

# Parent Perceptions of Parent Involvement With Elementary-Aged Students With Learning Disabilities

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The purpose of this research was to explore parent perceptions concerning their involvement in their children's special education. The goal of this study was to better understand why some parents become involved while others do not. Survey methodology was utilized to determine parent perceptions of (a) levels of parent and children's participation in home literacy activities, (b) levels of parent efficacy, and (c) parent viewpoints of their responsibilities in the home-school relationship. Participants in this study consisted of 49 parents of elementary-aged children diagnosed with specific learning disabilities, and included six elementary schools from two school districts, one rural and one urban district. Descriptive statistics and correlational analysis were utilized. Participants provided demographic/background information and completed a modified version of the Likert-type survey known as the "Parent Survey of Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades." Results indicate a strong positive correlation between parent literacy activities and at home child literacy activities and a correlation between parent efficacy and parent involvement at school.

**Keywords:** *parent involvement, parent perceptions, learning disabilities*

## Introduction

It is clear that parent involvement in education is an important factor in student outcomes (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008). Involved parents are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes and behaviors toward school, and their children are more likely to demonstrate passing grades (NICHCY, 2011). Parent involvement also appears to have a positive influence in decreasing drop-out rates (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Rumberger, 1995), and special education placements (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). Although parent involvement is recognized as an important component in a child's educational career, many school-wide efforts have been unsuccessful in their attempt to recruit parents to participate, especially those from low-income families (Cole & Frederick 1995; Jenkins, 1981).

Some educators believe the absence of parent involvement is due to lack of interest in their child's education (Cole & Frederick, 1995; Jenkins, 1981), while others believe it is the result of parental beliefs and/or prior experiences within their own educational careers. Though either may play an active part in the lack of parental involvement, research suggests (Goldberg, 1987; Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005) parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds want to be involved and want to assist their children with homework in the anticipation of improving their children's skill levels in both reading and writing (Faires, Nichols, & Rickelman, 2000).

A link between a child's success in school and the literary activities parents participate in with their children at home has been identified (Leseman & de Jong, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 1996). Therefore, it is important for parents

to understand and acknowledge the skill and ability levels of their children at every age, so they may have a realistic view in helping their children acquire the skills needed for later academic success. In a study by Marvin and Wright (1997), parents of children with disabilities predicted their children would have the skills to read and write well enough to attend college. Unfortunately, at the age of 21, 20% of those same parents were wrong in their predictions, and their adult children's literacy levels were well below what is required for a student to attend college. Parents who are aware of the negative effects of a learning disability and understand the benefits of parent involvement are better equipped to help improve the educational outcome for their children (Eccles & Harold, 1996). Learning about the factors that contribute to parent involvement and/or the lack of parental involvement continues to grow increasingly important in understanding parent perceptions concerning education. Socioeconomic status, parental self-efficacy, and parent education level are only three factors of several to consider in the lack of parent involvement.

### **Socioeconomic Factors**

A parent's socioeconomic level is one element believed to impact the amount of time a parent is involved in their children's education. Most parents from low-income backgrounds value education and perceive it as a pathway out of poverty (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). Unfortunately, for some parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds, actively participating in their children's education may be somewhat challenging. Many parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds maintain work obligations, which are a hindrance to the amount of time they have to spend with their children in educational endeavors. Parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds also suggest they, too, lack the resources to participate in educational activities with their children, even though they want to participate and are aware of the importance of parent involvement (Chavkin & Williams, 1989; Chin & Newman, 2002; Garcia et al., 2002; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Heyman, & Earle, 2000; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Weiss et al., 2003).

Patrikakou and Weissberg (2000) found single-parent families were in part associated with low socioeconomic status and were less involved in their children's education than two-parent households. Children from low socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to come from single-parent households (Blair et al., 2008; Evan, Gonnella, Marcynyszyn, Getile, & Salpekar, 2005) and were more likely to demonstrate poor attendance, lower grades, and limited opportunities to attend college (Xi &

Lal, 2006). It is common in both single and two parent households for work demands to take priority over the family due to economic reasons. However, children from two-parent households tend to experience more time with one or both parents, have more supervision, can afford to participate in extracurricular activities, and do better in school (Evans, 2004). In addition, in both single- and two-parent households, typically the mother is the person who bears most of the responsibility in balancing the demands between work and family (Eccles & Harold, 1993). Research suggests mothers who work full-time are less involved, and mothers from low socioeconomic backgrounds who worked or were in school full-time were also inclined to be less involved with their children (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Muller, 1995; Weiss et al., 2003).

### **Self-Efficacy**

Parents' perception of their knowledge and skill level can also impact the types of activities in which they choose to participate (Green, et al., 2007; Walker et al., 2005). Parents are more apt to engage in activities when they believe they have the necessary skills and knowledge. When parents believe they do not have the skill sets to help their children, they are less likely to become involved. Parents provided with opportunities and help from their children's teacher, regardless of educational background, generally want to help their children with homework and other educational activities (Faires et al., 2000; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000).

Similar to parents' perception of their knowledge and skill level is a parent's level of self-efficacy. Parental self-efficacy as described by Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1992) is based on the researcher's assumption that parents make choices to become involved with their children if they believe their involvement will result in positive outcomes. Parents with a high sense of self-efficacy were more likely to spend more time in their children's educational activities and volunteer in the classroom. Parents with a high sense of self-efficacy were also less likely to receive negative feedback from teachers regarding their children at school.

### **Parent Education**

In relation to self-efficacy, a link between parent education and parent self-efficacy has also been found (Coleman & Karraker, 2000). Parents with all levels of a college education had higher efficacy scores than did parents with only a grade school education, and parents with a high school education had significantly lower efficacy scores than did parents with more than a bachelor's degree (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992).

Although parents with less education generally demonstrate a lower sense of self-efficacy, results from a previous study (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992) found parents with lower levels of self-efficacy spent more time helping their children with homework than did parents with a higher sense of self-efficacy. Some reasons parents may spend more time on homework may be due to several factors, one of which is their determination to see their children succeed; they may have used less effective homework strategies that took more time; or their children may have experienced greater school difficulty, which may take longer to respond (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992). In addition, prior research (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Sheldon, 2002) found parents' self-efficacy directly impacted their level of involvement at home but had no influence on their level of involvement at school. If parents lack confidence in their ability to help their children with homework, participating at home or school with their children's educational activities may become somewhat challenging. These challenges may prevent parents from becoming involved in their children's development of the basic skills needed for later educational success.

The purpose of this research was to explore parent perceptions concerning their involvement in their children's education, specifically parents of children with learning

disabilities. It is important to explore parent perceptions to better understand why some parents become involved in their children's education while others do not. The following research questions guide this study:

1. What do parents report about their responsibilities that ensure children's school success?
2. What is the nature of relationships between parent efficacy and parent levels of involvement?
3. Is there a relation between parent involvement and at-home literacy activities?

## Method

### Participants

This research was designed to assess parent levels of involvement in the education of their children with mild to moderate disabilities. Survey methodology was utilized to determine parent perceptions of (a) what parents view as their responsibilities in the home-school relationship, (b) levels of parent efficacy, and (c) levels of parents' and children's participation in home literacy activities. The study included six elementary schools in two school districts (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
*Ethnicity of Family by Setting*

Setting	Ethnicity	<i>n</i>	%
<u>Urban (<i>N</i> = 20)</u>	Asian American	0	0
	Black or African American	5	25
	Biracial	5	25
	Hispanic or Latino	1	5
	Native American/Pacific Island	0	0
	White or Caucasian	8	40
	Other	1	5
	Total	20	100
<u>Rural (<i>N</i>=29)</u>	Asian American	0	0
	Black or African American	2	7
	Biracial	2	7
	Hispanic or Latino	3	10
	Native American/Pacific Islander	1	4
	White or Caucasian	19	65
	Other	2	7
	Total	29	100

Participants in this study consisted of 49 parents of elementary-aged children who have been diagnosed with a specific learning disability. The children were between the ages of 6 and 11 years old, enrolled in public school in grades 1 through 5, and were receiving special education services for students diagnosed with learning disabilities. The sample was selected based on administrative cooperation in order to represent a rural school district and an urban school district in order to increase and diversify the sample.

### Measures

Past studies examining parent involvement used survey methodology to describe parent involvement levels (Delandsey & Bertrand, 2005; Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995; Sheldon, 2002). The primary survey used in this study was a modified version of the Likert-type survey known as the "Parent Survey of Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades," (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007). Sheldon and Epstein's (2007) survey was organized under the following headings: (a) school communication, (b) school climate, (c) parent involvement, (d) parent ideas, (e) connections with other parents, and (f) demographics. The survey included approximately 100 items and employed a 4-point Likert-type response scale.

A second survey utilized for this study, the "Home Literacy Inventory," (Marvin & Ogden, 2005) was used partly to identify the types of at-home literacy activities parents' report participating in with their children. This questionnaire was originally developed for families to report at home literacy experiences of their young children with and without disabilities. This survey required parents to report how often they used and their children used or read specific items, such as magazines and books in the home. The survey also asked parents to report how often their children participated in these same type activities. This measure used a response range of Every day/Most Days (1), Once a Week (2), Once in A while (3), and Never (4).

### Procedure

Initially, 71 survey packets were sent to the two school districts; 37 went to the rural school and 34 for the urban setting. The researcher gave the schools one week to administer and collect the surveys. Teachers were instructed by their principals to send the surveys home on a Monday and to return the surveys by Friday of the same week. Once the surveys were returned, the student

received a \$5.00 gift card to a local food establishment. Data consisted of 20 surveys returned from the urban school and 29 from the five elementary schools in the rural school district. A total of 49 surveys were returned and had an overall response rate of 69% (See Table 1).

### Results

The sample included parents of 30 males and 19 female students who participated in the study. Eighty-eight percent of the participants that completed the survey were mothers. The majority of students were enrolled in the second and fifth grades. The majorities of the families had two adults living in the home and were families who had three children. Thirty-nine percent of the parents had attended some college, and 51% believed their children would graduate with a college degree. English was described as the primary language spoken in the home. Forty-one percent of the parents were employed full-time, 12% part-time, and 47% of the participants reported being unemployed. Fifty-three percent of their spouses were employed full-time, 6% were employed part-time, and 16% were not employed. Twenty-five percent of the participants answered their spouse's employment as non-applicable. Seventy-eight percent of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch programs (See Table 2).

Independent *t*-tests were used to compare the demographic data between the rural and urban school districts. Ethnicity of the samples was the only significant demographic found between the two school districts. An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the racial identities of the parents in the rural school district and those from the urban school district. There was only one significant difference found in *t* scores between the rural ( $M = 5.34$ ,  $SD = 1.370$ ) and urban school districts, ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = .414$ ),  $t(47) = -2.355$ ,  $p = .025$  (two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -1.145, 95% CI: -2.07 to -2.19) was small (eta squared = .021). The urban samples were more diverse ethnically than the participants from the rural setting. The urban sample self-reported as 25% African American or Black, and an additional 25% described their family ethnicity as Biracial. Five percent identified as Hispanic or Latino. Forty percent considered themselves to be White or Caucasian. Five percent of the urban sample selected the "other" category. The population from the rural sample reported: 7% African American or Black, 7% Biracial, 10% Hispanic, 3%, Native American/Pacific Islander, 66% White, and 7% of the rural sample characterized themselves as the term "other," (See Table 2).

**Table 2**  
*Characteristics of Parents*

Parent Demographics		<i>N</i>	%
Child Characteristics			
	Males	30	61
	Females	19	39
	Total	49	100
Age of Child (years)			
	6	3	6
	7	4	8
	8	10	20
	9	11	22
	10	9	18
	11	11	20
	12	2	4
	Total	49	100
Grade of Child			
	First	4	8
	Second	15	31
	Third	7	14
	Fourth	10	20
	Fifth	12	25
	Total	48	98
	Missing	1	2
	Total	49	100
Relationship to Child			
	Mother	43	88
	Father	4	8
	Stepfather	1	2
	Other	1	2
	Total	49	100
Number of Children in the Home			
	1	5	10
	2	17	35
	3	14	29
	4	11	22
	5	1	2
	6	1	2
	Total	49	100
Number of Adults in the Home			
	1	12	25
	2	34	69
	3	2	4
	4	1	2
	Total	49	100

cont.

**Table 2 (cont.)**

<b>Parent Demographics</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Parent Level of Education</b>		
Some High School	5	10
Some College	11	22
Vocational/Technical	19	39
College Degree	7	14
Graduate Degree/Credits	5	10
Total	1	2
Missing	49	98
Total	1	2
	49	100
<b>Parent Perceived Level of Child's Educational Attainment</b>		
High School Diploma	9	18
Some College	6	12
Vocational/Technical	3	6
College Degree	25	51
Graduate Degree Credits	5	10
Total	48	98
Missing	1	2
Total	49	100
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Black or African American	7	15
Biracial	7	14
Hispanic or Latino	4	8
Native American/Pacific Islander	1	2
White or Caucasian	27	55
Total	3	6
	49	100
<b>Language Spoken in the Home</b>		
English	49	100
<b>Parent Employment Level</b>		
Full Time	20	41
Part Time	6	12
Not Employed	23	47
Total	49	100
<b>Spouse Employment Level</b>		
Full Time	26	53
Part Time	3	6
Not Employed	8	16
NA	12	25
Total	49	100
<b>Free and Reduced Lunches</b>		
Yes	38	78
No	10	20
Blank	1	2
Total	49	100



Research question one examined what parents believe their responsibilities were in their children's education. Table 3 depicts what parents reported as their responsibilities in their children's education. The majority of parents, 92%, reported it is their responsibility to keep track of their children's progress in school ( $M = 1.08$ ,  $SD = .277$ ). In addition, 92% of the parents strongly agreed that it is important to show interest in their children's schoolwork ( $M = 1.12$ ,  $SD = .484$ ). Eighty six percent of subjects strongly agreed it was the parents' job to make sure their children learned in school ( $M = 1.16$ ,  $SD = .426$ ).

Research question two examined the relationship between parent efficacy and their levels of involvement in their children's education. The relationship between parent efficacy (as measured by the Parent Survey of Family and Community Involvement, Sheldon & Epstein, 2007) and parent levels of involvement in children's education (also measured by the Parent Survey of Family and Community Involvement, Sheldon & Epstein, 2007) was determined by using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity occurred. There was no significant correlation found between the two variables, parent efficacy and the parents' involvement levels,  $r(47) = 0.18$ ,  $p > .206$ .

When the parent involvement sub-measures were examined separately, a significant correlation was found between the variables of parent efficacy and parent involvement at-school,  $r(47) = 0.39$ ,  $p < .01$ . Parents with greater efficacy were more likely to be involved at school than parents with less self-efficacy (See Table 4). Parent efficacy was also related to the school involvement activity, "go to a school event,"  $r = .411$ ,  $n = 49$ ,  $p < .01$ . Parents with a high sense of self-efficacy were more likely to go to a school event than parents with low self-efficacy.

Research question three requested parents to report the amount of time spent engaging in literacy activities in the home and to report how often their children participate in at home literacy activities. The relationship between parent literacy activities (as measured by the Home Literacy Inventory) and at home child related literacy activities (also measured by the Home Literacy Inventory) was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity occurred. There was a strong, positive correlation between the two variables, parent literacy activities and at home child literacy activities,  $r = .703$ ,  $n = 49$ ,  $p < .000$ . Children who were more involved in home literacy activities had parents who reported participating more frequently in literacy activities. Parents also reported the number of books in their homes (See Table 5).

**Table 3**

*Parent Reports of Responsibilities in their Children's Education: Percentage for "Strongly Agreed," Means and Standard Deviations (N=49)*

<b>My job as a parent is to...</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>%</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>
Make sure my child learns at school.	1.16	85.7	.426
Teach my child to value school.	1.16	87.8	.514
Show my child how to find definitions and information.	1.22	77.6	.422
Contact the teacher as soon as academic problems arise.	1.16	85.7	.426
Help my child review for tests.	1.10	89.8	.306
Keep track of my child's progress.	1.08	91.8	.277
Show an interest in my child's schoolwork.	1.12	91.8	.484
Help my child understand homework.	1.10	89.8	.306
Know if my child is having trouble in school.	1.10	89.8	.306

Response range 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*)

**Table 4**

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Inter-correlations: Parent Involvement Variables and Parent Efficacy (N=49)*

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6
Teacher Invitations	—	-.006	.159	-.105	.041	-.018
Parent Involvement At-Home		—	.441	.837	.960	.005
Parent Involvement at School			—	.522	.348	.392**
Monitoring Children's Work				—	.676	.109
Parent Involvement in Reading/Language Arts					—	-.047
Parent Efficacy						—
<i>M</i>	10.73	11.63	10.69	4.24	6.26	16.10
<i>SD</i>	4.45	3.43	2.35	1.15	2.33	3.64

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed)

**Table 5**

*Parents Report of Number of Books in the Home*

Number of Books in the Home	<i>N</i>	%
1-5	1	2
10-20	12	25
20-30	11	22
30-40	6	12
50 or more	11	22
100 or more	7	14
Missing	1	2
Total	49	100

## Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore parent perceptions concerning their involvement in their children's education, specifically parents of elementary aged students with learning disabilities. Research indicates a key component in assuring successful academic outcomes for children is parent involvement (Lynch, Anderson, Anderson,

& Shapiro, 2006; e.g., Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). Fifty-one percent of parents in this study reported they believed their children's highest educational attainment would be attending college and graduating with a college degree. It is important for parents to understand their children's skill and ability level at every age so they can help their children acquire the skills or resources necessary to achieve these



goals. Parents' lack of involvement may lead them to an unrealistic view of where their children stand academically resulting in missed opportunities to remediate problems or further enrich their children's learning outcomes.

Parents who lack confidence in their literacy skills may hesitate to help their children with homework. Other parents may feel like it is their responsibility to help their children but may not have the skills, and yet others may have the skills, but not the time or energy to become involved with their children at school or in the home environment. Whatever the reason, these challenges may impede parents from becoming involved in their children's education (Sheldon, 2002).

Even with time constraints and daily challenges that parents encounter, parents reported that they strongly agreed it was their responsibility to be involved in their children's education. Similar to prior research findings (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) the majority of parents in the present study reported it was their responsibility to keep track of their children's progress in school ( $M = 1.08, SD = .277$ ) and to show interest in schoolwork ( $M = 1.12, SD = .484$ ). Participants agreed it was their responsibility to monitor their children's learning in school and to know if their children were experiencing difficulties. Eighty-eight percent of this sample reported it was their responsibility to teach their children the importance of school achievements. These findings differ from those of previous research (Kay, Fitzgerald, Paradee, & Mellencamp, 1994). Kay and colleagues reported parents of children with learning disabilities were unsure of their responsibilities and wanted to know more about what teachers expected from them. This study supports a strong positive relationship between parent responsibility and parent involvement.

The present study found no significant relationship between parent level of efficacy and their involvement levels, ( $r = .184, n = 49, p > .206$ ). This may reflect a lack of a representative sample of respondents or the limited number of parents surveyed. When examining the parent involvement sub-measures, parent involvement at school and parent involvement at home separately, parent self-efficacy was related to levels of parent involvement at school,  $r = .39, n = 49, p < .01$ . This finding is different from the results of Anderson and Minke (2007) and findings by Sheldon (2002). Both studies (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Sheldon, 2002) found parent involvement at home was positively associated with parent self-efficacy and levels of parent involvement at school were not.

Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy suggests that parents would be more involved if they believed they have the knowledge and skills to help their children. Parents' perception of their knowledge and skills may increase or

limit their degrees of parent involvement (Green et al., 2007; Walker et al., 2005). Parents of children without disabilities may be more likely to believe their involvement will lead to successful outcomes based on their own successful school experiences. Previous findings (Kay et al., 1994) indicated that some parents of children with disabilities believed they were ill prepared to help their children with schoolwork.

In the present study, parent self-efficacy was related to the demographic variable ethnicity,  $r = .30, n = 49, p < .05$ . The families from ethnic backgrounds in this study were more likely to have increased levels of self-efficacy. Parent efficacy and parent levels of involvement at school were also positively associated. This finding is important, because 39% of the families in this study were from ethnic backgrounds other than Caucasian. Often parents from low socioeconomic and diverse backgrounds are viewed as having the lowest levels of participation and less exposure to books in the home (Evans, 2004; Kumanyika & Grier, 2006). In this study, 25% of the families reported having an average of 10 to 20 books in the home. Twenty-two percent of families reported having 20 to 30 books in the home and 22% reported having 50 or more books in the home. Ethnicity of the samples was the only significant demographic variable between the two school districts and no differences were reported in levels of parent involvement. This finding is similar to prior research by Mo and Singh (2008) that no differences were found in levels of parent involvement between ethnic groups and/or gender.

When comparing how parent literacy relates to child literacy, data from the present study indicated a strong, positive correlation between the two variables. Parents reported their literacy activities and the provision of at home child literacy activities were significantly correlated,  $r = .703, n = 49, p < .000$ . Children who were commonly involved in home literacy activities had parents who reported participating frequently in literacy activities. This finding was important, because past research (Mo & Singh, 2008) suggested highly involved parents are more likely to have more engaged children, leading to more positive academic outcomes. Teachers should be made aware of the importance in parents participating in at home literacy activities with their children, so they may inform parents the importance of parent involvement.

Research suggests (Elish-Piper & Lelko, 2013; Staples & Diliberto, 2010) the first step in encouraging parent involvement is to build rapport and develop a communication system between teachers and parents. Reaching out to parents at the very beginning of the school year via email or personal contact aids in bridging the gap between home and school. Continued communication through daily dialogue, weekly newsletters, monthly and/

or quarterly newsletters that provide information about students' developmental stages at each grade level is also important in keeping parents informed (Elish-Piper & Lelko, 2013).

### Limitations

The survey data were based on self-reports of parents' literacy perceptions and their literacy behaviors. Parents may not respond adequately about the levels of parent involvement at school or the literacy activities engaged in with their children at home. Another limitation to this study was that data collection did not utilize qualitative methods; no interviews or observations of the participants were conducted. The data collected cannot confirm the accuracy or validity of the survey results. No data were collected to document home/school social contexts, interactions, or communication patterns between respondents, rich descriptions of child observations, or modeling of literacy learning were provided.

Prior research (Anderson & Minke, 2007) meant to determine levels of parent involvement and perceptions have primarily utilized written surveys. Surveys deter parents who are illiterate in English and limit their participation in research. In addition, the help of teachers to administer surveys introduced a threat to internal validity. Clarity of communication or biased selection and teacher noncompliance to their principal's directions were not determined. Though teachers were instructed to only give the surveys to parents of students receiving special education services for specific learning disabilities, it is possible that students diagnosed with other mild or moderate disabilities may have received the surveys. The intellectual (i.e., IQ) status or achievement levels of the students were also not identified on the demographic form; therefore, the students identified as having a specific learning disability were based on the school district's evaluation process and definition of student with learning disabilities. The findings may not generalize to other parents with children diagnosed with learning disabilities in other school districts that may use different assessments and guidelines in the identification and evaluation of students with learning disabilities.

A larger more representative sample would have increased levels of generalization of the findings. The study was designed to gather information from approximately 50 to 100 or more participants. In order to increase the sample size the surveys needed to be sent to several school districts rather than from one rural district and one urban school district. A national study with larger numbers of participants and representation from suburban schools would have increased the statistical power of analyses.

### Need for Additional Research and Implications

This study suggested overall parental satisfaction with communications they received from schools. School communication is important for teachers to maintain and can increase parent participation in their classrooms. Research suggests teachers that communicate well with the parents of their students are more likely to have involved parents (Partikakou & Weissberg, 2000).

The population of students with disabilities enrolled in schools is much smaller than students without disabilities, and federal legislation mandates higher levels of parent participation in special education processes. In order to achieve adequate parental input, teacher communication and invitations to the classroom are necessary. Teachers may communicate with parents through social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, blogs, and/or email. For parents without Internet access, inviting parents to participate via telephone and texts messages, personal contact through home visits, special events, and/or parent-teacher conferences are essential in fostering parent-teacher collaboration (Staples & Diliberto, 2010). Since social networks may be smaller for families raising a child with disabilities (Sheldon, 2002) teacher communication may be the primary avenue of information concerning school and community opportunities.

The purpose of this research was to increase educator awareness and recognition of the relationship between parent involvement in literacy activities and child opportunities for literacy learning. Teachers must encourage the parents of their students to participate in at-home literacy activities with their children and teach them how to do it. Research (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1996) has suggested parents of post-elementary school-aged children tend to become less involved in their children's educational activities. It is important for teachers to continue to encourage parents to participate in literacy activities in the home, especially parents of students with disabilities, who may need it the most. Many parents enjoy activities they can participate in with their children. If teachers were more aware of the types of activities that parents like to participate in, they could encourage at-home literacy activities that the parent and child could do together. Most routine domestic activities contain potential literacy opportunities. Shopping and running errands provide myriad reading activities. Requesting child participation when cooking, reading directions for product use, planning for television schedules, or accessing newspapers for information about family activities are all naturally occurring literacy opportunities. Teachers who encourage parents to embed incidental literacy learning into daily living tasks demonstrate

awareness of the time demands on parents. Teachers who present literacy opportunities as an additional burden to parents reduce the likelihood that these activities will enhance the enjoyment of shared literacy and overall participation. In order for children to have successful literacy outcomes, teachers need clearer understandings of the relationship between parent and child literacy. Rather than articulating the importance of children completing homework, teachers should emphasize homework as an opportunity for parents to become involved with their children. Teachers may do so by communicating quick and easy evidence-based practical strategies for parents to use. For example, teaching parents to repeat simple readings could help improve their child's reading fluency (Sawyer, 2015). Teachers could also recommend lists of age appropriate books to read together along with extension activities to increase parent-child interactions (Elish-Piper & Lelko, 2013).

### Recommendations for Future Research

Parent involvement is a contributing factor to successful student outcomes. It is imperative to continue to examine why some parents participate in their children's education, while others do not, especially for parents of children with disabilities. Overall, there is a broad amount of research on parent involvement concerning parents with typically developing children, but the research on parent involvement and parents of children with disabilities is limited.

In addition, research has implied that parents of children with disabilities have more stress and require more coping mechanisms to adapt to the demands of daily life (Park, Turnbull & Turnbull, 2002). Parents who are overwhelmed with having a child with a disability may be less involved in academic achievements than other parents. Parents of children with disabilities may also be less likely to seek the needed social support than peers with typical children (Honig & Keller, 2004). Though the extent of parent social networks was not examined in the current study, it would be worthwhile to examine the social networks of parents of children with disabilities. Research on social networks is needed in order to increase opportunities for support and parent resources to cope with the demands of having a child with a disability.

The population of students with disabilities is much smaller than that of typically developing students therefore the parents' social network may also be smaller. Though results by Sheldon (2002) suggest the size of the network does not necessarily have to be large, the more parents communicate with other parents of children with disabilities, the more likely they are to find families with

similarities of their own. If parents were truly influenced by other parents, the examination of social networks would be necessary in the effort to explore parent involvement.

In this study, almost half of the parents reported that school communication did not include community involvement activities. Community involvement is important for all families, especially those who live in poverty and with children who are disabled (Posner & Vandell, 1999; Sherman, 1994). Among children with disabilities, aged 3 to 21, 28% are living at poverty or below poverty levels (Fujiura & Yamaki, 2000). Research suggests families living in poverty spend less time socializing with others (Sherman, 1994), and impoverished neighborhoods provide less support than do affluent locations (Park et al., 2002). Results from this research suggest that schools should partner more effectively with their communities, and invite families to enriching events like free admission days at museums, festivals, and concerts.

Another area for future research is to examine parents who have disabilities with children who also have a disability. The current study did not seek information pertaining to parents with disabilities, only those that had children with disabilities. Parent efficacy was related to parent involvement to a point in this study, but the correlation was not as strong as in past research. Exploring the characteristics of parents with disabilities, including illiteracy, would extend understanding of these types of relationships between self-efficacy and literacy outcomes of children with disabilities. Qualitative research suggests parents of children with disabilities may not express confidence in their abilities to assist their child with academics (Kay et al., 1994). If the parent also has a disability, they may have even less self-efficacy than typical parents of children with disabilities.

Though the current study provided information that could be useful to school administrators and educators, an additional qualitative component might have given a more honest description of parent reports of the home-school relationship. Additional research with the same sample population might further explain the differences found between past studies and the present study. Observing and comparing parent reports of highly involved parents and those that are not, may also provide further explanations of parent involvement.

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