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A Study of Parental Satisfaction in the First Year of a Full-Day Kindergarten Program

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A STUDY OF PARENTAL SATISFACTION IN THE FIRST YEAR OF
A FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

Ed. S. Field Project

Presented to the

Department of Educational Administration

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Educational Specialist

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Kevin Elwood

May 2002

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ED. S. FIELD PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Educational Specialist,
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The education of 5-year-old children will always be a perplexing issue among parents, teachers, and administrators within the educational community. For many decades, the adults involved in the education of our kindergarten age children have debated the best methodology to use with these unique students.

History reveals that kindergarten programs have traditionally been structured in a half-day setting. However, in recent years, the trend is shifting from providing a half-day kindergarten program to a program designed to utilize each minute of an entire school day. According to the Iowa Department of Education's annual report (2000) only 25% of Iowa schools offered a full-day kindergarten program during the 1985 school year. Whereas, 15 years later, 81% of the public schools in Iowa are currently offering a full-day kindergarten program.

With the trends in early childhood education leaning toward providing full-day experiences, one must question whether this opportunity is for the improvement of the child or convenience of the parent. The literature suggests that those opposing a full-day program believe that it is being imposed only for the benefit of the parents, not the children. However, I wondered if parents in my local district saw added educational benefits and opportunities in addition to the convenience provided for parents.

In the Treynor Community School District in Treynor, Iowa, 2000 – 2001 was the first year of implementing a full-day kindergarten program. Therefore, at the

conclusion of that school year, I surveyed the parents of the kindergarten class in order to determine if they were satisfied with the performance of our full-day program.

By surveying the parents, I gathered feedback for the educational staff, administration, board of education, and community, as to parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program in the Treynor Community School District. By reviewing this data, I was able to obtain the parents' current level of satisfaction with the new kindergarten program.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this survey study was to determine the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program. Parents of the kindergarten students in the 2000-2001 kindergarten class were surveyed to identify their level of satisfaction. Respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction on a 5-point Likert scale. A response of "very satisfied" indicated that the expectation of the parent in relation to their child's educational needs was fulfilled. A response of "very unsatisfied" indicated that the expectation of the parent in relation to their child's educational needs was not fulfilled. The academic areas examined were: letter recognition, sound recognition, number identification, sight words, socialization, following instructions, preparation for first grade, enthusiasm for learning, independence, respect for others, and satisfaction with teachers.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study.

1. What is the level of parental satisfaction in the first year of a full-day kindergarten program?
2. Does a student's prior preschool experience impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program?
3. Does kindergarten entry age impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program?
4. Does a student's gender impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program?
5. Is a parent's level of satisfaction impacted by having a child who participated in the half-day kindergarten program?
6. What themes emerged from parental comments about full-day kindergarten?

Definition of Terms

Kindergarten: An educational program within the public school setting that is structured to provide a developmentally appropriate education for children in the 5-to 6-year-old age ranges in order to homogenize the student body.

Full-day kindergarten: A kindergarten program that is typically in session each day for 4 to 8 hours.

Half-day kindergarten: A kindergarten program that is typically in session each day for 2 ½ to 3 hours.

Developmentally appropriate: An educational practice that requires the activities and materials used with children to be age appropriate and take into account individual needs (Gullo, 1990).

Preschool: An education experience that is structured to provide students in the 3-to 5-year-old age range with social and academic encounters. These programs are traditionally established outside of the public school setting. The students gather for 2 ½ to 3 hours per session, which range from 1 to 5 days per week.

Satisfaction: The extent to which expectations of the parent are met in relation to their child's educational needs.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the first group of families who participated in the full-day kindergarten program at Treynor Elementary School. Therefore, input from other sources was not examined at this time.

The study was conducted to gather satisfaction opinions from parents at Treynor Elementary School. Hence, it is unacceptable for others to make comparisons about the success of their full-day kindergarten programs by perusing the data that I have collected. However, others should be able to easily replicate this study to gather local information for the evaluation of their full-day kindergarten program.

Significance of the Study

Kindergarten education has undergone dramatic change in the United States during the past 30 years. The most significant change in early childhood education is that of switching from a half-day to a full-day kindergarten (Elicker & Mathur, 1997).

Therefore, the significance of this study was to establish the level of parental satisfaction for those who have experienced this program change. By gathering this information, parents, community members, teachers, school administrators and board members were able to determine parental satisfaction after the implementation of the full-day kindergarten program.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The literature review for this study will be presented using the following format. First, a review of the history and philosophy of preschool and kindergarten programs will be presented. In order to determine the success of the current kindergarten program, it is important to understand the trends that have taken place in preschool and kindergarten programs. Second, the literature as it relates to half-day and full-day kindergarten programs will be discussed. The literature will examine the idea that the original framework for a kindergarten program was that of a half-day; however, the full-day program is rapidly growing in popularity. Third, parental attitudes and expectations will be identified in relationship to a successful kindergarten program.

Preschool History and Philosophy

The National Association for the Education of Young Children defines preschool as a program offered to 4- and 5-year-olds, that is, the years prior to kindergarten or first grade (Bickel, 1991). Preschool programs in public schools have been developed with the belief that low-income children need a strong early childhood development experience as a foundation for later learning (Blank & Reisman, 1989).

According to Bickel (1991) many pieces of federal legislation, during the past 30 years, have been responsible for the inclusion of preschool programs into the public school setting. Bickel (1991) identified the important pieces of federal legislation that helped set the groundwork for preschool programs as being:

- in 1963, Public Law 88-156 provided prenatal care to disadvantaged mothers to prevent mental retardation;
- in 1964, Head Start was developed to provide comprehensive services to preschool-aged children from low-income homes;
- in 1965, Public Law 89-313 provided funding to state-operated schools and institutions for the handicapped;
- in 1967, Public Law 90-248 established programs to screen, diagnose, and treat low-income infants and children for a variety of medical and developmental disorders;
- in 1972, Public Law 92-924 mandated that 10% of the Head Start population must be identified as handicapped;
- in 1975, Public Law 94-142 created the Preschool Incentive Grant, which provided funds to states to extend all the rights under 94-142 to children aged 3 to 5;
- in 1986, Public Law 99-457 increased federal funds to the states for two new programs, one for infants through age 2 and another for 3- to 5-year-olds.

As society moved into the 1970s, the “diminishing mothers” factor began to appear. That is, as mothers pursue careers or work out of necessity, other institutions or individuals have taken on what used to be the mother’s role (Gullo, 1990). Due to this trend, preschool enrollments grew 81% between 1970 and 1980, and 25% from 1980 to 1985 (Gullo, 1990). However, even with many federal programs available, in 1985, fewer than 33% of 4-year-olds with family incomes below \$10,000 per year

were enrolled in preschool programs. In contrast, 67% of 4-year-olds from families with incomes of \$35,000 per year or more attended preschool (Blank & Reisman, 1989). In Iowa, preschool enrollment has increased by more than 47% from 1996 to 2000 (“The annual condition,” 2000).

Kindergarten History and Philosophy

When searching for a common kindergarten philosophy, one receives many different answers depending on the background and experience of the individual being consulted. However, about 6 of every 10 teachers characterize the focus of their kindergarten program as “preparation with a focus on academic learning and social readiness for later schooling” (“Kindergarten Programs,” 1986).

According to Olsen and Zigler (1989), the first kindergarten program in the United States was established more than 140 years ago. The program was based on the views of Frederick Froebel, who saw kindergarten education as being necessary to develop and emphasize self-directed activities that foster a child’s innate curiosity and sense of social responsibility.

In the 19th century, public schools were used to educate and to form good moral character in poor children, who were believed to be lacking in those areas. Children from wealthier families were tutored at home or sent to private schools (Bloch, Seidlinger, & Seward, 1989). According to Bloch et al. (1989) in 1817, laws in Boston guaranteed publicly funded primary schools for children who were 4 to 6 years old. New York and Pennsylvania established similar laws in 1831 and 1838 in order to develop their primary programs. However, by 1840 primary programs began

to decline in popularity and by 1870 they had all but disappeared. The beliefs of the elite and educational reformers were that the proper place for young children to be educated was at home.

Around 1873, kindergarten programs began to evolve and from 1900 to 1930 there was an enormous amount of public support for these programs. Many reasons were cited for the change of attitude about the need for kindergarten programs, such as, social and educational reform; early education for poor children; and the concern to develop a more professional and scientific approach to kindergarten (Bloch et al., 1989; Olsen & Zigler, 1989).

Unfortunately, the public school funding cuts that developed during the depression era of the 1930s led to the closing of most kindergarten programs. The depression brought about a decline in the push for educating our children who are the thirstiest for knowledge. However, by the 1940s, the evolution of the nursery school, the popularity of preschool education, and the post-World War II baby boom era led to increased enrollments in kindergarten programs.

In summary, I believe the history and philosophy of the kindergarten program has changed to fit the needs of society and to reflect the large-scale issues that are transpiring within society during each decade. As the trends of society have shifted, so has the importance placed upon the amount of funding and public support for the kindergarten program. According to Olsen and Zigler (1989), over the past 2 decades, there has been considerable erosion of the concern with the young child's overall development and an increased emphasis on school readiness and acquisition of

specific academic skills. Due to this, kindergarten is no longer the child's introduction to school, but part of a continuum of early childhood education that begins with preschool and progresses through the primary grades.

Half-Day Kindergarten

In the 1960s and 1970s the concept of publicly funded kindergarten education began to take a stronghold in the United States. The primary arrangement for these ever-popular programs was a half-day structure. According to Elicker and Mathur (1997), most kindergartens were half-day programs, 2 ½ to 3 hours per day, modeled after traditional private nursery schools. Curriculum goals typically emphasized play, socialization, and easing the transition from home to school.

Compulsory attendance for kindergarten age students was never mandated as the kindergarten movement continued to grow. Kindergarten age students in the state of Iowa are still not required to attend school. However, kindergarten attendance is mandatory in seven states and the District of Columbia (Karweit, 1992). As states continue to move toward mandatory kindergarten attendance, a shift away from half-day kindergarten programs continues to increase (Natale, 2001).

For the past 30 years, half-day kindergarten programs have been the norm in the United States. In 1992, the majority of kindergarten children (58%) participated in a half-day program (Karweit, 1992). However, across the United States and in the state of Iowa, the movement away from the half-day kindergarten program is quickly increasing. The Iowa Department of Education's Annual Report (2000) documents the state's declining half-day kindergarten programs:

Percent of Iowa School Districts Offering Half-Day Kindergarten

Year	Percent of Districts
1985-1986	75%
1989-1990	63%
1992-1993	48%
1995-1996	33%
1997-1998	26%
1999-2000	19%

Increasing interest in compensatory programs and the need for childcare have led to a steady decline in the number of half-day programs (Karweit, 1992). The next section of the literature review will examine the full-day kindergarten trend and the reasons why parents and educators are so quick to abandon the half-day philosophy and quickly move their support to the new philosophy of providing full-day kindergarten experiences for our youngest students.

Full-Day Kindergarten

The full-day kindergarten movement has grown rapidly during the last 20 years due to changes in society and education. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 55% of the 4 million children enrolled in kindergarten in the fall of 1998 attended full-day programs. At the beginning of the 2000 school year, 15 states required their school districts to offer full-day kindergarten programs (Natale, 2001). The Iowa Department of Education's annual report (2000) indicates that 81% of Iowa public schools are offering full-day kindergarten programs. As full-day kindergarten

programs continue to escalate during the last 5 years, the trend in kindergarten education is to focus more on academics rather than socialization (Natale, 2001).

Full-day kindergarten programs are becoming popular for a variety of reasons. Damian (1997) states that the growth of full-day kindergarten since the 1990s is based on 3 key factors: complex family lives, academic pressures on the kindergarten curriculum, and the resulting mismatch with the developmentally appropriate practice philosophy. Due to time limitations in the half-day setting, students are often quickly pushed through activities rather than allowing them to develop at their own rate. Also, full-day programs eliminate the need to provide buses and crossing guards at mid-day (Rothenberg, 1995). In addition, these programs better accommodate families with two employed parents, they give teachers the luxury of having more time to teach, and they provide an educational pace that is much more relaxed for the students (Natale, 2001).

Full-day kindergarten programs do have a few drawbacks. Puleo (1986) states that fatigue may be one of the biggest factors in a full-day program. Other worries are that these longer programs stress kids, squelch their creativity and natural inquisitiveness, and simply expect too much too soon (Natale, 2001). In addition, Anderson (1985) identifies some concerns of parents as being:

- young children need more time at home for nurturing;
- children would be too tired as a result of staying all day;
- half-day kindergarten allows a child to become accustomed to school gradually;

- children benefit from unstructured time at home.

In order to achieve success in a full-day kindergarten setting, the program should be structured to allow children and teachers time to explore topics in depth; reduce the amount of transition time versus the amount of class time; provide for greater continuity of day-to-day activities; and provide an environment that favors a child-centered, developmentally appropriate approach (Rothenberg, 1995). According to Rothenberg (1995), a full-day kindergarten program using developmentally appropriate practices should show evidence of the following characteristics:

- use mixed-age and mixed-ability groups in order to integrate new learning with past experiences;
- emphasize language development and age appropriate preliteracy activities;
- offer a balance of small group, large group, and individual activities;
- involve children in first-hand experience and informal interaction with objects, other children, and adults;
- work with parents to completely understand the child and foster positive parent and teacher roles;
- assess students' progress with the use of close teacher observations and systematic collection of student work, usually using portfolios;
- develop children's social skills, including conflict resolution strategies.

Research studies confirm that attendance in full-day kindergarten results in academic and social benefits for students, at least in the primary grades (Rothenberg, 1995). According to Cryan, Hedden, Sheehan, and Weichel (1992), the most

significant gains are shown by students who are considered at-risk or who are living in below poverty households. However, students coming from economically stable, middle-class families, are still showing academic and developmental advantages from participating in a full-day program. Cryan, et al. (1992) found that full-day kindergartners exhibited more independent learning, classroom involvement, productivity in work with peers, and reflectiveness than half-day kindergartners. They also were more likely to approach the teacher and they expressed less withdrawal, anger, shyness, and blaming behavior than their half-day counterparts.

As society continues to change during the 21st century, the full-day kindergarten trend continues to expand at a rapid pace. Both staff and parent reaction to full-day kindergarten is favorable. According to Puleo (1986) staff accounts are “overwhelmingly positive” and “enthusiastic”. Similarly, in parent surveys requesting a choice between full-day and half-day programs, parents typically favor full-day programs by 90%.

Parental Attitudes

In order to determine the success of a program one must take into account many perspectives during an evaluation. One such perspective should be the satisfaction level of the consumer. In the case of full-day kindergarten, the child's parents are the consumers. In all program evaluations the researcher will encounter radical opinions on both ends of the continuum; however, by gathering a random sample of parents' views one should be able to get a general feeling concerning the parents' level of satisfaction.

In research conducted by Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (1999) parents identified several components they felt helped their child have a successful kindergarten experience. The components consisted of: ongoing communication between school and family about the child's needs, child and parent familiarity with school prior to the start of kindergarten, preschool or child care experience, and agreed-upon standards for performance and behavior.

Towers (1991) found that attitudes toward full-day kindergarten varied immensely. When asked if they were "generally satisfied" with the program, over half the parents "strongly agreed" and 85% overall said they were satisfied. When asked if their children were better prepared to begin first grade, 83% of the parents felt that they were. Some of the general feelings expressed by parents were:

- When we enrolled our daughter in all-day, everyday kindergarten last year, I was uncertain about the program, but after seeing her grow to love school and observing how this program has helped prepare her for first grade, I'm now strongly in favor of it.
- The daily continuity is the best aspect.
- Learning was more relaxed when given a full-day to accomplish the tasks traditionally squeezed into a half-day schedule.
- My son was always tired when he came home from school.
- With so many working parents, I believe that it has become just a cheap baby-sitter. (Towers, 1991, pp. 25-26)

Summary

As we enter a new millennium, the push toward full-day, everyday kindergarten has overtaken the traditional half-day kindergarten approach. Kindergarten programs are slowly adding more academic components in order to meet the demands placed on educators for increasing test scores and being accountable for state standards. Hopefully, by adding additional time into the kindergarten day, we can still provide the needed time for our youngest learners to socialize and develop at an appropriate rate, while also providing challenging curricula for those who are developmentally ready to focus on additional academic skills.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of parental satisfaction in the first year of a full-day kindergarten program. This chapter will identify the methods used in order to accomplish the study. The areas that were reviewed are: research design, sample, format for data collection, instruments used, research questions and data analysis.

Research Design

In order to determine parental satisfaction after a program change, a satisfaction survey was utilized as a means to gather the needed data. After reviewing the current educational tests and surveys, which have been conducted over the years, I was unable to locate an existing survey that met the data collection needs of this study. Therefore, a survey was developed and piloted in order to determine its reliability and validity.

Sample

The Treynor Elementary class of 2000 – 2001 had an enrollment of 47 students. In order to identify parental satisfaction, 47 surveys were mailed, one to each student's family. Parents / guardians residing within the family structure were asked to complete only one survey per child.

As a component of the survey, demographic information was collected to help disaggregate the data. The demographic information collected was:

- Gender of the individual completing the survey
- Gender of the kindergarten student
- Age of the kindergarten student when school began
- Kindergarten students' prior preschool experiences
- Number of children the parent has that experienced the half-day kindergarten program

Data Collection

The study was conducted in a small, rural community in southwest Iowa. The community is located 10 miles from a large metropolitan area. The school district has a K-12 enrollment of 575 students with approximately 45 students per grade. The free and reduced lunch rate for the district is 10 percent. Therefore, the socioeconomic status of most families participating in the study ranges from the middle to upper middle class. The population is comprised of 47 Caucasian families that all speak English as their primary language.

The sample being utilized is a non-probability sample. The 2000-2001 school year was the first year of a new kindergarten program and the purpose of the study was to determine parental satisfaction with the new program. Therefore, the study was limited to those families who were involved in the program at that time.

In order to collect the data for this study, the surveys were mailed to each of the 47 families within the population. The parents were asked to return the survey within 7 days using an enclosed stamped envelope. Each envelope was coded to identify who had returned the survey. Next, a follow-up mailing was sent as a

reminder to those families who had not yet returned their survey. A wait period of 7 days was given and then followed up with a personal phone call. With such a small number of parents able to participate in the study, I established a goal of getting an 85% return rate, approximately 40 of the 47 surveys.

Instrument

After reviewing the current literature on kindergarten programs and developmental practices, it was determined that an existing survey was not available that would serve the purpose of this study. Therefore, the author designed the survey for this study with input from 2 kindergarten teachers.

The survey consisted of 19 questions developed to gather information pertaining to demographics, parental satisfaction and open-ended input (see Parent Satisfaction Survey). The first 5 survey questions gathered demographic information. They pertained to the gender of the parent and child and entry age and educational experience of the child. Questions 6, 7, and 8 were open-ended questions that allowed the parent to respond to what they liked and disliked about the full-day kindergarten program and how the full-day program impacted their family life. Questions 9 through 19 were written to determine the parent's level of satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program. The parent was asked to answer each question using a 5-point Likert response scale with "5" being very satisfied and "1" being very unsatisfied.

The content validity of the survey was determined with the assistance of 5 adult reviewers. The survey was given to each of the reviewers and they were asked

to rate each question from 1 to 3 with a “1” identifying the question as confusing and a “3” identifying the question as easily understood. Any question that did not receive a score of 2 or higher was eliminated from the survey.

Research Questions

The parent satisfaction survey was administered with the purpose of answering the following research questions:

1. What is the level of parental satisfaction in the first year of a full-day kindergarten program?
2. Does a student’s prior preschool experience impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program?
3. Does kindergarten entry age impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program?
4. Does a student’s gender impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program?
5. Is a parent’s level of satisfaction impacted by having a child who participated in the half-day kindergarten program?
6. What themes emerged from parental comments about full-day kindergarten?

Data Analysis

The following descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data that were collected from the survey:

- Question 1 was analyzed by computing the percentage of parents that fell within each satisfaction level on questions 9-19 of the survey.
- Question 2 was analyzed by using a one-way ANOVA test to compare parental responses on question 19 to the prior preschool experience of their child.
- Question 3 was analyzed by using a one-way ANOVA test to compare parental responses on question 19 to the kindergarten entry age of their child.
- Question 4 was analyzed by using a t-test to compare parental responses on question 19 to the gender of their child.
- Question 5 was analyzed by using a t-test to compare parental responses on question 19 to whether or not they had a child that participated in the half-day kindergarten program.
- Question 6 was analyzed by cross-referencing parental comments to determine common words or themes that appeared.

CHAPTER 4

Survey Results

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of parental satisfaction in the first year of a full-day kindergarten program. This chapter will review the research questions that were developed, depict the type of respondents who completed the survey and examine the data that were collected.

The research questions presented were:

1. What is the level of parental satisfaction in the first year of a full-day kindergarten program?
2. Does a student's prior preschool experience impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program?
3. Does kindergarten entry age impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program?
4. Does a student's gender impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program?
5. Is a parent's level of satisfaction impacted by having a child who participated in the half-day kindergarten program?
6. What themes emerged from parental comments about full-day kindergarten?

Of the 47 surveys disseminated, 35 were completed and returned. This yielded a return rate of 75%. Of the 35 respondents, there were 4 male and 31 females. When

the respondents were asked how many children they previously had go through a half-day kindergarten program, 48.6% had none, 45.7% had one and 5.7% had two.

Therefore, about half of the respondents have had children participate in a half-day kindergarten program, and this was the first kindergarten experience for the other half of the respondents.

Research Question One

In order to determine the level of parental satisfaction in the first year of a full-day kindergarten program, percentages were calculated for questions 9-19 of the survey. Parents were asked to determine if they were very satisfied, satisfied, neither, unsatisfied, or very unsatisfied for each of the questions presented. The results are presented in Table 1.

Research Question Two

Does a student's prior preschool experience impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program? In order to answer this question, a one-way ANOVA test was used to compare parental responses on questions 5 and 19 of the survey. The data indicated that prior preschool experience does not yield a higher level of parental satisfaction ($F(4, 30) = 1.036, p = .405$). The results are presented in Table 2.

Research Question Three

Does kindergarten entry age impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program? In order to answer this question a one-way ANOVA test was used to compare parental responses on questions 4 and 19 of the

Table 1

Parental Satisfaction Responses for Survey Questions 9-19

Survey Question	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied
9. The progress your child has made in the area of letter recognition.	65.7%	28.6%	5.7%	0.0%	0.0%
10. The progress your child has made in the area of associating sounds with each letter.	54.3%	40.0%	2.9%	2.9%	0.0%
11. The progress your child has made in number identification.	62.9%	37.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
12. The progress your child has made in reading the kindergarten vocabulary words.	51.4%	37.1%	2.9%	5.7%	2.9%
13. The progress your child has made in the area of socializing appropriately with other children.	40.0%	57.1%	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%
14. The progress your child has made in the area of following instructions.	42.9%	54.3%	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%
15. The progress your child has made in the area of working independently.	51.4%	45.7%	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%
16. The progress your child has made in the area of preparation for first grade.	57.1%	34.3%	5.7%	2.9%	0.0%
17. The teacher's ability to foster your child's enthusiasm for learning.	65.7%	25.7%	2.9%	5.7%	0.0%
18. Your level of satisfaction with the classroom teacher.	62.9%	25.7%	2.9%	5.7%	2.9%
19. Overall satisfaction with the full-day program.	57.1%	34.3%	8.6%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 2

Prior Preschool Experience Compared to No Preschool Experience

Preschool Experience	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
0.0	13	4.38	.77
0.5	01	4.00	.00
1.0	13	4.38	.65
2.0	05	4.80	.45
3.0	03	5.00	.00
Total	35	4.49	.66

survey. The data indicated that parental satisfaction is not impacted by the entry age of their child ($F(2, 32) = 1.956, p = .158$). The results are presented in Table 3. The 3 entry age categories on Table 3 were broken down as follows: Group 1 was students in the 5 to 5 ½ age range. Group 2 was students in the 5 ½ to 6-age range. Group 3 was students 6 years old or older when they entered school.

Research Question Four

Does a student's gender impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program? The respondents of the survey were representative of 17 male and 18 female students from the kindergarten class. An independent t-test was used to compare parental responses on question 19 of the survey to the gender of their child. In addition, the mean rankings for each of the respondent groups, clustered by student gender, were calculated using a scale of 1 being very unsatisfied and 5 being very satisfied. There was no significant difference between male ($M=4.65, SD=.61$) and female ($M=4.33, SD=.69$) mean scores when comparing their parents' level of satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program ($t(33) = 1.43, p = .162$).

Research Question Five

Is a parent's level of satisfaction impacted by having another child who previously participated in a half-day kindergarten program? Again, an independent t-test was used to compare parental responses on question 19 of the survey when scores were aggregated for clusters who previously had a child who participated in a half-day kindergarten program as compared to those who had not. These numbers were almost evenly split, with 17 respondents indicating they did not have any children who

Table 3

Kindergarten Entry Age Compared to Parental Satisfaction

Kindergarten Entry Age	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.0	14	4.29	.47
2.0	17	4.71	.69
3.0	04	4.25	.96
Total	35	4.49	.66

attended the half-day program and 18 respondents indicating that they did. The means of these two groups were calculated. There was no significant difference between not having children participate in the half-day program ($M=4.65, SD=.49$) and having children who participated in a half-day program ($M=4.33, SD=.77$) and their parents level of satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program ($t(33) = 1.43, p = .162$).

Research Question Six

Three open-ended questions were asked of the respondents in order to engage them in thinking about:

- how full-day kindergarten has impacted their family life
- the aspects of a full-day kindergarten that should be continued
- the aspects of a full-day kindergarten that should be changed

After listing all of the comments under each category, I was able to identify themes and common thoughts that emerged from the respondents' comments.

More than half of the respondents indicated that managing their family life has been made easier and less hectic by having all of their children on similar schedules. When a half-day kindergarten program was being utilized, families were forced to make mid-day transportation arrangements and additional daycare arrangements that are no longer needed with a full-day kindergarten program. One parent wrote, "it is easier to plan our daily routine and my child is in a structured learning environment, rather than daycare." In addition, the respondents felt their children were ready for a full-day program and the academic challenges that it provides.

Of the 35 surveys returned, 25 individuals made positive comments about various aspects of the kindergarten program. The other 10 respondents did not answer this question. 60% of the respondents indicated they were delighted with the entire full-day program. Some of the comments were:

- “class size was appropriate”
- “rest time was beneficial”
- “children were pushed academically”
- “phonics, numbers and letters were covered thoroughly”

When examining the idea of change, one central theme seemed to consistently appear. Of the parents that responded to this question, 50% were concerned about the structure of the 3 classrooms. They did not like the idea of 1 teacher being half time and some students being required to move between 2 teachers throughout the day. In addition, other comments suggested that the program needed:

- “more exposure to computers”
- “the use of a mat or blanket during rest time”
- “a transition period at the beginning of the year”
- “a stronger reading program for those that can already read”
- “a morning snack time”

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of parental satisfaction in the first year of a full-day kindergarten program. After engaging the community in an extensive study of the district's early childhood programs, the Treynor Community School's Board of Education made a decision to implement a full-day kindergarten program. In order to gauge the satisfaction of the parents at the conclusion of the first year, six research questions were developed to be studied. The following questions were used to guide the study:

1. What is the level of parental satisfaction in the first year of a full-day kindergarten program?
2. Does a student's prior preschool experience impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program?
3. Does kindergarten entry age impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program?
4. Does a student's gender impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program?
5. Is a parent's level of satisfaction impacted by having a child who participated in the half-day kindergarten program?
6. What themes emerged from parental comments about full-day kindergarten?

In order to establish specific levels of parental satisfaction, a survey was developed using a 5-point Likert scale. Parents were asked to rate their satisfaction level using a response of “very satisfied” to indicate that the expectation of the parent in relation to their child’s educational needs was fulfilled. A response of “very unsatisfied” indicated that the expectation of the parent in relation to their child’s educational needs was not fulfilled.

The survey was distributed to the parents of all 47 students in the 2000 - 2001 Treynor Elementary kindergarten class. Of the 47 surveys distributed, 35 were collected, yielding a return rate of 75%.

Conclusions

As a result of analyzing the data that were collected, some specific conclusions were formulated. The conclusions that I have drawn from the study will be identified in the following sections.

Research Question One

The first question of the study entailed looking at 11 specific questions pertaining to the academics and structure of the full-day kindergarten program. In order to give a quick glimpse of the parents’ level of satisfaction for each of the items, I have combined the very satisfied, satisfied and neither responses into one percentage value. By creating this one value, I hope to generalize the percentage of parents that have no level of dissatisfaction relating to the particular item.

As Table 4 indicates, over 90% of the respondents were satisfied with every facet of our kindergarten program that was reviewed in the survey. The two areas that

Table 4

Combined Percent of Respondents Indicating Very Satisfied, Satisfied or Neither

Question and Content	Satisfaction Percent
9. Letter Recognition	100.0%
10. Letter / sound associations	97.1%
11. Number identification	100.0%
12. Kindergarten vocabulary words	91.4%
13. Socialization	100.0%
14. Following instructions	100.0%
15. Working independently	100.0%
16. Preparation for first grade	97.1%
17. Fostering enthusiasm for learning	94.3%
18. Satisfaction with teacher	91.4%
19. Overall satisfaction with program	100.0%

show the most room for improvement relate to kindergarten vocabulary words and level of satisfaction with the teachers. I was encouraged to see that 6 of the 11 items received 100% satisfaction levels from the respondents. Most importantly, the overall satisfaction level with the full-day program was 100%, indicating that the parents are overall pleased with full-day kindergarten program.

Research Question Two

This question examined the issue of whether or not prior preschool experience correlated with a higher level of parent satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program. The data indicated that there was no significant difference between satisfaction levels of parents regardless of the prior preschool experiences of their children. About 50% of each year's incoming kindergarten class have attended a preschool program. If preschool experience was a significant factor, we would need to consider restructuring the curriculum that we provide in order to address specific academic issues with those children who have participated in preschool compared to those children who have not.

Research Question Three

The focus of this question was to determine if a child's entry age impacts the parent's level of satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program. After comparing the students' entry age with the parents' responses, the answer is no, entry age does not impact a parent's level of satisfaction.

To examine this question in more detail, the 35 students were broken down into 3 categories depending on their age when they entered kindergarten (See Table 3).

Group 1 was in the 5 to 5 ½ age range. Group 2 was in the 5 ½ to 6-age range. Group 3 was 6 years old or older when they entered school. When a mean for the total group was computed it came out at 4.49 (4 being satisfied and 5 being very satisfied). Table 3 also points out the individual means for each of the 3 groups. When looking strictly at the satisfaction levels for each group it is very encouraging to see that all 3 groups feel very satisfied with the program regardless of the child's entry age.

Research Question Four

Does a student's gender impact the level of parental satisfaction with the full-day kindergarten program? The data show that gender does not impact parental satisfaction levels. The male group had a mean of 4.65, whereas the female group mean was 4.33. The parents of male students had a slightly higher mean; however, both groups were satisfied with the full-day program regardless of gender. The full-day kindergarten program appears to be addressing the needs of both the male and female students within this class.

Research Question Five

This question was designed to consider the notion of whether or not a parent's level of satisfaction was impacted by having a child who did or did not participate in the half-day kindergarten program. Surprisingly, the results of this independent t-test were very similar to those in question four. Parents who did not have any children who participated in the half-day kindergarten program produced a mean of 4.65. Whereas, parents who did have children who participated in the half-day kindergarten

program produced a mean of 4.33. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the parents' level of satisfaction.

Research Question Six

Parents were given an opportunity to respond to open-ended questions in order to provide suggestions for making change, maintaining the strengths of the program, and describing how this new kindergarten format impacted their family life. After analyzing the comments that appeared from the respondents, one significant theme was frequently mentioned. According to the parents, the most common area of concern needing to be addressed is the structure of the full-day program. Parents really want the consistency throughout the day of having just one teacher for their child. As plans are developed for future classes, this will be an important factor to take into consideration.

Discussion

It was interesting to review the results of the survey and examine how the parent's comments reaffirmed some of the earlier research presented in Chapter 2. Damian (1997) stated that the growth of the full-day program was based upon complex family lives, increased academic pressures on the kindergarten curriculum, and a lack of time in the half-day setting. In addition, Rothenberg (1995) indicated that full-day programs helped eliminate the need for mid-day busses and better accommodated families with two employed parents. When comparing the responses received from the survey, I noticed the parents were providing the same feedback that Damian and Rothenberg had reported.

Summary

The primary objective of this study was to determine the overall satisfaction level of parents after implementing the first year of a full-day kindergarten program. Then, I wanted to determine if different variables caused a parent's level of satisfaction to rise or fall. Finally, I sought to gather feedback from parents on what they viewed as the strengths and weaknesses of the full-day program.

The respondents provided clear data to answer the questions. They indicated overwhelmingly that they were satisfied with the majority of the aspects of the full-day kindergarten program. At the same time, they ruled out the ideas that a student's entry age, preschool experience, gender or families' prior experience with a half-day program significantly impacted a parent's level of satisfaction with the full-day program. Parent responses confirmed that families felt the full-day program made their lives easier by allowing all the children to be on the same schedule and avoiding a mid-day shuffle to the baby-sitters. Additionally, the parents were very pleased with the teachers and curriculum being used. Finally, over 50% of the parents stated that the one major change needed is the elimination of a part-time instructor and funding of only full-time kindergarten instructors.

Therefore, by completing this study, I have gathered feedback for the educational staff, administration, board of education and community that can be utilized to make appropriate changes to the full-day kindergarten program. By strengthening the identified weaknesses of the program and striving to keep all other

areas as “very satisfied” our district will be able to maintain a high level of satisfaction among the families that we serve.

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Parent Letter

Dear Parent,

Congratulations, your child has just made Treynor history! We have successfully completed the first year of our full-day kindergarten program. In order to continue offering a strong kindergarten program, I would like you to assist in evaluating the program by responding to the attached parent satisfaction survey.

The survey will only take a few minutes to complete and provides us with valuable information as we examine the first year of the program. Please leave your name off of the survey so that you can answer each item as freely as possible. Your responses will remain completely confidential through the use of an identification number on the postage-prepaid envelope. Once your survey is received, the envelope is destroyed, and your responses will be added to the database. The information provided by your answers will be carefully summarized into group data. This means that no person can be identified, and all information remains confidential. The summarized group data will be presented to the staff so that we may make any adjustments needed to improve the program.

Please be careful to fill out both sides of the survey. After you have completed the survey, please return it to me in the enclosed pre-stamped envelope within the next 7-10 days.

Thank you for your time and input! If you have any questions, please call me at 487-3422 or 525-1112.

Sincerely,

Kevin Elwood

PARENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

Full-Day Kindergarten Program

Demographic Information

The following questions pertain to the individual completing the survey:

1. Gender: (please circle one)
 - Male
 - Female
2. Number of your children who participated in the half-day kindergarten program:
 - 0 (please circle one)
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3 or more

The following questions pertain to your kindergarten child:

3. Gender: (please circle one)
 - Male
 - Female
4. Age when he/she started kindergarten: _____ years _____ months
5. Years of preschool experience: (please circle one)
 - No preschool
 - 1 year of preschool
 - 2 years of preschool
 - 3 years of preschool

Please feel free to write your response to questions 6 through 8.

6. In what ways has full-day kindergarten impacted your family life?
7. What aspects of the full-day program would you like to see continued?
8. What aspects of the full-day program would you like to see changed?

- 5 = Very Satisfied
 4 = Satisfied
 3 = Neither Satisfied nor Unsatisfied
 2 = Unsatisfied
 1 = Very Unsatisfied

For questions 9 through 19, indicate how satisfied you are with each area.

	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Unsatisfied</i>	<i>Very Unsatisfied</i>
9. The progress your child has made in the area of letter recognition.	5	4	3	2	1
10. The progress your child has made in the area of associating sounds with each letter.	5	4	3	2	1
11. The progress your child has made in number identification.	5	4	3	2	1
12. The progress your child has made in reading the kindergarten vocabulary words.	5	4	3	2	1
13. The progress your child has made in the area of socializing appropriately with other children.	5	4	3	2	1
14. The progress your child has made in the area of following instructions.	5	4	3	2	1
15. The progress your child has made in the area of working independently.	5	4	3	2	1
16. The progress your child has made in the area of preparation for first grade.	5	4	3	2	1
17. The teacher's ability to foster your child's enthusiasm for learning.	5	4	3	2	1
18. Your level of satisfaction with the classroom teacher.	5	4	3	2	1
19. Overall satisfaction with the full-day program.	5	4	3	2	1

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. Please return the survey in the pre-addressed envelope provided.



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June 26, 2001

Kevin Elwood
10453 290th St
Silver City, IA 51571

IRB#: 265-01-EX

TITLE OF PROTOCOL: A Survey of Parental Satisfaction in the First Year of a Full-Day Kindergarten Program

Dear Mr. Elwood:

The IRB has reviewed your Exemption Form for the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 2. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines. It is also understood that the IRB will be immediately notified of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project.

Please be advised that the IRB has a maximum protocol approval period of three years from the original date of approval and release. If this study continues beyond the three year approval period, the project must be resubmitted in order to maintain an active approval status.

Sincerely,

Ernest D. Prentice, PhD/MDK

Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, IRB

gdk