

**Providing Support to Families with Specific Regard to the Removal of Barriers that
Exist for Families Trying to Provide Academic Support at Home**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to provide resources for families such that they would be well equipped to provide academic support at home; hence examining the impact of providing said resources and the subsequent impact on a first grade child's reading development. In this study, the researcher took a group of twenty students and divided them into two groups. One group was given a weekly literacy backpack with related activities that were clearly defined and required a minimal time commitment. The second group was given a reading log to record books that were read each night, with no directives, scaffolded support, or additional resources offered. The researcher showed that when families receive guidance, directives, related necessary materials, and support, they are subsequently better equipped to assist their child academically at home; the impact is subsequently seen in each child's respective literacy development.

Introduction

The researcher has experience teaching middle school mathematics as well as first grade students. With both of these experiences the researcher saw how much parents wanted to help their students, but they often did not have the skills or resources to do so. Often parents were so frustrated and discouraged that they did not even know how to help. They genuinely did not know what to do and did not have the emotional strength or skills to help. Over subsequent years of teaching the researcher tried to implement a variety of activities to promote parental involvement. The results indicated that parents are more likely to get involved when the teacher provides scaffolded support. It is necessary for parents to be involved in their child's life such that they are showing their child that education is viewed as valuable. This action research project involved a plan to support parents in their efforts to be involved in their child's academic development.

During the varied professional experiences held by the researcher, the frustration of colleagues has also been observed, specifically with the family situations in which many

students live. More often than not, the frustration ends with complaining and nothing more. While teachers cannot take ownership of the problem, they can take ownership of a solution. This is why parental involvement is so important to the researcher. When teaching in the inner-city, problems that exist are not likely to disappear any time soon.

The researcher has observed the most change with parental involvement at times when the instructions and/or expectations were clearly spelled out, such that parents are guided through the process without ambiguity. The researcher wanted to impact the first grade students of Muskegon Public Schools through the impact on their parents. This impact will initially take place in the home environment of each student, specifically with parental involvement with homework and subsequently impact the reading development within the classroom.

One assumption held by the researcher was that all parents want what is best for their children and want to be involved. It was also assumed that parents have obstacles that make it difficult for them to participate to the ability they may like. Family dynamics such as single parent households, parents who work two or three jobs, parents without high-school diplomas, families who do not have stable consistent homes with heat, electricity, or food may negatively impact student learning. Additionally, it was assumed that families may not have the necessary resources such as books and/or school supplies. A final assumption was that by providing the resources and necessary tools, parents will willingly become involved with their child's academic growth at home.

The level of parental involvement was subject to change throughout the project time period. Due to family constraints it was possible that participation may not be consistent during the entire project time period. Thus, growth may not be consistent either. This could be due to employment, financial situation, extra-curricular obligations, relationships within the household, or other unforeseen circumstances.

The level of student and family satisfaction is also subject to change throughout the project time period. If the level of satisfaction changes throughout the project period, it

was also likely that the level of participation would change respectively. This could then lead to a possible skew in the data.

A similar variable is that of parental commitment. By effectively providing families with adequate support and resources, it was the intent to subsequently impact families and their views on academics and homework in a positive manner. For example, from previous experience with families, the researcher had to overcome a negative light shed on reading for enjoyment. Many families used reading as a form of punishment or do not see the value in reading to their child. The degree to which each family participated fully and engaged in the beliefs set forth pertaining to reading was subject to change throughout the project period and at different rates.

Literature Review

DeCastro-Ambrosetti, D., & Cho, G. (2005). Do parents value education? Teachers' perceptions of minority parents. *Multicultural Education*, 44-46. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/EJ759621.pdf>

The researcher chose this article because it potentially provided underlying reasons why parents may or may not be active participants in their child's education. Ultimately, it is important to ascertain any barriers before identifying strategies to get around such barriers. The researcher found that the results of the study were not surprising, having experience working with inner-city students. The article summarized the findings of a study involving one-hundred and sixty preservice and inservice teachers who were all enrolled in educational courses. Each of the participants completed a related questionnaire. The study found that although the majority of the participants reported positive attitudes towards issues of diversity, these same teachers continued to blame the home environment and the parent's lack of education for a student's low academic performance. Prior to the study, research was cited that found that communication is the key to successful parent

involvement. Based on the conclusions of the study, it was noted that as long as a rift exists between home and school, communications will be strained (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005, p.45).

Institute of Education Sciences - National Center for Education Statistics. (2006, September). *School and parent interaction by household language and poverty status: 2002-03*. (Issue Brief No. 086). U.S. Department of Education

This article summarized the findings of a study involving parents of school aged children whose primary language spoken at home was English or Spanish. The study looked at school-to-home communication practices and opportunities for parent involvement at school. One of the findings indicated that there was a difference in school communication practices and opportunities between English-speaking and Spanish-speaking households. Spanish-speaking households reported not receiving personal notes, newsletters and other forms of communications, as well as not receiving invitations to participate in school and volunteer opportunities. The study also looked at the poverty levels of participants and noted that differences were still apparent after taking poverty status into account (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006, p.3). For example, more English-speaking families, compared to Spanish-speaking families, reported receiving notices, regardless of poverty status.

The researcher chose the next article because it was similar to the previous article but from a parent's perspective. The results from this study gave another piece of information that was valuable. In the researcher's situation, most letters and written communications are sent to all families. However, because translation services are not readily available, parents often have to be the instigator, hence requesting translation services. There are only a handful of teachers who are bilingual and they certainly cannot translate every newsletter and written form of communication for every teacher in the

district. There have also been instances when teachers have been asked to select a few parents who might be interested in respective volunteer opportunities. While the intent was understandable at the time, it is very likely that teachers chose parents who were already involved and whose income was above poverty level.

Yerger-St. George, C. (2010). How can elementary teachers collaborate more effectively with parents to support student literacy learning? *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 76 (2), 32-38. Retrieved from <http://proquest.umi.com.library.marygrove.edu:2048/pdweb?did=2071788471&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=43935&RQT=309&VName=PQD>

This article summarized the findings of a study that involved ten elementary teachers and ten parents in a Collegial Circle. A Collegial Circle is a type of professional development in which participants have an equal voice in all group actions. The purpose of the study was to explore how teachers could more effectively collaborate with parents to support student literacy development. The study focused on three main areas of interest. The first question posed to the group was to identify challenges to parent teacher partnerships. The biggest challenge identified by teachers and parents was lack of resources, including time constraints (Yerger-St. George, 2010, p.5). Additionally, it was noted that effective communication, as well as confusion and insecurity pertaining to parents' and teachers' roles and responsibilities also factor in as challenges.

The second question posed to the group was to discuss strategies to overcome the identified challenges and form recommendations. Three common themes emerged. The first was to offer more professional development in the form of Collegial Circles, improving communication, and instituting interactive homework activities designed by teachers to engage families. The final question posed to the group was to reflect and articulate if there was a change in each participant's perceptions and thinking at the end of the meetings. The

response was that everyone had a new appreciation and renewed commitment to building a partnership between home and school. The overall conclusions of the study highlighted the necessity for open and supportive relationships and communication. The results of this study were of particular interest because they involved parental input.

Luong, N. (2008). *Family support for at-risk second graders to improve reading fluency* (Master's thesis, Dominican University of California, 2008). Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED501222.pdf>

This article summarized the findings of a study that examined the effects of consistent and directed home support. The parents who participated in the study had second grade children who were reading below level. The program that was organized for parents was very specific and scripted. The results of the study indicated that all students showed improvement in their reading scores. Furthermore, parents felt confident with their efforts as they started to see their child's growth (Luong, 2008, p.28). Additionally, students also expressed increased confidence as their scores improved.

The researcher chose this article because reading is an area of focus. Similarly, the researcher will be working with first grade students. The results, although subjective in nature, go to the heart of the researcher's beliefs. It is the intent that parents are engaged in their student's academics at home such that the effect is felt by both the parents and the students. While this notion of "effects being felt" is certainly subjective in nature, it is merely an added bonus. This study, as well as the project that the researcher will be conducting, look at actual reading scores and the advancement thereof.

Tam, V. C., & Chan, R. M. (2009). Parental involvement in primary children's homework in Hong Kong. *The School Community Journal*, 19(2), 81-100. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/EJ867970.pdf>

This article summarized the findings of a study which collected data using homework diaries and questionnaires from over one thousand families. The study examined parental involvement in homework. The results indicated that parental involvement changes depending on the age and grade level of the student; likewise involvement fluctuates with the parent's educational level (Tam & Chan, 2009, p.97). The data suggested that parental involvement does have a significant effect on educational gains. The study noted the importance of encouraging parents to continue to support their children beyond primary grade levels, as well as encouraging families of lower socioeconomic status.

The researcher chose this article because it dealt directly with the effect of parental involvement with homework. This study looks primarily at families in Hong Kong, where there is already a common belief in the importance of homework. Homework is a significant part of each student's learning experience and this belief is shared among most families and schools without hesitation. While this added an element to the study that is not true of the demographics the researcher serves, the results were of interest because they eliminated one factor in the equation and allowed the focus to be solely on parental involvement. It is important to note that many of the other studies found it necessary to consider parental view on academics as a factor; this truly was not the case with the family demographics in this study.

Institute of Education Sciences - National Center for Education Statistics. (2008).

Expectations and reports of homework for public school students in the first, third, and fifth grades (Issue Brief No. 033). U.S. Department of Education.

This article summarized the amount of homework that was typically expected of students in grades first through fifth. As expected, parents and teachers both reported that the amount of time spent on homework increased as students progressed through their

grade levels. However, an interesting finding was that students from diverse schools or schools with larger minority populations were given more homework to complete than schools with less diversity or a lower number of minority students. Children in schools with higher percentages of minority student had teachers who expected more homework on a typical evening, whereas generally children in lower minority students had teachers who expected less homework (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008, p. 2). The researcher found this piece of literature of particular interest considering that the prospective project calls for creating appropriate literacy activities for families to complete at home. Hence, the amount of time that should be spent on homework specifically for first grade needs to be considered.

Skaggs, A. (2007). *Homework: A nightly ritual beginning in the elementary grades* (Master's thesis, Dominican University of California, 2007). Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED497419.pdf>

This article sought to identify what approaches to homework need to be made to meet the student's individual needs in order to create a positive experience for the student (Skaggs, A., 2007, p. 6). The researcher found this article of particular interest because it summarized many components that demonstrate reasonable belief in their success. Hence, the findings introduce activities or strategies that may be of particular interest to the prospective project. The article concluded that there is a direct correlation between low socioeconomic status, lack of education and parental involvement. The one strategy that the researcher found important was including a component that assisted families with important nonacademic skills such as time management and responsibility.

Patall, E. A., Cooper, H., & Robinson, J. C. (2008). Parent involvement in homework: A research synthesis. *Review of Educational Research, 78*, 1039-1101.
doi:10.3102/0034654308325185

This article compared many different studies on the relationship between homework and parental involvement and sought to identify important factors. The article summarized the positive effects of parental involvement in homework as well as the negative effects. Some positive effects included accelerated learning, enhanced enjoyment of homework, facilitated communication between parent and child, improved behaviors in school, and improved homework completion. Some negative effects include increased fatigue and frustration, increased tension between mother and child, and confusion of instructional techniques. Setting rules about when and where homework should be done had the strongest positive relationship with achievement (Patall, E. A., Cooper, H., & Robinson, J. C., 2008, p. 1090). Parent monitoring of homework was negatively related to achievement whereas direct aid was positively related (Patall, E. A., Cooper, H., & Robinson, J. C., 2008, p. 1090).

The researcher found this article of particular interest because of the findings. It is the researcher's intent to create homework activities that are easy to complete and can be completed in a timely manner. This study reinforced the need to pay particular attention to the types of activities that are included, specifically that there is no ambiguity as to the instructional techniques. Additionally, it may also be important to include a component that helps parents set up a time and a place to complete activities, which was also noted in a previous article.

Joe, E. M. & Davis, J. E. (2009). Parental influence, school readiness and early academic achievement of African American boys. *The Journal of Negro Education, 78*(3), 260-276.

This article sought to identify the impact of literacy behaviors within the home on various outcomes for African American males. The researcher found several things about this article useful. The first finding suggests that when parents read for pleasure at home and have relevant reading materials at home, there is a direct correlation with literacy skill development. The study provided evidence to support the claim that the academic behaviors and beliefs of parents are important for achievement outcomes (Joe, E. M. & Davis, J. E., 2009, p. 272). The researcher found this article of particular relevance because African American boys are a large percentage of the population taught in her respective district. There were also a few interesting points, such as the importance of parental attitudes towards reading. Educators must work with parents to assure that the most academically vulnerable students, such as African American boys, are nurtured and supported to actualize their academic potential (Joe, E. M. & Davis, J. E., 2009, p. 272).

Battle-Bailey, L. (2003). Training teachers to design interactive homework. *ERIC Digests*.

Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED482700.pdf>

This article identified the components of interactive homework and the effects on both parents and students when homework is interactive in nature. When parents are interested in young children's homework and provide adequate parental support to complete home learning assignments, students are more likely to successfully complete their homework assignments (Battle-Bailey, L., 2003, p. 2). The article also looked at the importance of facilitating parent-child interactions. The researcher found this article very important to the prospective project because it specifically looked at interactive homework which is a large component of the project. It is also the intent to create homework activities that parents want to complete with their children, thus setting the stage for

sending a sound academic message to their child. The researcher seeks to avoid all possible negative effects of homework such as tensions at home.

Research Process

Figure 1 Research Matrix (Appendix A)

Research Questions	Data Source		
	1	2	3
Q1: What type of home support is most effective in assisting a child with their reading development?	Parent Pre-Survey: Assistance Needed at Home	Teacher Pre-Observations of Reading Strategies Used	Parent Post-Survey: Effectiveness of Given Assistance
Q2: What kind of impact does very specific guidance from the respective teacher have on a parent’s ability to assist their child at home?	Parent Questionnaire using Likert Scale	Homework: Completion of Reading Logs	Homework: Completion of Literacy Activities
Q3: What type of growth should be expected that would be above and beyond that of a child not receiving assistance at home?	Benchmark Assessment Kit: Initial Assessment	Benchmark Assessment Kit: Final Assessment	Teacher Post-Observations of Reading Strategies Used

The first two data sources the researcher used, came from *The Benchmark Assessment System 1* from Fountas and Pinnell (2010). With the first data source, *Benchmark Assessment Kit: Initial Assessment*, students were given an initial assessment that assigned an independent and instructional reading level upon completion. Reading levels are designated from A to Z, with first grade results typically ranging anywhere from A to N. Along with the reading assessment, students were also asked comprehension questions pertaining to the stories they read. The initial questions were basic recall questions, with subsequent questions which prompted students to make connections to the text. Likewise, with the second data source, *Benchmark Assessment Kit: Final Assessment*, students were again assessed and given an independent reading level that demonstrated their growth during said time period. In order to interpret the data, the researcher also

considered what growth would be otherwise expected. The best way to do this was to compare the results of the students who participated in the project with those of the students who did not participate. The tool used to record the respective results can be found in Appendix B.

The next two data sources the researcher used pertained to the completion of homework. In order to use the information from the benchmark assessment kit, it was important to know which students were actually completing their literacy activities and reading at home. The first homework tool, Homework: Completion of Reading-Logs, was used to articulate if there was an increase in the amount of reading completed at home. The second homework tool, Homework: Completion of Literacy Activities, was used to articulate the percentage of students who participated in the literacy activities at home. At the end of the project, the researcher calculated the percentage of literacy activities that were completed and the amount of time students were reading outside of school. Since half of the class participated in the project and half did not, the researcher was able to use the data from both groups and compare the percentages. In order to interpret the data, the researcher looked to see if there was an increased participation in the completion of homework. Additionally, since the number of students who initially read at home was lower than the percentage of students that completed literacy activities at home, the researcher also looked to see if the amount of reading completed at home increased. The tool used to record the respective results can be found in Appendix C.

The next two data sources that were used came from teacher observations. The fifth data source, Teacher Pre-Observations of Reading Strategies Used, was completed during independent reading as well as during the initial Benchmark Assessments. From the results, the researcher was able to calculate the percentage of strategies used before participating in the project and after. For example, there were eight different strategies that the researcher specifically monitored. Additionally, the researcher was able to identify which strategies needed continued teaching and support. The sixth data source, Teacher Post-

Observations of Reading Strategies Used, was used to demonstrate if growth. If a student used two of the eight strategies before the project and seven of the strategies at the end of the project, the growth was calculated. In order to interpret the data, the researcher looked to see if there was an increase of strategies used during independent reading, beyond that of the students who did not participate in the project. All of the students in the class still received implicit instruction regarding reading strategies. The tool used to record the respective results can be found in Appendix D.

The last three data sources that the researcher used were parent surveys. The first survey, Parent Pre-Survey: Assistance Needed at Home, was given before the project began. Parents were surveyed as to the level of assistance they viewed as being necessary to adequately encourage and provide assistance with homework, reading, and related activities each night. Additionally, information was obtained that gave the researcher a better idea of the current home environment as it pertained to parental involvement at home. The second survey, Parent Post-Survey: Effectiveness of Given Assistance, was given at the end of the project period. Parents were surveyed as to the level of effectiveness from said assistance, as set forth based on preconceived biases and pre-survey results. The final survey asked parents to respond to said prompts using a likert scale. The questions pertained to the importance of support at home including environmental support as it relates to completion of homework and reading at home. In order to interpret the survey results, the researcher looked at the responses of each family that participated. Specifically, the researcher looked to see if the assistance given during the project timeframe aided the family in their attempts to help their child with homework and reading at home. The parent surveys can be found in Appendix E, F, and G.

The researcher had twenty first grade students in her class. These students were separated into two groups. Based on the way homework was being completed, students were separated into the following groups: students who were not completing homework (approximately eight students), students who were completing their weekly homework but

were not completing any reading logs (approximately eight students), and students who were completing their weekly homework and their weekly reading logs (approximately four students). Based on the above defined subgroups, students were randomly divided into two groups, by drawing an equal number of names from each of the subgroups. The first set of names that were drawn, were subsequently placed into the first group. The second set of names that were drawn, were placed into the second group. To summarize, each group of ten students included three students were not completing their homework, four students who were completing their weekly homework but not completing a reading log, and three students who were completing their weekly homework and their weekly reading log.

After the groups were formed, the first set of names was blindly chosen as the group who ultimately received the literacy backpacks. During the course of the project, the selected students were given a literacy backpack to take home, each Friday. Upon receiving a literacy backpack, families found a user friendly, easy to use instruction sheet, five to seven books relating to the theme of the literacy backpack, and two literacy activities. The activities were clearly defined and required a minimal time commitment. Additionally, these families were given simple, easy to understand information about how to help their child at home. Topics included creating a designated reading spot at home, setting aside a specific time each night to work with their child, taking picture walks before reading, talking about the stories we read, and strategies that readers use to help them figure out unknown words.

The other group of ten students continued to receive the same homework they had been receiving, which included five mathematics worksheets, five language arts worksheets, and a reading log to record nightly reading activity. The difference between the two groups was that one group was provided the books to read at home, literacy activities, related materials, and specific easy to use instructions. There were no other directives or scaffolded support offered for the second group of students. The intent was to determine the level of impact, specifically on literacy development, when a parent gets specific

guidance, directives, and support that enables them to fully assist their child academically and with confidence.

For the purpose of this project, the researcher needed enough resources for ten literacy backpacks. Additionally, three more backpacks were needed in case a student didn't return their backpack on the designated day. Each student took home a different literacy backpack each week of the project. The materials needed for implementation of the prospective project were approximately ninety-one books, thirteen backpacks, twenty-six literacy activities, and thirteen sets of instructions.

Data Analysis

The first question the researcher asked was "What type of home support is most effective in assisting a child with their reading development?" Academic support for families should be provided, and should include easy-to-understand directives and the respective tools needed to complete tasks. The researcher used three different data sources to try and prove this statement. Based on the results of the respective data sited, the researcher concluded that academic support should in fact be provided for families, in the form of easy-to-understand directives, academic support, and necessary tools.

The first data source, Parent Pre-Survey: Assistance Needed at Home, essentially asked parents what they needed at home in order to be able to work with their child each night. Additionally, parents were asked what obstacles they currently have such that they are not able to work with child each night. The pre-survey results indicated that parents did not have the books, time, resources, or academic knowledge to help their children at home. There were several obstacles such as time and medical complications that could not be fixed or addressed during this project. The researcher therefore, looked specifically at the remaining factors of books, resources, and knowledge, throughout this project and provided parents with solutions to the respective barriers.

The pre-survey results indicated that only two out of ten families were reading to their children on a nightly basis, while only one out of ten families had more than thirty books at home for their child to read. From the ten families that participated in the action research project, only four families helped their first grade child with their homework. Additionally, of the ten families, only six families identified that an adult was available in the household to help their child. Only one family indicated that they had a set time and place for their child to do their reading or homework. The majority of families responded that they did not have the adequate resources to help their child at home, such as paper, pencils, scissors, crayons, or glue; and only three families felt comfortable with their own knowledge of how a child reads. The pre-survey results were a good indication that support and resources were needed for families to home, so that they would feel more comfortable with helping their child at home. In fact, of the ten families surveyed, all ten indicated that having access to the respective supplies, would in fact help them be better able to assist their child at home.

The second data source, Teacher Observations of Reading Strategies Used, was a checklist that was utilized throughout the action research project. This checklist was used to assess which strategies students used when they were reading independently and which strategies needed further assistance and teaching. Students were assessed at the beginning of the project period. The information garnered from the observations, was then used to identify which strategies students would need more help with at home. Families were provided with easy-to-understand directives that would reinforce the reading strategies taught at school.

The initial observations indicated that all of the strategies needed reinforcement at home. Two of the reading strategies, rereading and recognizing and using diphthongs and digraphs, were not consistently utilized by any of the students. The strategy that was used by the most students, four out of ten, was using pictures to help determine a word. The remaining strategies, stretching sounds in words when reading, uses beginning sounds,

notices if a sentence does not make sense, uses chunks and words within words, and recognizes high frequency words, were only used by two of the ten students; but not the same two students. In fact, of the ten students, only one student utilized more than half of the strategies. It is fair to say that all of the ten students needed continued support respective to using reading strategies.

The third data source, Parent Post-Survey: Effectiveness of Given Assistance, asked parents to reflect on the effectiveness of the literacy backpack program. The survey questions were directly comparable to the pre-survey questions and served to demonstrate growth in said areas. Based on the survey results, eighty percent of the families were able to read to their child each night, compared to only twenty percent before using the literacy backpack program, with every family reporting that they were using the books provided. Participation with homework went up by fifty percent. Interestingly, the pre-survey results found that only six of the ten families were able to designate a responsible adult to read to their child each evening, while the post-survey results found that nine of the families were able to designate a responsible adult to read with their child each night. It is the subjective opinion of the researcher that when parents are educated on the value of providing support at home and given the respective resources, it also serves to motivate them to find solutions to other problems. While the pre-survey results indicated that families were not emphasizing the importance of providing a consistent time and place to read and complete homework each night, the post-survey results indicated that seven out of ten families were able to provide the time and space; this figure increased from one of ten families initially. Providing resources, such as paper, pencils, crayons, glue, or scissors with the respective literacy activities, was a valuable resource for nine of the ten families. One of the most important findings was that eight of the ten families felt more comfortable with their own knowledge and abilities to help their child. Finally, all ten families indicated that the resources provided made an impact on their ability to help their child at home.

Figure 2 Homework Frequency

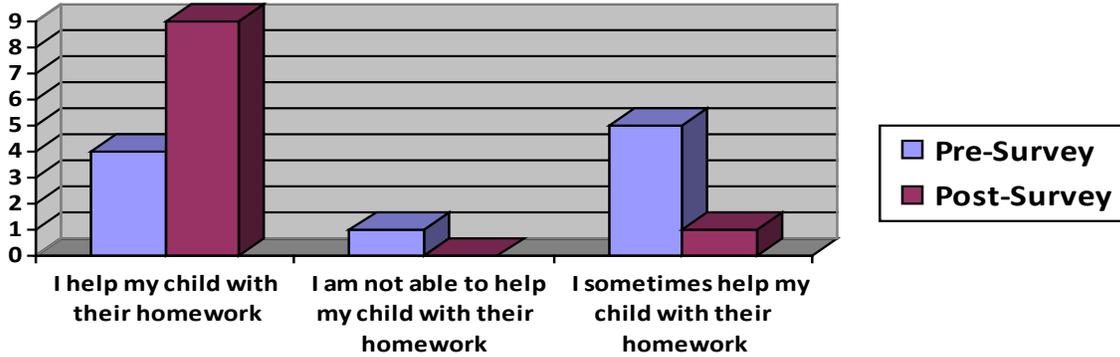
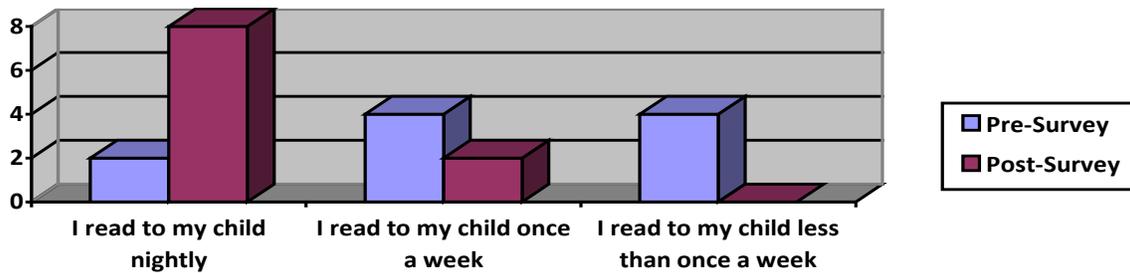


Figure 3 Reading Frequency



The second question the researcher asked was “What kinds of impact does very specific guidance from respective teacher have on a parent’s ability to assist their child at home?” When specific guidance is provided to families attempting to assist their children with reading at home, barriers that exist in hindering a parent’s ability to academically assist their child, such as lack of resources and lack of knowledge, will be removed. The researcher used three different data sources to try and prove this statement. Based on the results of the respective data sited, the research concluded that there was a definite impact on each respective family’s ability to assist their child at home. As can be seen from Figure 2 and 3, the researcher demonstrated that families are more equipped and subsequently spend more time assisting their child at home, when support is provided by the respective teacher and/or school.

The first data source, Parent Questionnaire using Likert Scale, served to demonstrate which resources made the biggest impact on a family’s ability to assist their child at home.

Based on the parent questionnaire, families indicated that the biggest impact was made by the books, resources, and academic resources that were provided, with nine out of ten families responding respectively. Eight out of ten families also agreed that providing a consistent time to read and do homework each night was beneficial, as well as easy-to-read instructions. While only five out of ten families agreed that a designated reading spot made an impact. Eight of the ten families reported that participating in the literacy backpack program made an impact on their child’s reading development and growth.

Figure 4 The following resources made it easier to read with my child each night:

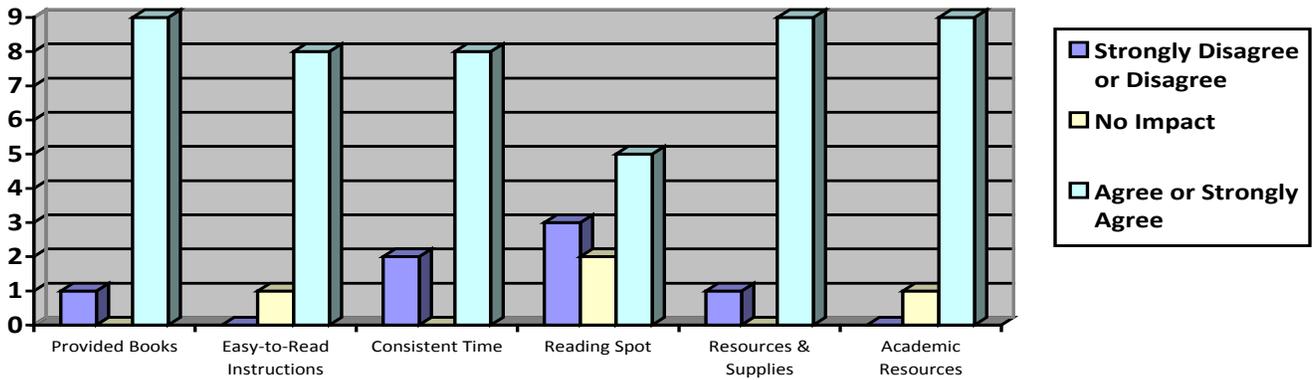
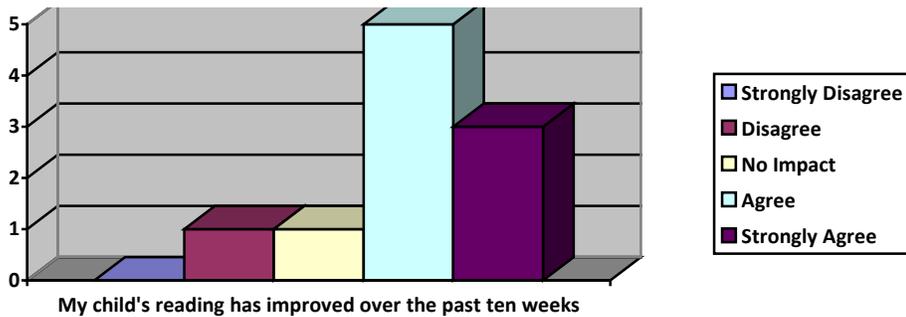


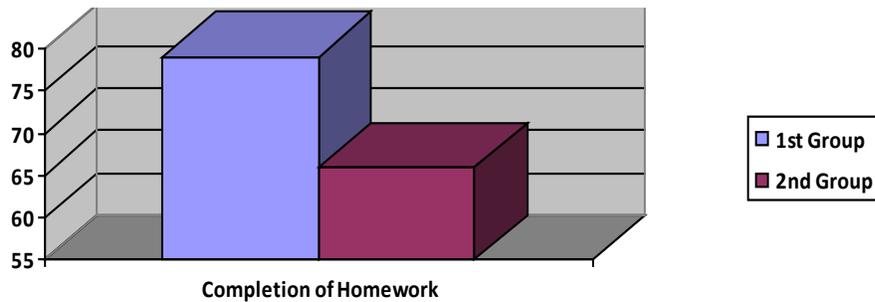
Figure 5 Reading Improvement



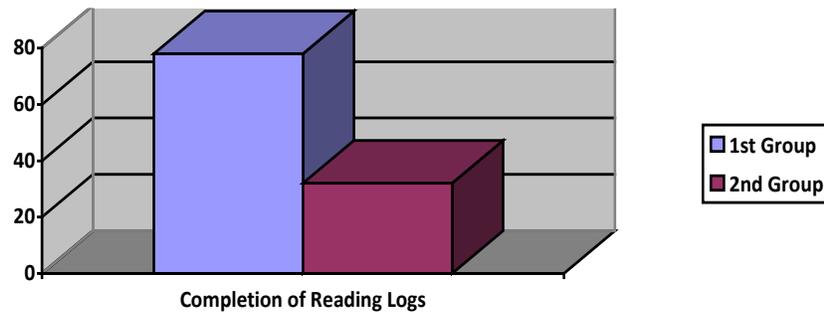
The second data source, Homework: Completion of Reading-Logs, supplied strong evidence that students were more likely to complete homework when families were supported with the necessary resources. The first group of students, the group that

participated in the literacy backpack program, completed their homework seventy-nine percent of the time. The second group of students, the group that did not participate in the literacy backpack program, completed their homework sixty-six percent of the time. When the students were initially segregated into groups, they were separated by the amount of homework and reading they did at home; therefore, the participation difference of thirteen percent is directly related to the support that said families received throughout the literacy backpack program.

Figure 6 Homework



The third data source, Homework: Completion of Literacy Activities, likewise supplied strong evidence that students were more likely to read at home when families were supported with the necessary resources. The first group of students, the group that participated in the literacy backpack program, completed their reading logs seventy-nine percent of the time. The second group of students, the group that did not participate in the literacy backpack program, completed their reading logs thirty-two percent of the time. Again, because the groups were initially segregated by the amount of homework and reading they did at home, the participation difference of forty-seven percent is directly related to the support that said families received throughout the literacy backpack program.

Figure 7 Reading Logs

The third question the researcher asked was “What type of growth should be expected that would be above and beyond that of a child not receiving assistance at home?” Academic growth relative to each student’s ability level should be evident when a parent assists the respective student at home. The researcher used three different data sources to try and prove this statement. Based on the results of the respective data cited, the researcher concluded that academic growth is evident when a child is getting additional academic assistance at home.

The first data source, *Benchmark Assessment Kit: Initial Assessment*, provided an initial reading level for each child in the classroom. The initial reading levels were then compared to the final reading levels to demonstrate reading growth within said period. It was the intent of the researcher to use the demonstrated growth to prove that, while academic growth is relative to each student’s ability level, that respective students demonstrate more growth when support is provided at home. In order to demonstrate such growth, the researcher will look at the second data source, the *Benchmark Assessment Kit: Final Assessment*. For the purpose of this assessment, the researcher looked at the results from both groups of students. The first group of students, the students that participated in the literacy backpack program, demonstrated, on average, a growth of 2.8 reading levels. The second group of students, students who did not participate in the program, demonstrated, on average a growth of 1.5 reading levels. Subsequently, the growth rate of the first group of readers was 1.87 times more than that of the second group.

Figure 8 First Group of Reading Level Results

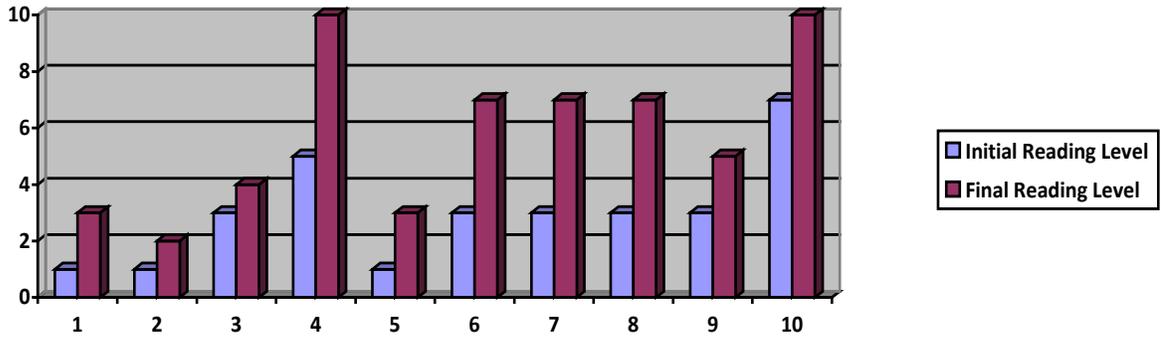


Figure 9 Second Group of Reading Level Results

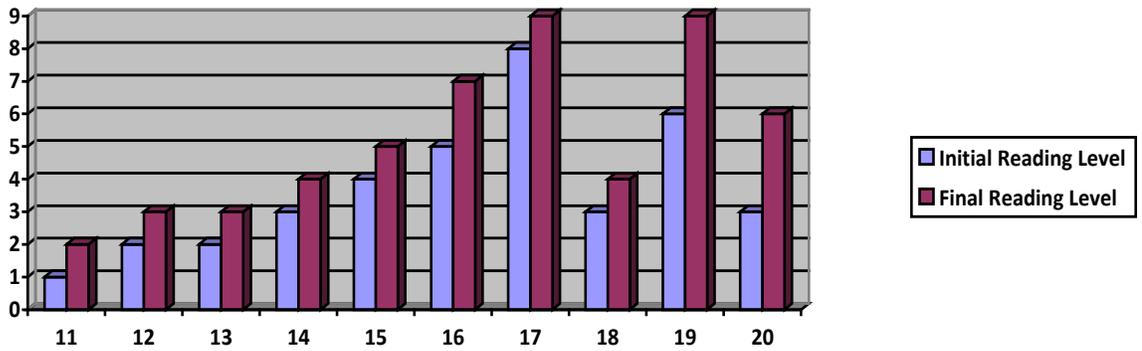
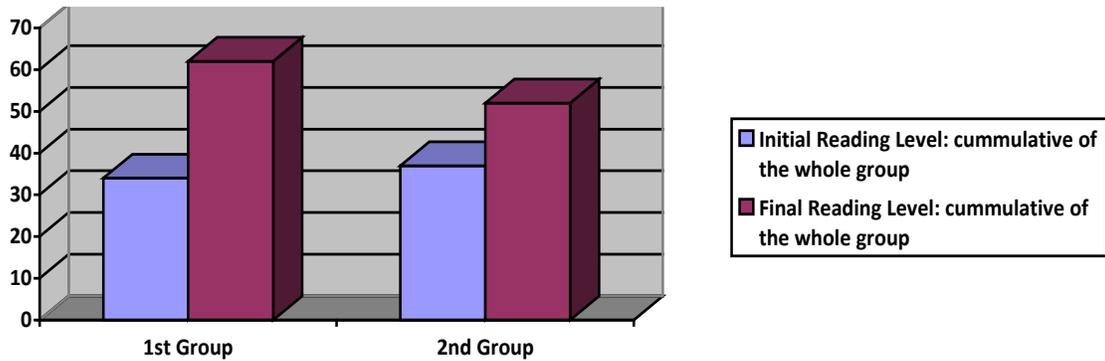


Figure 10 Reading Levels: Group Comparison



The third data source for this question is the Teacher Post-Observations of Reading Strategies Used. While the Teacher Pre-Observations of Reading Strategies Used assessment was used to determine what strategies students needed support with; together, the pre and post observations serve to demonstrate subsequent growth that occurred throughout the timeframe of the literacy backpack program. To demonstrate growth, the researcher looked at the results from the first group of students, students that participated in the literacy backpack program, with that of the second group of students, students that did not participate in the literacy backpack program. Students from the first group demonstrated, on average, a growth of 4.3 strategies. Students from the second group demonstrated, on average, a growth of 3.3 strategies. Students from the first group demonstrated a growth of one more strategy than that of the second group of students.

Figure 11 First Group Reading Strategies Used

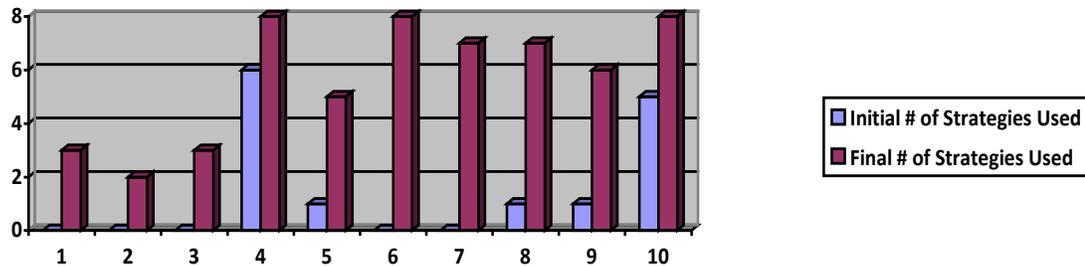


Figure 12 Second Group Reading Strategies Used

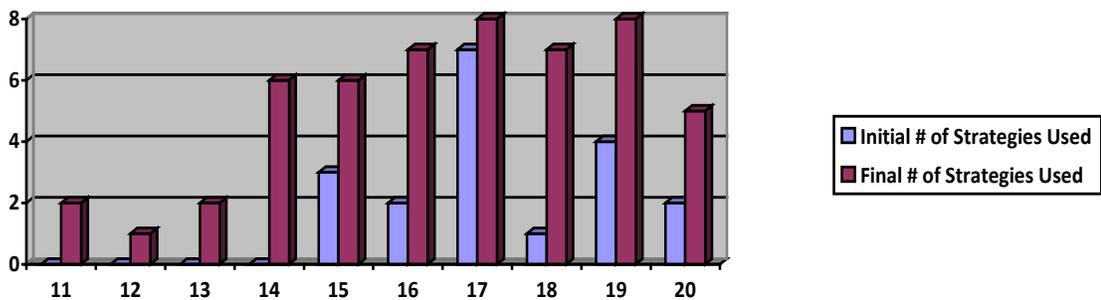
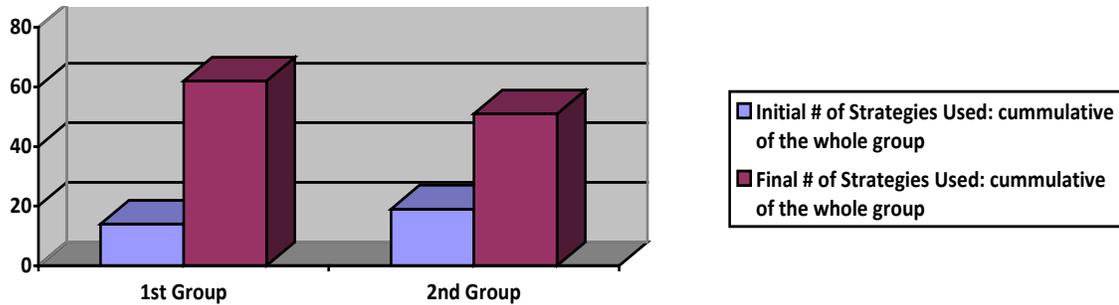


Figure 13 Reading Strategies Used: Group Comparison



Action Plan

The researcher has benefited from this project in many ways. Parental involvement has been a passion for the researcher for many, many years. Coming from a home where education was valued and efforts were supported, the researcher has been searching for ways to encourage families to become involved, not only in the classroom but in their homes as well. It was discovered long ago that there are many obstacles for families wanting to become involved in the classroom, but that should not stop any parent from being able to be involved in their child's education. Throughout the process of deciding what would be the best research topic, the researcher looked at many different ways that teachers can help parents become involved. With this initial phase the researcher really benefitted from reflecting and coming up with the many varied ways with which teachers can make an impact on parental involvement.

The next area with which the researcher benefitted was through the interaction with parents. With the use of three different surveys, parents had many opportunities to share their opinions and experiences. Additionally, because of the surveys and participation in the literacy backpack program, many parents felt more open to share and communicate with the researcher. By the end of the research period, a lot of information was gleaned pertaining to which ideas benefitted families the most, as well as many new ideas to try in the future. The researcher looks forward to continuing this process on a larger scale.

Finally, the action research process in and of itself provides many opportunities for teachers to implement ideas that they think should have great impact on academic growth.

Additionally, teachers are afforded the opportunity to research and gain evidence that said implemented ideas are indeed beneficial. Without such evidence, many of the new implemented ideas are mere speculation. The researcher also sees the benefit of utilizing parent surveys with future action research projects.

The researcher plans to use the information gleaned from this project in many different ways. As mentioned above, the researcher plans on implementing the ideas from this research action project on a larger scale. Specifically, this action research project has shown that providing families with the necessary resources and academic knowledge is beneficial for each respective student's reading development. The researcher plans on refining the process and related literacy activities, such that the maximum gain can be made in all respects. The researcher has truly taken away the importance of basing decisions on the findings of related research.

The researcher plans to disseminate the project to a professional learning community by presenting the findings to her grade level team, the respective school improvement team, and the language arts committee. Since the researcher teaches in a lower elementary classroom, she feels there is a great opportunity to get parents involved from the beginning. By sharing related research with grade level colleagues, the researcher will not only be sharing her passion for parental involvement and the importance thereof, but she will be sharing the impact that the research project had on families from the respective neighborhood. The researcher plans on sharing the information with the language arts committee because there is a real need for parental involvement within the school community. Many of the activities that the language arts committee facilitates have never been well attended. There is a direct relationship between literacy and parental involvement within this research project; likewise there is a direct relationship between literacy and parental involvement embedded within the many activities that the language arts committee plans. Therefore, it is a fair assumption that much of the information

gleaned from said research, can be utilized to make the most of respective literacy activities.

In reflection, the researcher has concluded that parental involvement should be creatively pursued at all costs. Use what we know that works, and work on what we know does not. The researcher will use what was gleaned from this project and continue to pursue new and innovative ways to encourage parental involvement. As our society continues to change, the ways that we make education come alive must also adapt. The families with which we are trying to reach are varied and complex and their needs are just as varied and just as complex; so must we provide a varied, complex, and innovate approach to education.

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Appendix A

Figure 1. Research Matrix

Research Questions	Data Source		
	1	2	3
Q1: What type of home support is most effective in assisting a child with their reading development?	Parent Pre-Survey: Assistance Needed at Home	Teacher Pre-Observations of Reading Strategies Used	Parent Post-Survey: Effectiveness of Given Assistance
Q2: What kind of impact does very specific guidance from the respective teacher have on a parent’s ability to assist their child at home?	Parent Questionnaire using Likert Scale	Homework: Completion of Reading Logs	Homework: Completion of Literacy Activities
Q3: What type of growth should be expected that would be above and beyond that of a child not receiving assistance at home?	Benchmark Assessment Kit: Initial Assessment	Benchmark Assessment Kit: Final Assessment	Teacher Post-Observations of Reading Strategies Used

Appendix B

Benchmark Assessments: Jan. (initial level) / Mar. (final level)

Students by Coded Number	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
<i>First Group</i>														
#1 does not complete homework or reading	H	H/In	H/Is	I										
#2 does not complete homework or reading	H/In	H/H	H/H											
#3 does not complete homework or reading		In	Is/In	H/Is	H									
#4 does not complete homework or reading				In	Is	H			In	Is	H			
#5 completes homework but not reading	H	H/In	H/Is	H										
#6 completes homework but not reading			In	Is	H		In	Is	H					
#7 completes homework but not reading		In	Is	H		In	Is	H						
#8 completes homework but not reading			In	Is	H		In	Is						
#9 completes homework and reading				In	Is	H/In	Is	H						
#10 completes homework and reading						In	Is	H	In	Is	H			
<i>Second Group</i>														
#11 does not complete homework or reading	H/In	H/H	H/H											
#12 does not complete homework or reading	In	H/In	H/Is	H										
#13 does not complete homework or reading	In	Is/In	H/Is	I										
#14 does not complete homework or reading		In	Is/In	H/Is	H									
#15 completes homework but not reading			In	Is/In	H/Is	H								
#16 completes homework but not reading				In	Is	H/In	Is	H						
#17 completes homework but not reading							In	Is/In	H/Is	H				
#18 completes homework but not reading		In	Is/In	H/Is	H									
#19 completes homework and reading					In	Is	H	In	Is	H				
#20 completes homework and reading		In	Is	H	In	Is	H							

Instructions: Indicate if the reading level was independent=id (96-100%), instructional=is (90-95%), or hard=h (below 90%).

Appendix D

Conferring Checklist: *initial/final*

Students by Coded Number	stretches sounds in words when reading	Uses beginning sounds	goes back and rereads	notices if a sentence does or does not make sense	uses chunks and words within words	recognizes digraphs and diphthongs	uses pictures	recognizes and reads high frequency words
<i>First Group</i>								
#1 does not complete homework or reading	n/y	n/y	n/n	n/y	n/n	n/n	n/y	n/n
#2 does not complete homework or reading	n/n	n/y	n/n	n/n	n/n	n/n	n/y	n/n
#3 does not complete homework or reading	n/y	n/y	n/n	n/n	n/n	n/n	n/y	n/n
#4 does not complete homework or reading	y/y	y/y	n/y	y/y	y/y	n/y	y/y	y/y
#5 completes homework but not reading	n/y	n/y	n/n	y/y	n/n	n/n	n/y	n/y
#6 completes homework but not reading	n/y	n/y	n/y	n/y	n/y	n/y	n/y	n/y
#7 completes homework but not reading	n/y	n/y	n/y	n/y	n/y	n/n	n/y	n/y
#8 completes homework but not reading	n/y	n/y	n/y	n/y	n/y	n/n	y/y	n/y
#9 completes homework and reading	n/y	n/y	n/n	n/y	n/y	n/n	y/y	n/y
#10 completes homework and reading	y/y	y/y	n/y	n/y	y/y	n/y	y/y	y/y
<i>Second Group</i>								
#11 does not complete homework or reading	n/n	n/n	n/n	n/n	n/n	n/n	n/y	n/n
#12 does not complete homework or reading	n/n	n/n	n/n	n/n	n/n	n/n	n/y	n/n
#13 does not complete homework or reading	n/n	n/y	n/n	n/n	n/n	n/n	n/y	n/n
#14 does not complete homework or reading	n/y	n/y	n/y	n/n	n/y	n/n	n/y	n/y
#15 completes homework but not reading	y/y	y/y	n/n	n/n	n/y	n/y	y/y	n/y
#16 completes homework but not reading	y/y	n/y	n/y	n/y	n/n	n/y	y/y	n/y
#17 completes homework but not reading	y/y	y/y	n/y	y/y	y/y	y/y	y/y	y/y
#18 completes homework but not reading	n/y	n/y	n/n	n/y	n/y	n/y	y/y	n/y
#19 completes homework and reading	y/y	y/y	n/y	n/y	n/y	n/y	y/y	y/y
#20 completes homework and reading	n/n	y/y	n/n	n/n	n/y	n/y	y/y	n/y

Appendix E

Parent Pre-Survey

Please answer the following questions regarding the level with which you are currently able to assist your child at home, as well as any barriers that might prohibit you from working with your child at home. Please be as honest as possible. You may send the survey back to school with your child or drop it off in the office, but in either case I will not see the results until I have received all of the surveys back. This survey is anonymous and only serves to help me know how to better help our students and families. (parent responses are in red)

1. How often do you read to your child at home?
 - a. Nightly 2
 - b. Once a Week 4
 - c. Less often 4
2. How many books do you have at home, that are appropriate for a first grader to read?
 - a. Less than 10 books 3
 - b. 10 to 30 books 6
 - c. More than 30 books 1
3. Do you currently help your child with their homework?
 - a. Yes 4
 - b. No 1
 - c. Sometimes 5
4. Is there an adult who is available to read to your child each night?
 - a. Yes, a parent 4
 - b. Yes, a caregiver or family member 2
 - c. No, there is no one available 4
5. Do you have a set time when you or another adult sits down with your child and helps them with their homework or read to them?
 - a. Yes 1
 - b. No 9
6. Do you have a special spot where you read to your child and/or where your child completes their homework?
 - a. Yes 1
 - b. No 9
7. Do you have the resources at home to complete homework and activities, such as pencils, paper, scissors, glue, and crayons?
 - a. Yes 3
 - b. No 7
8. Do you feel comfortable with your own knowledge of how a child learns to read, such that it is not an obstacle in assisting your child at home?
 - a. Yes 4
 - b. No 3
 - c. Sometimes 3
9. If you were provided with the resources you needed, such as books, easy-to-understand directions, academic support, and supplies, would it make an impact on your ability to help your child at home?
 - a. Yes 10
 - b. No 0
10. Please list any circumstances that may restrict you from reading to your child or helping them with their homework:

Many families responded that time and other responsibilities are a huge restriction when it comes to helping their child with homework or reading at home. Some examples included health restrictions such dialysis and depression, taking care of children or family that are immobile, dialysis, jobs that require 2nd and 3rd shift hours, multiple kids to assist, extended family living within the house or living with someone else, and general responsibilities that leave no extra time. There were also many responses referring to not understanding homework, although some references were made in reference to older siblings. Additionally, many families don't have resources at home.

Appendix F

Parent Post-Survey

Please answer the following questions pertaining to your participation in the literacy backpack program. You may send the survey back to school with your child or drop it off in the office, but in either case I will not see the results until I have received all of the surveys back. This survey is anonymous and only serves to help me know how to better help our students and families. *(parent responses are in red)*

1. How often were you able to read to your child during the past ten weeks?
 - a. Nightly 8
 - b. Once a Week 2
 - c. Less Often 0
2. How often did you use the books that were provided in the literacy backpacks?
 - a. Nightly 8
 - b. Once a Week 2
 - c. Less Often 0
3. Were you able to help your child with their homework during the past ten weeks?
 - a. Yes 9
 - b. No 0
 - c. Sometimes 1
4. Were you able to designate a responsible adult to read to your child each evening?
 - a. Yes, a parent 7
 - b. Yes, a caregiver/adult 2
 - c. No 1
5. Were you able to provide a consistent time to read to your child each night?
 - a. Yes 7
 - b. No 3
6. Were you able to find a special spot to read to your child and/or complete homework?
 - a. Yes 7
 - b. No 3
7. Were the provided resources, paper, pencils, crayons, glue, or scissors, helpful in being able to help your child with their homework and reading?
 - a. Yes 9
 - b. No 1
8. Did the academic resources provided make you feel more comfortable with your own knowledge of how a child learns to read?
 - a. Yes 8
 - b. No 0
 - c. Sometimes 2
9. Did the any of resources you needed (books, easy-to-understand directions, academic support and supplies) impact on your ability to help your child at home?
 - a. Yes 9
 - b. No 1

Appendix G

Parent Survey

Throughout the last ten weeks, your child has been using literacy backpacks at home. Please answer the following questions about the benefits of using the literacy backpacks. Answer the questions using a scale of 1 to 5. You may send the survey back to school with your child or drop it off in the office, but in either case I will not see the results until I have received all of the surveys back. This survey is anonymous and only serves to help me know how to better help our students and families. (parent responses are in red)

1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=no impact 4=agree 5=strongly agree

1. The books that were provided made it easier to read to my child each night.

1	2	3	4	5
0	1	0	4	5

2. The directions that were provided each week made it easier for me to help my child complete their assignments.

1	2	3	4	5
0	1	1	5	3

3. Setting a consistent time each night to do homework was helpful in making sure that homework got done each night.

1	2	3	4	5
1	1	0	8	0

4. Choosing a special spot to read was helpful in making sure that we read each night.

1	2	3	4	5
1	2	2	4	1

5. The resources provided in the literacy backpacks were helpful in completing the related activities.

1	2	3	4	5
0	1	0	6	3

6. The academic resources provided in the literacy backpacks were helpful in being able to assist my child.

1	2	3	4	5
0	0	1	8	1

7. I noticed that my child's reading improved over the past ten weeks.

1	2	3	4	5
0	1	1	5	3