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THE EFFECTS OF PARENT TEACHER INTERACTIONS AND THE INFLUENCES THAT THESE INTERACTIONS HAVE ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND HOME LEARNING ACTIVITIES

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THE EFFECTS OF PARENT TEACHER INTERACTIONS AND THE INFLUENCES THAT THESE INTERACTIONS HAVE ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND HOME LEARNING ACTIVITIES

by

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Abstract

As component of the P-20 initiative, education at all levels is critical when moving forward with innovative ideas to increase the lifelong learning of an individual. The foundation for one's entire educational career begins during a child's earliest years of life. This time period, prior to kindergarten can have lasting impacts on educational achievement, by influencing the ways that families interact with their child's school, as well as carries out home learning activities. The purpose of this research study was to investigate the role of family engagement in home learning activities and the role in which parent teacher involvement and interactions influences the home learning and family engagement. In order to answer the research questions as outlined in this study, parents and families of kindergarten students in five school districts located within rural western Kentucky, were targeted in order to gain information regarding the child's prior setting before entering kindergarten, and if the prior setting has an effect on family engagement and teacher interactions

Keywords: At home learning activities; Family Engagement; Kindergarten readiness; Parental involvement; Rural Communities; State funded preschool

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Dedication

I dedicate this work, to my late parents John and Brenda Jackson. When I enrolled in the Ed.D. in P-20 and Community Leadership program at Murray State University, I was a single mother of two young children under the age of 4. My mother and father would happily keep my young children, so that I could attend weekend long classes, summer residencies, and complete homework without interruption. Mom would often sit and talk with me about how nice it would be to call me Dr. Jackson (my maiden name), and how many opportunities I would be able to offer to my children, with the professional doors this degree would open. Their loss in 2016 was a very difficult and dark time in my life. However, even in that darkness, I could still feel their love for, and pride in me. It was a dream of my parents, that I attain this degree and I know that with all my heart they are smiling down upon this this work. I am shouting "2" as loud as I can, hoping that you can hear me in the heavens.

Love you both.

Kam

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

During the past few decades, early education in the United States has garnered increased interest and attention from politicians, education researchers, administrators, educators, and even parents. In the Commonwealth of Kentucky, with specific emphasis on rural areas, there is little to no research available on community differences (i.e., urban versus rural) and the role in which community setting plays with family engagement and school readiness (Keys, 2013). In the most rural areas, investments in education and family services during the early childhood years have been directly linked to improving graduation rates, lower rates of dependence on welfare, as well as lower crime rates. The ability to educate our youngest learners with 21st century skills is also crucial to the success of the Commonwealth's economic development (Knudsen, Heckman, Cameron, & Schonkoff, 2006).

After decades of research, findings illustrate the importance of a child's early experiences. In fact, Ravitch (2010) stated, "As every educator knows, families are children's first teachers" (p. 239). These early learning experiences occur within the child's natural environment as well as within the preschool setting. Literacy and language skills, specifically oral language, print knowledge, and phonological awareness in the early years of a child's life are strong indicators for academic achievement in one's educational career (Lonigan, Schatschneider, & Westberg, 2008). Writings by Sheldon and Epstein (2005) pointed to the role in which a parent plays in a child's life can affect a child's academic performance.

Bronfenbrenner's stance on family engagement and the critical role that it plays in child's academic success dates to the late 1960's when in his writings he declared that the "most important element in determining how well the child did in school is the child's home background" (Bronfenbrenner, 1967, p. 203). Bronfenbrenner's theory of development was

focused on the interactions between a child and his or her environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) further defined "ecology of human development" as:

> A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics. (p. 22)

According to Hayes, O'Toole, and Halpenny (2017), Bronfenbrenner's theory considered the relationship between the child and individuals in the child's environment as the main mode of development. Bronfenbrenner's theory of development was further supported by the findings of Carl Rogers, who also believed that child development is a product of the relationships that occur within their natural environment (Hayes et al., 2017).

A child's later academic achievement has been linked to the physical, emotional, and cognitive readiness at the entry of kindergarten (Reynolds, 1991; Schweinhart, Barnes, Weikart, Barnett, & Epstien, 1993). A child's emotional development is directly linked to the development of higher order cognitive skills and school readiness (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2001). Green, Malsch, Kothari, Busse, & Brennan (2012) found that development in social skills, self-regulation, emotional control, and attention is critical for school readiness. Lavigne et al. (1996) indicated that children with delays in social emotional development when entering school have problems later in their academic career. Writings in the literature report that children, from "at-risk" low-income backgrounds present with higher number of delays in social-emotional development when entering school (Lopez et al., 2000). A key component to encourage the development of the child in the area of social-emotional competences is directly related to the amount of time that the family engages the child in activities that encourage development (Bryant & Zick, 1996; Sheridan et al., 2010).

A child's readiness is also linked to health and motor development. Children who live in rural areas and whose families live at or below the poverty line are at a greater risk for health issues and as a result may experience a delay in motor development due to lack of exposure of fundamental motor skill development activities (Winter & Sass, 2011). Over the past decade, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have presented data that directly links health and motor development as a component of school readiness. According to the NICHD (2009) the major goal is to identify effective school readiness and health promotion strategies to improve the outcomes for children at high risk of school failure. Research has indicated that the link between poverty stricken rural areas and school failure is linked to parent's lack of understanding of school importance and the parents or families own limited abilities to help children be successful (Neuman & Gallagher, 1994).

This profound knowledge of the importance of the earliest years of one's life lead to the enactment of *Goals 2000: Educate America* act, which was signed into law in 1994 by President Clinton, and which stated eight specific goals that would guide the future of education in the United States. This act is critical to early childhood education, as evidenced by Goal One, which states that "By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (P.L. 1003-227, p. 6) The goal also included three objectives. These objectives stated that (a) all children will have access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschools; (b) every parent in the United States will be the child's first teacher; and (c) children will receive nutrition, physical activity experiences, and the health care needed to arrive at school healthy (Espinosa, Thornburg, & Mathews, 1997).

It is the second objective outlined by this goal that is most intriguing, as it deals directly with family engagement during the formative years, including the preschool year. Specifically, the objective reads that “Every parent in the United States will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping such parent's preschool child learn, and parents will have access to the training and support parents need” (Espinosa et al., 1997, p. 119).

This importance of family engagement and involvement is once again illustrated as a critical component in Goal Eight, which states, “By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children” (P.L. 1003-227, p. 8). Additionally, Myers and Myers (2013) pointed out that schools, along with students, have positive outcomes when families are engaged (p. 95). Thus, positive student educational outcomes are based on strong relationships between parents and teachers (Montgomery, 2005).

The objectives outlined by goals one and eight, as outlined in P.L. 1003-227 places added weight on the shoulders of the families making them accountable for assisting with the growth and development of their child. This objective also places accountability on the early child classrooms across the nation for providing resources and training to help families work with their child outside of the preschool classroom, so that a child can enter kindergarten ready to learn. In addition to accountability on the preschool classroom, this partnership between the school and the family is an essential component of P-20 education, where community members, politicians, educators, and academic researchers must work together in order to create a seamless pipeline throughout one’s educational career.

What is Kindergarten Readiness?

The term kindergarten readiness is currently a sensitive and highly debated topic among educators, policy makers, and families especially within the rural areas of the Kentucky. Kindergarten readiness is not a new term; however, it is a term that is highly debated during the previous two decades. Shonkoff and Phillips (2001) defined being kindergarten ready, when a child is able to demonstrate the foundational knowledge, skills and behaviors that enable one to participate and succeed in school. Kagan (1990) was a strong critic of the term readiness and feels as though the current understanding is a "narrow and artificial construct of questionable merit" (p. 272). The definition of kindergarten readiness varies by state, with each state's Department of Education providing specific definitions.

According to the Governor's office on Early Childhood, within Kentucky, school readiness is defined by saying that in Kentucky, each child enters school ready to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences that best promote the child's success and ability to be ready to grow, ready to learn, and ready to succeed (retrieved from KDE.org on July 26, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

When attempting to complete empirical research of data regarding school readiness of students in rural areas, there is little research available (Espinosa et al., 1997). Machida, Taylor, and Kim (2002) indicated that while there is a broad amount of data available regarding socio-demographics (income, education level, minority status) there is little to no research that indicates what factors contribute to a family's implementation of at home learning activities. The lack of data regarding school readiness and at home learning activities is further supported by Garbacz, Herman, Thompson, & Reinke (2017) who found that there is a limited amount of research on parent involvement, and within the limited amount of research, there was an

extremely small amount of meaningful results regarding parent involvement. There is even less data regarding the amounts of family engagement during the early childhood years, specifically state funded preschool. As such, a study that specifically analyzes family engagement and at home learning in rural Western Kentucky would enable educators, families, and law makers to design and implement early childhood education mandates to early childhood education programs that are effective at fostering at home learning activities, increased parent teacher involvement, while improving kindergarten readiness skills.

Kindergarten Readiness in the Commonwealth

"*Ready to grow…Ready to Learn…Ready to Succeed"* is the motto taken from the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Development and Education (education.ky.gov, n.d.). What does this mean for our most impoverished learners of the rural areas of Kentucky who on a daily basis live below the poverty line and struggle to make ends meet? More specifically what is a rural area? There are a variety of ways to describe rural communities. By definition rural communities are geographically small in size; limited in economic stability with few opportunities to have income and revenue; the citizen populations being small in number and stagnant growth; and normally a sizeable distance from urban areas (Monk, 2007).

In the year 2009, Governor Steven L. Beshear saw the need for more research to be completed in order to deepen the understanding of the importance of the earliest years of one's life in relation to the academic achievements and outcomes not only during one's educational career, but also in life. It was the thought process of the governor that led to an executive order in February of 2009 that created the Task Force on Early Childhood Development and Education. This task force consisted of 28 members from various areas of commerce, education, and policy makers within the Commonwealth. The task force was charged with finding ways to increase the

opportunity of every child in the Kentucky to become kindergarten ready, from the most rural areas to the urban areas and inner cities. One goal of the taskforce was to determine a common definition of "school readiness" (Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Development and Education, 2010). The Task Force defined school readiness in the Commonwealth as a child being "*ready to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences that best promote the child's success"* (Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Development and Education, 2010; Atkins-Stumbo, 2018).

When determining kindergarten readiness, the task force chose to adopt a common screening tool in order to gage a child's readiness for kindergarten. The use of a screener was deemed more desirable by the task force, as it was determined that more formal assessments that were currently being used, took up too much time, and prevented learning activities from occurring (Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Development and Education, 2010 p. 16). According to the Task Force (2010) a quality-screening tool is able to determine how a child is developing and identify areas in which a child needs further assessment. The Task Force (2010) went on to state that the screening tool will also enable classroom teachers to guide instruction.

In order to meet the recommendations of the Task Force of Kentucky implement the use of a screening tool, the *Brigance Kindergarten Screener* (Glascoe, 1999) was adopted in the fall of 2011. This screener was adopted by the state of Kentucky as a tool to assess children in the fall of their kindergarten year. According to Kentucky State regulation 704 KAR 5:070, the assessment is to be administered within the first 30 days of the child's kindergarten year, and no earlier than 15 days prior to the start of the kindergarten year. This assessment helps to determine if the child is ready for kindergarten (Curriculum Associates, 2018 p.1). The screening tool is aligned not only with the state of Kentucky's definition of being school ready; it also directly

aligns with Kentucky Early Childhood Standards. The term kindergarten ready is also important when considering family engagement and parental involvement in the years prior to a child entering kindergarten. As a parent is a child's teacher it is critical to P-20 research that educators at all levels understand the need for and importance of parental involvement and the engagement activities that come from increased levels of parental involvement.

Rationale

Historical data has shown time and time again, that there is a direct link to formal early childhood education and kindergarten readiness, with the data being collected in urban settings (Temple, 2009). When completing historical research regarding long-term outcomes for children who reside in rural areas, as well as family engagement, the data is limited. In rural areas many children enter school without any type of early education due to limited access to early childhood programs (Bainbridge, Meyers, Tanko, & Waldfogel, 2005). While there is some research showing that rural children have limited access to early childhood programs, there is even less data regarding the amounts of family engagement during the early childhood years in rural areas with specific emphasis on state funded preschools. As such, a study that specifically analyzes family engagement and at home learning in rural Western Kentucky would enable educators, families, and law makers to design and implement early childhood education mandates to early childhood education programs that are effective at fostering at home learning activities and increasing kindergarten readiness.

Definitions

At home learning activities: The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (Sylva, et al., 2004) gave a working definition of at-home learning activities as things such as reading to

your child, playing with letters and numbers, drawing and painting, teaching the alphabet to one's child, and arranging for opportunities to interact with peers (Sylva et al., 2004).

Family engagement: The National Family, School and Community Engagement Policy Council (2010) defined that family engagement is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways in which families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development at home, in school and across the life span of the child.

Kindergarten readiness: within Kentucky, school readiness is defined as each child entering school ready to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences that best promote the child's success and ability to be ready to grow, ready to learn, and ready to succeed (retrieved July 26, 2017).

Parental involvement: Parental involvement is defined as the interaction and engagement of the parent within the educational process and experiences of their child (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Rural communities: According the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) rural communities are the areas that are left after defining an individual urban area.

State funded preschool: An initiative that is funded, controlled, and directed by the state, serving children preschool age, and early childhood education is the primary focus of the initiative (Barnett et al., 2017).

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the role of family engagement in home learning activities and the role in which parent-teacher involvement and interactions influences the home learning and family engagement. When completing research of historical

data and writings in literature consistent gaps were found in the literature involving family engagement and parental involvement in rural areas. It was this gap within the literature that served as a driving force when designing the research questions and hypothesis of the study. In order to answer the research questions as outlined in this study, parents and families in five school districts located within rural Western Kentucky, were targeted in order to gain information regarding family engagement and what role if any, this has in impacting the kindergarten readiness of their child when entering school. This study was completed over a two-week window, utilizing quantitative methods. Two survey instruments, *Family Engagement Survey* (FES; Hagedorn, Roth, Carver, Van de Kerckhove, & Smith, 2009) and the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* (PTIQ, Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1991) were utilized to collect information regarding the level of family engagement and engagement between the parent and the teacher, respectively.

Research question 1: Do parents reported levels of involvement, as reported on the PTIQ, vary based on the type of preschool that their child attended prior to entering kindergarten?

Null Hypothesis 1a: No statistically significant differences will be found in the level of parent involvement, as measured by the PTIQ, between kindergarten students who attended state funded preschool and kindergarten students who attended private, family paid preschools.

Null Hypothesis 1b: No statistically significant differences will be found in the level of parent involvement, as measured by the PTIQ, between kindergarten students who attended state funded preschool and kindergarten students who did not attended preschool.

Null Hypothesis 1c: No Statistically significant difference will be found in the level of parent involvement, as measured by the PTIQ, between kindergarten students who attended state private, family paid preschools and those who did not attend preschool.

Research Question 2: Does family engagement, as reported on the FES, differ by exposure to schooling prior to kindergarten?

Null hypothesis 2a. No statistically significant differences in the reported levels of family engagement will exist, as measured by the FES, between students who attended state funded preschool and kindergarten students who attended private, family paid preschools.

Null Hypothesis 2b. No statistically significant differences in the reported levels of family engagement will exist, as measured by the FES, between kindergarten students who attended state funded preschool and kindergarten students who did not attended preschool

Null Hypothesis 2c. No statistically significant differences in the reported levels of family engagement will exist, as measured by the FES, between kindergarten students who attended private, family paid preschools and kindergarten students who did not attend preschool.

Research Question 3: Do parents reported levels of involvement, as measured by the PTIQ, influence family engagement, as measured by the FES?

Null Hypothesis 3a: No statistically significant correlation will exist between parents reported levels of involvement on the PTIQ and family engagement as reported on the FES.

Assumptions

Several assumptions drive this study. It is assumed that all school districts who agreed to participate in the study will disseminate the surveys created by the researcher to every family who has a child enrolled in the districts Kindergarten program. It is assumed that parents and

families will correctly identify their child's prior background setting when enrolling their child into kindergarten in the fall of the year when completing the surveys. An additional assumption is that all parents who complete the surveys will be honest with their responses regarding the amount of time that they engaged in at-home learning experiences.

Scope

The scope of this study is dictated by the data derived from the Kentucky Department of Education in which school systems are classified as rural or non-rural, in the western region of the Kentucky for school year 2017 through 2018. The families of the students who attended the rural schools will be surveyed regarding family engagement and the use of at-home learning activities. The results of the families will be analyzed to determine the amount of family engagement, with specific emphasis on the amount of time spent per week engaged in at-home learning activities.

Significance

By completing this study, research was garnered in an area where little to no research exists. Upon review of the literature, the need for further study of family engagement in the rural setting is commonly noted. There is even less data to be found regarding family engagement within the rural regions of Western Kentucky. The findings of this study will be useful to educators, as they will have better insight on the views and ideas of the family regarding the importance of family engagement and at home learning during the early childhood years. This information will also be useful to district staff as they can use the results to help target specific areas of need for family education that will help increase the families understanding of the need for at-home learning activities through finely tailored programs and activities. Finally, this information will be useful to policymakers as they will be able to see how current policy is

affecting early childhood education in the Kentucky, as well as provide useful data to drive innovation and change.

Summary

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the role of family engagement in home learning activities and the role in which parent teacher involvement and interactions influences the home learning and family engagement, while looking at prior learning settings for children during the kindergarten year. These settings included state funded preschool, federally funded Head Start classrooms, private paid preschools, and those students who did not attend a preschool/day care program.

In order to answer the research questions as outlined in this study, parents and families in five school districts located within rural Western Kentucky, were targeted in order to gain information regarding family engagement and what role if any, the type of preschool that the child attended had parent teacher involvement and family engagement as reported on the PTIQ and the FES.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The History of Preschool

The history of preschool dates back three and a half centuries, to England and the formation of the charity school movement, which was designed to help educate the poor children of the nation (Cahan,1989). These charity schools were grounded in the religious teachings and by the mid-17th century there more than 30,000 children who attended classes through the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (Cahan, 1989). By the 1800's, the onset of the Industrial Revolution lead to women leaving the home to work in the factories. This trend from mothers leaving the home led to the development of programs that focused on early education (White & Buka, 1987). In 1828, Lord Brougham of Great Britain was a champion for infant schools and early learning, when he wrote:

> The truth is that he (being the child) can and does learn a great deal more before that age [six years] than all he ever learns or can learn in all his afterlife. His attention is more easily aroused, his memory is more retentive, bad habits are not yet formed, nor is his judgement warped by unfair bias. (Forest, 1927, p. 49)

The history of the infant schools laid the foundations of the current preschools and early childhood learning that currently exist around the globe. It was during the Industrial Revolution that early childhood education was established in the U.S. In the 19th century, the U.S. viewed poverty not as an economic problem, but one of spirit (Beatty, 1981). It was this thinking that lead to the formation of the Boston Infant Schools, whose goal was to eliminate poverty in three generations (Cahan, 1989). During this period, early education was not just for the poor, as parents who lived a comfortable life in urban areas also sent their children to infant schools, so that the child would have an advantage when starting school. However, by the late 1820's the

infant school movement started to dissipate, when cities such as New York established primary schools as part of the public-school system, and the Boston Primary School Board rejected the concept of incorporating infant schools into their program (Beatty, 1981).

Nursery Schools

With infant schools fading into the pages of history, as the 19th century came to an end, there was still a need for early childcare, which gave rise to the "nursery schools" (Cahan, 1989). The need for these schools was driven by the need of families who had both parents working outside of the home. In the initial years of the nursery schools, they were used as a daycare and not as a method for education (Cahan, 1989). However, as the U.S. entered the 20th century, and fought World War I, there was deemed to be a decline in family life. This decline was the driving force behind the use of supplementing home education by educational experts who worked in the nursey schools (Merrill Public School, 1921). One strong proponent of using nursery schools to provide education was William Russell, who was the dean of the Teachers College at Columbia University. In his writings, Russell (1931) urged that nursery schools be used for education, because of changes in the home, neighborhoods, and churches; therefore, schools must assist in the socialization of young children. Russel (1931) went on to state that the nursery school, "is one of the efforts made by society to compensate for this defect; and parental education is one way of trying to rehabilitate the institution [of the family] which cannot do its share" (p. 9).

With the support of proponents such as Russel and other scholars, as well as a new-found group of college educated women, the child development movement grew, and a great deal of study was being completed in the realm of child development. By the end of the 1930's, 74 colleges and universities had nursery schools, and over 60 of them reported that the main role of the nursery school was to aid in research regarding child development, and over 40 universities

reported using the nursery schools as part of teacher preparation (Davis & Hansen, 1933). Following the post war era, the 1950's and 1960's would usher in monumental changes that would change the face of American education and the role that early childhood education played within the larger the picture.

The Development of the Modern Preschool

Research of the social science, specifically human development and learning was monumental in the 1950's and 1960's. Writings by Hunt (1961) alluded that beginning years of one's life are significant in developing a foundation of skills that one would use later in their educational career. Bloom (1964), who studied longitudinal data, determined that children learn rapidly in the early years of one's life, and then learn at a lower rate as they get older. Based on the data collected, Bloom (1964) stated "that early childhood education profoundly affects the child's general learning pattern" (p.110). The profound importance of early childhood education is further documented in the literature through discussions of nursery schools in Wisconsin. Tank (1980), indicated that development of nursery schools in Wisconsin, with specific emphasis on the Day Nursery association of Milwaukee, organized a pedagogical program that focused on the development of the whole child. The development of these programs served as further support for the role of early childhood education.

It was also at this time that Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, were seeking ways to improve the social outcomes for Americas most poor, and they initiated a war on poverty (Ziegler & Valentine, 1979). It was part of this "war" that lead to a recommendation to the Office of Economic Opportunity that preschool programs be implemented nationwide to help children who lived in poverty (Ziegler & Valentine, 1979). It was this recommendation, which lead to the founding of the federally funded Head Start Program in 1965. Initially termed Project Head

Start, the goal of the program was to develop the child, family, and community in which the families reside (Ziegler & Valentine, 1979).

The Head Start program is still in place and used today. However, in 1971 there was a shift from federally funded preschool programs due to a presidential veto of the Comprehensive Child Development Act, which placed more responsibility on the states to provide early childhood education (Roth, 1976). In 1972, the Education Commissions of the States, launched its Early Childhood Project. The purpose of this project was to help expand and build their early childhood projects (Karch, 2010). It was this action that lead to the formation of what is currently known as state funded preschool, with the preschool programs varying from state to state.

According the National Institute for Early Education Research there are only seven states who do not currently offer preschool programs, compared to 2002, when 13 states offed no state-funded preschool programs. Since the implementation of public funding for preschool programs in the United States, the amount of dollars being spent on early childhood programs has significantly increased. Data reported by the states that offer preschool programs, indicated that states spend over seven billion dollars a year to educate one and a half million 3- and 4-year-old children (Barnett et al., 2017).

With the predominate focus of research being on the publicly funded school systems, there is also a large amount of data that studies the effectiveness of privately funded preschools. Privately funded preschools are often affiliated with a church or other religious belief and operate outside of the regulations that are the driving force behind policy and procedures that publicly funded schools are required to follow. There have been many studies over the years to determine if there is an advantage to private funded preschools versus publicly funded schools. Henry, Gordon, and Rickman (2006) found that when comparing private versus state-

funded preschools in Georgia, the private preschools did outperform the public preschools. Specifically, private preschool students scored higher on language arts test scores in grade three and there was a decreased retention rate when looking at longitudinal data (Henry et al., 2006).

Effectiveness of Publicly Funded Preschool

The early years of one's life are known to be a period where rapid growth occurs in all areas of a child's development. This time period is a critical to encourage the development of skills that will increase a child's educational potential (Shonkoff & Phillps, 2000). When studying the literature on preschool programing, programs focus education on skill development such as cognitive skills, social emotional skills, self-help, language, and adaptive skills. The focus on these five areas of development is well known to be key factors in helping a child have a positive educational career (Heckman, Pinto, & Savelyev, 2013).

In the last decade enrollment rates in state funded preschools have more than doubled (Barnett et al., 2017; Barnett, Hustedt, Robin, & Schulman, 2003). With this increase of enrollment and understanding of the critical time period of the early years of one's life, there has been significant research that shows the effectiveness of preschool on the long-term trajectory of a child's educational career due to methodological and substantive reasons (McCoy et al., 2017). Bakken, Brown, and Downing (2017) wrote that participation in a preschool program decreases the likelihood that a child would be placed into special education. Also, participation in a preschool program decreases the likelihood of a child being retained in a grade. Finally, children who attended preschool were found more likely to complete high school compared to peers who did not attend preschool. Currently, in the U.S., 373,000 students per year leave high school without graduating (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & Kewal-Ramani, 2011).

In rural areas children are less likely to attend an early childhood program (Barnett and Yaroz, 2004). Temple (2009) found that children who live in rural areas have a 12% lower probability of enrolling in a preschool program. While not true for all, some children who do not attend preschool may not be ready to enter school. Children who are not school ready struggle academically throughout their educational career (Temple, 2009). Temple and Reynolds (2007) found that children, who are not school ready, increase school expenses due to grade level retention and special education cost. By increasing access to early childhood education in rural areas, the long lasting impact for the rural areas include decreased crime, reduction of social cost, and higher income earnings once students enter the workforce (Temple and Reynolds, 2007). Therefore, it is essential that parents, educators, and legislators in rural areas understand the need for high quality early childhood education and information from this study can be utilized to help with program planning, community awareness, and family engagement activities.

Parent Involvement and the Preschool

Parent involvement is a critical component of a child's overall educational success (Epstein, 1996). Over the last three decades, research was completed studying the impacts of family and school separately in relation to the development of the child. During this time there has been a shift in research that is addressing the link between a child's family and the school to determine future outcomes for the child (Epstein, 1996). When discussing preschool and the field of early childhood education, the home-school connection, which encompasses the ways that the parents interact with school personnel and the child, is termed parent involvement (Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007). This concept of parent involvement is most critical in the lives of children who live in poverty, as this connection between home and school may help to alleviate the stressors that often occur in poverty-stricken families (Garmezy, 1991). McLoyd (1998)

found that families, who live in higher income levels, have lower level of parental stress, thus have a positive effect on parenting. Furthermore, parents with higher income levels can allocate funds on childcare (Duncan, Morris, Rodrigues, 2011). Morris, Gennetian, and Ducnan (2005) indicated that when families spend for childcare centers, there is an increased amount of time that children spend in the center, which then leads to greater school achievement in the long run.

The federally funded program Head Start has long understood the importance of and the need for parent-school interactions in order for children to have success in school (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). Takanishi and DeLeon (1994) found that Head Start students enter kindergarten with increased cognitive skills and well-defined social skills. Studies have shown that when low socioeconomic families have parents who are involved in decision making and other components of their child's education, there is more of a connection between the home and school environment (Mendes & Fogle, 2002). The cohesion that develops when parents are involved in school, enables the classroom teacher to have a better understanding of the student. This deeper understanding enables the teacher to reach the student and family with greater understanding and clarity. In addition to the teacher having a better understanding, the parents are also able to learn from the teachers and have more appropriate interactions with their child (Haynes & Ben-Avie, 1996). Shumow et al. (1999) reported that parent involvement in the educational process of their child, by volunteering in the classroom and participating in other school lead programs, had children who were better able to overcome the obstacles that occur when one lives in low income, high crime areas.

When studying the literature, the term of parent involvement is often defined as the number of times that a parent visited to the school (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000). Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) indicated that parent involvement can take place in a variety of forms not

only at school but also within the family's home. Policy makers who drafted No Child Left Behind (NCLB) called for "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (No Child Left Behind Act 2002:9101).

Schools sometimes ask for parents to be involved in activities that require a great amount of time and resources in order for the family to successfully participate (Posey-Maddox, 2012). Often, families who struggle economically incur challenges that prevent the parents from interacting with the child at home (Marcon, 1999). Many parents work multiple jobs, or both parents work outside of the home. Family dynamics, such as family size, parent education, and socio-economic standing are a key component to gage the level of parent involvement. Single parents are less likely to be highly engaged in home learning activities (Zill, 1996). Eccles and Harold (1996) created a model regarding parental involvement and that this involvement can have long lasting positive effect on the student's educational success.

The classroom teacher as well as school staff's beliefs regarding parental involvement is determining factor of how much parental involvement will occur during one's educational career. Eccles and Harold (1996) reported that the characteristics of the school and the teacher can encourage or discourage a parent's involvement. Epstein and Dauber (1991) found that teachers who have a more positive attitude toward parents, especially parents who they deemed "hard to reach" have more success at increasing the level of parental involvement. Research has shown that parents who felt a connection with the classroom teacher were more responsive to home led learning activities and reported a higher level of parental involvement (Waanders, Mendes, & Downer, 2007).

Comer and Haynes (1991) and Epstein and Dauber (1991) indicated a strong argument for more research into the connection between not only home school connections, but also the quality of the connections fostered between the home and school. The main challenge for both early childhood programs as well as elementary schools is bringing parents together who come from varied social background in order to increase parental involvement (Hamilin & Flessa, 2016). While there is data available, the majority of the data is based on families who are served by the federally funded Head Start program, and who live in urban areas. This identified challenge drives the need for further research in the area of parental involvement and family engagement in preschool; as such, this author aims to address the relationship between these two concepts as part of this study.

Importance of Family Engagement

Each year, the educational standards and learning outcomes for the youngest of learners has added more rigidity with additional focus being placed on the educational needs of the child to increase kindergarten readiness (Hilado, Kallemeyn, Lundy, Israel, & Leow, 2011). This push towards a more school like approach in the early childhood setting puts a new emphasis on the importance of family involvement during the preschool years. Hair, Halle, Terry-Human, Lavelle, & Calkins (2006) indicated activities that occur within the child's home and preschool classroom as being directly related to the skills and competencies that are present at the beginning of the child's kindergarten year (Pentimonti, Justice, & Kaderavek, 2014) Findings in the literature indicated that the involvement of the family is a significant and critical component of a child's academic success (Durand 2011; Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, & Henderson 2013; Jung, 2016). Writings by Pelletier and Brent (2002) indicated that a child's family is not only the child's first teacher, but also the most important teacher during the child's early life.

These findings presented by Pelletier and Brent (2002) are further supported by writings presented by Bronfenbrenner that date back to the early 1900's.

Bronfenbrenner (1974) found that for early childhood education to be successful, there must be a strong partnership in place between the families, the staff, and the community. This concept is also grounded in ideals found in Bronfenbrenner's social ecology theory (1974), which highlighted family involvement is essential in intervention; otherwise the growth will dissipate once the intervention ceases. Early childhood education programs located in the rural area of Kentucky not only educate children and families, but they also serve as intervention tools, as the state funded preschools are for families who live at or below the poverty line or have child with a disability. Therefore, the limited data regarding family engagement in the rural areas is a limiting factor for both teachers and policy makers when developing services that will be delivered in the state funded preschool classroom.

Historical data shows that parental involvement in the early years of child' s life serves as predictors of later school-related outcomes (Hart & Risley, 1985). Schwab (1987) reported that a child's learning is dependent on one's family and community. Data collected over several decades, found that the parenting practices during the early years of a child' life serve as a tool to determine school-related outcomes later in one's educational career (Lally, 2010). Activities that occur in the child's natural environment, such as reading books together and playing games significantly impacted the later academic development of the child (Benson & Mokhtari, 2011; Lever & Se´ne´chal, 2011). Reading books with children and other shared family experiences that occur in the child's natural environment are essential, as research has consistently shown that skills developed in early childhood in the area of mathematics (Duncan et al., 2007) and a

child's ability to read is a significant tool that educators can use to predict later academic success.

Parents have the greatest effect for cognitive skill development during the early years of one's life (Cunha, Heckman, Lochner, & Masterov, 2006). Mol and Bus (2011) found that children who come from homes where families spend time engaged in reading activities, have larger vocabularies and increased comprehension skills when entering kindergarten. The amount of family engagement activities that occur in the child's natural environment directly correlate with the parent's beliefs regarding learning in the home (Evans & Shaw, 2008; Geoffroy et al., 2010). By completing this study, educators in rural Western Kentucky will have better insight on the views and ideas held by the family regarding the importance of family engagement and at home learning during the early childhood years. Data gathered from the study will help practitioners target specific areas of need for family education, that schools can target to cultivate family engagement and parental involvement.

Theoretical Framework

Components of Family Engagement

When considering family engagement in the early childhood classroom, one must first ask the question, "What is family engagement?" and why is the term "engagement" often interchanged with "involvement"? When studying the literature, family engagement is typically presented as two-way communication between home and school; involving the families in program planning; sharing information; enabling families to find community resources; and working to resolve any conflicts that occur between the family and the school (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 23). A real-time example of family engagement within the context of early childhood education, would be a parent or family member sitting down with their child and

playing a game of alphabet bingo, making sure to ask the child to identify letters, and helping the child to name letters they did not know

When examining parental involvement, the term engagement is often used in place of involvement. Parental involvement usually included parents' behaviors at home as well as at school in order to increase and support the child's educational growth (El Nokali, Bachman, Votruba-Drzal, 2010). One type of involvement that is especially critical to the preschool aged child being kindergarten ready at the start of the kindergarten year, is the amount of learning that occurs at home. This involvement might look like a parent attending family nights that are hosted by the child's preschool, then engaging in two-way communication with the teacher to help encourage the child's development.

Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership

In 1995, Epstein defined parental involvement through six categories of how parents can be involved in their child's learning. Epstein (2011) further developed his theory into six key elements, that show how essential engagement is between the home, school, and community (p.415). Epstein's Framework allows educators and families to use research-based practices when selecting and implementing engagement strategies, thus encouraging the success of students throughout their educational career (Epstein, 2011, p.394). Epstein (2011) went on to write that any or all of the strategies can be utilized by schools in order to help meet the specific needs of their programs (p. 396). Epstein's six types of involvement are:

Type 1: Parenting - Help all families establish home environments to support children as students. Parents are responsible for making sure that their child's needs are met (Epstein, 2011, p.417). Schools can provide materials and information to families, so

that they can increase their ability to help their child succeed (Epstein, 2011). Through trainings and learning opportunities parents are given the needed skills so that they can help their child meet their educational goals as the move throughout their educational career.

Type 2: Communicating - Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs. Schools and parents can keep each other aware of critical information regarding child by using a varied means of communication (Epstein, 2011, pp. 424-425). Schools must communicate with families in their native language. Finally, educators must keep parents aware of their child's grades, events at school, and other issues through communication (Epstein, 2011).

Type 3: Volunteering - Recruit and organize parent help and support. By allowing parents to volunteer, this gives the family an important role in the education process and gain insight into their child's educational career. Epstein (2011) indicated that it may take effort on the school's part to arrange for volunteer opportunities, but the positive outcomes that are gained form the experience outweigh the work required from the school to make it happen.

Type 4: Learning at Home - Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. Young learners are given materials to work on at home so that the families can help the youngest of learners reinforce skills that are taught in the classroom (Epstein, 2011, p. 442). As the child ages, it is essential to effectively communicate with the families what the students are learning, and what the ever increasing expectations are, so that the child continues to have achievements at school (Epstein, 2011).

Type 5: Decision Making - Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives. When parents are included in making decisions, they are engaged and involved within the school. Parents are a critical component of acting within a consulting capacity, regarding information about their child (Epstein, 2011).

Type 6: Collaborating with the Community - Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. (Epstein, 2011, p. 141). Schools can provide families with information and assistance to "after-school care, health services, and other resources that coordinate these arrangements" so that children arrive at school ready to learn and ready to grow (Epstein, 2011, p.132).

Which of Epstein's Categories has the Most Profound Impact on Early Learning?

While all six categories of Epstein are essential to a child's development, it is category Type 4 that is most essential to the development of our youngest learners. Epstein (2008) discussed learning at home, by saying that teachers play a significant role in increasing parental involvement in learning. Epstein (2002) defined learning at home as teachers providing information and ideas to families about how to help students learn within the home environment. Epstein (2008) goes on to state that the goal of home-based learning be meaningful and coordinate with what the student is learning in the classroom. This can become a gray area in the realm of early childhood education as each child is at a different point on the developmental spectrum, however through clear activities and information about student development, parents are able to play a vital role in helping their child transition from one level to the next. Copious amounts of data collected over the past two decades that focus on family engagement in urban areas, and with families who attended federally funded Head Start

programs, however there is significant gaps in the literature regarding families who live in rural areas, and attend state funded preschool.

In 2003, the U.S. Department of Education released the results of a study regarding parent involvement in school related activities. The 2003 study indicated that only 38% of parents volunteered at their child's school. This 2003 report looked at activities involving what type of activities in relation to school that a parent was involved in, and it was reported that in Kindergarten through 12th grade, 95% of parents helped to do homework, however only 85% of families reported that there was an adult responsible for making sure that homework was complete (Wright, 2009). These finding indicate that there is a discrepancy between the percentage of parents who help with homework and the percentage of families that responded making sure that homework was completed. This discrepancy is vital to the research as it shows an area of opportunity to increase student schuss with at home learning activities, which was of interest to the researcher.

When discussing family engagement there are several terms that are used simultaneously throughout the literature, however the focus of the terms is centered on families and their participation in their child's education. Garbacz et al. (2017) identified the following key terms family involvement, family-centered services, family school partnerships, and family engagement (p. 2)

Writings by Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, and Ortiz (2008) explained that family engagement and involvement can occur in variety of ways, and that educators need to develop a working knowledge of the critical components to be able to create an environment in which those occur. Teacher preparation programs provide students enrolled with an in-depth knowledge of pedagogy, new teachers are often not trained in ways to foster family partnerships. Not only are

educators not trained in ways to engage families, they also are not adequately prepared to look for ways to foster partnerships within the community. Teacher preparation programs do not do enough to train new teachers how to create meaningful interactions with families (Epstein, 2001). This lack of awareness and knowledge of leadership skills to adequately foster family and community partnerships can have an adverse effect on student outcomes. This adverse effect on student outcomes not only occurs in the early childhood setting but continues to follow that child throughout their educational career and into adulthood (Epstein, 2011). Kroeger and Lash (2011) reported that teacher education programs at universities, who offer courses focusing on family engagements, yield educators who enter the filed more able to facilitate meaningful family engagements.

Weiss, Caspe, and Lopes (2006) identified that family engagement is a three-step process that includes parenting, home-school relationships, and a responsibility for learning. Under the first component, parenting consists of the parent's perceptions of raising children and their individual values. The home-school connection consists of the interactions that occur between the school and families. The final component, the responsibility for learning, studies the way that parents uses activities that occur in the home in order enable their child to acquire new skills and be kindergarten ready when entering kindergarten. It is this utilization of home learning activities that account for the level of family engagement.

Educators and policymakers alike must give adequate thought to the area of family engagement, while being respectful and mindful of the families' perception of parenting. In addition to a parent's education level, the number of children in the home, and the overall desire of the parent to participate in school activities, a family's socioeconomic level can affect the parenting style that is implemented within the home. Families who live in poverty have fewer

opportunities to engage in social supports that focus on parenting (Marshall, Noonan, McCartney, Marx, & Keefe, 2001). Pentimonti et al. (2014) wrote that children who live in at-risk homes based on socioeconomic standards have children who often test not ready for kindergarten when compared to their same aged peers of higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

Studies by Hair et al. (2006) led one to determine that children from lower income families provide fewer opportunities to improve kindergarten readiness skills. Risley and Hart (1995) found that children from higher socioeconomic levels had expanded vocabulary growth, than did their peers who lived at or below the poverty line. When a child feels emotionally connected and safe, studies have shown that there is an increase of developed communication skills (Connell & Prinz, 2002). Research of historical data indicated students from families who are considered at-risk enter school one standard deviation below their same aged peers (Burkham, Ready, Lee, & Logerfo, 2004). Dahl and Lochner (2012), as cited in Reardon and Portilla (2016), found that children's cognitive abilities and social emotional development is affected by the family income.

Families who have more financial stability are able to provide more opportunities for educational development, and this increase of capital into the child's learning affects the child's developmental outcomes (Gershoff, Aber, Raver, & Lennon, 2007). Data derived from the Consumer Expenditure Surveys found that families who live above the poverty line report spending more money on child care and activities that will stimulate cognitive development (Readon & Portilla, 2016). Data collected during the American Time Use Surveys found that mothers, who had college degrees spent more time engaging their preschool aged children, thus increasing the overall development of the child (Kalil, Ryan, & Corey, 2012).

Writings in the literature find direct associations between a child's residential area and kindergarten readiness skills. The neighborhood, or area in which a child resides, and the conditions of that particular area have been found to directly associate with the cognitive development of the child, and the later academic outcomes of the child (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, McCarton, & McCormick, 1998; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Chetty, Hendren, and Katz (2016) reported that children, who live in high poverty areas, have long-term educational outcomes that are negatively affected by poverty rates of the area.

The socio-economic status of a family is important to this study, as the purpose of this study is to determine parental views on family engagement and at home learning activities, of families who attend state funded preschools located within rural areas. Rural areas have a higher poverty rate than other areas with fewer resources to help the families that reside there. State funded preschools were developed in order to serve children and families who live at or below poverty level in these areas.

Family Engagement and the State Funded Preschool

During the preschool year, prior to the transition to kindergarten, families are able to learn ways to engage with school personnel through positive partnerships, so that they can encourage and support children' s learning (Epstein, 1996). The Harvard Family Research Project indicates that for a child to be successful from birth through adulthood, there must be a variety of supports present at all stages of development (Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006). Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2017) indicated that the education of a child from, both the family and the community in which the child lives, starts at birth and continues for the lifespan of the child.

A child's later school success may be linked to a concrete connection that is formed regarding the importance of school, when young children see the family engage in school related activities and ongoing communication (Fantuzzo, McWayne, & Perry, 1999). Parent involvement in the early childhood classroom is essential to yielding positive student learning outcomes (White, Taylor, & Moss, 1992). Students who had higher levels of family participation during the preschool and kindergarten years were found to have higher retention rates and higher reading achievement scores at the end of the eighth school year (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). Similar findings by Marcon (1999) found that children, who had more active family engagement during the preschool year, reached curriculum-based learning objects at a higher rate than peers with limited family engagement. In addition to academic success, family engagement during the preschool year has also been linked to social skill development and behavior regulation (Bronson, 2000). Wittings by Webster (2019) indicated that attention and attending to learning skills, is a behavior that is learned during the earliest years of one's life (Duncan et al., 2007). Additional research found that children with increased family engagement in the preschool classroom engaged in less disruptive peer play in both the home and school setting (Fanutzzo et al., 1999). When families are not as engaged in the education, research has shown an increase in negative behavior and decreased achievement in academics (El Nokali, Backman, & Vortuba-Drazal, 2010).

The significance of family engagement in a young child's life not only affects that the child's later academic outcomes, but also serves as an indicator in other areas as well, such as peer interactions and friendship (Lindsey, Sean, & Nebitt, 2010). Children who came from homes where the families were actively engaged with the children through sportive and positive parenting, excelled academically in their initial years of primary school (Fuligni, Han, & Brook-

Gunn, 2004). Van Voorhis (2011) reported that the current literature supports a link between family engagement activities in the home and the parent's beliefs regarding school readiness. However, there is limited data regarding family engagement activities and beliefs regarding school readiness in rural, impoverished areas and how the family engages with the teachers and staff from the local preschool classrooms.

The approach by the early childhood classroom teacher and other staff members to engage the families in the student's educational career is both a significant and essential component in the amount of active family engagement (Fantuzzo, Perry, & Childs, 2006). When families have open two-way communication with the school and can be active in preschool-based activities, children have greater learning outcomes (Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006). Writings by Hinde (1987) indicated that interactions between a family and school form a pattern that involve expectations and builds "a quality separate from the interactions themselves" (Pianta &Walsh, 1996, p. 66). This interaction or responsiveness is when teacher or program "meets the families where they are." The program must then take a scaffold approach to provide the needed tools to successfully move the families from where they are, to where they need to be (Christenson, 2004). This responsiveness is an essential component of a high-quality preschool classroom (Hyson, Copple, & Jones, 2006).

According to Powell et al. (2010) the way that a parent perceives the responsiveness of the classroom teacher to the child and the family is a unique component of family and school partnerships. This thinking is rooted in theoretical perspectives by Bronfenbrenner (1979) which identified family-school relationships as a system in which there is a balance of power and open two-way communication between the school and family. The habit of continuous interactions between home and school that are acquired by the family during the preschool year will continue

to occur as the child enters elementary school (Mantizicopoulos, 2003). While this knowledge of family engagement is critical, it is also essential that educators across all areas of education have skills to foster and develop rich connections with the families of the students that they serve. Focus must not only be placed on the type of family involvement, but also the quality of the family involvement (Arnold, O'Leary, & Edwards, 1997).

While there are many benefits of children attending a preschool program, a family must take responsibility for fostering skill development and growth outside of the school setting. Most preschool classes only meet for half of the day, four days a week. For this reason, the family must take responsibility for helping their child learn. Rakies et al. (2006) reported that "at-risk" families who participated in shared reading experiences with children, who were age one, had an increased vocabulary, and this increased vocabulary influenced reading skills at age three. Haney and Hill (2004) found that children, who were engaged at home by the families in activities that focused on direct parent teaching activities in literary skills, increased both letter recognition and phonemic awareness. Parents, who play games with their children, increase their child's ability to solve problems and lengthen their attention span (Leibhaman, Alexander, Johnson, Neitzel, & Reis-Henri, 2005).

Families, who are considered at-risk, often need support from the school in order to learn ways in which to engage their children in learning activates in the home setting (Hart & Risley, 1995). A high-quality preschool will help to develop these skills through rich family engagement activities (Foster, Lambert, Abbott-Shim, McCarty, & Franze, 2005). In both the federally funded Head Start program and the state funded preschools, the main focus is to target families who are deemed "at-risk." Writings by Arnold et al. (2008) explained that family engagement and involvement can occur in variety of ways, and that educators need to develop a working

knowledge of the critical components of family involvement and then be able to create an environment in which those occur.

A diverse group of components affect family engagement, with one of the key components being family structure. Berk (2009) indicated that a child's first and longest lasting context for development is the child's family (p. 563). It is evident to most educators and researchers that parents are a child's most important educator, and it is within this primary setting that most children's lives are formed (Hayes, O'Toole, & Halpenny, 2017). Recent research has indicated that it is not what the family dynamics look like (i.e., traditional family, single parent family, other non-traditional family), but the quality of the family process and interactions that occur within the child's natural environment (Halpenny, Greene, & Hogan 2008). In our current climate of testing for kindergarten readiness, it is essential that educators and policymakers enable families to cultivate an environment for learning within the home, regardless of the dynamic of the family make-up (Brooker, 2015).

Family Engagement and Kindergarten Readiness

When looking beyond the realm of educators and policy makers, parents and community members often do not give the most thought and consideration to the time period prior to elementary school in a child's life. However, as a child moves from the early childhood years into elementary school, this transition time period is linked to academic success later in one's educational career, with specific emphasis on the middle and high school years (Butler, Marsh, Sheppard, M., & Sheppard, J., 1985).

Before understanding the role of the family in kindergarten readiness, one must define what kindergarten readiness is. Shonkoff and Phillips (2001) defined being kindergarten ready, when a child can demonstrate the foundational knowledge, skills and behaviors that enable one

to participate and succeed in school. In Kentucky, school readiness is defined by saying that each child enters school ready to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences that best promote the child's success and ability to be ready to grow, ready to learn, and ready to succeed (kidsnow.ky.gov).

The transition period from preschool to kindergarten is a critical period and has been labeled by a time period that is essential for later school success (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Pelletier and Brent (2002) identified children not being school ready when entering the kindergarten year as being a key factor of academic failure during the earliest years of education. Children leaving the early childhood setting not being kindergarten ready has also been linked as an early indicator for problems in adulthood, such as not being able to hold a job and engagement in criminal activity (Power & Hertzman, 1999).

Findings by the National Early Literacy Panel (2008) showed that the literacy and language skills acquired in the preschool setting are linked to a child's reading ability in elementary school. There is some research that does not indicate the longitudinal positive gains for preschool attendance. This could be linked to the decrease of family engagement activities that occur as a child enters elementary school and the reduced amount of open two-way communication between home and school that occurred when the child was in preschool and early elementary school (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000).

The involvement level of the family both at home and in the classroom during the earliest years of a child's life is an essential element for aiding in the development in a young child's life (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Hilado et al., 2011; Mo & Singh, 2008). When families are actively engaged in activities occurring in the preschool classroom, children have an easier transition into the school setting (Olmstead, 1991) Even with this working knowledge of the

essential importance of this time period of a child's life, young children continue to enter elementary school with disadvantages in place (Mollborn, 2016). There have been programs implemented nationwide in order to assist in counteracting this disparity (Barham, 2012); however, these programs target urban areas, with little to no attention given to how the programs assist families who live in rural, impoverished areas. It is this gap in the research, paired with the knowledge of the importance of family engagement being a key indicator of a child's later academic success that is a motivating force for this study. The purpose of this study is to determine how families in rural Western Kentucky engage with their children.

By the end of the 1960's, the United States the governing body had encompassed neoconservatism philosophy and engaged in a war on poverty. One such project implemented, Project Head Start, was a half-day preschool, to help children and families who lived at or below the poverty line. This eight-week expanded into a federally funded program, whose mission is to not only to meet the educational needs of the child, but to also provide supports for families through the use of parent training sessions, nutrition, and access to community based social service programs for families (O'Brien & Dervarics, 2007). One of the foundational philosophies for the Head Start program is family involvement (Arnold, Zelio, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008). Currie and Thomas (1995) found that students served by Head Start, had positive effects on school readiness and these positive effects enable low-income student to reach the same academic success of those peer who live in a higher socioeconomic status. Head Start is a well-established program, which allows for longitudinal data to be collected in order to determine the effectiveness of early child programing and school readiness.

In addition to Project Head Start, Chicago public schools initiated the Chicago Child Parent Centers (CPC) to target children and families who live at or below poverty level

(Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001). The CPC is the second oldest federal preschool program and holds the title as the oldest early intervention program. Funding for the program is provided through Title 1 funds (Chapman, 2010). The CPC premise is not only providing academic focus, but to also target the families of the children served. The program requires family engagement at their child's center no less than one half day per week. This focus on family engagement has been extremely beneficial. Longitudinal data collected from participants of the CPC, indicated that the children of families who participated in the program had 40 percent fewer retention and placements into special education services (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2002). Additionally, students who participated in the CPC program had higher reading and math scores as they entered high school, increased graduation rates, and lower arrest rates during the high school years (Chapman 2010; Reynolds et al., 2002).

One of the most monumental and long-lasting studies in the field of early education was The High/Scope Perry Preschool project. "The High/Scope Perry Preschool study was one of the first to address what is now known as the achievement gap, the disparity in academic performance between children born to low-income, highly challenged families with multiple risk factors for academic failure and children from more advantaged backgrounds" (Nelson, 2006, p. 3). This project is of interest to both researchers and practitioners of family engagement, due to the way that family engagement was carried out in the project. The students attend class five days a week for two and one-half hours. The service also included a weekly home visit with the mother and child, which lasted for one and one-half hours (Wat, 2007). The participants were studied through age 40 and it was found that children who participated in the program had much higher scores in language and literacy, throughout their educational career and into adult hood (Chapman, 2010). The High/Scope Perry Preschool project is of particular interest to this study,

as it serves as longitudinal study that examined early childhood programs fostering family engagement and parental involvement through parent training activities and provides guidance to the researcher as to how family engagement can be fostered in the rural school systems of Kentucky.

Findings in the literature enforce the importance of family engagement further by introducing discussion regarding developmental ecology. Mollborn (2016) introduced the concept of a developmental ecology, which is the study of everyday components of a child's life, that influence the overall development of a child. The idea of developmental ecology is an essential component of kindergarten readiness, as one of the areas that this concept focuses on is the effect of the family component and the child's transition into kindergarten. Specific focus is given to the child's proximal environment and how changes affect the child. Findings by Cavanagh and Huston (2006) indicated that when a child experiences multiple changes within the family dynamic, there is potential to adversely affect kindergarten readiness. These changes can be the addition or removal of parental romantic partners, the amount of time that they parent(s) spend at work, blended families, and other factors that cause changes within the dynamics of the immediate family (Fombay & Cherlin, 2007). Developmental ecology and a child's proximal environment are supported in earlier works within the literature. Gonzales et al. (2005) presented research that indicated children who indicated that they had a greater interest in learning and more self-confidence had a strong support system at home, which included increased parental involvement. This increased parental involvement leads to increased family engagement. Writings by Mo and Singh (2008) found that students who had a strong relationship with a parent, which were identified as a form of parental involvement, would use this bond to develop educational goals with their parent, and the parents would be more involved and

engaged in school activities. This increased involvement, in turn leads to higher academic achievement over the course of one's academic career.

There has been some research, which contradicts the benefits and importance of family engagement. Robinson and Harris (2012) stated "Most forms of parental involvement do not improve achievement. In some cases, they may hinder it." Garbacz et al. (2017) indicated that while these findings were shocking, the findings do indicate the need to determine if the focus of the family engagement in the rural setting is geared toward behavior or education. The overall purpose of this study is to seek answers to questions that practitioner, researchers, and policy makers have regarding families' views on home learning experiences, and the effects of these experiences on a child's ability to be successful in one's educational career, and the role of early childhood settings and parent school involvement and overall family engagement as the child enters elementary school.

Family Engagement, Kindergarten Readiness, and Socioeconomic Status

When studying a child's ability to start school, being identified as ready to learn, research shows a link between a child's socioeconomic status (SES) and kindergarten readiness. Children who live at or below the poverty line consistently have lower school readiness scores and academic competences when compared to children from more affluent families (Zill, Collins, West, & Hausken, 1995). Huttman (1991) reported that within the socioeconomic classes, the middle class, and working class have higher expectations for their children, than do those of less affluent "at-risk" socioeconomic class. There are other factors that occur within the family based on the families' socioeconomic status. These factors include stress, parenting styles, experiences available to the children in the home, and stressors placed upon the family (Chazen-Cohen et al. 2009). When studying the data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten

Cohort, it was determined that children who are from homes at or below the poverty line presented with lower scores on both cognitive and languages assessments when entering kindergarten (West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000). In addition to the SES of a family, there is also a connection between the education level of the parent and the readiness of the child when entering kindergarten (Dotterer, Iruka, & Pungello, 2012).

According to the Children's Defense Fund, while there has been a recent decline in the number of children who live in poverty, an alarming 18% of young children still live in poverty. In 2016, there were over forty million people living at or below poverty in the United States, with nearly one in three people being children (retrieved August 11, 2018 from Childrensdefene.org). Bradley, Corwyn, Burchinal, Pipe-McAdoo, & Garcia (2001) found that children who live in poverty are most affected during the earliest years of one's life. One's SES has a direct correlation on academic achievement, and for children who live at or below the poverty line underachievement in academics is the most prevalent (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Duncan et al., 1998).

In order for a child to be successful at school one must be interested in academia (Eccles & Wigfiled, 2002). Arnold and Doctoroff (2003) defined interest as a group of variables which include interest, motivation, engagement, goals, values, and self-efficacy (p. 520). While children who live in poverty often start school with interest, this interest tends to dissipate during the first few years of one's educational career (Arnold & Doctoroff, 2003; Stipek & Tannatt 1984; Wigfield et al., 1997). Arnold and Doctoroff (2003) provided the following summary regarding children who live in poverty:

> In sum, low-SES children often suffer a negative cycle of failure and disinterest, whereby failure increases disengagement, and disaffection fosters additional failure. Hope arises

> from the knowledge that equally potent positive cycles are possible, in which academic success could foster interest and vice versa. (p. 522)

A child's SES has also been shown to have a direct link to home learning experiences prior to entering school and this especially true in early literacy skill development (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Research by McCormick and Mason (1986) found that only half of preschools living at or below the poverty line have alphabet books in their homes, when compared to peers living above the poverty line. This gap is prevalent in the parent's attitudes toward learning and academic expectations in families who are of low SES status (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). These findings are supported by earlier research by Gottfried, A.E., Flemming, & Gottfried, A.W. (1998) who found that the home environment affects a child's academic interest, and the attitudes of the home toward school vary depending on one's SES status. In addition, the home environment of lower SES children, research has also found that children who live in poverty have less access to high quality education starting at the preschool level (Phillips, Voran, Kisker, Howes, & Whitebrook, 1994; Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002). Research has also found that teachers who work with low-SES student's demonstrate lower expectations and negative perceptions of these students (Alexander et al., 1987; McLoyd, 1998).

Particularly, a child's social emotional development is linked to one's ability to be successful in kindergarten. Social emotional development is directly linked to parent involvement and family engagement (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). In order to gage the social-emotional development of young children, in order to address the achievement gap, a study was completed in Head Start centers across the United States, in order to help guide policy and program for the youngest learners. The Head Start Impact Study (Administration for Children and Families, 2005) found that the program was helping to increase the social-emotional

competences in the children that it serves, but children who live in poverty often have difficulty with the development of social-emotional skills. Writings in the literature indicate child's social emotional skills are direct indicator of their ability to be successful in kindergarten (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). This lack of social skill development, which is linked to levels of family engagement and parental involvement, indicates that there is further need for research in this area. This lack of development is directly related to stress that often affect families that live in poverty (Zill, Moore, Smith, Stief, & Coiro, 1991).

In summary, a child's SES status is directly linked to later academic success or failures, and the foundational skills that are needed for success begin early in one's life. Children with lower SES status are at risk for academic failure due to multiple forces. The current literature compounds a need for more research in order to understand why this is the case, and this compounds the need for this research study by looking at the effect of family engagement and parent involvement in rural state funded preschools.

Parenting Styles

For decades researchers have been interested in how parents impact child development. It is well documented that a parent is the most influential component in the child's over all development (Boateng & Cleveland, 2014). While many researchers have studied the effects of parenting, there is one researcher whose works stand out and have had long lasting impacts on parenting and the role that it plays regarding parent involvement and family engagement. It is through her writings and decade long studies that enabled Baumrind, (1966, 1967, 1971, 1991, 2005) to propose that parenting styles are critical to researchers and practitioners in the classroom when researching parenting. It was through her research that she found two critical components of successful parenting. These two aspects were parental responsiveness and

parental demanding (Miguel, Valentim, & Carugati, 2013). It was though Baumrind's two aspects of parenting, that researchers developed four styles of parenting which are identified as: authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent and neglectful or uninvolved (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Each of these styles are associated with different outcomes and interactions between parent and child, and these interactions and outcomes affect parent involvement and parent teacher interactions.

When considering parenting styles, one must consider the role in which parenting plays when considering parent interactions with the school, family engagement in school related activities and school readiness. When considering the Ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) the foundational skills of school readiness start well before the preschool years within the confines of the child's natural environment, the child's home (Sheridan, Rispoli, & Holmes, 2014). One key component of a child being ready to learn in kindergarten is the social emotional development of the child (Fantuzzo et al., 2007; Thompson & Raikes, 2007). A child must be able to interact with both peers and staff by forming relationships. These early relationships are a direct reflection of how the child interacts with the parent, and the parent interacts with the school staff, this interaction depends on the parenting style that is utilized by the family. This ability to interact with one's peers and teachers, participate in classroom activities, enjoy learning and have a smoother transition into kindergarten (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). When interviewing kindergarten teachers, it was found that nearly half of all teachers reported that half of the students who enter kindergarten do not have the needed social-emotional skills to be successful in the kindergarten classroom (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000). Joseph and John (2008) reported that a family’s parenting style is a key factor in the overall psychological and social function of the child. It is for this reason that a child’s exposure to relationships prior to entering

school are essential for helping to form the child's ability to interact with both peers and adults when entering the kindergarten year.

Parenting Styles and Family Engagement

Numerous studies have been completed to determine the role of parenting style on school success. Spera (Spera, 2005) found that there was direct impact on the academic achievement of the child based on the style of parenting that occurred within the home. One study completed by Matejevic, Jovanovic, & Jovanovic (2014) found that children who come from homes with authoritative parenting styles were more successful in their educational career than those who came from homes with authoritarian or permissive parenting styles. Findings within the literature by Steinberg, Lamborn, & Dornbusch (1992), Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch (1991) and Matejevic et al. (2014) showed that it is essential for school to understand the parenting style of the families that they serve, and provide ways to foster educational activities directed towards the parents in order to promote a culture of parent involvement and family engagement during ones' earliest educational years.

Family Engagement and Parent Involvement in the Rural School

Jung (2016) reported that a study of the literature indicates that there is a difference of parental beliefs regarding academic importance between socioeconomic classes. In the literature, the term academic beliefs occur numerous times. Cannon and Ginsburg's (2008) definition of academic beliefs as the thoughts and views that a parent has regarding what academic skills a child should have prior to kindergarten. Chazen-Cohen et al. (2009) found that the family's socioeconomic status has a significant influence of a child's later academic success. Parents, who

are in the middle and upper class, have a reported higher level of involvement, than lower income families (de Carvalho, 2001). Children who live at or below the poverty line have lower levels of parental involvement and fewer academic gains (Smith, 2006).

Within rural communities, family engagement interactions between the school and family can strengthen support services for the children and the families served by supporting learning and development (Sheridan et al., 2017). As supported in other research, the amount of family engagement is largely based on the quality of the responsiveness between the teacher, parent, and child (Sheridan et al., 2012). Recent research by Sheridan et al. (2017) has found that students in rural communities' benefit from family engagement that is fostered through family school partnerships. Strong family engagement activities that encourage family-school partnerships in impoverished rural areas is a key component for school success.

Even with the understood importance of family engagement in the rural school, family partnerships and meaningful two-way interactions do not always occur. Research by Prater, Bermudez, and Owen (1997) found that rural families interact with teachers and school less often than urban parents. During a 2007 survey of rural families a little over 50% reported being happy with the interactions at their child's school (Provasnik et al., 2007). Additionally, when schools in rural communities do not encourage meaningful family engagement opportunities, there has been a missed chance to input from key stakeholders (Sheridan et al., 2017).

Summary

While there is current data available regarding family engagement being fostered by the school systems, there is limited data available regarding how the families in rural areas actually view and implement home learning activities in the child's natural environment. There are significant gaps within the literature that need to be filled. It is these gaps that support the need

for a study to examine the dynamics of family engagement and parent teacher interaction within rural Western Kentucky. Specifically, looking at the role in which a child's prior setting, the time before entrance into kindergarten, affects how the families of that child interact with school staff once the child enters kindergarten. By completing this research study, the goal is to help close the gaps, that have left policy makers and educators needing more information and data to help drive decision-making in school districts within the rural areas of Kentucky

CHAPTER III. METHODOLGY

The purpose of this study is to determine if a relationship exists between parent/family engagement during at-home learning activities as reported on the *Family Engagement Survey* and the amount of parent teacher communication as reported on the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire*.

It is the goal of the researcher that that the findings of this study will provide educators and policy makers data that will enable a deeper understanding of the significance of at-home learning and the critical role it plays regarding the development of our youngest learners.

Research Design

This study utilized a cross-sectional survey design to seek answers to the following research questions:

Research Question 1

Do parents reported levels of involvement as reported on the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire*, vary based on the type of preschool that their child attended prior to entering kindergarten?

Null hypothesis 1 a: No statistically significant differences will be found in the level of parent involvement as measured by the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* between kindergarten students who attended state funded preschool and kindergarten students who attended private, family paid preschools.

Null Hypothesis 1 b: No statistically significant differences will be found in the level of parent involvement as measured by the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* between

kindergarten students who attended state funded preschool and kindergarten students who did not attended preschool.

Null Hypothesis 1c: No statistically significant differences will be found in the level of parent involvement as measured by the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* between kindergarten students who attended private, family paid preschools and kindergarten students who did not attended preschool.

Research Question 2

Does family engagement differ by exposure to schooling prior to kindergarten as measured by on the *Family Engagement Survey*?

Null Hypothesis 2 a: No statistically significant differences I n the reported amount of family engagement as measured by the *Family Engagement Survey* will exist between kindergarten students who attended state funded preschool and kindergarten students who attended private, family paid preschools.

Null Hypothesis 2 b: No statistically significant differences in reported levels of family engagement as measured by the *Family Engagement Survey* will exist between kindergarten students who attended state funded preschool and kindergarten students who did not attended preschool.

Null Hypothesis 2 c: No statistically significant differences in reported levels of family engagement will exist between kindergarten students who attended private, family paid preschools and kindergarten students who did not attend preschool.

Research Question 3

Do parents reported levels of involvement on the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* influence family engagement as reported on *the Family Engagement Survey*?

Null Hypothesis 3a. No statistically significant relationship will exist between parents reported levels of involvement on the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* and family engagement as reported on the *Family Engagement Survey*.

Approach

Before research began, the researcher contacted the school systems to seek permission to conduct the research. Once permission was granted from the districts, parent surveys were sent home with each kindergarten student. Every family of a kindergarten student was given a survey to complete. When the parents completed the survey, they identified the child's prior setting, before entering kindergarten. No family was excluded from the survey. In order to collect the surveys at the end of the assessment window, the researcher placed a collection box or envelope at each site that was selected to participate in the study.

Setting and Sample

This study took place in the western region of Kentucky, specifically in rural counties. The study targeted five school systems, identified as rural based on 2010 Census data collected by the United States government, and published in the Kentucky Annual Economic Report (Troske, Bollinger, Blomquist, Hackbart, & Childress, 2012), and also from the Office of Rural Health Policy List of Rural Counties as based on the 2010 Census report (2018). In addition to the school districts being identified as rural, the criterion was also established that the districts must offer state funded preschool to the families that reside within the district. School districts that are not deemed rural according to census data or have preschool classrooms that are blended with the federally funded Head Start program will be excluded from the study.

Procedures Followed

Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was sought from Murray State University. Once approval was granted by IRB, the researcher made contact to the preschool coordinators and some building level administrators through email with a copy of the confirmed consent (See Appendix A). Once the administrators gave permission from the 5 school districts selected for the study, for the researcher to conduct research within the district, the researcher calculated the number of survey packets needed for each school within the district that had kindergarten classes. The researcher prepared a survey packet containing both the FES and the PTIQ (see Appendix B and Appendix C) for each child.

The researcher then hand delivered packets to each school, along with a collection bin for the packets. The researcher made arrangements to come back to the schools and pick up any surveys that were collected by the teachers. Additionally, the researcher also provided pre-stamped, self-addressed envelopes, to each site, so that any surveys not picked up in person, could be mailed back to the researcher.

Participants were not contacted directly by the researcher, instead a paper packet was sent home with each child enrolled in kindergarten within the selected school districts. Each packet that was sent home with a child contained a cover letter with informed consent, and one copy each of the FES and the PTIQ. The families were asked to complete the surveys and return the completed surveys to their child's teacher. At the end of a two-week period, the researcher returned to each school and collected any survey packets that the teachers had collected.

Data Collection

The families were asked to complete (a) the *Family Engagement Survey* (FES; Appendix B), adapted from the 2007 School Readiness Parent Survey portion of the U.S. Department of Education National Household Education Surveys Program; and (b) the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* (PTIQ; Appendix C), which was adapted for the Fast Track Project which is a longitudinal research project that tracked children from kindergarten through grades five. Permission to use the PTIQ was given through a release letter from the designer of the survey.

The FES, which was adapted from the 2007 School Readiness Parents Survey of the U.S. Department of Education National Household Education Survey (NHES) Program was selected to provide a cross-sectional estimate of children's development in the area of literacy, numeracy, program participation and educational activities that occurred in the child's home (Hagerdorn et al., 2009). The School Readiness Parents Survey was designed through the collaborative efforts of researchers in the academic, private, and government setting (Hagerdon et al., 2009). Hagerdone et al. (2009) further went on to indicate that the survey instrument was vetted via a two-stage filed test. The NHES was developed by the National Center for Education Statistics to study educational issues that cannot be addressed by institutional surveys (Hagerdone et al., 2009, p. 1).

The PTIQ is a 26-item measure that was developed to assess the amount of parent and teacher involvement (Miller-Johnson & Maumary-Gremaud, 1995). The tool looks at both the amount and kinds of contact that occur between the families and the school. The tool also examines the parent's satisfaction of the school, their comfort level of talking to the teacher, and how involved the parent is with their child's education (Miller-Johnson & Maumary-Gremaud,

1995). The items on the questionnaire are coded on a 5-point Likert scale that examines frequency ratings, with a point value being assigned to each response (Corrigan, 2002).

Data Analysis

For data calculation purposes, the FES was divided into five subscales in order to determine the level of family engagement as reported by the families. Within the subscales, lower numerical scores represented more family engagement, while higher numerical scores indicated that the family had less engagement.

These five subscales included:

- Language Engagement- Items 6 (a-c) and 7 (b).
- Creativity Engagement- Items 7 (a-f).
- Cultural Engagement- Items 8 (a-g).
- Numeracy Engagement- Items 9 (a-c).
- Writing Engagement- Items 12 (a-d).

The PTIQ was also grouped into subscales in order to calculate data. The PTIQ was broken into 4 subscales, with higher numerical scores indicating a higher level of involvement, while a lower score indicated less involvement. The four subscales are:

- Quality of the Relationship between Parent and Teacher - Items 12-16.
- Parent's Involvement and Volunteering at School - Items 6,7, 10, 11, 18-22.
- Parent's Endorsement of Child's School - Items 23-26.
- Frequency of Parent-Teacher Contact - Items 1-5, 8, 9, 17.

The researcher used SPSS in order to complete statistical analysis of data collected. For research questions 1 and 2, the researcher used independent samples t-test in order to determine if the independent variables identified in each Null Hypothesis affect the dependent variable.

Research question 3 was assessed via a Pearson Correlation to assess relationship between the two dependent variables.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in this study was on a voluntary basis, and each respondent did have the choice to not participate. All survey questions were free from offensive and discriminatory language. In this study, the researcher maintained anonymity and privacy of participants. As the researcher, it was my duty to maintain high levels of objectivity when analyzing data and discussing results and discussing future uses of data collected from this study.

Summary

In this chapter the researcher identified the target population of the study, which is rural Western Kentucky. Participants from five school districts participated the study by completing either paper-based or online surveys. Furthermore, this chapter examined the psychometric properties of the assessments utilized in this study. In addition to discussing the research questions, this chapter also provided support for the proposed statistical analyses.

CHAPTER IV. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the role of family engagement in home learning activities and the role in which parent teacher involvement and interactions influences the home learning and family engagement. In order to answer the research questions as outlined in this study, parents and families in five school districts located within rural Western Kentucky were targeted in order to gain information regarding family engagement and what role if any, this has in impacting the kindergarten readiness of their child when entering school. This study was completed over a two-week window, utilizing quantitative methods. Two survey instruments; *Family Engagement Survey* (FES; Hagerdon et al., 2009) and the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* (PTIQ; Miller-Johnson & Maumary-Gremaud, 1995) were utilized to collect information regarding the level of family engagement and interaction between the parent and the teacher, respectively.

This chapter begins with an overview of the analysis of the quantitative data collected from 5 rural school districts in Western Kentucky, totaling 473 families. The results of the parent's responses were analyzed to assesses the following research questions: (a) Do parents reported levels of involvement as reported on the PTIQ, vary based on the type of preschool that their child attended prior to entering kindergarten? (b) Does family engagement differ by exposure to schooling prior to kindergarten as measured on the FES? (c) Do parents reported levels of involvement on the PTIQ influence family engagement as reported on the FES?

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher utilized data collected from a single solicitation survey that was conducted during a two-week window in the fall of the of 2018. The instrument was distributed both electronically via an online survey website, as well as a paper-based survey that was sent home to each kindergarten family within the school districts that participated in the study. No identifying information was collected by the researcher.

Response Rate to the Research Survey

The population of this study consisted of five school districts, for a total of 473 families in rural Western Kentucky. Of the 473 families solicited by the survey only 156 families completed the FES. Of the 156 families who completed the FES, only 153 returned the PTIQ to the researcher. Further study of data indicated that out of the total of 153 surveys returned, only 59 of these surveys are viable for data calculations. Therefore, from this point forward all data valuations and analysis are derived from those surveys n = 59. When calculated this left the researcher with an average response rate of 33% for the FES and a minimal 13% response rate for the PTIQ.

Analysis of Descriptive Data

Prior Settings

In relation to the prior setting of the participants children, 18 (30.5%) attended a state funded preschool. When looking at the prior setting of Head Start, 18 (30.5%) reported that their child attended a local Head Start center. 13 (22%) participants reported that their child had attended a private, family paid preschool program prior to entering preschool. Only 9 (15.3%) participants indicated that their child did not attend a formal program before entering kindergarten, and 1 (1.7%) participant did not respond (see Table 1).

Table 1

Frequency Distribution by Prior Setting

Prior Setting	Frequency	Percent
State Funded Preschool	18	30.5%
Head Start Centers	18	30.5%
Private, Family Paid Preschool	13	22.0%
Did Not Attend Preschool	9	15.3%
No Response	1	1.7%

N= 59

Demographics

The demographic data of families who participated in the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequency distributions are included to provide a clear and concise illustration of the sample population. More specifically, the participants' prior setting nationality, gender, marital status, age, education, and income level, are presented below.

In relation to participants' nationality, 37 (62.7%) participants identified as white, 11 (18.6%) identifies as Asian, 3 (5.1%) participants identified as Black or African American, while 5 respondents chose no response, and 2 participants were missing (3.4%). When researching marital status, 29 (49.2%) of respondents indicated that they were married or in a domestic partnership, 17 (28.8%) of the respondents identified as single, 9 (15.3%) of the respondents were divorced, 3 (5.1%) widowed, and 1 (1.7%) separated. It was of interest to the researcher that 55 participants in the survey identified themselves as female (93.2%), while only 4 participants were male (6.8%) (see Table 2). Table 2 describes a frequency distribution of the sample's reported nationality, gender, and marital status.

Table 2

Frequency Distribution by Nationality, Gender, and Marital Status

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Nationality		
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	1.7%
Asian	11	18.6%
Black or African American	3	5.1%
White	37	62.7%
No Response	5	9.5%
Missing	2	3.4%
Gender		
Female	55	93.2%
Male	4	6.8%
Marital Status		
Single	17	28.8%
Married/Domestic Partnership	29	49.2%
Widowed	3	5.1%
Divorced	9	15.3%
Separated	1	1.7%

N=59

Age of Participants

The age of the respondents was also of interest to the researcher, in order to better understand the dynamic make-up of the families who were participating in the study. The

researcher broke age responses into five categories (see Table 3). The largest number of respondents fell in the 25 to 34-year age range (52.5%). 28.8% of the respondents indicated that their age falls between 35 and 44-years of age. 16.9% of the respondents indicated that their age placed them into the 18 to 24-year age range. Only once participant in the study indicated that they were aged 55 years plus,

Table 3

Frequency Distribution by Age of Participants

Age	Frequency	Percent
18-24 years old	10	16.9 %
25-34 years old	31	52.5%
35 -44 years old	17	28.8%
55 years plus	1	1.7%

N=59

Education and Income Level

When studying the data regarding the education levels of the parent or family member who was completing the survey, the results were of interest to the researcher (Table 3), as the researcher gained insight into the participants experience with education. 67.8% of the respondents reported an education level of less than a high school diploma. 27.1% of the respondents reported an education level of earning a high-school diploma or GED. Of the 59 surveys returned, no family reported an education level higher than a high school diploma or GED.

Household income was also analyzed as part of the study (see Table 4). Of the 59 surveys used for data calculations, 13.6% of the respondents indicated that the family has a total house hold income level of less than $20,000 per year. 58.8% of the families indicated that they

had an annual income that ranged from $20,000 to $49,000. 11.9% of families reported having annual incomes over $75,000.

Table 4

Frequency Distribution by Educational Level and Income Level

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Education Level		
Less than a High School Diploma	40	67.8%
H.S. Diploma or GED	16	27.1%
Missing	3	5.1%
Household Income		
Less $20,000	8	13.6 %
$20,000-34,000	17	28.8%
$35,000-49,000	13	22.0%
$50,000-74,000	11	18.6%
$75,000-99,999	5	8.5%
Over $100,0000	2	3.4%
No Response	2	3.4%

N=59

Data Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1

Do parents reported levels of involvement as reported on the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire,* vary based on the type of preschool that their child attended prior to entering kindergarten?

Null Hypothesis 1a: No statistically significant differences will be found in the level of parent involvement as measured by the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* between kindergarten students who attended state funded preschool and kindergarten students who attended private, family paid preschools. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare parent involvement levels of kindergarten students who attended state funded preschool and parent involvement levels of kindergarten students who attended private, family paid preschools. There was not a significant difference between the levels of parent involvement who attended state funded preschool (M = 19.56, SD = 5.863) and private, family paid preschool (M=18.68, SD= 5.750); $t(29) = .41$, $p = .689$.

Null Hypothesis 1b: No statistically significant differences will be found in the level of parent involvement as measured by the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* between kindergarten students who state funded preschool and kindergarten students who did not attended preschool. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare parent involvement levels of kindergarten students who attended state funded preschool and parent involvement levels of kindergarten students who did not attend preschool. There was not a significant difference between the levels of parent involvement who's child attended state funded preschool (M = 19.56, SD = 5.863) and the families whose child did not attend preschool (M=18.89, SD=4.885); $t(25) = .293$, $p = .772$.

Null Hypothesis 1c: No statistically significant differences will be found in the level of parent involvement as measured by the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* between kindergarten students who attended private, family paid preschools and kindergarten students who did not attended preschool. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare parent involvement levels of kindergarten students who attended private, family paid preschools and those of kindergarten students who did not attend preschool. There was no significant difference in the reported levels of family involvement of private, family paid (M = 18.69, SD = 5.750) and those who did not attend preschool (M = 18.89, SD = 4.885); t(20)= -.084, p = .934.

Research Question 2

Does family engagement differ by exposure to schooling prior to kindergarten as measured by on the *Family Engagement Survey*?

Null Hypothesis 2a: No statistically significant differences in the reported amount of family engagement will exist between students who attended state funded preschool and kindergarten students who attended private, family paid preschools. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the reported level of family engagement between students who attended state-funded preschool and students who attended private, family paid preschools. There was no significant difference in the reported levels of family engagement for state funded preschool (M = 30.83, SD = 3.276) and private, family paid preschool (M =31.69, SD =3.59); $t(29)$ = -.692, p = .494.

Null Hypothesis 2b: No statistically significant differences in reported levels of family engagement will exist between kindergarten students who attended state funded preschool and kindergarten students who did not attended preschool. An independent-samples t-test was

conducted to compare the reported level of family engagement between students who attended state-funded preschool and students who did not attended preschool. There was not a significant difference in the reported levels of family engagement for state funded preschool (M = 30.83, SD = 3.276) and students who did not attend preschool (M = 30.56, SD = 1.94); $t(25)$ = .233, p = .817.

Null Hypothesis 2c: No statistically significant differences in reported levels of family engagement will exist between kindergarten students who attended private, family paid preschools and kindergarten students who did not attend preschool. Independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the reported levels of family engagement between families who attended private, family paid preschools, and that of families whose child did not attend preschool. There was no significant difference for private, family paid preschool (M = 31.69, SD = 3.59) and did not attend preschool (M = 30.56, SD = 1.94); $t(20)$ = .862, p = .399.

Research Question 3

Do parents reported levels of involvement, as measured by the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire*, influence family engagement, as measured by the *Family Engagement Survey*? A Pearson Product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between parental involvement and family engagement.

Null Hypothesis 3a. No statistically significant relationship will exist between parents reported levels of involvement on the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* and family engagement as reported on the *Family Engagement Survey.*

There was a positive correlation between the two variables, r = .530, n = 59, $p < .05$. There was also a positive correlation between language engagement and writing engagement in the child's home, r = .409, n = 59, $p < .05$. Also, as indicated in Table 4, there is significant

correlation between the frequency of parent teacher contacts as reported on the PTIQ and the amount of cultural engagement activities that a family engaged as reported on the *FES*, r = -.329, n = 59, $p < .05$. Additionally, there was also a correlation between the frequency of parent teacher contacts and the reported amount of parent involvement as reported on the *PTI*Q, r = .653, n = 59, $p < .05$. Table 5 shows the correlations between the reported levels of involvement on the PTIQ and the reported levels of family engagement as reported of the FES.

Table 5

Pearson Correlations of Influence of family engagement (FES) on Involvement based on the (PTIQ)

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Language Engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	.124	.168	.409**	.530**	-.008	.060	-.051	-.167
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.348	.204	.001	.000	.954	.651	.702	.207
	N	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59
2. Cultural Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.124	1	.167	.006	.013	-.329*	-.235	.074	.095
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.348		.207	.963	.925	.011	.073	.579	.476
	N	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59
3. Creativity Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.168	.167	1	.165	.158	-.072	-.085	-.254	.031
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.204	.207		.212	.231	.586	.523	.052	.814
	N	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59
4. Writing Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.409**	.006	.016	1	.522**	-.058	-.157	-.124	-.079
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.963	.212		.000	.663	.235	.351	.554
	N	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59
5. Math Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.530**	.013	.158	.522**	1	.210	.032	-.144	-.180
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.925	.231	.000		.110	.811	.275	.172
	N	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59
6. Freq. of Parent teacher contact	Pearson Correlation	-.008	-.329*	-.072	-.058	.210	1	.653**	.241	.128
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.954	.011	.586	.663	.110		.000	.066	.335
	N	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59

7. Parent Involvement	Pearson Correlation	.060	-.235	-.085	-.157	.032	.653**	1	.222	.155
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.651	.073	.523	.235	.811	.000		.092	.240
	N	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59
8. Parents Endorsement of school	Pearson Correlation	-.051	.074	-.254	-.124	-.144	.241	.222	1	.155
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.702	.579	.052	.351	.275	.066	.092		.240
	N	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59
9. Parent teacher Relationship	Pearson Correlation	-.167	.095	.031	-.079	-.180	.128	.155	.398**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.207	.476	.814	.554	.172	.335	.240	.002	
	N	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59

N=59

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Summary

This chapter provided a quantitative analysis of the data collected within the study. The data was collected over a two-week period using paper based and online surveys. Upon the end of the collection window of the 156 surveys that were returned, only 59 of the surveys met the required conditions to be useable by the researcher. The analysis of the data revealed that there was not a statically significant difference between the parents reported levels of involvement as reported on the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* and preschool experience. Additionally, analysis of the data revealed that there was not a statically

significant difference between family engagement as measured by the *Family Engagement Survey* and exposure to schooling prior to kindergarten. Finally, aspects of parents reported levels of involvement on the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* did influence aspects of family engagement as reported on the *Family Engagement Survey*.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss implications gleaned from the conducted research study. Also, the researcher will provide a discussion of the limitations of the study's findings, and give recommendations for future research. The final component of this chapter will focus on a summary of the study and how findings from the study align with P-20 initiatives that promotes a seamless learning experience from the earliest years of one's life until they leave the school setting and enter the workforce.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the role of family engagement in home learning activities and the role in which parent teacher involvement and interactions influences the home learning and family engagement. In order to answer the research questions as outlined in this study, parents and families in five school districts located within rural Western Kentucky were targeted in order to gain information regarding family engagement and what role if any, this has in impacting the kindergarten readiness of their child when entering school. This study was completed over a two-week window, utilizing quantitative methods. Two survey instruments, *Family Engagement Survey* (FES; Hagedorn et al., 2009) and the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire* (PTIQ, Miller-Johnson & Maumary-Gremaud, 1995) were utilized to collect information regarding the level of family engagement and engagement between the parent and the teacher, respectively. It is the goal of the researcher that that the findings of this study will provide educators and policy makers data that will enable a deeper understanding of the significance of at-home learning and the critical role it plays regarding the development of our youngest learners.

Discussion of Findings

In this research study, three research questions were developed to help guide the study of the effects of parent teacher interactions and family engagement on kindergarten readiness of students living in five rural school districts in Western Kentucky. Of the school systems, one school system to did not accurately report a child's prior setting, and there for their data was not able to be used within the study, and the finally results were based on surveys returned in 4 school districts in rural Western Kentucky

Research Question 1

The first research question in this study focused on finding the differences between the reported levels of parent involvement as reported on the PTIQ and the prior setting in which the child attended before entering kindergarten. Interestingly, this study did not result in any significant interactions between the type of preschool that a child attended prior to entering kindergarten and the level of parent and teacher involvement during the child's kindergarten year of schooling. More specifically the results of this research study indicated that not only is there no difference between the reported levels of parent involvement from families of children who attended state funded and private preschools settings. Additionally, there was no difference in the reported levels of parent teacher involvement of those who attended some type of preschool when compared to those who did not attend school at all.

Some existing research supports this notion. When studying current data and research studies that focus on parent involvement, the findings within this study align with trends found in the current data. Sawyer (2015) indicated that research shows a clear and steady decline in parent involvement in the past few years. Specifically, during the kindergarten year, research by

Reinhardt (2016) showed that while parents' express interest in helping in the classroom, there is low parental involvement. There are many reasons as to why a parent might not be involved. Some of these reasons include, but not limited to: lack of time (Stone & Chakroborty, 2011), lack of transportation (Lee & Bowen, 2006), and not feeling welcomed by the classroom or school (Lee & Bowne, 2006). Education level of the parent may also be another reason that parents may have a low involvement rate (Duchane, Coulter-Kern, & DePlanty, 2007).

The benefits of parent involvement have been clearly documented in the literature. Sawyer (2015) indicated that parent involvement sends a message to the child that school is important and should be viewed as a "valued institution" (p.172). In the field of P-20 education the goal is to create a seamless continuum from the earliest years of a child's life, until that child leaves the education setting and enters the workforce. The results of this study combined with findings in current data indicates an area of need that must be addressed by educators, administrators, and researchers. This is of particular interest to P-20 education researchers who are constantly seeking new and innovative ways to improve the education filed. It is through P-20 research that one can find solutions and new ways to involve families in their child's education, starting at the earliest years of one's life.

Research Question 2

The second research question in this study focused on finding the differences between the reported levels of family engagement as reported on the *FES* and the prior setting in which the child attended before entering kindergarten. Interestingly, this study did not result in any significant interactions between the type of preschool that a child attended prior to entering kindergarten and the level of family engagement as reported on the FE*S*. More specifically, this research indicated that not only was there no difference between state funded and private

preschools settings, there was also no difference in the reported level of family engagement of those children who attended some type of preschool when compared to those who did not attend school at all. Current research shows that many early childhood education programs fail to engage families as active partners in their child's educational career and instead families are often viewed as recipients of the educational process (Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird, & Kupzyk, 2010). When looking at data collected from rural areas versus urban areas, research indicates that there is a difference in the level of family engagement that occurs between the two areas. For instance, Keys (2013) found that families who live in rural areas have an overall difference in the reported level of family engagement when compared to their urban peers. Many preschool programs work very hard to support and develop family engagement, however many families from lower income do not participate in the activities (Bierman, Morris, & Abenayoli (2017). This link of engagement outside of the school setting gives hope that school administrators, P-20 education researchers, and community stakeholders, will be able to close the gap that exist due to socio-economic disadvantages that often occur in rural areas with innovative concepts and new ideas.

Research Question 3

Of particular interest to the researcher was the amount of family engagement related to parent teacher involvement. The results of the calculations in this study indicated that there were significant correlations between reported levels of involvement on the PTIQ and the FES. Specifically, correlations were found between language engagement and both writing and math engagement. This positive correlation is of interest to the researcher as it links a family's verbal engagement with their child, while also adding to the development and writing and math skills through home learning engagement activities. Additionally, this study found that families who

had more contacts with the classroom teacher, reported higher levels of parent involvement in school activities. This study also found that families who have increased levels of teacher contacts, were more likely to endorse their child's school.

Findings in the literature that discuss intensive family engagement strategies implemented by schools, support the findings in this study. Bierman, Morris, and Abenayoli (2017) reported that preschool programs who utilize intensive, more involved strategies to increase the amount of family engagement, had better success at closing the gaps often associated with economically disadvantaged families, such as those families targeted in this study.

The numerous statistical correlations between variables of reported levels of family engagement and the reported amount of parent-teacher involvement, provide strong indications that for students and families to be successful during the early years of one's education there must be a continuous fluid relationship between the family and the teacher (or the school). This fluidity allows open lines of communication between both parties, which in turns enables growth of the child, while the family has a positive school experience. As the field of P-20 education continues to evolve, researchers, school leaders, and classroom teachers must continue to look for innovative ideas that can be easily molded to fit the particular needs of each family. It is through these innovative methods and open, honest communication that family engagement will be facilitated, thus increasing the overall educational success of the child.

Implications

Based on the outcomes of the quantitative research in this study, there was no statistically significant relationship between a child's prior setting before entering kindergarten and the reported levels of parent teacher interactions as reported on the PTIQ and reported level of

family engagement as reported on the FES. However, results from the study found that there is a correlation between family engagement and parent teacher involvement. While the finding that there is a correlation between parent teacher involvement and family engagement, when looking at the educational pipeline, only 22% of 4-year-old children attend some type of preschool, and the percentage of 3-year old's is even lower, at a mere 3% (Lucido, 2008). When looking at the total educational career of a child, research has shown over and over again that students who come from families with a higher level of family engagement then students have both higher GPA's as well as a greater chance at successfully completing high school and moving into some type of higher education or career training path. With the overall trend in the current data showing that family engagement is a critical component to the overall educational success, families who live in rural, poverty-stricken areas are not participating in engagement activities in the school setting. Therefore, within the field of P-20 education, where policy makers, researchers, and educators are striving to create a seamless continuum, it is critical that novel methods are developed to engage families in their child's education.

Based on results yielded from this study, the following recommendations are provided to school districts, classroom teachers, and P-20 researchers who are currently looking for ways to increase students' levels of kindergarten readiness, foster a culture of meaningful parent teacher interactions, and raise the level of family engagement in educational activities when entering kindergarten.

Accurate data collection. School districts will ensure that a child's prior setting (state funded preschool, Head Start, private family pay preschool, or no preschool) before kindergarten is accurately recorded and entered, so that researchers are able to accurately study the districts kindergarten readiness data. Additionally, educators within the district will have tools to

accurately analyze preschool programs and community outreach programs. This will enable both researchers and school districts to look for weakness or lack of family engagement within early childhood programs and provide immediate interventions to best meet the needs of the child.

Increase the amount of parent teacher interaction. School district administrators and classroom teachers must work diligently in order to increase the amount of teacher and parent interactions. Interestingly while this study did not show significant findings between a child's prior setting during the preschool years, there are direct correlations between parent teacher interactions, as reported on the PTIQ and the level of family engagement as reported on the FES. Findings from this study suggest that school districts implement procedures that encourage more interactions between teachers and the families of the students they serve. Suggested activities include yearly home visits, open houses each nine weeks that school is in session, and weekly communication between staff and family. It is also recommended that school systems utilize social media to their advantage in order to share information and provide families more access to information about the school and employees of the school who work with their children.

Provide home learning activities for families to increase family engagement in the early childhood setting. Early childhood classroom instructors should send weekly activities home for the family and child to complete in the child's natural environment so that the child is better able to generalize early learning skills. An additional component of fostering family engagement is the concept of developing community engagement. When families are partnered with resources within the community there is a reduction in the factors that placed the child "at-risk" and allows for successful gains in the child's overall development (Kirp, 2007). Hildado (2011) indicated that while there are obvious benefits to the collaborative partnerships between

families and social resources, there is not a clear understanding of the relationship between level of parent involvement with the utilization of community based social resources (p. 345).

P-20 Implications

Within the field of P-20 education and community leadership, the goal is to create a pipeline that allows a continuous flow from the beginning of a child's educational career to the end (and beyond), then we must strive to find ways as cohort to bring families, who are at the root the most significant factor in a child's development, to the education table. Not only is it essential that we find ways to foster family engagement in the earliest years of one's life, it is critical that we as educators keep the lines of communication open, so that as the child moves down the education pipeline, the families remain actively engaged in and a part of their child's educational career, so that we are able to help students reach their full potential and become the next generation of innovate thinkers.

Additionally, in order to increase family engagement, and facilitate parent involvement, one must look at making changes within the current curriculum of teacher preparation programs in the United States. While it is critical that programs focus on pedagogy and classroom management, in order to provide a well-rounded educator, we must also provide new teachers with skills to work with families. Faculty and staff who work in teacher preparatory programs need to provide classes that allow teacher prep candidates the opportunity to study the importance of parent involvement and family engagement in-depth. In addition to training that would occur in the classroom setting, the program would also include assignments that require the teacher prep candidates to interact with families. These interactions would serve as opportunities that are supervised, so that they are able increase skills they currently possess and

to learn new skills that will enable to them to engage families at a higher level when they enter their own classrooms.

While the sample size of the study was small, the 59 families who did complete the questionnaire were able to provide significant results that indicated that parents who interact with the classroom teacher, participate in more home learning activities as reported on the *Family Engagement Survey*. As current trends in data have shown over and over again, the level of family engagement and parent teacher interactions have potential to shape the entire educational career of a child. Within the field of early education, educational leaders have a prime opportunity to create a culture of family engagement and open communication between the school and the family. The first experience that a family has with a school system or educational program is often an interaction between a parent and preschool teacher or other preschool staff members. It is through these initial meetings and engagements, that educators have the ability to lay the foundation for parent teacher involvement and family engagement, that will last through out the child's educational career. Therefore, it is essential that our P-20 educational cohort (classroom teachers, school administration, college educators and researchers) work together to create a toolkit that enables early childhood educators to reach beyond the walls of their classroom.

Limitations

Throughout the course of this study, the researcher faced some limitations. Simon (2011) stated that limitations are potential weakness that is out of one's control when completing a research study. Limitations for the current study are discussed below.

Access to Prior Settings

When obtaining kindergarten readiness scores, one school district did not report prior settings for their kindergarten students. This non-reporting of prior setting affected the data, and due to small sample size prevented some statistical calculations. It is also important to note that in very small school districts, prior settings are not publicly reported due to the small number of students, and if published they could be identified.

Lack of Participation

While 156 *Family Engagement Surveys* were returned to the researcher, families did not participate as fully with the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire*. Ninety-seven families did not complete the *Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire.* This left only 59 surveys that could be used for statistical calculations. Based on sample size calculations, 300 surveys would have yielded optimal results, while the sample size for this study of 59, allowed for potentially skewed results that are not an accurate reflection of the population.

Size of School Districts

Of the five school districts used for this study, two districts were very small in relation to other districts in the study. While it was not surprising to find small classes, thus yielding a small sample size. The small size of the study (n = 59) causes limitations that can affect the overall outcomes of the study (Farber & Fonseca, 2014). Small sample size might not accurately reflect the levels of family engagement and parent teacher involvement within rural Western Kentucky. Ideally, based on the population of the area that was surveyed, 300 returned surveys would have yielded a more accurate reflection of family engagement and parenteral involvement.

Research Design

An additional limitation for this study was research design. The researcher relied on family's willingness to participate in the survey, without any explanation other than a written invitation letter, and the survey packet. It is feasible that families may have not understood questions, or been able to read the questions on the survey and given answers that did not reflect the activities within the home. In addition to not understanding the questions on the survey, the research design did not take into account families who spoke and read languages other than English.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results of this study, the researcher is making the following recommendations for future research by school districts and education researchers. The recommendations are mainly focused on the need for further research of the role of family engagement and kindergarten readiness:

1. Mixed methods studies need to be completed on a larger scale within the rural areas of Kentucky in order to determine a child's prior setting and be able to gain parental insights regarding connecting with preschool staff. In order to carry out this mixed method study it is recommended that the FES and PTIQ be administered on a larger scale across the Commonwealth. Additionally, a qualitative aspect to the study that consists of parent interviews could be used to determine obstacles that parents and families face that might inhibit family engagement and parental involvement. The study could also include teachers and inquire about obstacles that they encounter regarding parental involvement.

2. More research needs to be completed in the area of family engagement during the preschool year and the role that this engagement has on kindergarten readiness. The surveys would be administered at the beginning of the preschool year to establish a baseline, and then at the end of the preschool year in order to determine the level of engagement that occurred as the school year progressed.
3. Research within prior settings before kindergarten needs to be completed in order to determine parent and teacher involvement between students enrolled in state funded preschools and children who attend private/family paid preschools. This recommendation is being made, with the understanding that the research take place on a larger scale and include at least 15 school systems in the western portion of the state that meet the qualifications to be considered rural.
4. Additional research needs to be completed that looks at the reported levels of family engagement and parental involvement within single parent households and households that have two parents present. In an ad-hoc analysis of data collected in this study, it was determined that there was not a statically significant difference in between families who identified as single (M=60.65, SD=2.48) and married or domestic partnerships (M=65.90, SD=2.39); $t(44) = 1.43$, $p = .159$. Due to the small nature of this study, these findings might potentially be skewed, thus yielding inaccurate results of how the number of household members affects reported levels of engagement. By conducting research on a larger scale that focuses on single households and households made up of two or more parents, it is of interest to see how the size of the study could potentially yield different results.

Summary and Conclusion

Upon review of the literature, findings from previous studies, as well as this study, it evident that a child's emotional development is clearly linked the development of higher order cognitive skills and school readiness (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). In addition to emotional development, Green et al. (2012) found that development in social skills, self-regulation, emotional control, and attention is critical for school readiness. Lavigne et al. (1996) reported that children with delays in social emotional development when entering school have problems later in their academic career. These are all areas that families have the greatest ability to create lasting change in their child's life, through family engagement activities geared toward both cognitive development and social emotional development in the child's natural environment.

In order to help guide educators, lawmakers, and families in rural Western Kentucky three research questions were drafted in order to guide the research that sought to seek answers about how families and teachers interacted. When this cohesion occurs and an early childhood program links the stakeholders-families, educators, children, and members from the community, the programs value expands, and the possibility of long-term engagement will improve. While the research in this study did not yield the desired the outcome of demonstrating the statistical significance desired, it did yield insight into family engagement and parent teacher involvement within rural Western Kentucky. Educators, policy makers, and academia that focuses on P-20 research can use the implications gleaned from this study to help guide further research in order to provide the highest level of learning to our youngest learners.

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APPENDIX A
Letter of Approval from Institutional Review Board

MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board

328 Wells Hall
Murray, KY 42071-3318
270-809-2916• msu.irb@murraystate.edu

TO: Samir Patel, College of Education and Human Services

FROM: Jonathan Baskin, IRB Coordinator JB

DATE: 10/11/2018

RE: Human Subjects Protocol I.D. – IRB # 19-035

The IRB has completed its review of your student's Level 1 protocol entitled *The Effects of Family Engagement and Parental Involvement in the State Funded Preschools of Western Kentucky and Kindergarten Readiness.* After review and consideration, the IRB has determined that the research, as described in the protocol form, will be conducted in compliance with Murray State University guidelines for the protection of human participants.

The forms and materials that have been approved for use in this research study are attached to the email containing this letter. These are the forms and materials that must be presented to the subjects. Use of any process or forms other than those approved by the IRB will be considered misconduct in research as stated in the MSU IRB Procedures and Guidelines section 20.3.

Your stated data collection period is from 10/3/2018 to 10/25/2018.

If data collection extends beyond this period, please submit an Amendment to an Approved Protocol form detailing the new data collection period and the reason for the change.

This Level 1 approval is valid until 10/10/2019.

If data collection and analysis extends beyond this date, the research project must be reviewed as a continuation project by the IRB prior to the end of the approval period, 10/10/2019. You must reapply for IRB approval by submitting a Project Update and Closure form (available at murraystate.edu/irb). You must allow ample time for IRB processing and decision prior to your expiration date, or your research must stop until such time that IRB approval is received. If the research project is completed by the end of the approval period, then a Project Update and Closure form must be submitted for IRB review so that your protocol may be closed. It is your responsibility to submit the appropriate paperwork in a timely manner.

The protocol is approved. You may begin data collection now.

Opportunity

Murray State University
College of Education and Human Services
Online Research Participation Consent

Study Title: THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY ENGAGMENT AND PARENTAL INVOLVMENT IN THE STATE FUNDED PRESCHOOLS OF WESTERN KENTUCKY AND KINDERGARTEN READINESS

Primary Investigator: Kammie King. Faculty Supervisor: Samir Patel 3218 Alexander Hall, Murray, KY 42071. Phone: 270-809-6123. Email: spatel4@murraystate.edu

You are being invited to participate in an online research study conducted through Murray State University. This document contains information you will need to help you decide whether to be in this research study or not. You must be at least 18 years old to participate. Please read the form carefully and ask the study team member(s) questions about anything that is not clear. You should print a copy of this document for your records.

1. **Nature and Purpose of Project:** The purpose of this study is to gain understanding of family engagement among preschool and kindergarten families in western Kentucky in order to fulfill graduation requirements of the dissertation component.
2. **Participant Selection:** You are being asked to participate because you currently have a child who is enrolled in kindergarten in Western Kentucky.
3. **Explanation of Procedures:** For you to participate in this study, you will need to complete the survey and questionnaire either on line or paper based (provided behind this letter). Once you have answered the questions of both the survey and the questionnaire your participation will be completed.
   The study activities include the Family Engagement Survey and the Parent and teacher Involvement Questionnaire. It should take you approximately fifteen minutes to complete the online or paper based survey and questionnaire.
4. **Discomforts and Risks:** There are no known risk and/or discomforts for participants. All information if confidential, and no identifying information will be collected by the researcher.
   All responses from online participants will be treated confidentially and stored on a secure server. However, I am unable to guarantee the security of the computer or smart device on which you choose to enter your responses. Information (or data) you enter, and websites you visit online can be tracked, captured, corrupted, lost, or otherwise misused.
5. **Benefits:** This study is not designed to benefit you directly. However, your participation may help to increase our understanding of the role of parent involvement and family engagement during the preschool and kindergarten year and how this engagement and involvement affects not only kindergarten readiness, but the overall trajectory of a child's educational career.
6. **Confidentiality:** Your participation in this study is anonymous. Neither the researcher(s) nor anyone else will know if you have participated or how you responded.
7. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Your participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw/stop participating at any time with absolutely no penalty.
8. **Contact Information:** Any questions about the procedures or conduct of this research should be brought to the attention of Kammie King at 270-797-3811 or kjackson18@murraystate.edu

Your response submission; Clicking the link below or returning the paper based forms to your child's school indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study.

Family Engagement Survey
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/QYDJ726

Parent and teacher Involvement Questionnaire
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/QBQLJQR

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Murray State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the MSU IRB Coordinator at (270) 809-2916 or msu.irb@murraystate.edu

APPENDIX B
FAMILY ENGAGMENT SURVEY

1. Did your child attend preschool? YES NO
   If so was the preschool…
   a. State funded
   b. Head Start
   c. Private (such as church preschool or private individual)

2. What is your age?
   18 -24 years old
   25-34 years old
   35-44 years old
   45-54 years old
   55 and older

3. What is your current marital Status?
   Single
   Married, or in a domestic partnership
   Widowed
   Divorced
   Separated

4. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin? Yes NO

How would you best describe yourself?
   American Indian or Alaska Native
   Asian
   Black or African American
   Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   White

5. Gender? _____

6. When your read to your child do you …

	Yes	No
a. Have the child tell you what is in a picture?		
b. Stop reading and point out letters?		
c. Talk about the story and what happened when the book is done?		

7. In the past week, has anyone in your family done the following things with your child?

	YES	NO
a. Told him/her a story?		
b. Taught him/her letters, words, or numbers?		
c. Taught the child simple songs?		
d. Did arts and crafts, for example coloring, painting, or using clay?		
e. Played sports, active games, or exercised together?		
f. Played board games or did puzzles?		

8. In the past week, has anyone in your family done the following things with your child?

	YES	NO
a. Visited a library?		
b. Visited a bookstore?		
c. Gone to a play or concert?		
d. Visited an art gallery or museum?		
e. Attended a sporting event?		
f. Attended a community-sponsored event		
g. Visited a zoo or aquarium?		

9. In the past week has anyone in your family done the following things with your child?

	YES	NO
a. Counted by rote (1,2,3,4…) with your child?		
b. Counted objects?		
c. Practiced shape identification?		

10. How many hours per week do spend watching television or movies with your child?

0-4 hours
5-8 hours
9-12 hours
13 plus hours

11. In the past week has anyone in your family done the following with your child?

	YES	NO
a. Practiced writing numbers?		
b. Practiced writing the child's name?		
c. Practiced writing letters?		
d. Practiced drawing shapes?		

12. In the past week how much alone screen time (TV, tablet, computer, or other electronic device has your child had?

0-4 hours
5-8 hours
9-12 hours
13 plus hours

13. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? (If you're currently enrolled in school, please indicate the highest degree you have received.)

Less than a high school diploma
High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)
Some college, no degree
Associate degree (e.g. AA, AS)
Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS)
Master's degree (e.g. MA, MS, MEd)
Professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, DVM)
Doctorate (e.g. PhD, EdD)

14. What is your current household income?

less than $20,000
$20,000 to $34,999
$35,000 to $49,999
$50,000 to $74,999
$75,000 to $99,999
Over $100,000

APPENDIX C
PARENT TEACHER INOVOLVMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

FAST TRACK PROJECT

USE NO. 2 PENCIL ONLY

• Use a NO. 2 PENCIL only. • Do not use ink or ballpoint pen. • Darken in the oval completely.
• Erase cleanly any marks you wish to change. • Do not make any stray marks on this form.

Mark Reflex® by NCS EM-160160:65432 AED08 Printed in U.S.A.

Parent and Teacher Involvement Questionnaire - Grade 4+

You are your child's first and most important teacher. When your child goes to school, teachers become important to him/her. You and the teachers can work together to help your child do well in school. So, we would like some information about your relationship with your child's school teacher and your involvement in your child's school life.

Please indicate the number that best completes each statement:

	More Than Once Per Week	Almost Every Week	Almost Every Month	Once or Twice a Year	Never	Not Applicable
1. In the past year, you have called your child's teacher.						NA
2. In the past year, your child's teacher has called you.						NA
3. In the past year, you have written your child's teacher.						NA
4. In the past year, your child's teacher has written you.						NA
5. In the past year, you stopped by to talk to your child's teacher.						NA
6. In the past year, you have been invited to your child's school for a special event (such as a book fair).						NA
7. In the past year, you have visited your child's school for a special event (such as a book fair).						NA
8. In the past year, you have been invited to attend a parent-teacher conference.						NA
9. In the past year, you have attended a parent-teacher conference.						NA
10. In the past year, you have attended PTA meetings.						NA

	A Great Deal	A Lot	Some	A Little	Not At All	Not Applicable
11. You feel welcome to visit your child's school.						NA
12. You enjoy talking with your child's teacher.						NA
13. You feel your child's teacher cares about your child.						NA
14. You think your child's teacher is interested in getting to know you.						NA

	A Great Deal	A Lot	Some	A Little	Not At All	Not Applicable
15. You feel comfortable talking with your child's teacher about your child.						NA
16. You feel your child's teacher pays attention to your suggestions.						NA
17. You ask your child's teacher questions or make suggestions about your child.						NA
18. You send things to class like story books and other things.						NA
19. You help your child at home with subjects that he/she is having difficulty with.						NA
20. You take your child to the library.						NA
21. You make sure that your child gets his/her homework done.						NA
22. You volunteer at your child's school.						NA

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
23. Your child's school is a good place for your child to be.						NA
24. The staff at your child's school is doing good things for your child.						NA
25. You have confidence in the people at your child's school.						NA
26. Your child's school is doing a good job of preparing children for their futures.						NA

– FOR OFFICE USE ONLY –

CODE

A. Cohort Number (1=1st, 2=2nd, 3=3rd)
B. Site (0=NC, 1=TN, 2=WA and 3=PA)
C.-F. Child's ID
G. Year of Participation in Study (1=1st, 2=2nd, etc.)

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
0	0	0	0	0		
1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3
		4	4	4	4	4
		5	5	5	5	5
		6	6	6	6	6
		7	7	7	7	7
		8	8	8	8	8
		9	9	9	9	9

CODE

A. Respondent: 0=relative other than parent or grandparent
1=biological mother
2=biological father
3=stepmother
4=stepfather
5=grandmother
6=grandfather
7=unrelated guardian
8=adoptive mother
9=adoptive father
B.-C. Interviewer ID Number

A	B	C
0	0	0
1	1	1
2	2	2
3	3	3
4	4	4
5	5	5
6	6	6
7	7	7
8	8	8
9	9	9