Parent involvement in a public preschool: Proposed guidelines for an effective program

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Parent involvement in a public preschool: Proposed guidelines for an effective program

Abstract
There has been a substantial amount of research indicating that the major source of a student's motives for achievement, as well as his or her personality structure, is the home in which he or she grows up (Gordon, 1977). The behavior and attitudes of parents, as well as the nature of the physical setting and materials provided, have a direct impact on the child's behavior before and during the school years. The school is another source of a child's intellectual and personality development. The nature of the curriculum, the mode of teacher behavior, and the classroom ecology all influence not only immediate behavior, but also patterns of behavior for the future (Revicki et al., 1979).
Parent Involvement in a Public Preschool: Proposed Guidelines for an Effective Program

A Graduate Project
Submitted to the Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in Education University of Northern Iowa

by
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Introduction

There has been a substantial amount of research indicating that the major source of a student's motives for achievement, as well as his or her personality structure, is the home in which he or she grows up (Gordon, 1977). The behavior and attitudes of parents, as well as the nature of the physical setting and materials provided, have a direct impact on the child's behavior before and during the school years. The school is another source of a child's intellectual and personality development. The nature of the curriculum, the mode of teacher behavior, and the classroom ecology all influence not only immediate behavior, but also patterns of behavior for the future (Revicki et al., 1979).

The combination of the home and school environments requires not only its own internal changes but also changes in its interaction. Also, it requires changes in all the social, economic, and political agencies and systems which impinge on it. Parents do not operate in isolation. What goes on within the family is influenced by a variety of forces, and the family in turn plays a role in
influencing a variety of social forces (Gordon, 1978).

The conception of the role that parents should play in public education has undergone a dramatic shift in the last decade. In the not-too-distant past, the parents' role in public schools consisted mainly of (a) dropping their children off at the door of the school, and (b) voting for bond issues (Gordon, 1977). With the advent of the 1966 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, however, parents have been asked to assume a more direct role in their children's formal education. Parent involvement, in fact, has become a focal concern of American schools. Research on parent involvement by Bloom (1965) and Lavin (1983) showed that parental educational values and their reinforcement of school learning directly affects academic achievement.

The "Nation at Risk" report challenged parents to be responsible for their children's education. The Association for Childhood Education International promoted home, school, and community relations; "we believe that teachers and parents need to establish a stronger bond with one another" (Umansky, 1983).
Parent and school involvement and cooperation are essential. Both the home and the school have important functions to serve in educating the child; neither can work effectively without the understanding, support, and assistance of the other (Herman, 1983). Guiding the development of the child is a cooperative endeavor. Parents and teachers need to work together in order to provide a complete program for children. The quality of the teacher-parent relationship during the early period will have an influence upon children throughout their formative years (Gordon, 1979).

Each opportunity that involves a parent with the school program enables the teacher to know and understand better the children and their families. It also gives parents a better understanding of what the school is trying to do for their children. Educators need parents' help in learning about the child so that the child's individual needs can be met more quickly, thereby building on his strengths and helping him to develop in weak areas (Comers, 1984; Pugh, 1985).

The most significant influences on a child's emotional development come from his primary
environment--his home, and especially from interaction with his parents (Winter, 1985). If children are to reach their potential, parents must serve as basic supporters and reinforcers of the learning environment. This implies thorough communication and cooperation between parent and teacher (Meyerhoff, 1986).

While children are influenced greatly by their teachers, they are influenced most by their parents (Meyerhoff, 1986). Most parents are interested in what is best for their children. When there is an opportunity for sharing, parents and teachers can trade thoughts, beliefs, and hopes for the education of children (Winter, 1985).

Through a relationship with teachers, parents give their children tangible evidence of putting their trust in the school, the teacher, and the value of school experiences. This may make a difference in the child's accepting, trusting, valuing, and learning at school (Jowett, 1988).

Parents can help their children to derive more from schooling by extending educational experiences into the home. Parents, however, can only do this
if the teacher has shared the educational experience of the school with them (Comers, 1986).

Parents can inform teachers of their child as they see him at home. They can share what they believe are their child's abilities or inabilities, interests, and pleasures (Schmitt, 1986).

Parents can contribute to the teacher's understanding of their child by sharing information about other family members in the home, family interests, play and living space, the neighborhood environment and/or other information which might be valuable to the teacher in helping her know the child even better (Jowett, 1988).

The importance of early involvement of parents in their child's education was cited by White (1987) in a study conducted with children ranging in ages from birth to three years of age. White (1987) found that parent involvement in the first three years of life was important not only for culturally different children but for all children in order to gain the most from their early experiences. According to Morrison (1978), as parenting skills improved and as parents developed meaningful interaction with their children, the school
achievement of children increased, and their daily lives were enriched. Many educators have come to understand that parents are teachers at home.

Gordon (1979) states that parent involvement enables children to achieve better and learn more. An awareness of the relation between children's social, emotional, and intellectual development and the quantity and quality of their interaction with their parents has made us realize the importance of parents in the education of their children. Parents, and the quality of life they provide their children, are the strongest determiner of how well children will perform in the basic skills areas of reading and computation (Granowsky, Middleton, & Mumford, 1979).

Meier (1978) reported on benefits of parent participation for both parents and children. Parents who participated in an early education program gained a sensitivity to their child's emotional, social, intellectual development and needs; a greater enjoyment of their children, and the ability to respect individual differences. As a result of their parents' involvement children were: (a) more aware and responsive, (b) able to vocalize
in early years and develop more language skills in second and third years, (c) more successful in both short-term and long-term intellectual development, (d) stronger socially and emotionally, and (e) able to improve attachment to parents.

The relation among home, school, and academic achievement is documented by the studies of Herman (1983), Revicki (1979), Wade (1980), Ellis (1983), and Revicki (1981). Some educators support this approach in principle but point out that it is difficult to establish good home-school relations, particularly schools serving low-income children and those from minority groups. Opposers of involving parents in schools believe that the quality of home school relations is unrelated to academic achievement and believe that parent participation in schools can be a detriment (Granowsky et al., 1979). Some educators voice a need for training in involving parents in the classroom. Even educators who are convinced of the value of parent involvement often find themselves lacking in effective and creative ways to implement meaningful participation.

Many schools simply don't want parents to visit, or when parents do visit, they don't give
parents the opportunity to play a meaningful role at school. In some situations parents are called to the school only when there is a problem with their child. Even when parents are invited into the school, there is often no plan for using them effectively, thereby making parents feel that time spent in their child's school is wasted.

Not all families, however, know how to become involved in school-related activities and not all schools actively encourage and direct parent involvement (Epstein, 1987). Families in which both parents work, often are nonparticipants in school activities because there is so little time at home with their children. Working parents often prefer to spend time as a family rather than attend activities they consider not very interesting (Jowett, 1988).

Because of the amount of research supporting parent involvement, especially with very young children, it is advisable for educators to overcome the obstacles preventing effective parent participation. Parents and educators both have an obligation to work together to provide the best possible education for children.
A close look at parent involvement in the preschool program is important as government agencies attempt to mandate preschools in the public schools. If we are to support the general positive effects of parental involvement on children's learning, administrators and classroom teachers will need to implement effective parenting programs along with public preschooling. It is helpful to look at the history of parent involvement, to consult research studies, to view school districts current programs, and to appraise our own experience in working with preschool parents in developing guidelines for an effective preschool parent program.

**Purpose of the Study**

Four purposes of the study are given below. These include the following:

1. Give an overview of the history of parent involvement in the school system over the past century so that we might understand better the state of involvement today.

2. Review how recent research defines and evaluates five types of parent involvement.
3. Describe the current aspects of the Waterloo District Chapter One preschool parent program.

4. Develop guidelines to be used by public school systems in designing and implementing new or existing preschool parent involvement components.

Need for the Study

Extensive and convincing research exists relating to the benefits of parent involvement in schools (Ellis, 1983; Wade, 1980; Revicki, 1979; Herman et al., 1983). These studies support the premise that if there is to be a lasting effect on our students' learning, provisions need to be made that educate and involve parents in their child's academic and social development.

While there has been much discussion about the benefits of parent involvement, few articles have been written to help school districts set up effective ways of encouraging parent involvement. This is evidenced in the concerns expressed by directors who are in the process of setting up their own parent programs. Many have voiced their own feelings of inadequacies in developing a program. This paper will set up needed guidelines that will
assist school districts in developing and implementing effective parent programs to be used with preschool programs in public schools.

**Definitions**

*Parent involvement* refers to the processes that increase the parents' ability to help in their child's academic and social development (Jowett, 1988).

*Ripple effect* is used by Olmsted (1979) to describe the extraneous effect that a treatment brings about.

**History**

Parent involvement in schools is not a new idea. Parent programming, as we know it today, is based on a long history of developing and changing in the ways parents and parenting groups give assistance in the educational process of children. The following is a synopsis of the history of parent involvement over the past century.

Friedrich Frobel (1895), "Father of Kindergarten," who considered parents to be an integral component of early education and kindergarten movement involved parents from its inception. In the United States, by 1897, there
were over 400 Free Kindergarten Associations involved in the education of young children and parents. The Women's Christian Temperance Union developed a course using Frobel's belief in unity with a sequential curriculum for use with mothers of young children. Many worked with the lower socioeconomic groups and new immigrants.

In 1888, a group of interested New York City mothers founded The Child Study Association. The Child Study Association of America has emphasized child study and parent education. It is known to be the earliest and largest organization solely committed to the study of children.

The National Congress of Parents and Teachers founded the PTA in 1897. The PTA has been concerned with parent-school relationships since its inception.

G. Stanley Hall (1921), a psychologist at Clark University, founded a child study center. Children had not been studied to a great extent prior to that time. His research made use of questionnaires, first administered by associates and later by teachers and parents. With this, Hall led the way
for the development of effective child-rearing practices.

The 1890s and early 1900s were centered around the family with defined roles for mother, father, and children. The father was to financially support the family while the mother controlled the home. It was very important to provide a good home environment for the rearing of children. Because of the emphasis on a proper environment for children, the PTA was active in supporting child labor laws, pure food and drug acts, and housing legislation.

The 1920s saw a change in parent education. The change was from parent education for underprivileged and immigrants to the involvement of many middle-class parents in study groups for their own growth and enjoyment.

The nursery school movement was organized by Abigale Eliot in 1922. Her nursery school emphasized the family as partners in education.

The parent cooperative, which was developed in California, became a way for parents to share responsibilities in their child's education. Parents were required to participate in their
child's education in order for their child to be enrolled in these cooperatives.

By 1926 many school systems across the country had implemented parent education and preschool programs. The emphasis was on health education and child-rearing theories to aid in parenting skills.

The 1930s found the depression era influencing a necessary response to the needy and a broad concern for family and family relationships. As a result, parent education continued to be a high priority across the United States.

Many changes in community living, by the 1960s, brought about changes in our school communities. These changes included the gradual change from a rural nation to an urban nation. Many more women joined the work force to supplement their husbands income or to increase their own economic freedom and as a result, the father's relationship with his children was given more importance than ever before.

In 1965 the Office of Economic Opportunity began an eight week summer program for 550,000 disadvantaged preschool children. This was the beginning of the Head Start program which correlated family background, parent involvement, and academic
success. Soon to follow was the Follow Through program designed to carry the benefits of Head Start into the public school system. This program also provided for parent participation as a major component.

The 1970s saw a greater shift from community to urban schools. This resulted in a change in the control of schools so that the parental influence in the schools was replaced by professional control. This brought about an increased separation of school and families (Berger, 1987).

In 1972, the first Home Start programs were offered to infants and their parents. These programs were built around a Head Start program and were implemented to promote continuity of service by including all children in the participating family from prenatal stage through age eight.

The trend toward greater parent involvement in the education of their children continues to the present time. This effort of involving parents is difficult because, in more than half of the families in the United States, both parents work, the time available to spend with children is at a premium.
To confound matters more, monetary support for family support programs has decreased.

The family is the most stable component of society. Families remain even though many have undergone change. The schools must have knowledge of and respect for the family in order to meet the needs of children. Parent-school support of children's academic and social growth is essential in giving our children the best education possible.

Despite the recommendation of major educational reports in the past twenty years (Plowden, Bullock, Taylor, & Warnock, 1967) there still appears to be little parental involvement in the public preschools. Head Start was one of the first programs to include mandatory parent involvement. The results of the Head Start program showed that strategies which included parents in early childhood education seemed to be more effective in terms of long-term gains than those which did not (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). A more recent review of long-term gains from twelve such programs again confirmed the significance of involving parents, although it did not include what type of involvement or support was most effective (Consortium, 1982).
Types of Parent Involvement

Perhaps a look at the types of home-school relations will be helpful in understanding an existing parent component program. There are several types of parent involvement activities. Each of these activities should be included in any program where there is a desire to improve parent involvement. These activities are discussed below.

Home Visits

One school based program which used home visits is the Parent Education Follow Through Program (PEFTP). This model was designed by Ira J. Gordon in 1968. Gordon's program used paraprofessionals who would visit each child's home in an effort to model a teaching experience. Materials were provided for parents so they could work at home with their child.

Gordon's original design called for fun-type activities. More emphasis was to be placed on abstract experience rather than learning experiences directly related to classroom activities.

One of the major objectives of the home visit is to assist parents in teaching their children at home. This objective is achieved through scheduled
visits. In setting up these visits, parents are notified of a time and date when the teacher will arrive in their homes. During the home visit, a paraprofessional staff member works with the child using the materials provided by the school while the parent watches the session. After parents learn how to use the materials they are encouraged to participate. Home learning tasks are demonstrated by the staff to emphasize desirable teaching behaviors to be used by parents in teaching their children (Ellis, 1983). At the conclusion of the home visits, materials are left for the child and parents' use. The number of visits in each child's home will vary depending on the ratio of children to parent-training personnel.

A school district in Pennsylvania set up a home-based preschool. A study was conducted to determine effectiveness of such a program. Frequency of visits was determined by the students pretest scores and parents prior experience in teaching their children. As a result of the Home Base program, test scores have consistently shown that children have made progress in learning readiness. The school district where these children
eventually enrolled also found that training parents to work with their preschoolers at home is an effective approach toward achieving parental involvement in the early education of children (Spewock, 1988).

Parental involvement with their child from infancy through age three was the subject of a project set up by Burton White in Massachusetts. Results of these projects were presented by Jester and Guinagh (1983) and Meyerhoff and White (1986). These studies were concerned with providing parental training in families with young children from infancy through age three years. Both studies concluded that parents were the primary educators of their children. These projects presented evidence that enhancement of the stimulating environment in the home will result in measurable success. White's study measured intellectual and linguistic development and left little doubt of the success in enhancing the educational prospects of the project children. In the case of the Gordon study, children that were in the program for two or three consecutive years, performed better on achievement
tests than the control children for as long as seven years.

In a study conducted by Ellis (1983), the home visit program (PEFTP) was evaluated by investigating the implementation of home learning tasks by PEFTP and non-PEFTP parents. Ellis found that 88% of the sample PEFTP parents in the study used home learning tasks. This study also disclosed an awareness of Follow Through parents for the need to teach their children at home. Prior to the implementation of home learning tasks most parents were unaware of a need to work with their child at home and were also unable to find appropriate activities. Results also found 100% of PEFTP parents were in favor of continuing home learning tasks.

School Volunteers

The complex and diverse nature of the activities under the heading of "parent volunteers" is clear. Such contacts involve parents directly in the school curriculum with their own children, involve them in periods of transition with their own children, and involve them in general school and classroom activities. Contact may also involve parents in decision-making and school management
(Jowett, 1980). Parents as volunteers in school are helpful in numerous areas within the school community. A study by Jowett (1988) listed the benefits of parent volunteers as seen by respondents to a questionnaire. It improved parents' understanding of schools and education. Pupil achievement was improved. It enabled parents to learn, from the teaching staff, ways to help their children, and schools became more sensitive to local needs and opinions.

Recent research on parent involvement in elementary school classrooms has documented that improved student achievement is related to parent involvement (Comers, 1984). Programs have been designed to increase parents' understanding of what the school expects of children. These programs can also help their parents to educate children at home (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1974).

Improved reading abilities of children whose parents were closely involved in the schools have been documented by Grimmett and McCoy (1980) and Shuck, Ulsh and Platt (1983).

When lower socio-economic status parents receive assistance from the school system, they
become more involved with the programs directly affecting their child's academic achievement (Grimmet & McCoy, 1980). McLaughlin & Shields (1987) also found that involving low-income parents in the schools has a positive effect in improving educational outcomes for their children.

Other potential benefits can be derived from involving parents in their child's education. Parents have an opportunity to improve their understanding of school and education. In addition, parent volunteers provide practical help for overworked teaching staff. Parents can also develop a positive attitude about their child's education. Finally, involvement provides an opportunity for parents and teaching staff to share information. When parents became involved in their child's educational process, Olmsted (1979) observed a certain "ripple effect." Olmsted used this term to describe the effect of parental involvement on parents. For some parents, involvement has led to the development of skills and increased self-confidence. Many parent educators in the Follow Through program have not only finished their GED but have also graduated from college. Another ripple
effect has been observed in the advanced level of younger siblings of Follow Through students when they enter preschool. These children were observed as having higher entrance skills than those students whose families were not involved in the Follow Through parent program (Olmsted, 1979).

In a program designed by Comers (1986), parents were often called upon to participate in the area in which they were most likely to have strength. Parents volunteered to help directly in classroom learning or chose to prepare classroom materials. Parents also volunteered time to develop a school social calendar and events centering around these events. In addition, parents developed workshops for themselves and other parents, usually led by building teachers and other staff members. These workshops were designed to help parents understand the academic and social programs of the school and also to understand how to help their children perform better.

This type of volunteer project allowed students to observe their parents, or people from the community who were much like their parents, interacting in a cooperative way with teachers and
other school staff members. Comers (1986) also observed that in a climate of good parent/teacher relationships, students were more responsive to the academic and behavioral expectations of the school staff.

Another program was presented by administrative and staff members of the Tama-Toledo School district at the 1987 State Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC) Conference in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. It involved every parent in their volunteer project. Parents of preschoolers and kindergarten students were expected to select a day during each semester for which they would volunteer to work in their child's classroom. Staff members involved in this program reported high involvement of parents. A positive response was also observed by students whose parents participated.

Parent Education

In a study conducted by Wade (1980) a program was designed to provide parent education for parents of four- and five-year old children. Parents involved in the sessions had children who attended the preschool. Videotapes were used to show parents various components of the program. This proved to
be a highly effective means of motivating parents to attend meetings. Written notices encouraged parents to "come see your children on television." After the video tapes were shown the Reading Coordinator and the preschool teachers worked with parents and stressed the importance of preschool experiences. Meetings were held four times a year at each preschool center.

This project was found to be highly successful as evidenced by participation and comments of parents. The study was continued with first grade students in order to determine statistical significance of the program.

Another program set up by Schmitt (1986) involved the parents of at-risk preschoolers. Parents spent 90 minutes each week observing their children engaged in learning activities. After this observation, the parents role-played the kinds of teaching strategies the teacher was modeling. Then parents made materials/games that they would take home to use with their child the following week. The teacher also spent time with parents answering questions and explaining why specific activities were planned.
Parent Advisory Board

The opportunity for parents to influence policy decisions concerning the education of their children is an important aspect of the parent involvement program (Maloy & Scribner, 1985). Parents involved in Parent/Teacher Associations (PTA), Parent/Teacher Organization (PTO), or Parent Advisory Council (PAC), make decisions in a variety of areas. These groups may be active as advocates for children; participate in school improvement plans; help to formulate or revise school policies, develop program priorities, curricula, or budgets; participate in the selection of new principals, teachers, or staff; or take part in other school-related activities mandated by state-funded programs. These organizations act as a separate group but are part of the school and the school district (Epstein, 1987).

Parent advisory structures have typically given parents little genuine involvement in the decision-making process. However, there is considerable evidence that active parent advisory councils bring significant educational benefits. Advisory boards can add cultural education to the curriculum, help
to determine new curriculum, and support appropriate preschool curriculum when dealing with district administration (McLaughlin & Shields, 1987).

Comers' (1984) model for a representative governance and body coordinates the program at the building level. This committee consists of members selected by their own members. Represented in this group are the principal, parents, teachers, aides, and support staff (psychologist or social worker). The duties of the group are to identify problems and opportunities in the school, to evaluate the outcome of programs, and modify programs on the basis of evaluation findings. All adults in the school are represented in the decision-making process and therefore, this design provides for a feeling of mutual trust, respect, and understanding among the groups represented.

The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (1978), states that "PAC (Parent Advisory Council) members must know the program well and keep abreast of how it is operating in each project."

The agency also lists six requirements a school district should meet in setting up a parent advisory council. These guidelines were used in setting up
the Chapter One programs which serve students receiving Chapter One services.

communication

The school has an obligation to inform parents about school programs and their children's progress, and parents are expected to act on the information they receive. All schools send home memos, report cards, calendars of the school year, and notices of special events. A survey conducted by Epstein (1987) revealed that more than one third of the parents had no conference with a teacher during the school year. About 60% had never talked with a teacher by phone.

Principals and teachers can vary the form, frequency, timing, and content of information sent home. Information can be sent via memos, phone calls, newsletters, radio, TV or the local newspaper. Regardless of which means is used, teachers must communicate with parents. Ideally, a school's communications can be designed so that useful messages, ideas, and questions go from school to home and from home to school (Epstein, 1987).
Description of Current Chapter One Parent Involvement Program

The Chapter One preschool program in the Waterloo Community School District consists of two preschool classrooms which serve a total of 64 four-year old children. The following are used to determine eligibility for the program.

1. Children must be four years of age by September 15 of the current school year.

2. Children must live in a Chapter One school district. (Chapter One status is determined by the number of free and reduced lunches in each school building.)

3. Parents must provide transportation for their children to the preschool sight.

4. Children must take a screening test to determine "most need." According to Chapter One guidelines, students will be selected on the basis of those who score the lowest on the screening instrument.

5. Parents are required to participate in the parent component aspect of the preschool program.

The preschool site at the Longfellow Annex serves children from five Chapter One buildings.
within the Waterloo School District. The preschool center in the McKinstry Elementary building serves four-year-olds from six of the Chapter One buildings in the Waterloo system. Each of these two centers provides two sessions of preschool classes each day. Each of these sections is attended by 16 children who have qualified for the program. Classes meet for two-and-one-half hours four days each week during the regular school year. Classes meet Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday each week. Wednesdays are reserved for the compensatory parent involvement project.

Each center employs a full-time, certified preschool teacher and a full-time associate. The program also has the services of a parent coordinator. The parent coordinator works closely with the preschool parents and with the preschool teachers in designing and implementing the parent component program.

The parent component program of the Chapter One preschool consists of four separate divisions. Three of these components are implemented on Wednesdays, the day reserved for parent involvement. The following is a description of the current parent
program as it has existed for the past two school years.

Home Visits

Home visits are made by staff members to the preschoolers homes three times each school year. The visits are designed to involve the parent in their child's education by modeling teaching techniques and providing materials to be left in the home for the parent and child to use together.

Parents are notified of the upcoming home visit early so that they can reschedule if the date or time is inconvenient. The visit is made by the teacher and the associate as a team. Both teacher and associate are involved in the modeling of the teaching technique and in answering questions the parents may have concerning the program and the importance of the learning activity modeled. The learning activities presented at home visits are:

1. To identify color and shape and classify by color, shape, and size.

2. Math concepts including one-to-one correspondence, and number identification of numerals 1-10.
3. Sequencing of size from smallest to largest. Story sequencing using up to five pictures to tell a sequential story.

School Volunteers

The parent coordinator selects one parent from each section of preschool classes. These four parents are requested to volunteer their time in the classroom for one hour each week. The parent coordinator provides an inservice for these parent volunteers which outlines the types of activities they will be asked to help with and the kind of modeling they will need to provide for the children they will be working with.

In the classroom parents are asked to work with small groups of children during "center time." Parents might teach a simple table game, help with an art project, read a story to an individual or small group or encourage children to talk about a picture they painted or something they wrote."

The parent volunteer program has been less than successful these past years. Few parents were willing or able to commit themselves to this weekly volunteer project. As a result, the preschool program was without a volunteer parent in the
classroom. There is a real need to limit the amount of commitment a parent volunteer is requested to make in the classroom.

**Parent Education**

Educational sessions for parents are organized by the parent coordinator employed by the Chapter One preschool program. The parent coordinator contacts specialists in areas such as speech, nutrition and reading. These specialists present information to the parents which help them to understand better the way young children develop and learn. Written materials are always provided to reinforce the main points developed by the speaker.

Another type of session organized by the parent coordinator is designed to provide opportunities for positive interaction between parent and child. Examples of this type include parent/child make and takes and field trips to places of local interest. These meetings are scheduled on Wednesdays which have been reserved for parent involvement projects. Free child care for preschoolers and younger siblings is provided for each of these Wednesday functions. Examples of meeting themes are: (a) speech and language development of preschool aged children, (b)
disciplining your preschooler, (c) nutritious snacks, (d) valentine make and take (for parents and child), (e) the importance of reading to your child, (f) educational toys you can afford/make, (g) kindergarten readiness, (h) Christmas cookie decorating (for parent and child), (i) field trip to the public library (for parent and child), (j) field trip to the Grout Museum (for parent and child), and (k) family picnic.

Because of low attendance for these parent informational meetings, there is a need to provide other ways of presenting information to parents. Activities that include ways in which parents can work in non-threatening ways with their children are attended well. Field trips that have been planned are also well attended. Therefore, these types of parent involvement which provide opportunities for conversation and fun interaction between parent and preschooler will continue to be included in our parent program.

Parent Advisory Board

There is no form of advisory board for the preschool. However, research shows that parents who feel they have an influence on their children's
programs are more likely to become involved. The Federal Interagency Day Care guidelines (1968) for parental involvement now mandate that parents must have an opportunity to become involved themselves in the making of decisions concerning the nature and operation of the day care facility. Also whenever a day care serves 40 or more children there must be a Policy Advisory Committee. This committee is to include not less than a 50% representation by parents.

Berger (1987) recommends the board members be elected. Parents should have an opportunity to nominate themselves or others, and an election should be held to determine who will represent the community on the council. Advantages that a democratic selection process creates are numerous including: an interest in the program, a sense of self-determination and autonomy on the part of the parents, a source of relevant information and feedback from those being affected, and increased cooperation between school and parents.

Communications

The Chapter One Preschool program of the Waterloo Schools provides a parent handbook for each
parent at the Parent Orientation meeting held just before classes begin in the Fall. This handbook informs parents of policies, the yearly curricular format, a schedule of parent events and activities and a yearly calendar of special dates and vacations.

Parents are also encouraged to attend parent/teacher conferences held two times each year. A written form of the conference information is sent home with the parents to share with other family members. A questionnaire sent home before conferences requests parents to discuss three questions with their preschoolers. These questions are designed to help parents to better understand their child's feelings about preschool and encourage parents to attend conferences.

Newsletters are sent home at the beginning of each month. Information is included about special news from the preceding month and the plans for unit work coming up. Each child's name appears in each newsletter relating a special contributions made by the children. The parent coordinator adds a column with items of interest to parents. The newsletter also includes a calendar noting parent events, field trips, vacation days and days of special interest.
Verbal communication with preschool parents in the center is especially frequent because parents come in to the center each day to drop off their child and again to pick their child up. This provides opportunities for both parent and teacher to share information about the child's day or other areas of concern.
Guidelines for Public Preschool
Parent Component Project

With the possible mandating of preschools in the public school, there is a need to develop guidelines for effectively involving parents in their children's preschool education. The Chapter One Preschool program provides a design which could be used by other school systems as they implement preschool programming.

Some parts of the current Chapter One Preschool parent program are effective and need little or no change. However, other component parts are in need of revamping or a complete rewriting. Other parts are nonexistent (Parent Advisory Council).

As a result of information gained through reading research, talking to other districts and personnel experience, I will make the following recommendations in regards to guidelines in a preschool involvement program within a public school system.

These guidelines assume that the system will provide one day each week to devote to these parent functions. The teacher is an integral part of the parent program, and therefore, the teacher will need
this time to be free of classroom duties in order to allow her to work directly with the parents of her students one day each week.

Home Visits

Guideline: Visits to homes of culturally different children will provide an opportunity for teachers to gain information for a more appropriate curriculum.

The home visit program will continue to provide an opportunity for the teacher and associate to get a better picture of the child's home environment. These visits are to be set up in advance at the convenience of the parents' and the teachers' schedules.

The following are steps to prepare for a home visit:

1. Home visits are scheduled on Wednesday, the day children are not in class.

2. A note is sent home notifying parents of the up-coming visit. The note should state whom will make the visit, the date of the visit, the length of the visit and to what address you are planning to go. Notes should also indicate a phone number for the
parent to call for setting up a more convenient time for a visit if necessary.

3. Prepare and pack needed materials for home visits.

The following describes a home visit:

1. Visits are conducted on Wednesdays.
2. Parent, guardian or other designated caretaker must be present. This is important as one of the major outcomes from a home visit is for parents to see modeling of a particular lesson being taught.
3. Each visit will be approximately thirty minutes in length.
4. Materials for continued home use will be left with the parent and child and become their property.
5. Each child will be visited approximately three times each year.

School Volunteers

Guideline: Parents will be provided the opportunity to visit, work, and share experiences with their children.

In an effort to involve the greatest number of parents in the classroom and to provide an
opportunity for parents to share the special interests, talents or hobbies, each parent will volunteer one day each trimester. This will allow for each parent to be in the classroom three days during the school year. A calendar will be provided at the orientation meeting held prior to classes beginning in the Fall. Parents will be expected to sign up for the day of their choice on which they will participate during the first trimester. Also, they will be encouraged to share a family story, game or favorite book for their first participation. Calendars will also be provided at conference times. At each conference, parents will be expected to choose a day during the second and third trimesters on which they will participate in the classroom. Parents will be encouraged to share a special interest, talent or hobby for their visit during the second trimester. They will be encouraged to teach a song, read a story or teach a game for their visit during the third trimester.

The classroom teacher will need to contact each parent the week before their scheduled visit in order to lend support or offer suggestions if necessary. It might be helpful for the teacher to provide a list
of suggestions to send home with parents who voice uncertainty regarding their participation.

Parent Education

Guideline: Parents will be provided with usable information in understanding how children learn.

These meetings are offered to present information to parents concerning their child's development and to encourage parent/child activities. The following describe the parent education meetings:

1. Subjects for parent education meetings will be determined from ITBS scores of the kindergarten classes in Chapter One buildings being served. Those areas seen as needing most improvement are the topics that need to be presented to the preschool parents.

2. The parent coordinator notifies parents, by note, of each Wednesday meeting. Notes will be sent home on Monday and again on Tuesday of the meeting week encouraging attendance.

3. The parent coordinator arranges for the facility and persons to provide adequate and free child care for preschoolers and younger siblings.

4. Parent education meetings will be held at least one time each month.
5. Parent education meetings will be organized, prepared and presented by the classroom teacher. Suggested meeting themes include: (a) how to get along with your preschooler (on discipline), (b) my child is great! (on developing positive self-confidence), (c) reading to your child, (d) beginning writing, (e) math readiness, (f) kindergarten readiness, (g) developing thinking skills, (h) field trip: public library (parent/preschooler), (i) field trip: Grout Museum (parent/preschooler), (j) Christmas make and take (parent/preschooler), (k) valentine make and take (parent/preschooler), and (l) family picnic.

Parent Advisory Board

Guideline: Parents will have an opportunity to become involved in the decision-making processes of the preschool center.

An advisory board will be made up of teachers, the parent coordinator, the Early Childhood director, and preschool parents. Committee members should include not less than 50% parents who are selected by the parents themselves.

Parents will be actively involved in the decision-making process. They may formulate, revise
and evaluate policies. They will also contribute to a well-rounded cultural curriculum.

Communications

Guideline: Communication will be encouraged between home and school by the classroom teacher.

Parent communication not included in any of the previous forms of involvement will be discussed here. Written and verbal communications are necessary particularly when teaching young children. Many times young children have difficulty recalling the day's activities to their families and they need the assistance of the teaching staff to help them share special activities and experiences. Parents also need to be aware of policies and expectations for their participation in their child's program. The following are forms of communication that need to be shared with preschool parents throughout the year:

1. Parent orientation. This meeting should be held before classes begin in the Fall. Parents should be informed of school policies and items for which the school will hold the parent responsible.

2. Parent handbook. The handbook should state policies and dates of importance for the school year.
3. Conferences. At least two parent-teacher conferences should be held each year. Parents should be expected to attend. Parents who do not attend a conference should be visited at their home so information about their children can be shared with the parent.

4. Newsletters. Newsletters should be sent home at least once each month. Newsletters should inform parents of classroom happenings, important upcoming dates, and if possible, each child's name should appear in each newsletter.

5. Phone calls and face-to-face conversations. The teacher should make every attempt to share positive comments with each child's parents.
Summary and Conclusions

A closer relationship with parents offers opportunities for overcoming some of the differences between home and preschool services. The experiences of preschool will be of greatest value if it relates to what happens at home and can compliment it. This will not happen unless preschool workers are consulting with and listening to parents. Professionals will need to learn to be more receptive to the experience and the perceptions of parents. Parents of preschool-aged children are interested in their child's education and we, as teachers must involve parents in as many ways as possible in order to provide the best possible atmosphere for learning.

Increasing parent participation in the education of their child by means of such things as volunteer activities, advisory boards and parents' education meetings, may increase parents' perceptions of their influence on the school and their child's achievement. In addition, giving parents some influence and involvement in the school programs will help to make the program more sensitive to students' needs. Also the resources
offered to the schools in terms of volunteer time may enable preschools to improve their instructional program and their attention to individual needs, which results in more student success in learning.

The guidelines that were suggested in this paper will provide the framework for an effective parent involvement program. These guidelines will help teachers and administrators to enable parents to increase their ability to help in their child's development and will provide parents with the opportunity to influence policy decisions concerning the education of their children.

Teachers and administrators will need to be aware of and work closely with parents. As the needs of the community change, the ways in which these needs are most effectively met may also change. Open communication between educators and families will keep the communication channels open so we may develop appropriate and effective education for preschool children.
References


