



## **Influences of Family Resource Program Participation on Elementary School Achievement**

Carl J. Dunst  
Jill Ardley  
Donna Bollinger

*CASEinPoint*, 2006  
Volume 2, Number 8

*CASEinPoint* is an electronic publication of the Center for the Advanced Study of Excellence in Early Childhood and Family Support Practices, Family, Infant and Preschool Program, J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center, Morganton, NC. CASE is an applied research center focusing on the characteristics of evidence-based practices and methods for promoting utilization of practices informed by research.

© 2006 by the Center for the Advanced Study of Excellence in Early Childhood and Family Support Practices. All rights reserved.

### ABSTRACT

The study described in this *CASEinPoint* evaluated the benefits of child and parent participation in several Family Resource Centers operated by the Family, Infant and Preschool Program. The study was implemented as part of efforts to ascertain the elementary school consequences of early childhood intervention and parenting supports provided by Family Resource Centers. Results showed that parents' judgments of their children's school readiness and achievement were associated with Family Resource Program practices.

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this *CASEinPoint* was to assess the extent to which child and parent participation in Family Resource Programs was associated with parents' judgments of different aspects of their children's elementary school readiness and school achievement as well as their own involvement in their children's elementary education. A secondary purpose was to ascertain if the parents' children had received special honors or recognition for their school performance.

The study was conducted with parents who were involved in the Family, Infant and Preschool Program's (FIPP) Burke County (NC) Family Resource Programs. These particular family resource programs have been the focus of several previous evaluations to determine the benefits associated with program participation (Dunst & Trivette, 2001; Dunst, Trivette, & Hamby, 2006). The present as well as previous studies are part of a line of evaluative research investigating the manner in which different aspects of family resource program practices are associated with parent, family, and child benefits (Dunst, 1995).

At the time the present survey was administered, FIPP operated six family resource programs in Burke County, North Carolina. The programs typically offered two morning or afternoon sessions and included a combination of child, parent/child, and parent activities. The activities were intended to provide children different kinds of learning opportunities and parents different kinds of assistance supporting and strengthening parenting capabilities. One focus of the Family Resource Cen-

ters was the provision of preacademic child learning opportunities for promoting school readiness. The extent to which the latter occurred was the purpose of this study.

METHOD

*Participants*

The study participants were the parents and other caregivers of children attending the Burke County Family Resource Centers. A master list of all parents and children participating in the Family Resource Centers was compiled from Center records. The list included all families who were previously involved in the Centers, and whose children were now in the elementary grades 1 through 4. The master list included 372 program participants.

Three hundred and twenty eight (328) of the 372 program participants (88%) were contacted and agreed to be survey respondents. Most of the other participants could not be located, had moved with no forwarding addresses, or had telephone numbers that were disconnected. The 88% participation rate is extremely high (Fink, 1995), and adds substantial validity to the study results (Lavrakas, 1987).

*Survey*

An eight item telephone survey was developed for the study. The survey included one school readiness item, two school achievement items, and one parent involvement item. Respondents were asked to indicate if they *strongly disagreed*, *disagreed*, *agreed*, or *strongly agreed* with four different statements (e.g., Participation in the resource center helped your child be ready for school). The remaining questions asked about grade retention, school awards received by the children, and achievement of honor roll status.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the parents' responses to the four items asking about school readiness, school achievement, and parent participation in their children's education. One hundred (100) percent of the respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that participation in the Family Resource Centers helped prepare their children for school entry. Nearly all of the respondents (95% to 98%) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the Family Resource Centers contributed in their children's academic success. Nearly all the respondents (97%) also *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the supports they received at the Family Resource Centers promoted their active participation in their children's education.

The second part of the survey includes four *yes* or *no* questions to ascertain "school standing" and academic performance. The majority of survey respondents (79%) reported that their children had received one or more awards since starting school. (e.g., Student of the Month and Citizen of the Month). More than one fourth (28%) of the respondents indicated that their children had made the honor roll at least once. Only nine of the children (3%) had been retained in a grade since entering school.

DISCUSSION

Findings from this evaluation indicated that parents' judged participation in the Family Resource Centers as beneficial to both themselves and their children in terms of elementary school experiences. Taken together, the results indicate that positive consequences are realized by child and parent participation in Family Resource Centers.

The parents' judgments of their children's school readiness and achievement were independently validated

Table 1

*Percent of Respondents Agreeing or Disagreeing with the Survey Statements*

Survey Items	Percent of Respondents			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
FRC helped my child be ready for school	0	0	22	78
FRC helped my child make good grades	0	2	34	64
FRC helped my child learn to read and write	1	4	39	56
FRC promoted parent participation in my child's education	1	2	33	65

by the fact that 259 children received one or more school awards and the fact that only nine children were retained in grade. The retention rate for the Family Resource Center program participants is less than half that of the State of North Carolina and considerably lower than that for children in the Burke County (NC) public schools (Kindergarten Readiness Issues Group, 2003).

The importance of parent involvement in their children's early education has been recognized and acknowledged for more than a hundred years (Dunst, 2002). Family Resource Centers are at least one viable mechanism for promoting and strengthening parents' confidence and competence in providing their children school readiness experiences (Bruner, 2004; Kinlaw, Kurtz, & Goldman-Fraser, 2001) and subsequently remaining involved in their children's education (Epstein, 1992). The latter is important because school success, in part, is related to parents' involvement in their children's education (Connors & Epstein, 1995; Henderson, 1989).

#### REFERENCES

- Bruner, C. (2004, May). *Beyond the usual suspects: Developing the new allies to invest in school readiness*. Des Moines, IA: Child and Family Policy Center.
- Connors, L., & Epstein, J. (1995). Parent and school partnerships. In M. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Vol. 4. Applied and practical parenting* (pp. 437-458). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Dunst, C. J. (1995). *Key characteristics and features of community-based family support programs*. Chicago: Family Resource Coalition.
- Dunst, C. J. (2002). Family-centered practices: Birth through high school. *Journal of Special Education, 36*, 139-147.
- Dunst, C. J., & Trivette, C. M. (2001). *Benefits associated with family resource center practices*. Asheville, NC: Winterberry Press.
- Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., & Hamby, D. W. (2006). *Family support program quality and parent, family and child benefits*. Asheville, NC: Winterberry Press.
- Epstein, J. L. (1992). School and family partnerships. In M. C. Alkin (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of educational research* (6th ed., pp. 1139-1151). New York: Macmillan.
- Fink, A. (1995). *How to design surveys*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Henderson, A. T. (Ed.). (1989). *The evidence continues to grow: Parent involvement improves school achievement*. Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education.
- Kindergarten Readiness Issues Group, Partners in Research Forum. (2003). *North Carolina early grade retention in the age of accountability*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. Retrieved August 27, 2004, from [http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~pir/Retention\\_Brief.pdf](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~pir/Retention_Brief.pdf)
- Kinlaw, C. R., Kurtz, C., B., & Goldman-Fraser, J. (2001). Mothers' achievement beliefs and behaviors and their children's school readiness: A cultural comparison. *Applied Developmental Psychology, 22*, 493-506.
- Lavrakas, P. J. (1987). *Telephone survey methods: Sampling, selection, and supervision*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

#### AUTHORS

Carl J. Dunst, Ph.D., is Director, Center for the Advanced Study of Excellence (CASE) in Early Childhood and Family Support Practices, J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center, Morganton, NC, and Research Scientist, Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute, Asheville, NC ([cdunst@puckett.org](mailto:cdunst@puckett.org)). At the time the study reported in this paper was conducted, Jill Ardley, Ph.D., was Senior Coordinator, and Donna Bollinger, M.A., was Family Resource Program Coordinator, Family, Infant and Pre-school Program, Morganton, NC.