

# Linking Home and School: Teacher Candidates' Beliefs and Experiences

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## Abstract

The role of family in children's education is unquestionable. While a number of factors influence the type and level of educational support that parents provide for children, researchers have found that the greatest influence on parent involvement is the classroom teacher. Despite the important role teachers play in parent involvement, little is known about the ways teachers develop their beliefs and understandings of parent involvement practices. The current study focuses on candidates' observations, experiences, and perceptions of parent involvement activities during their field placements and student teaching. Findings indicate that teacher candidates observed a number of parent involvement activities during field experiences and student teaching. Candidates viewed parents as having an essential role in children's education. However, candidates did not observe ideal interactions with families when placed in urban settings, and there were inconsistencies between candidates' perceptions of parents' and teachers' roles.

Key words: home, schools, linking, teachers, candidates, preservice, pre-service, beliefs, experiences, family, families, parents, involvement, practices, urban, suburban, roles, perceptions, special, education, regular, classrooms

## Purpose

Parents play a critical role in their children's education. This is especially true in the areas of language and literacy development in which parents

can substantially influence development prior to and during children's years of formal schooling (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990; Durkin, 1966; Hart & Risely, 1995; Hewison & Tizard, 1980; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lese-man & de Jong, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 1996). Although parents can positively influence children's learning, not all families provide the same level or type of support at home. (Note: The term parent is used to represent a range of caregivers.) Researchers have shown inconsistencies in the levels and types of parent involvement depending on economic, cultural, and linguistic factors. Children who live in poverty and are culturally and linguistically diverse have been found to receive fewer of the language experiences necessary to build a strong vocabulary (Hart & Risely, 1995), fewer of the school-style literacy activities in their homes that support reading performance (Heath, 1983; Nord, Lennon, Westat, & Chandler, 1999; Ortiz, 1986; Purcell-Gates, 1996), and on national learning assessments, these children underperform their peers who are raised at higher income levels (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005).

Given the inconsistencies in parent involvement and the importance of parent involvement for children's education, researchers and educators have sought ways to promote parent involvement for all families. Researchers have demonstrated that parent involvement for school-aged children is most influenced by classroom teachers (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Dauber & Epstein, 1993), yet home-school partnerships are often complicated by differing expectations between teachers and families about their roles in children's education. This is especially true for students who are more likely to struggle with academic achievement and who might not be experiencing the home-based learning opportunities that best prepare them for academic achievement, such as storybook reading and homework support (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1990; Heath, 1983; Parra & Henderson, 1982; Valdés, 1996). Moreover, these differences in home learning opportunities can be exacerbated by teachers who have a better understanding of literacy practices in middle-class homes and who may select texts that are not "relevant" for diverse groups of children (McCarthy, 1997).

In order to find ways to foster parent involvement, some researchers have examined the effectiveness of providing professional development and support for practicing teachers and families to increase communication and sharing between the home and school (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Krol-Sinclair, Hindin, Emig, & McClure, 2003; Paratore, Hindin, Krol-Sinclair, & Dúran, 1999). Although there is more research on practicing teachers, a limited number of researchers have begun looking at the role of teacher preparation in parent involvement (Graue, 2005; Katz & Bauch, 1999; Morris &

Taylor, 1998; Power & Perry, 2000; Uludag, 2008). Nonetheless, research is still needed to address the ways teachers develop their beliefs and knowledge about parent involvement.

To address this gap, this study explores teacher candidates' experiences with and beliefs about home–school partnerships and the roles parents and teachers play in children's educational development. In this study, home–school partnerships are viewed as the ways teachers and families work together to support children's learning. The term parent involvement is broadly conceived to include experiences that take place at school and in children's homes and communities. Examples of home-based experiences include helping children with homework and school-based projects, supporting children's learning through encouragement and interest, reading with children, and discussing children's learning. Parent involvement also includes parental visits to the school to advocate for children, to learn about children's educational experiences, as well as to share their culture and expertise.

## Theoretical Framework

Parent involvement in children's education is clearly defined by Epstein (1994) who developed a typology for the range of parent involvement activities which include *basic obligations of families* (Type 1), *basic obligations of schools to effectively communicate with families* (Type 2), *involvement at the school building* (Type 3), *family involvement for learning activities at home* (Type 4), *decision making, participation, leadership, and school advocacy* (Type 5), and *collaborations and exchanges with the community* (Type 6). Epstein (2005) describes how this theory can be extended to view partnership in terms of *overlapping spheres of influence* that can be helpful in teacher preparation by illustrating the ways children's learning is influenced by teachers, families, and communities.

While a number of factors influence the educational support that parents provide for children, such as their own school experiences, teachers' efforts to involve parents is one critical factor. For example, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) emphasize the importance of teacher moves to involve parents in their model of parent involvement. They explain, "The considerable evidence on teacher practices intended to support parent involvement, and parents' sensitivity to teachers' attitudes about their involvement, underscores the importance of school generated invitations and opportunities for positive parental decisions about involvement" (p. 31). Similarly, Dauber and Epstein (1993) report about the impact of teachers on parent involvement and conclude, "The strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at school and at home are the specific school programs and teacher practices that

encourage or guide parental involvement” (p. 61). The importance of teachers is also supported by the research of Anderson and Minke (2007) who state, “The emergence of specific invitations from teachers as the single most influential variable on parents’ involvement choices is significant because schools are able to influence teacher practices more so than any other variable” (p. 321).

Despite the important role teachers play in parent involvement, little is known about the ways teachers develop their expectations and understandings of parent involvement practices. One factor that influences teacher expectations is their own experiences with parent involvement when they attended school (Graue, 2005; Graue & Brown, 2003). Graue (2005) found that teacher candidates’ memories of their parents’ interactions with school shaped their views about the roles teachers play in home–school partnerships. Once they begin their teacher preparation programs, candidates can be influenced by coursework addressing parent involvement (Morris & Taylor, 1998; Uludag, 2008). Yet, researchers have found this topic accounts for little of the content in teacher preparation programs (Lazar, Broderick, Mastrilli, & Slostad, 1999). Moreover, coursework is only one aspect of teacher preparation programs, and studies have shown that candidates are often more influenced by what they see in their field placements (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2002). For example, in a study of 223 teacher candidates, Uludag (2008) found that candidates became more confident about parental involvement during their teacher preparation program and candidates reported their perceptions about parent involvement were most influenced by their experiences in the field. Despite the importance of these field placements and student teaching, there are few studies that document the experiences candidates have in the field that relate to parent involvement. Researchers of home–school partnerships point to the need for more studies of teacher candidates’ experiences and learning during their preparation programs (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). This study sets out to address this gap by exploring teacher candidates’ experiences with home–school partnerships and their beliefs about parents’ roles in their children’s education and teachers’ roles in parent involvement. More specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of parent involvement practices do teacher candidates observe in field placements and student teaching, and do the practices differ by placement type (urban/suburban, regular education classroom, inclusive classroom, self-contained classroom)?
2. What are teacher candidates’ perceptions about the ways cooperating teachers interact with parents, and do their perceptions differ by placement type?
3. What types of parent involvement practices do teacher candidates participate in during their field placements and student teaching?

4. What are teacher candidates' beliefs about parents' roles and teachers' roles in children's education, and how do these beliefs compare before and after student teaching?

## Methods

### Participants

Study participants were undergraduate teacher candidates enrolled in a four-year teacher preparation program in the tri-state region around New York City in the United States. Candidates in our teacher preparation program are primarily White (88%) with 8.5% African American candidates and less than 1% Hispanic and other ethnicities. Participants in this study were in their senior year. Our teacher preparation program begins in freshman year with introductory education coursework. Beginning in sophomore year, candidates take their first methods classes and begin their four field placements which are 72 hours each semester. All candidates are placed in at least one urban, one suburban, one public, and one private/parochial setting. These placements must include at least one special education classroom and one inclusive classroom. In senior year, candidates complete their 15-week student teaching placement in conjunction with a senior seminar course. Placements are assigned by the director of the Office of Field Placement, who gathers data about the schools through the state department of education as well as site visits to each of the schools. These placement types are recorded for each candidate to ensure that they receive these diverse ranges of placement types. An examination of our 18 most frequently used school sites revealed that 4 of the schools have greater than 70% of students who receive free and reduced priced lunch.

### Data Sources

A survey was administered to teacher candidates prior to their student teaching in senior year and upon completion of their student teaching experience. Candidates had completed four 72-hour field placements in conjunction with methods classes in literacy, science, mathematics, and social studies. All candidates had at least one urban field placement and one special education placement. During these placements, candidates observed their cooperating teachers' practices and taught two lessons that coincided with their content-based university courses. There is no stand-alone course in parent involvement, but the topic is addressed in several classes including their literacy courses where they discuss the importance of parent involvement for supporting children's language and literacy development. In an introduction to teaching class, they wrote a family letter which is intended to be sent home to parents during

the first week of school. In the letter they introduced themselves and described their teaching philosophies. In addition, they set up a way to get to know the students such as using a parent questionnaire. Also in their introduction to teaching class, they engaged in classroom discussions about why some parents may not come to school and then brainstormed ways to promote parent involvement. In their introduction to special education course, candidates interviewed families of children with special needs about issues such as school and community supports. In the assessment class, candidates learned how to talk with parents about results of their children's assessments. During student teaching, candidates spend one of their seminar sessions on the topic of families and are required to write a letter of introduction to families.

Forty-nine seniors completed the initial survey. Recognizing the limitations of this retrospective account of candidates' field experiences, this survey provides a window into candidates' memories of their field placements in relation to home-school partnerships, and we suspect that it is these memories that candidates will bring with them into their teaching. This survey asked candidates to think about their four field placements in sophomore and junior year, to select the appropriate descriptors for the placement, and select the methods used by cooperating teachers for involving families. (See Appendix for the survey.) Candidates were provided a list of options including a space to add an item if it was not on the list. They were also asked in an open-ended question to describe any interactions they had with families during their placements. In addition, candidates rated their cooperating teachers' interactions with families using a Likert-type scale ranging from -2.0 (Very negative interactions with families) to 2 (Very positive interactions with families). The survey also included open-ended prompts asking candidates the following questions: (1) What do you believe to be parents' roles in their children's education? (2) How would you define a teacher's role in parent involvement?

Forty-seven seniors completed the second survey which was administered after candidates had completed their student teaching. Differences in response rates between the first and second survey were due to the voluntary nature of the survey, and although all senior candidates in the cohort elected to participate in the initial survey, not all candidates elected to complete the second survey. The second survey focused on candidates' student teaching experience, and like the first survey, asked candidates to describe methods used by their cooperating teachers for involving families. In addition, candidates rated their cooperating teachers' interactions with families and answered the open-ended questions relating to teachers' roles in parent involvement and parents' roles in their children's education. They were also asked to describe any interactions they had with families during their placements.

## Data Analysis

Candidates' reports of the parent involvement practices they observed in their field placements were analyzed based on the frequency of practices used by teachers. The analysis included calculations of the frequency of practices depending on the type of field placement (urban/suburban, regular education classroom/special education classroom) using two-way MANOVAs. Data from the initial survey were also analyzed using a one-way ANOVA to see if there were any differences in candidates' ratings of teachers' interactions with families depending on the type of field placement.

Responses to the open-ended questions were read and reread until coding categories emerged (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Codes were developed for responses to each of the open-ended questions about parents' and teachers' roles, and then codes were compared across questions to analyze relationships between their responses. Candidates' descriptions of parents' roles were categorized based on the type of support candidates thought parents should provide. The codes included *knowing what takes place at school* which parents could learn from their children or the teacher. The second code was *helping with academics* which included any type of support with school-based learning. The third code was *having a relationship with the teacher* which links to the idea of home-school partnerships. The fourth code was *providing encouragement and motivation for children's education*. The final code was *non-specific* and this code was used when candidates described parents as having an important role but without any particular examples of the ways parents might be involved.

Similarly, candidates' descriptions of teachers' roles in parent involvement were coded based on the actions teachers could take to involve parents. The first code for teachers' roles was *providing information to parents about their children's progress* both academically and behaviorally. The second code, *encouraging participation from parents*, was used to describe teachers encouraging parents to help their children with their school-based learning. The final code that emerged from the data was related to home-school partnerships when candidates described the teacher's role as *fostering collaboration between themselves and parents*. Coded responses were aggregated to find the percentage of candidates who gave different types of responses, and responses were compared between the initial survey and the final survey.

## Results

### Types of Parent Involvement Observed and Differences by Setting

When looking across the four field placements, teacher candidates most often (78%) reported that their cooperating teachers communicated with parents through parent–teacher conferences, which are often mandated by school districts. The second most frequent practice was sending notes home (76%) followed by calling parents (69%) and using a homework sign-off sheet (37%). Practices reported with less frequency were inviting parents to school to present (19%) or observe (19%) and using a reading log (25.5%). Table 1 displays frequencies of each practice reported by candidates for each of their four field placements.

Analyses of the different types of field placements yielded two significant differences between special education settings and general education settings based on candidates' designations of the type of field placements. A post hoc analysis revealed that candidates reported significantly more instances of calling parents ( $p = 0.39$ ) of children in special education settings ( $m = 0.81$ ) as compared to general education settings, as well as a significant difference ( $p = 0.02$ ) in sending notes home to parents, with higher rates of this practice ( $m = 0.89$ ) in special education settings as compared to general education settings ( $m = 0.69$ ).

Table 1. Candidates Reports of Involvement Practices in Field Placements

Number of Placements Reported	Percentage of Practices Reported by Candidates				
	All 196	Sub-urban 121	Urban 50	General Education 119	Special Education 77
Parent Involvement Practice					
Calling parents	68.9%	72.7%	64.0%	62.2%	79.2%
Sending notes home	76.5%	23.1%	74.0%	68.9%	88.3%
Parent–teacher conferences	78.1%	79.3%	78.0%	79.0%	76.6%
Inviting parents to school to present	18.9%	20.7%	18.0%	20.2%	16.9%
Inviting parents to school to observe	19.4%	21.5%	16.0%	15.1%	26.0%
Homework sign-off sheet	36.7%	35.5%	42.0%	38.7%	33.8%
Reading log	25.5%	29.8%	24.0%	24.4%	27.9%

Data from the second survey revealed that, like the field placements, candidates most often reported that cooperating teachers connected with families during parent–teacher conferences (83%) and through notes that were sent home (87%). Many candidates observed their cooperating teacher calling home (70%). During student teaching, fewer than half described their teacher using a homework sign-off sheet (47%) or using a reading log (43%). Inviting parents to school to present (34%) or observe (29%) was reported with even less frequency. Table 2 displays frequencies of each practice reported by candidates in their student teaching experience.

Table 2. Candidates' Reports of Involvement Practices in Student Teaching

Parent Involvement Practice	Percentage of Practices Reported by Candidates
Calling parents	70%
Sending notes home	87%
Parent–teacher conferences	83%
Inviting parents to school to present	34%
Inviting parents to school to observe	29%
Homework sign-off sheet	47%
Reading log	43%

### Candidates' Perceptions of Teachers' Interactions With Families

Although no statistical differences were found in candidates' reports of types of parent involvement practices when comparing urban and suburban field settings, significant differences were found when analyzing candidates' response to the question about the cooperating teachers' interactions with families. Candidates were asked to rate their teacher's interactions on a 5-point Likert scale (-2 very negative interactions with families to +2 very positive interactions with families). No description of what would constitute a positive or negative interaction was provided. Findings of the two-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference ( $p = 0.059$ ) between candidates' ratings of teachers' interactions depending on whether candidates were placed in an urban or suburban setting. Candidates rated teachers' interactions with parents more negatively when they were placed in urban settings as compared to suburban settings (suburban  $m = 0.97$ ; urban  $m = 0.64$ ).

### Candidates' Contacts With Families

Candidates are not required to interact with families during their field placements, yet they are encouraged to do so. These interactions may help to shape candidates' perceptions of home–school partnerships and provide them

with concrete experiences with sharing information about children and learning about children from parents. When asked about contacts with families during field placements, a majority (70%) of candidates reported some interaction with families. The types of interactions reported included back to school night, open house, holiday parties, and interactions during drop off and pick up. Candidates reported similar contacts with families during student teaching, and although most candidates described interactions with families, two candidates reported that they had no interactions with families during student teaching.

### Candidates' Perceptions of Parents' Roles in Children's Education

The qualitative analysis of candidates' responses revealed that most candidates believed parents' roles in education fall into four categories which include (1) parents should be informed about what is taking place at school and how their children are progressing; (2) parents should help with academics; (3) parents should work as a team with teachers to support their children; and (4) parents should encourage and motivate children in their educational pursuits. Table 3 displays the percentage of candidates who described the different parent roles. Of these types of involvement, the most frequently described prior to student teaching (43%) and after student teaching (42%) was helping with academic work, either by helping with homework, discussing school-based learning, or through activities that reinforce what children are learning in school. As one candidate explains, "Parents are teachers just as much as teachers are. If parents do not provide reinforcement of subject matter at home, I find that students do not master material as quickly. An example of this was when my students [kindergarten special education class] were learning letter-sound relationships."

Table 3. Candidates Descriptions of Parents' Roles in Education

Parents' Roles	% of Candidates Describing Role Pre (N = 49)	% of Candidates Describing Role Post (N = 47)
Knowing what takes place at school	20%	17%
Help with academics	43%	42%
Have a relationship with teacher	16%	8%
Encourage and motivate children's education	14%	11%
Nonspecific	29%	25%

The role described with the next most frequency by candidates was for parents to be informed about what is taking place at school and to know how their children are progressing. As one candidate explained, “I think it is crucial for parents to get involved and understand what their child is learning about and have a watchful eye on their success or decline in school.” Twenty percent of candidates described this role prior to student teaching, and 17% described this role after student teaching.

Prior to student teaching, a greater percentage of candidates (16%) described a parent’s role as working as a team with teachers as compared to 8% percent of candidates who described this role in the second survey. For example, one candidate stated, “Parents and teachers are a team that should work together in providing education for children.” They used words such as “teamwork” and “partners” to describe the way parents should work with their children’s teachers. Similarly, on the initial survey, a number of candidates (14%) described parents’ roles as encouraging and motivating children in their educational pursuits and described parents as “the ultimate role model” for their children. Somewhat fewer (11%) described this role after student teaching.

### **Candidates’ Perceptions of Teachers’ Roles in Parent Involvement**

The analysis of candidates’ responses revealed that most candidates believed teachers’ roles in education include the following three categories: (1) providing information about children’s progress; (2) encouraging participation from parents; and (3) encouraging collaboration between parents and teachers. Table 4 displays the percentage of candidates who described the different teacher roles. Of these roles, the category appearing most often on the survey before student teaching was providing information on children’s progress (39%). For example, one candidate explained, “A teacher should communicate with parents about activities, grades, [and] behavior of the students when needed.” The role described with the next most frequency was that teachers should encourage collaboration between parent and teachers (37%). Fewer candidates reported that teachers should encourage participation (16%). Candidates who described this role included statements such as, “A teacher should encourage parent involvement by making them [parents] a part of activities that go home.”

After completing student teaching, more than half of candidates (64%) described a teacher’s role as encouraging collaboration between parents and teachers, and one fourth (25%) of candidates thought it was the teacher’s role to provide information on children’s progress. Fewer candidates (13%) described a teacher’s role as encouraging participation from parents. Differences between candidates’ descriptions of teachers’ roles in parent involvement may reflect a change in their view of teachers as initiators of collaboration between families and teachers.

Table 4. Candidates Descriptions of Teachers' Roles in Parent Involvement

Teachers' Roles	% of Candidates Describing Role Pre (N=49)	% of Candidates Describing Role Post (N=47)
Provide information on child's progress	39%	25%
Encourage participation from parents	16%	13%
Encourage collaboration between parents and teachers	37%	64%

### Connections Between Candidates' Perceptions of Parents' and Teachers' Roles

When looking across candidates' responses, mixed results were found with regards to consistency between their descriptions of parents' and teachers' roles. For example, before student teaching, many candidates (43%) described parents' roles as including help with academics, whereas only 16% specifically described teachers' roles as supporting or fostering that home learning. Similarly, after student teaching, 42% of candidates described parents' roles as including help with academics, whereas only 13% specifically described teachers' roles as supporting or fostering that home learning. Candidates who did include this as part of their description of teachers' roles thought teachers should either provide suggestions for ways parents could help with academics, inform parents how they could be involved, or create homework assignments that include a parental component.

### Discussion

The current study provides evidence that field experiences and student teaching experiences provide candidates with opportunities to learn more than just teaching content; we need to consider the ways these experiences shape candidates' views of home-school partnerships. Our teacher candidates observed a number of parent involvement efforts by their teachers in all types of field placements; we found some differences between parent involvement efforts in special education settings and general education settings with candidates reporting significantly more instances of calling and writing notes to parents in special education settings. Not surprisingly, candidates most often reported that their cooperating teachers held parent-teacher conferences. The high percentage of candidates who reported the parent involvement practice of parent-teacher conferences is consistent with data from the Parent and Family

Involvement in Education Survey of the 2003 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), which reported that more than three-quarters of the students reported that the school held parent–teacher conferences (Eneyart, Diehl, Hampden-Thompson, & Scotchmer, 2006).

In addition to parent–teacher conferences, candidates also reported that their cooperating teachers primarily used the practices of calling or writing notes home or had parents sign-off on completed homework. All of these types of involvement parallel Epstein's (1994) Type 2 practices which involve the schools "basic obligations" to communicate with families. Reading logs were used with less frequency, although they were used with greater frequency in special education placements. Fewer of the candidates reported seeing parent involvement practices at Epstein's (1994) Type 3 level which included invitations for parents to come to the classroom during the school day to either share information with the class or observe in the classroom. These types of practices might be viewed by teachers as more difficult to arrange and require teachers to open up their classroom to families in ways that might not be as comfortable for them. Yet, if candidates are not seeing these types of practices in schools, it is important that teacher preparation programs teach candidates about the value and use of these practices.

Although there were no significant differences in the types of parent involvement practices used in urban and suburban field placements, candidates in our study reported significantly more negative interactions between teachers and parents in urban field placements. Although this finding is limited by candidates' self-selection of the placement type and their own idea of what constitutes a positive or negative interaction, this finding is consistent with the research that shows more strained relationships between parents and families in low income and linguistically diverse communities (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Lareau, 1986; 1991; Parra & Henderson, 1982) where there is more likely to be a mismatch between parents' and teachers' expectations for parent involvement in education.

Our teacher candidates' descriptions of parents' roles in their children's education included knowing what was taking place at school, helping with homework, connecting with teachers, and motivating and encouraging their children in their schoolwork. These are similar roles as described by practicing teachers (Baker, 1997; Shumow & Harris, 2000) who wanted parents to help children academically and to communicate with teachers. Our findings are also similar to teachers' expectations for families described by Wissbrun's and Eckart's (1992) description of "Level II: Support" which includes reviewing homework or completing activities at home that are requested by the teacher. Despite the importance of these forms of parent involvement, successful

home-school partnerships are based on the belief that parents can learn from teachers and teachers can learn from parents. As Paratore (2001) explains, "They share an assumption that parents and teachers have much to learn from each other, and they have established practices and routines that enable such learning to occur" (p. 88). Since none of the candidates described parents' roles as informing teachers about home educational practices, this indicates that candidates may not see parents as providers of valuable information about their children despite efforts to emphasize the importance of parents' perspectives in our courses.

Some of the candidates' descriptions of teachers' roles echoed their expectations for parents. Candidates in our study believed that teachers should inform parents about school practices just as they thought that parents should be informed about what takes place in school. Similarly, candidates believed that both teachers and parents should help to form partnerships with each other. There were also inconsistencies when viewing the relationship between candidates' expectations for parent and teachers. Although candidates valued parents' support of school learning, the majority of candidates did not describe ways teachers should work to facilitate that support. This is especially important when considering Mapp's (2003) finding that parents desired more clarity and support in helping with homework. Candidates' perceptions were similar to Dauber and Epstein's (1993) description of their findings from their research on teachers and families, "Teachers were more sure about what they wanted from parents than what they wanted to do for parents" (p. 55). Changes in candidates' beliefs about teachers' roles can be viewed as evidence that candidates gained an increased understanding about the important role teachers need to take in initiating collaboration with families. This is an important finding because researchers have found that practicing teachers often expect parents to initiate contacts (Shumow & Harris, 2000). Nonetheless, what seems to be missing is candidates' understanding that they need to provide specific opportunities, strategies, and suggestions for how families can work with children to foster academics.

Although this study is limited by the relatively small number of participants, understanding the types and nature of parent involvement activities experienced by our candidates helps move us closer to finding out how teachers' beliefs and practices are shaped. The fact that our teacher candidates' beliefs so closely mirrored beliefs of the practicing teachers they observed further emphasizes the importance of providing teacher candidates with positive experiences and models, especially if we want to improve on teachers' parent involvement practices.

The design of this study does not allow for conclusions about whether candidates entered our program with these beliefs about parent involvement or if their beliefs are similar to practicing teachers because of their experiences with teachers in their field placements. We suspect that, like those studied by Graue and Brown (2003), our candidates did have particular notions of parent involvement when they entered our program. Questioning candidates about their childhood experiences with home–school partnerships would provide a deeper understanding of how candidates develop their beliefs. Yet, this study helps us understand that our teacher candidates value parent involvement, but also underscores the need for teacher educators to create consistent and more meaningful experiences for candidates that allow them to connect with and learn from families (Katz & Bauch, 1999; Power & Perry, 2000). Just as Power and Perry (2000) explain,

We tell these novice teachers that parents will be important, even essential, partners in their work. But if there's one thing we've learned as teacher educators, it's that the things that will endure from our classes are those things our students have tried themselves. (p. 10)

Our findings also support the need for teacher educators to provide specific requirements for candidates to connect with families. This is especially necessary in light of the finding that two of our candidates had no contact with families during student teaching. Limitations of our survey prevent us from knowing whether these candidates also had no contact with families during their field placements; this necessitates requiring candidates to interact with families so that their first experience working with them is not after they become teachers. In order to better prepare candidates for parent involvement, teacher educators need to examine both the content of coursework and the match between the ideas expressed about home–school partnerships in courses and experiences candidates have in classrooms before they begin working as teachers.

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Appendix. Second Parent Involvement Survey

What do you believe to be parents' roles in their children's education?

How would you define a teacher's role in parent involvement?

Did the seminar help prepare you for parent involvement in education? If yes, please describe any activities, readings, or discussions that you found useful.

How would you describe your student teaching placement? Check all accurate descriptions.

	Urban	Suburban	Elementary school	Middle School	Preschool	Private School	Inclusive	Special Education Self-contained	Special Education Resource Room	Specialized School for Special Education
Student Teaching Placement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>							

During student teaching, what methods did your cooperating teacher use for involving families?

	Sending notes to parents	Parent Teacher Conferences	Inviting Parents to School to Present to the Class	Inviting Parents to School to Observe or Learn about the Class	Homework Sign-off Sheet	Reading Log
Calling parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Did you observe any other forms of parent involvement during student teaching? If so, what did you observe?

How would you describe your cooperating teachers' interactions with families during student teaching? What makes you think that?

	Very negative interactions with families	Negative interactions with families	No interactions with families	Positive interactions with families	Very positive interactions with families
Student Teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What do you think influenced your cooperating teachers' interactions with families?

Describe any contact you had with families during student teaching.