back the questionnaires. It will give me lots of time to think over the answers and make meaning of them. It is a large job ahead to take the huge amount of information I've collected and make sense of it all. Overall, I think I'm on the right track.

February 9th-In a different study, I'd like to correlate the importance of economic status with support services that families receive. I have noticed that families in lower economic states receive much more community services (i.e. oil, food stamps, rent assistance and housing, respite care et...) than families in lower middle class situations. Those families in the lower middle class situations, known as the "working poor" are the ones who seem to be struggling the most. I would like to know what services they wish they had, what their struggles are daily and how to better meet their needs. A surprising side study to the one I'm currently working on.

February 20th- Organized questionnaires and interpreted data into figures. Not sure how to put them into the report but will work on it.

February 24th-Organized data from interviews, made a table of common trends and themes to be added into research paper.

March 1-Finished community site visits table. I can see the end now, and how this will all make sense. Still very confused about technology and APA style but hope ... can help.

March 7-Class all day. Many students have had setbacks and are frustrated about their projects. It hasn't been easy with all the snow days, keeping ahead of all the work. Sometimes it's overwhelming but I feel supported by ... and my team Leah, Melissa and Marianne. I know we're all in this together. Got information about the professional day. Have a few ideas about making the board up, as well as including an article I wrote for the Parent Express, and a powerpoint show I made a few years back. Will check with ... if that's all OK.

March 21-22-Took all weekend to formalize the report. I fixed typos, headings, subheadings, added relevant information and new info I've come across. It's almost in the final stages. I will give it to my principal for peer review as well as my co-teacher. Also I'm sending it via e-mail to ... and Melissa for peer review. I can't wait for their input and thoughts on it.

April 18, 2009-This experience has been very time consuming, and required a lot of time and attention. It was worth all the time, as I feel I have learned a great deal about my profession, about writing technically, and making connections at ..., my school and in my community. I look forward to pondering more about future projects in the future and am excited to see where this experience will lead me. The professors at ... State College were encouraging and supportive. It has been a positive experience overall, however, right now, I'm tired!