

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Impact of HIPPY Participation on School Readiness and Parent Involvement

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HIPPY is a 3-year, home-based, early education intervention program that aims to help parents with limited formal education prepare their 3-, 4- and 5-year-old children for school. This article begins with a brief overview of the HIPPY program and then presents the results of a study of the effects of the HIPPY early intervention program on the parental involvement and school readiness of the children at multiple HIPPY sites in Texas. According to the results of paired-samples t-tests, HIPPY parents significantly increased their in-home literacy activities, contact with school personnel, and other school involvement activities. Kindergarten teachers reported that in comparison to parents of other students in their class, 91% of HIPPY parents were equally or more involved in their children's education. Kindergarten teachers also reported that in the area of classroom adaptability, 88.7% of HIPPY students were rated as "ready for school." In the area of classroom behavior, 90.8% of HIPPY students were rated as "average" or "above average." Overall, the results of this study suggest that the HIPPY program intervention can increase readiness skills and build a strong base for future parent involvement in their child's school experience.

Children from low-income, single-parent, and minority families are more likely to start school with limited language skills, health problems, and social and emotional problems that interfere with learning (Espinosa, 2007; Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005; Welsley & Buysse, 2003). While there are many types of intervention programs for at-risk children, those designed to improve children's school adjustment and to prevent later academic problems are most effective when they occur at school entry or during the preschool years (Hanson et al., 2006). Strategies that emphasize parent-child interactions can promote children's readiness to start school. One delivery method for early intervention programs is through home visits. Home visiting programs during the preschool years are generally based on the premise that parents are the first teachers of their children. Home visiting programs also aim to improve a family's access to resources, meet basic needs, and strengthen family wellbeing. By working intensively with families, these programs can help to prepare children for successful engagement with the school environment. The Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters program, better known as HIPPY, is one such early intervention program.

THE HIPPY PROGRAM

HIPPY is a 3-year, home-based, early education intervention program that aims to help parents with limited formal education prepare their 3-, 4- and 5-year-old children for school. Developed in Israel and brought to the United States in 1984, HIPPY now operates at more than 147 sites in 25 states, the District of Columbia, and 9 countries. The HIPPY program targets low-income, primarily minority, parents in hopes of breaking the cycle of educational limitations by increasing the chances of successful early school readiness among their children. The program provides educational enrichment to at-risk preschool children. To be eligible for the HIPPY program, a child must be economically disadvantaged, academically at-risk, or homeless (C. Weir, personal communication, July 19, 2007).

A professional coordinator whose primary responsibilities are recruiting parents, hiring and training home visitors, organizing parent group meetings, and developing enrichment activities supervises each HIPPY site. The coordinator and home visitors meet weekly to role-play the curriculum material, discuss the previous week's activities, and share experiences and problems. Sometimes problems arise that the coordinator may handle by making a home visit or by referring a parent to an appropriate social service agency.

The HIPPY program is delivered by home visitors who are members of the community in which they serve and are also parents in the program. Many of the home visitors have limited English proficiency and only a high school education or General Educational Development (GED: C. Weir, personal communication, July 19, 2007). Many HIPPY home visitors are AmeriCorps members. AmeriCorps is a federally funded network of local, state, and national service programs that connects more than 70,000 Americans each year with volunteer service organizations in the areas of education, public safety, health, and the environment (Corporation for National and Community Service, n.d.). As AmeriCorps members, home visitors receive training and an education award for successfully serving 900 hours as HIPPY home visitors.

HIPPY home visitors work with participating parents in the parents' homes weekly to instruct them in using the HIPPY educational materials. Each week, the coordinator practices the lesson for the week with the home visitors. The home visitors then role-play the lessons with the parents, and the parents in turn repeat the activities with their children during the week. Prior to presenting a new lesson, the home visitors follow up with each parent by reviewing the child's workbook and discussing the child's progress. Home visitors are crucial to the HIPPY model. Their knowledge of the community allows them to develop trusting relationships with the participating families, and since most home visitors are former HIPPY parents themselves, they identify with the kinds of challenges the parents face.

The home visitors teach the parents primarily through role-playing. Role-play provides opportunities to discuss the goals of the activities, reflect on the learners' specific needs (both adults and children), and teach new skills. Role-playing also promotes a comfortable, non-threatening learning environment that promotes parental empathy for the developmental capabilities of young children. Finally, the role-playing method of instruction allows parents with limited reading ability an opportunity to become effective first teachers for their children.

The HIPPY curriculum is designed for 3-, 4-, and 5- year old children and is available in both English and Spanish. Each year's materials include 30 weekly activity packets, 9 storybooks, and a set of 20 manipulative shapes. In addition to these basic materials, supplies such as scissors and crayons are provided for each participating family. The HIPPY curriculum is primarily cognitive-based, focusing on language development, problem solving, logical

thinking, and perceptual skills. The HIPPY curriculum exposes children to early literacy skills including phonological and phonemic awareness, letter recognition, book knowledge, and early writing experiences. In addition, the curriculum fosters social-emotional development as well as fine and gross motor development. All activities are completed at home using the provided materials or common household items such as spoons. Each activity pack is highly structured with step-by-step instructions, providing parents with little formal education the confidence to be their child's first teacher.

Parents also receive information and support in their role as their child's first teacher during group meetings and field trips. Parents are strongly encouraged to attend monthly group meetings where they share their experiences and engage in enrichment activities involving issues related to parenting, employment, school/community/social services, and personal growth. Parents chose the group meeting topics that help them learn how to be more effective parents and members of the community. Childcare is provided during the group meetings, and the children learn to interact socially.

Field trips provide parents and children experience learning opportunities in the larger community. Field trips include visits to museums, zoos, and theater productions (C. Weir, personal communication, July 19, 2007). One or both parents must attend field trips with their child so parents can be an active participant in the educational experience. In fact, entire families can participate in the child's learning experiences through field trips. Many HIPPY programs report that fathers, who are otherwise not involved with the HIPPY program, often attend field trips with their children (C. Weir, personal communication, July 19, 2007).

Conceptual Framework of HIPPY

In addition to serving as an early education program, HIPPY incorporates features of family support programs. HIPPY is based on an ecological approach that recognizes children's development as powerfully influenced by the families, communities, and societies in which they live (Westheimer, 2003). HIPPY therefore aims to create greater continuity between home and school by enhancing children's home learning environments.

HIPPY programs provide support for families in a way that is designed to recognize and respect family needs and values, another common feature of family support programs. HIPPY, like many other family support programs, respects the cultural diversity of the families it serves (Baker et al., 1999). Books and activity packets included as part of the program curriculum, respect ethnically and culturally diverse families. However, HIPPY diverges from some other family support programs in using a structured approach with parents, with set lesson plans designed to enhance children's cognitive skills.

The HIPPY program has resulted in positive outcomes for the participating children and families as well as for whole communities where the program is being implemented. Research shows accumulated evidence documenting the positive impacts of HIPPY, both on children's school readiness when entering kindergarten and later academic performance in higher grades (Baker et al., 1999; BarHava-Monteith, Harre, & Field, 1999; Garcia, 2006; Jacobson, 2003). Additionally, research documents the impact of HIPPY on parents participating in the program (Jacobson, 2003; Roundtree, 2003; Westheimer, 2003).

Evidence of increased school readiness

The first major U.S. study, funded primarily by the U.S. Department of Education, studied the outcomes of HIPPY children in two states, New York and Arkansas (Baker et al., 1999). The two-site, two-cohort longitudinal study of HIPPY examined the effects of HIPPY on children's school performance through the second grade. The design at each of the sites was different – quasi-experimental in one site with nonrandomized comparison groups and experimental in the other with randomized controls. In one site, the HIPPY children were compared to children who had no preschool services whatsoever; in the other site they were compared to children who, like the HIPPY children, had participated in a full-day, high-quality prekindergarten program. As they began kindergarten, HIPPY children in the first cohort outperformed those in the comparison groups on objective measures of school performance and teacher ratings of their motivation and adaptation to the classroom. HIPPY children also had better attendance, scored higher on standardized achievement tests, and were perceived by their teachers as better students. While these results were not replicated in the second cohort, the study concluded that there were significant findings in both cities in Cohort I which supported the hypothesis that participation in the HIPPY program improves children's school performance and competence.

Another study by BarHava-Monteith et al. (1999) measured the impact of participation in the HIPPY program in New Zealand on children's reading ability, school readiness, and school behavior. In three separate studies, children in the HIPPY program were matched with comparison children who had not participated in HIPPY. The children were then assessed using a Reading Diagnostic Survey, the Metropolitan Readiness test, and the Behavioral Academic Self Esteem Scale. HIPPY children consistently performed better on all of the measures than their peers, whether they were compared to students similar to themselves or to other school peers. Based on these results the study suggested that HIPPY plays a valuable role in enabling children from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed in school.

A study conducted in Texas by Jacobson (2003) looked at the effectiveness of HIPPY in four cities in Texas by studying children's school adaptability and functioning. Kindergarten teachers were asked to rate HIPPY children on their classroom adaptation and school readiness when compared with other children in their classroom. For each of the 3 years reported in this study, teachers rated three-quarters of the HIPPY children as average or above average. Also, the children enrolled in HIPPY show evidence of expected personal and social development and language learning, literacy, and math. While the children fared better in structured, concrete activities, they demonstrated less competence in areas of meaning, interpretation, and self-initiated learning as compared to their classmates.

Evidence of later school achievement.

Bradley and Gilkey (2002) conducted a quasi-experimental study to determine the effects of the HIPPY program on children who had completed two full years of the program and who were enrolled in third and sixth grades. The study used a quasi-experimental study using a post-hoc matching design to compare children who participated in the HIPPY program with similar children who had other preschool experiences. Child outcomes were examined in 5 categories: (a) school attendance; (b) official actions (suspension, retention, and special education) taken by the school district that affected students' experience in school; (c) classroom grades;

(d) standardized achievement test scores; and (e) student behavior. Results showed a modest positive impact on school suspensions, classroom behavior, and achievement test scores at both grade levels.

A recent study conducted in Texas by Garcia (2006) assessed HIPPY's impact on the academic achievement of Hispanic English language learners. Using a quasi-experimental design, the academic success of Hispanic third grade children who participated in the HIPPY program as 4- and 5- year olds was compared to a matched group of Hispanic third grade students who attended preschool programs offered by the public school district but not HIPPY. Comparison of state mandated standardized tests in reading and math revealed that HIPPY children consistently outperformed their non-HIPPY peers. In addition, more students from the HIPPY group completed the tests in English rather than Spanish.

Evidence of parent outcomes

The HIPPY program also purposes to prepare children for school by enhancing the home literacy environment, the quality of parent-child verbal interaction, and parents' ability to help their children learn. One study investigated the scaffolding behavior of mother-child dyads participating in the HIPPY program (Roundtree, 2003). Pre- and post-HIPPY observations looked at how mothers and children engaged in HIPPY activities. All of the mothers demonstrated a range of scaffolding behavior during their post-HIPPY observation.

In a quasi-experimental study, BarHava-Monteith et al. (2003) assessed the benefits of HIPPY to parents who participate in the program. The study examined the formal educational involvement, attitudes towards education, and self-esteem of a sample of both HIPPY and non-HIPPY parents in New Zealand. HIPPY parents were significantly more involved than comparison caregivers in educational activities. These activities included things like helping with field trips, serving on school committees, and serving as teachers' aids. HIPPY parents were also significantly more likely to be involved in an adult education class. No significant differences were found in terms of attitude and self-esteem.

In Jacobson's (2003) study mentioned earlier, parent involvement was assessed using a parent interview developed by the Center for Parent Education at the University of North Texas, by adapting instruments developed by the Center for Young Children and Families at Teachers College, Columbia University. Over half (61.9%) of the parents reported that they frequently or always encouraged their child to read or look through books or any other printed matter. In addition, 88.5% of parents reported that they became more aware of the importance of reading by participating in the HIPPY program.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of HIPPY on the parent involvement and school readiness of children. Five research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Did HIPPY parents of 3- and 4-year olds increase their engagement in home-literacy activities with their preschool children?
2. Did HIPPY parents of 3- or 4-year olds increase their interactions with school staff?

3. Did HIPPY parents of 3- and 4-year olds increase their school involvement?
4. In comparison to other non-HIPPY parents, how involved are HIPPY parents of kindergarteners in the education of their children?
5. Do HIPPY children enter kindergarten “ready for school”?

METHODOLOGY

The study is part of the larger statewide evaluation of the Texas HIPPY program and was conducted to evaluate the parental involvement of participants and their children’s school readiness. All ten of the Texas HIPPY sites from the 2005/2006 to 2007/2008 program years were included in this study, representing Texas families across the state (from North, Central, East, Southeast, and Southwest Texas) in cities with a population as small as 10,000 to as large as 2.3 million residents. Texas HIPPY sites were in communities that had high poverty levels, low student academic achievement, low literacy levels, and/or limited English proficiency.

Research Design

The study employed a quasi-experimental design involving an in-tack group of HIPPY students. A quasi-experimental design is one that is similar to an experimental design but lacks random assignment. (Freeman, Pisani, & Purves, 2007). This research design was chosen because the children in the HIPPY program were a pre-existing group and therefore it was not possible to randomly assign students to the HIPPY program after the fact. For the parental involvement outcome, first-year HIPPY parents were surveyed by home visitors. The HIPPY parents were parents of three- and four-year old HIPPY children who were new to the program. HIPPY home visitors administered the *Parent Involvement Interview* (PII) survey to the parents in their home at the beginning of the 30-week program (before week two of the program) and again at the ending of the program (after week 28). The home visitors performed this task with a new group of first-time HIPPY parents in the Fall of 2005, 2006, and 2007 and collected the post-survey data in the Spring of 2006, 2007, and 2008. Across the three years, the parents (n=2,146) were surveyed on their home literacy involvement with their children and school involvement with staff, teachers and activities. We calculated percentages and used one-tailed, paired sample t-tests to analyze the results.

The school readiness outcome was measured by the *Kindergarten Teacher Survey* (KTS). The survey was completed by kindergarten teachers of HIPPY five-year old children (n=619) enrolled in kindergarten. The kindergarten teachers’ principals were notified of the survey in the winters of 2006, 2007, and 2008 and with their permission teachers participated in the survey. In the springs of 2006, 2007, and 2008, teachers that had HIPPY children in their classrooms were mailed the KTS and asked to mail the survey back to the state evaluation office. The teachers were not informed that the surveys were for students involved in the HIPPY program. In addition, kindergarten teachers were asked about the HIPPY students’ parent school involvement in comparison to other students’ parents in their classrooms.

The school outcome data was calculated as percentages and compared to previously established benchmarks. The benchmarks were developed to determine how many of the questions in the classroom behavior and classroom adaptability sections of the KTS needed to be

rated as average or above average by kindergarten teachers for the students to be considered “ready for school”. In an earlier study, fifty-two of 70 kindergarten teachers across the state - reached a consensus that three out of the five classroom behavior questions and five out of eight classroom adaptability questions had to be rated as average or above average for a kindergartener to be considered “ready for school”.

Participants

This study population included parents and kindergarten students who participated in the HIPPY program in Texas during the 2005/2006; 2006/2007, and 2007/2008 school years. The number of parent participants was 2,146. The number of kindergarteners whose teacher completed the KS was 619. Of the kindergarten students in the study, 89.4% spoke Spanish as their home language; 7.1% were African American; 4.9% were Asian; .04% were White; and 87.6% were Latino.

Instruments

The *Parent Involvement Interview* (PII) is a 14-item, 4-point Likert questionnaire adapted from Britto and Brooks-Gunn’s (2002 “HIPPY Parent Interview” measure. The PII consists of three sections: a) in-home literacy, b) parent’s interactions with school staff, and c) parent’s school involvement. Section A asked all first-year parents about the literacy activities they participate in with their 3- or 4-year old children. A sample question is “In a typical week, how often do you spend time telling stories, reading books, or singing songs to your child at home?” Response categories for this section were “never/seldom,” “monthly,” “at least once a week,” and “daily.” Sections B and C were only completed by parents that at least had one child in an education program, such as elementary school. Response categories for these two sections were “never,” “a few times a year,” “monthly or more,” and “weekly or more.” Section B questioned parents about the frequency of their contact with school staff; for example, “How often have you had a face-to-face, phone conversation or conference with your child’s teacher?” Section C asked about the frequency of parent’s school involvement, such as “How often have you volunteered at your child’s school in the school office, library, or lunchroom?” The items in each section were averaged for a mean score. The alpha for the PII was 0.69.

The *Kindergarten Teacher Survey* (KTS) is a 20-item questionnaire that measured kindergarten students’ classroom verbal behavior and adaptability and parents’ school involvement. The KTS was adapted from Britto and Brooks-Gunn’s (2003) “Kindergarten Teacher Survey” instrument. The HIPPY students’ kindergarten teachers completed the KTS in the spring of the school year through observation of the child. Section A of the KTS is classroom adaptability, asking such questions as, “Child’s listening and paying attention: Child is attentive to teacher and other adults and children; pays attention/listens during group discussion or stories.” The teachers were instructed to answer the questions about the HIPPY child in comparison with other children in their classroom of the same age using the response categories “below average,” “average,” and “above average.” Section B had the same response categories and instructions, but focused on the students’ verbal classroom behavior, such as “Talks spontaneously and easily to others.” Section C asked the kindergarten teachers to rate the

frequency of students’ parental involvement at the school, with responses of “never,” “1 or 2 times,” and “3 or more times.” The KTS had an alpha of 0.89.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of the HIPPY early intervention program on the parental involvement and school readiness of the children.

Question 1:

During HIPPY parents’ first year of participation, 63.3% of HIPPY parents increased the amount of time they spent engaging their child in home literacy activities. Figure 1 displays the percentage of responses. The most striking increase was the increase from “weekly” to “daily” time spent in some type of home literacy activity.

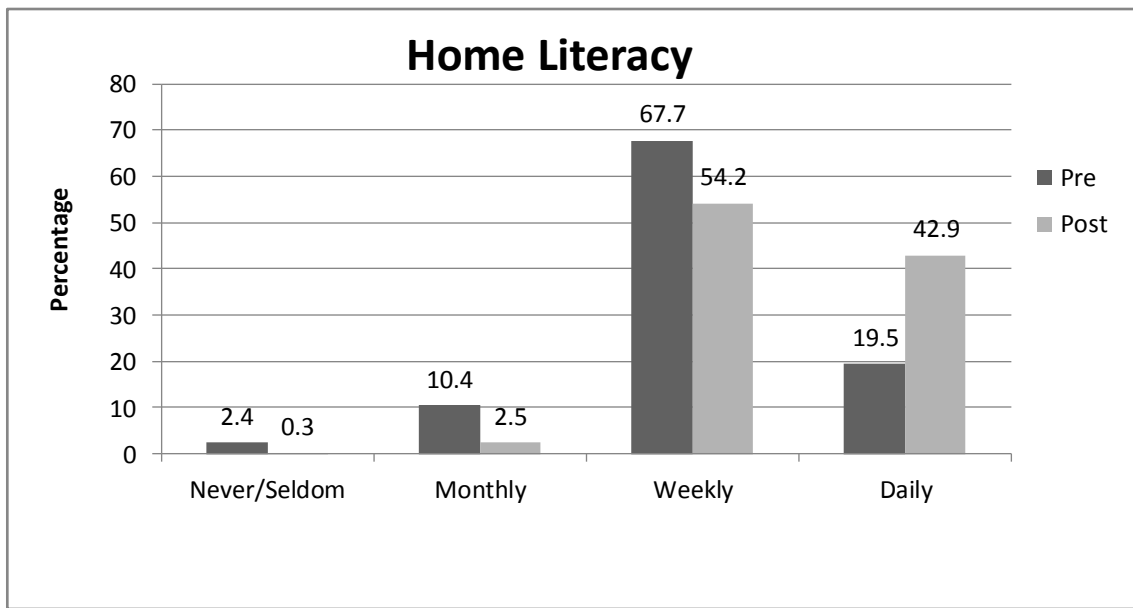


Figure 1. Responses to “Home Literacy” section of *Parent Involvement Interview*

In addition, to determine if there was a statistically significant increase in Home Literacy Activities, a paired-samples *t*-test was performed. According to the results of this analysis, there was a significant increase, $t(1433) = -20.650, p < .001$, from pre to post administration of the *Parent Involvement Interview* in the frequency of home literacy activities (see Table 1). HIPPY parents significantly increased the amount of time they participated in home literacy activities from the beginning of the program to the end of the program during their first year of participation. The medium to large effect size (Cohen’s $d=0.72$) indicated that on average HIPPY parents increased their involvement with their children in literacy-related activities almost three-fourths of a standard deviation from pre to post testing.

TABLE 1
New HIPPY Parents Involvement at Home and School

	Mean		<i>t</i>	df	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	Pre	Post			
In-Home Involvement	2.86 (0.61)	3.24 (0.45)	-20.65*	1433	-0.72
School Contact	1.90 (0.68)	2.22 (0.63)	-13.06*	1121	-0.49
School Involvement	1.42 (0.60)	1.70 (0.68)	-10.48*	912	-0.44

Note: * $p < 0.001$; standard deviations appear in parentheses beside means

Question 2:

During HIPPY parents' first year of participation, 60.4% of HIPPY parents increased the frequency of interactions with school staff members. Figure 2 displays the percentage of responses. Again, paired-samples *t*-test revealed a statistically significant increase in contacts with school staff, $t(1121) = -13.063$, $p < .001$ from pre to post administration of the *Parent Involvement Interview*. The medium effect size (Cohen's $d=0.49$) indicated that on average HIPPY parents increased their involvement with their children in literacy-related activities about one-half of a standard deviation from pre to post testing.

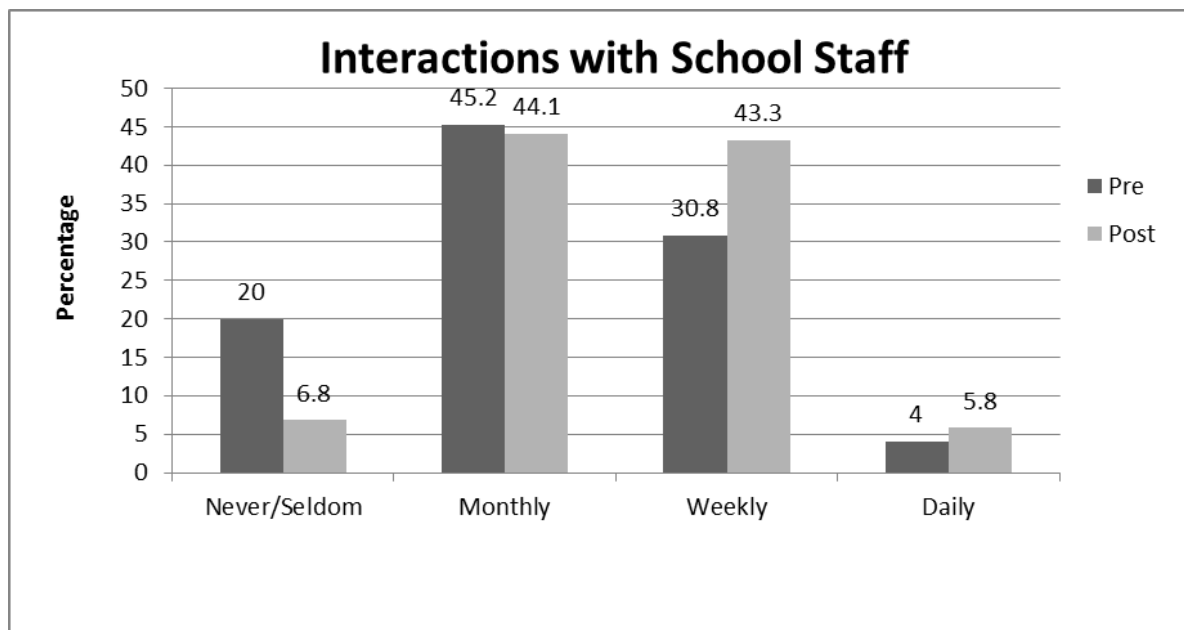


Figure 2. Responses to "Interaction with School Staff" Section of *Parent Involvement Interview*

Question 3:

HIPPY parents significantly increased, $t(911) = -10.482$, $p < .001$, phone and face-to-face contact with school personnel and attendance at school meetings and volunteerism at the school from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year (see Figure 3). While first-year HIPPY parents that have children enrolled in school also significantly increased their school involvement, the effect was less than half a standard deviation from the pre to post (see Table 1).

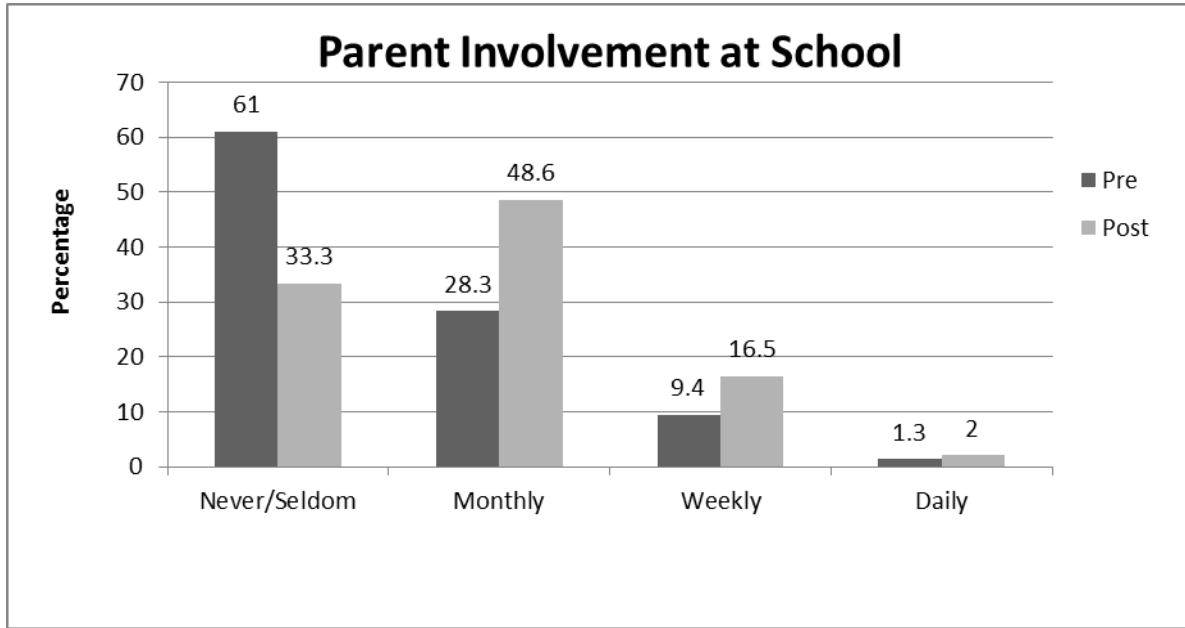


Figure 3. Responses to “Parent Involvement at School” Section of *Parent Involvement Interview*

Question 4:

Kindergarten teachers rated HIPPY parents (n=611) who had participated in the program for two to three years and had a five-year old enrolled in kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers reported that 97.1% of HIPPY parents participated in some type of involvement in their child’s education on at least a monthly basis (see Figure 4)

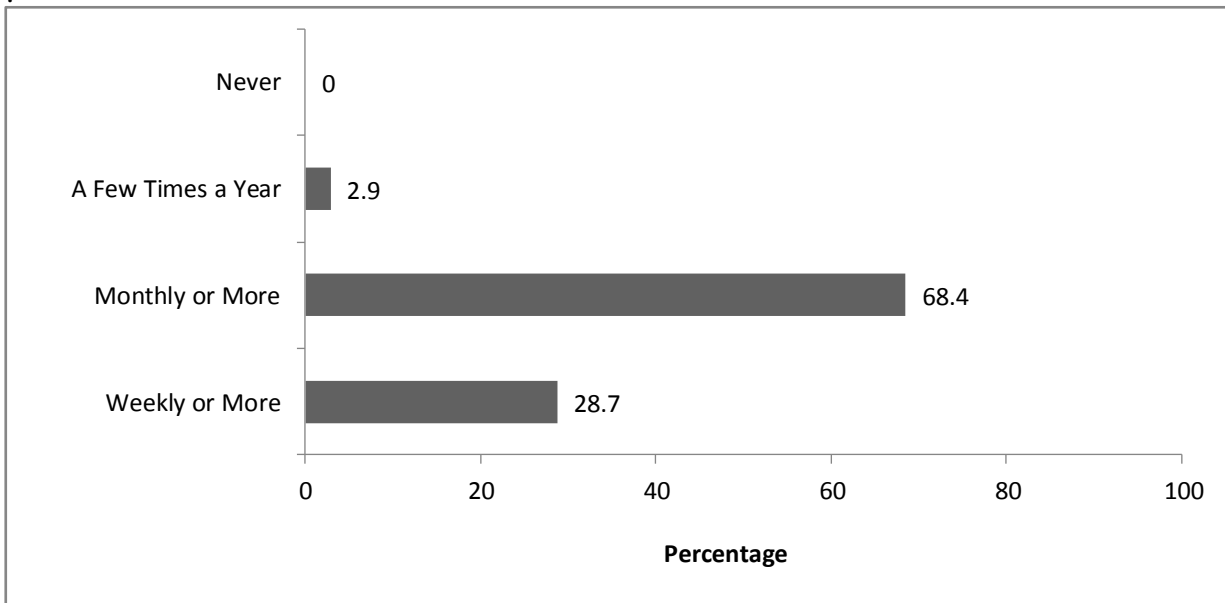


Figure 4. Frequency of parent involvement with child during kindergarten as reported by child’s kindergarten teacher.

In addition, Kindergarten teachers reported that in comparison to parents of other students in their class, 91% of HIPPY parents were equally or more involved in their children's education (see Figure 5).

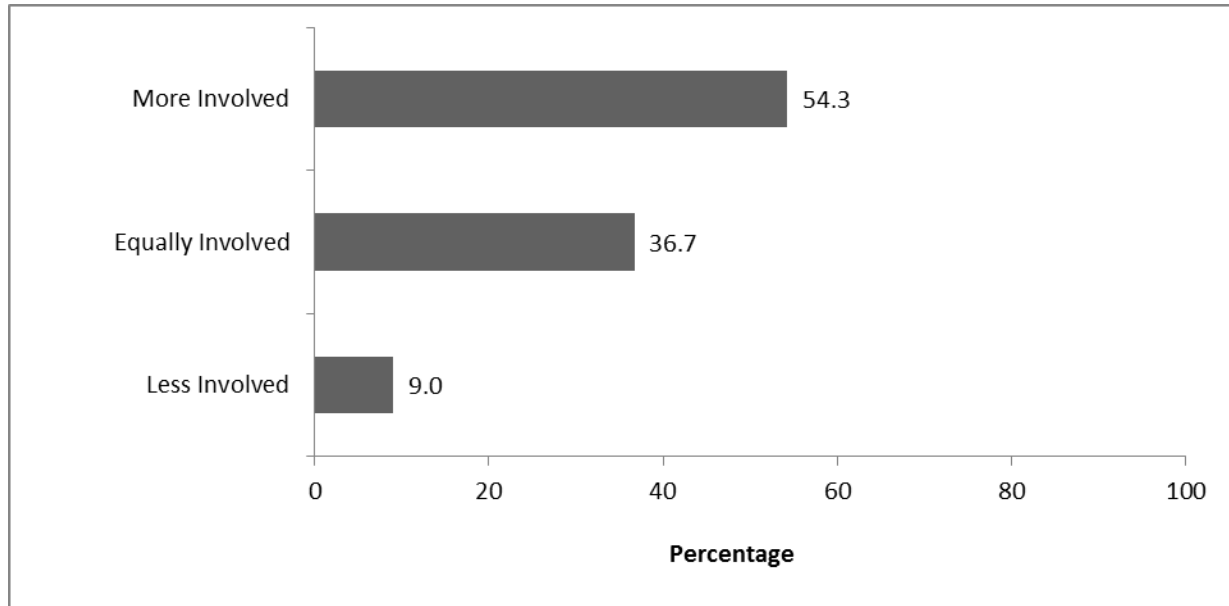


Figure 5. Parent involvement level of parent compared to non-hippy parent as reported by child's kindergarten teacher.

Question 5:

To determine the school readiness of HIPPY kindergartners, teachers completed the *Kindergarten Teacher Survey (KTS)*, which was analyzed using the benchmarking procedures discussed earlier. In classroom adaptability, 88.7% of HIPPY students were rated as "ready for school," evidenced by a score of "average" or "above average" in at least three out of five questions. In classroom behavior, 90.8% of HIPPY students were rated as "average" or "above average" on a minimum of five of eight questions, meaning that they were "ready for school." Overall, there were 84.2% of HIPPY kindergartners that were deemed school ready in both domains by their teachers. See Figure 6.

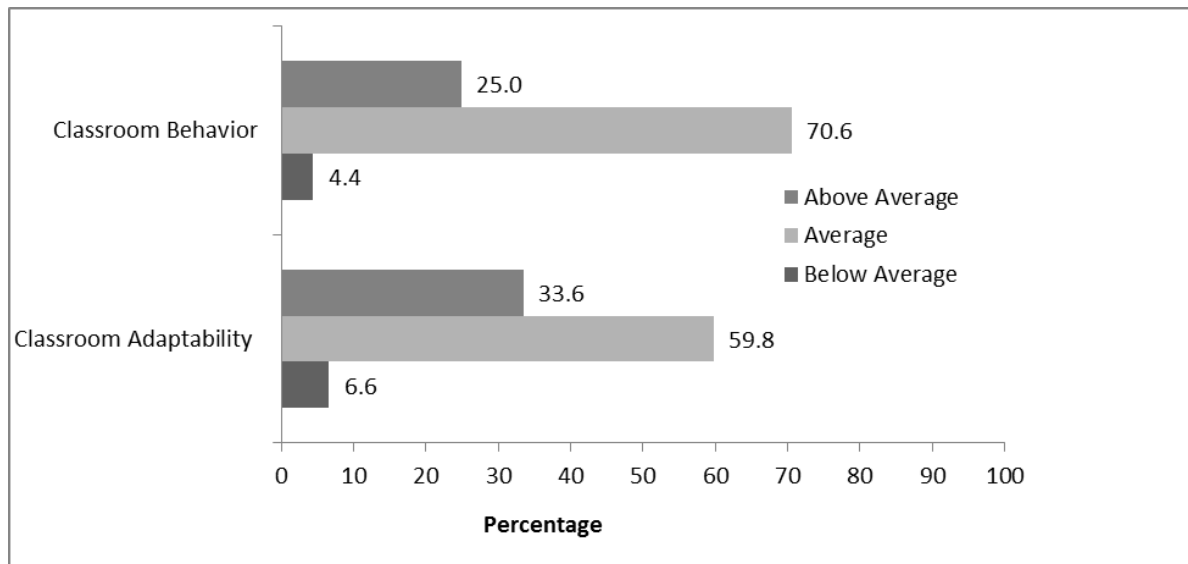


Figure 6. Kindergarten classroom behavior and classroom adaptability as reported by child's kindergarten teacher.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

These results concur with a meta-analysis of early childhood parenting intervention programs (Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003); intervention programs that involve the parent have a positive effect on at-risk children. These findings suggest that the parental involvement curriculum in HIPPY programs helps at-risk children to overcome the barriers they face by empowering their parents to be their child's first teacher so that children can enter school "ready for school."

The results also suggest that the HIPPY program intervention can increase readiness skills and build a strong base for future parent involvement in their child's school experience. Specifically, participation in the HIPPY program resulted in significantly higher parent involvement activities as well as notable rates of school readiness. This may suggest that the parental involvement curriculum in HIPPY programs helps typically at-risk students to overcome the barriers they face when ecological factors are in place.

The results of this study also coincide with the current body of HIPPY research and reinforce the HIPPY program's fundamental belief that a young child's education begins in the home. Researchers agree that it is crucial for young children to have meaningful time and attention from their parents, extended family, or other significant adults in their life (BarHava-Monteith et al., 1999; Bradley & Gilkey, 2003; Garcia, 2006; Jacobson, 2003).

There are a number of implications for future research on the HIPPY program. Questions about the HIPPY program not included in this evaluation. First, research should continue to follow families in the HIPPY program to determine the long-term effects of participation. In addition to the positive effects found in this study, additional benefits of participation in this program may be discovered as the children continue to develop and initial small gains in other outcome domains snowball into larger and significant effects in subsequent assessments. Conversely as Smith (1995) points out, initial gains for intervention participants may decline over time. Determining possible loss of effects would also be a useful endeavor, as it could indicate the need for more intensive follow-up services for children making the transition from intervention programs such as HIPPY into formal schooling. Future research should also aim to

identify the mediating processes by which parental participation in HIPPY affects children. For example, an examination of parental expectations for their children's school success, their confidence as their child's teacher, and other aspects of parental engagement in their child's schooling. Ideally, parents who participated in HIPPY will apply the skills developed in the program to support their children's education throughout their school careers. Examining treatment intensity would also make an important contribution by specifying how much of the HIPPY program is necessary for a parent to receive in order for a positive effect to be obtained. And finally, identification of subgroups of families who are more or less likely to benefit from the program could be useful for program coordinators as they recruit families into the program and train paraprofessionals to maintain family involvement over the two-year program.

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