THE FIRST DAY OF KINDERGARTEN: EXAMINING
SCHOOL READINESS ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES ACROSS MULTIPLE
DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXTS

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Human and Community Development
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010

Urbana, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

Young children are increasingly expected to perform at predetermined levels in various developmental domains when they enter kindergarten. Yet, researchers find that a significant percentage of children are "not ready to learn" on the first day of kindergarten. Reflecting disparities in social class, race, and gender, low-income and African American children's readiness for school falls below the general population. Moreover, low-income, African American boys are particularly disadvantaged.

"School readiness gaps" have been attributed to family life and parenting, home-school connectedness, community resources, and social inequality. Studies have shed light on school readiness as an important social issue and national concern. However, specific examinations of micro-level processes affecting African American children's school readiness and transitions into kindergarten are limited. Further, the majority of the existing studies focus on low-income, African American children's school readiness, without a similar discussion of middle-income, African American children's experiences.

This study addressed these limitations by examining specific mechanisms of school readiness advantages and disadvantages across low- and middle-income, African American home and school contexts in a Midwestern city. The guiding research questions were: (1) What characterizes kindergarten preparation in the context of low- and middle-income, African American homes? (2) What characterizes kindergarten preparation in the context of schools? What continuities and discontinuities exist between home and schools contexts? (3) What neighborhood resources and activities do adults utilize to facilitate kindergarten preparation and transitions? (5) How does education policy and law play out within local contexts?

An interdisciplinary theoretical framework guided this study. It was informed by the ecological model, the concept of cultural capital, critical race theory, and feminist theory. A qualitative case study research design and interpretive approach were employed. Data collection entailed eighty in-depth interviews with twenty educators and twenty African American primary caregivers and focused participant observation. These data were supplemented with documents, reports, artifacts, and photographs. The data were triangulated and analyzed inductively.

This study identified cumulative advantages and disadvantages that potentially perpetuate social class, and to a lesser extent racial and gender, disparities in children's "being ready to learn" on the first day of kindergarten. Three major findings were: (1) multifaceted and multidimensional school readiness expectations exist; (2) within the U.S. social structure some children are better positioned than others to meet changing expectations for young children to learn in schools; and (3) national education policy has raised kindergarten expectations, increased assessment, and shifted classroom instruction, locally. Substantively, this study contributes a nuanced construct of school readiness and offers a textured account of how social class, race, and gender play out in context. Theoretically, it expands upon the concept of cultural capital using critical race theory. This study also has implications for promoting locally informed best practices and early childhood education policy.

Dedicated in loving memory of my brother, Rodney

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all of the people to whom I owe thanks. I would first like to thank my mother, and all the other members of my large extended family for providing all the love and encouragement that I needed to continuously move forward in completing this dissertation. I would like to give special thanks to my sister, Semone Kelly, who was especially warm, giving, and went beyond the call of duty to assist me with every phase of this process. Thank you so much! I also would like to acknowledge my husband Will Hill. Though new to my life and the dissertation process, he acclimated quickly and was all that I needed whenever I needed it. I would like to thank my friends and colleagues for taking time out of their busy schedules to participate in peer debriefings, offer critical readings of dissertation chapters, and provide encouragement. I would like to acknowledge and thank my advisor, Robin Jarrett for her tireless efforts and advice throughout this process. Thank you committee members, Brent McBride, Jennifer Hamer, and Angela Wiley! Your patience and input were essential in my efforts to complete this work. I would like to thank each and every one of my participants for sharing their thoughts, experiences, and lives with me. Without your efforts and willingness to allow a stranger into your worlds, this dissertation would not have been possible. Thank you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A newspaper headline entitled "Held Back" compelled me to undertake this study. In a local community of the 22 kindergarteners retained in academic year 1998-1999, 21 of them were African American. Thinking back to my kindergarten experiences in a half day program, I was surprised to learn that children were retained in kindergarten. I initially had three questions: Why are children being retained in kindergarten? Why are African Americans disproportionately represented in the number of children retained? What do schools expect children to know upon entering kindergarten in order for them to be successful learners? This dissertation grew from these questions, my general interest in early learning and human development, and my belief that behind the headline there was a complex story to be told and heard. My initial investigation into this topic led me to pursue an in-depth exploration of school readiness. This dissertation is a qualitative case study of preparing children for school in the Middleton Community School District.[1] It considers the influence of multiple developmental contexts on the kindergarten transition process.

The Research Problem

What exactly is school readiness? School readiness has not been formally defined, however, young children are increasingly expected to perform at predetermined levels in various developmental domains when they enter kindergarten. Developmental proficiency and basic knowledge (e.g. colors, alphabet, numbers, an understanding of the conventions of reading) are assessed to determine readiness (Kessler, 1991). School readiness is an important social issue because, on average, research suggests a significant percentage of children in the United States are not ready to learn when they enter kindergarten. According to a national survey of children's

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[1] Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper for the names of places and participants referenced in order to maintain confidentiality.

school readiness, teachers reported that 35% of children residing in the United States lacked the skills necessary to perform well academically upon kindergarten entrance (Boyer, 1991). In addition, Hair, Halle, Terry-Humen, Lavelle, and Calkins' (2006) analysis of a nationally representative sample of American children who participated in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten (1998-1999) yielded a similar percentage of children entering kindergarten with limited readiness skills. Based upon liberal definitions of "school readiness risk," 35% of the children in their study lacked skills considered important for kindergarten transition. In the same study, more conservative indices of school readiness risk suggested that 45% of children had limited readiness skills.

Additionally, research notes social class, race, and gender disparities in assessments of school readiness. Nationally, poor and African American children's readiness for school falls below the general population—particularly compared to middle class, European American children. To add, boys, particularly African American boys, have been found to perform less well socially and emotionally upon entering kindergarten than their female counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

In the long term, school readiness, retention, and academic achievement can influence a child's development and an individual's life chances (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, Yeung, & Smith, 1998; Hair et al., 2006; Haskins & Rouse, 2005). More specifically, research indicates a correlation between lower intellectual assessment scores of preschool-aged children and lower academic achievement in the primary grades through high school; higher incidences of adolescent pregnancy; engagement in criminal behavior; higher rates of unemployment; and more frequent occurrences of depression in adulthood (Haskins & Rouse, 2005). Readiness to

learn is a national concern. The above trends illustrate the importance of understanding this issue in depth and undergird this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is twofold. The primary purpose is to explore the influences and roles of multiple developmental contexts, particularly families, in children's preparation for kindergarten in an effort to unpack school readiness and related practices. It discusses how notions of "school readiness" converge and diverge in multiple developmental contexts to include systems of stratification (social class, race, and gender), education policies, communities, schools, and homes. The study examines perceptions and identifies micro-level processes related to school readiness and kindergarten preparation that have the potential to confer school readiness advantages and disadvantages. Secondarily, the goal of this study is to inform education policy using qualitative data. It puts forth policy recommendations grounded in mundane features of the community school district and participants' everyday experiences.

Research Questions

This study does not solely address children's lack of readiness for formal schooling. Using one case example, it aims to contribute a diverse, comprehensive, and textured view of perceptions of school readiness and activities that took shape in multiple contexts that impacted kindergarten preparation. The following research questions guide this study:

1. What characterizes kindergarten preparation in the context of low and middle-income African American homes? How are socioeconomic status, race, and gender perceived to impact school readiness?

2. What characterizes kindergarten preparation in the context of schools? How are socioeconomic status, race, and gender perceived to impact school readiness?

3. What continuities and discontinuities exist between home and school views of school entry?

4. What neighborhood resources and activities do adults utilize to facilitate kindergarten preparation and transitions?

5. How do education policy and law (National Learning Standards and the No Child Left Behind Act) play out within local contexts?

This dissertation examined these research questions in concert. Individual questions were considered and presented in terms of their relevance to the major case findings.

Significance of the Study

Kindergarten transition cannot be ignored due to the associations that exist between early learning experiences and development over the life course. This study is warranted for other key reasons. It examines: (1) kindergarten preparation across multiple developmental contexts; (2) micro-level mechanisms of race, class, and gender; (3) the impact of education policy; and (4) kindergarten preparation using qualitative case study methodology.

Firstly, there is a lack of consensus on what is required of children upon entering kindergarten because different groups of parents, educators, community members, researchers, practitioners, and legislators see the issue of readiness from different perspectives (Pianta, 2002). This study seeks to develop a coherent and inclusive conceptualization of school readiness and related categories in one community. It focuses upon low and middle-income parents and preschool and elementary level educators' views of school readiness. In order to disentangle the influence of race and social class, special attention is given to African American family life and parenting practices as they relate to children's preparation for kindergarten because of the emphasis placed on this developmental context in promoting school readiness advantages and disadvantages. Also, connections and disconnections between parent and educator views are explored. This is particularly significant to the field because continuity and discontinuity

between these developmental contexts and subgroups can contribute to a more nuanced school readiness construct.

Secondly, segments of incoming kindergarteners do not fare as well as the general population of children in the American educational system. Race, class, and gender are often examined as variables within studies of "school readiness gaps." This study offers a specific examination of how race and class impact everyday experiences and perceptions of preparing children for school. It provides a critical analysis of these systems of stratification.

Third, an exploration of education policy is timely and critical in light of the resurgence of attention given to readiness and the role key players (parents and teachers) should assume in preparing children for school. Research examining African American parents' and educators' views and responses to current policies and goals pertaining to early childhood education is limited. This study addresses this limitation by examining the ways in which educational policies played out from the perspectives of the local community school district.

Lastly, this study contributes diversity to school readiness literature. Current research tends to draw from large national survey data. These studies provide a broad overall picture of African American children's school readiness and preparation that can be replicated and compared cross-nationally. However, a more in-depth, local examination also is warranted. Although well-suited for understanding macro-level processes, quantitative data alone may neglect some micro-level, local processes taking place as children transition from home into school. This study employs qualitative case study methodology to identify micro-level processes impacting current readiness trends in order to build upon the notions of school readiness and preparing children for kindergarten reported in the literature. Qualitative case study design facilitates an exploration of this social issue at multiple levels, drawing upon multiple

perspectives. Qualitative methods provide a means for investigating processes and unexplored areas of this particular topic because attention is focused upon the everyday, lived experiences of the adults involved.

Chapter Outline

Twelve chapters follow. The next four chapters provide an overview of the study and how it was conducted. Chapter Two is a review of related literature. I explore the meaning of school readiness, how American children are faring in terms of being "ready to learn," and current explanations for disparities in assessments of school readiness. Chapter Three provides a discussion of the theoretical framework guiding this study. Ecological, cultural capital, critical race, and feminist tenets are outlined and synthesized. Chapter Four describes the research design. I provide a detailed description of the methodology and discuss data management and analysis. Major research findings related to preparing children for kindergarten are presented in chapters Five through Twelve. Chapter Thirteen concludes this study. In this final chapter findings are summarized, and implications for theory building, policy, practice, and future research are given.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of this chapter is to explore the discourses on readiness to learn in kindergarten and early learning in school and at home more generally. It addresses three basic questions: (1) What is school readiness? (2) How are American children faring in terms of being "ready" for school? (3) How are school readiness and related disparities explained? This review of literature offers a summary of social science research examining school readiness and early learning and highlights how this study contributes to this important topic.

What is School Readiness?

School readiness is a developmental issue. Readiness for school refers to a child's ability to function and learn certain concepts and skills in the institution of schooling. Readiness is not a static event, but rather "a process that spans a critical period of early learning and development" (Graue, 2003, p. 147). Child development is a dynamic process that involves cognitive, socioemotional, psychological, and physical/biological changes taking place over time (Miller, 2002). These processes are assessed and considered vital to a child's ability to learn in school. School readiness as a construct, assessment, and pedagogy are three distinct, yet interrelated concepts. One concept cannot be addressed without understanding and/or addressing others.

Constructing School Readiness

The construct of school readiness gained attention in the mid 1990s (Snow, 2006). It is a policy, research, pedagogical, and familial concern. Constructions of school readiness are diverse. Several definitions and conceptualizations of school readiness have been advanced by various interest groups that include politicians, scholars, educators and parents. These constructions are discussed next.

Politics and School Readiness

Education and academic achievement rank high as a national concern for citizens and government officials. School readiness surfaced as a social problem and key to promoting national academic achievement. Four fairly recent governmental efforts are particularly relevant to how school readiness has been constructed by politicians: the adoption of National Education Goals, the development of a School Readiness Initiative, and the enactment of the School Readiness Bill and the No Child Left Behind Act.

Following a summit on education and reform in 1989, eight National Education Goals were adopted (National Education Goals Panel, n.d.). National Education Goal One is for all children to begin school "ready to learn" by year 2000. The primary objectives were for: (1) children to be physically healthy upon school entrance; (2) parents to be children's first teachers and provide learning experiences for preschoolers on a daily basis; and (3) preschool programs to be high quality and developmentally appropriate and children to have access to them (NEGP, n.d.). These goals, particularly the first one, have influenced political conceptualizations of school readiness and early childhood education. The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) was a bipartisan panel consisting of federal and state level government officials. It was established in 1990 to track the country's progress in meeting the National Education Goals. The NEGP articulated five domains of school readiness: (1) cognitive, (2) social/emotional, (3) language, (4) physical health, and (5) approaches to learning (Kagan, Moore, & Bradekamp, 1995). The panel has since been dissolved. However, National Education Goal One was central in constructing school readiness in the 1990s.

Political entities developed initiatives to further conceptualize school readiness. For instance, the School Readiness Indicator Initiative was created to inform educational policies and

practices in an effort to provide more guidance and input on standards of readiness. Seventeen states participated in this initiative (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005; Saluja, Scott-Little, & Clifford, 2000). Five domains (physical development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language, and cognition) and several "measurable" indicators of school readiness have been developed by this initiative. Twenty core indicators of "ready" children, families, services, and schools have been outlined and indicators are still emerging to assess progress in school readiness at the state level.

Federal bills and laws also influence how school readiness is constructed. The School Readiness Bill included the following standards in their conceptualizations of school readiness: (1) language knowledge and skills, (2) early literacy, specifically pre-reading skills, (3) early basic mathematical concepts, (4) cognitive skills, (5) socioemotional development that "supports" school success, and (6) for second language learners, English acquisition. In 1998 researchers pointed out that "for the first time, policy makers articulated that school readiness should be the primary goal for Head Start programs" (Parker, Boak, Griffin, Ripple, & Peay, 1999, p. 413).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001. NCLB is a federal law enacted in 2002 upon President George W. Bush's proposal (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Although, the NCLB Act focused its efforts on elementary and high school, some researchers pointed out the trickle down impact of this law on early childhood education (Hyun, 2003; Stipek, 2006). Under the NCLB Act, all students' academic performance must be assessed, including children with disabilities, and reported disaggregated. The law is based upon four premises, referred to as pillars: school

accountability, local freedom, evidence-based curriculum, and parental choice (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Accountability focuses on achievement in reading, math, and language arts primarily measured by designated standardized testing. Annual state and district Report Cards are required under this law to inform communities and parents of the schools' performances (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Schools are accountable for educating students and closing the achievement gap that exists due to race and class. Under NCLB, if students do not achieve at state standards, schools are responsible for implementing supplemental services such as free tutoring. Schools have five years to meet their state's benchmark of Adequate Yearly Progress before the school is restructured and/or other systemic changes occur at the district or state level. In terms of local freedom, NCLB also grants districts and states more discretion in the allocation of federal funding. In some cases, school districts can transfer federal funds from one program to another without special approval. The evidence-based curriculum pillar of NCLB is centered on the need for schools to incorporate evidence-based curriculum and teaching practices into classrooms. This seeks out and funds scientifically proven methods in education that improve students' academic achievement. Lastly, the parental choice pillar of NCLB was enacted to give parents a greater role in making educational decisions for their children. Parents have the option of transferring their children from poorly performing and unsafe schools into better performing, safer schools within their district, at the district's expense for transportation (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The law is up for reauthorization. There are proposals to reauthorize and strengthen the NCLB Act within the federal government.

School Readiness and Social Science Research

Historically, age has been the major criteria used to determine who could attend formal schools. Chronological age was a key factor in determining the maturity level of a child. In fact, laws requiring children of predetermined ages to participate in formal schooling were established in 1836. Ages of mandatory entry varied by state, but on average, this age was somewhat older than the current age requirements of today. Children were initially not schooled until they were able to read and write; 8 years old was the typical age children began formal schooling— particularly in the northern states (Cubberley, 1947). Chronological age remains a significant factor in determining readiness. For example, "in 39 states children are eligible for kindergarten entry if they are 5 years of age prior to mid-October of the school year" (Snow, 2006). The age for kindergarten entrance has increased recently. Stipek (2006) suggests that the increasing age of children entering kindergarten is a trend that has emerged since the enactment of the NCLB Act.

Social science and educational research has generally constructed school readiness in terms of maturation (biological unfolding of psychomotor and cognitive functioning) and relevant experiences and skills that center on remediation and child competencies at the time children begin school (Graue, 1992; Snow, 2006). Researchers have conceptualized school readiness in multiple ways. For example, the National Education Households Survey conducted in 1999 conceptualized school readiness skills as children's: ability to recognize all letters of the alphabet, rote count to 20, write his or her name, and read or pretend to read storybooks (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). Other definitions typically focus on the two-dimensional nature of school readiness which includes readiness to learn a particular concept or subject and readiness for school in terms of entering an institution expecting and requiring certain skill sets (Boyer,

1991; Diamond, Reagan & Brandyk, 2000). Pianta (2002) detailed these two dimensions as follows:

> In addition to these pre-academic skills, the research agrees that children need skills in social and emotional areas. School readiness is more than knowing your ABCs. Children who communicate effectively, who follow directions and cooperate, who are attentive, enthusiastic, and actively involved in classroom activities, and who can ask for and receive help demonstrate a cluster of skills we could call teachability (p. 3).

Graue (2003) conceptualized readiness in the following:

> Readiness typically connotes an age range when most children are deemed old enough to benefit from formal school experiences. Readiness also connotes a constellation of skills considered precursors to school success. These skills combine a complex set of physical/biological maturation, prior experience, and dispositional qualities (p. 147).

Graue's definition of school readiness combined traditional concepts typically noted in social science literature. She extended the construct by suggesting its multi-dimensionality.

Social science conceptualizations of school readiness have been key in constructing school readiness nationally and locally. However, the school readiness construct has been critiqued by some scholars in the field. For example, Carlton and Winsler (1999) argued that current readiness conceptions "may be creating a type of exclusionary sorting process that results in denying or delaying educational services to precisely those children who might benefit the most from such services" (p. 345). As it stands, children might have to prove that they are ready to enter kindergarten if conceptualizations of school readiness are overly rigid.

Educators' Perceptions of School Readiness

Teachers working within the context of school policies and practices make daily decisions and assessments regarding children's readiness and abilities to achieve, therefore their conceptions of school readiness are particularly important to explore. Though diverse, teachers and early childhood practitioners discuss readiness multi-dimensionally as well. For example, a national study of teachers conducted through the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of

Teaching outlined school readiness as preparedness for formal schooling, which involves "physical well-being, social confidence, emotional maturity, language richness, general knowledge, and moral awareness" (Boyer, 1991, p.7). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which consists of early childhood educators and others with vested interests in the education and rights of children from birth to eight, described school readiness in terms of promoting ready children, families, communities, and schools (National Association for the Education of Children, 1995) in support of children's transitions into formal schooling.

Teachers primarily focus on social and emotional skills in their conceptualizations of school readiness (Hains, Fowler, Schwartz, Kottwitz, & Rosenkoetter, 1989; Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). In a study conducted by Hains et al. (1989), the most highly ranked skills among kindergarten and preschool teachers were related to social and emotional domains. Educators in this study considered being proficient in communication, self care, social interaction, following instructions, and displaying good conduct as important for school readiness. While they noted children's academic abilities, making transitions and participating in large group and independent work were least important. In a separate study, teachers held children's approaches to learning in terms of interest and engagement more highly than children's basic knowledge at kindergarten entrance (Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000). Wesley and Buysse (2003) conducted focus group interviews with preschool and kindergarten teachers. Data also revealed an emphasis on social and emotional development among their participants. Being confident, creative, curious, and attentive were some social skills discussed as important for children to display when they entered kindergarten. Academic skills were expected to be easily promoted when social and emotional skills were evident.

There is some variation among teachers in their expectations for school readiness. For example, one study examining kindergarten and preschool teachers' expectations of school readiness found that preschool teachers rated more items important for children to learn prior to exiting preschool than kindergarten teachers expected children to have upon entering kindergarten (Hains et. al, 1989). By the middle of the kindergarten year, kindergarten teachers and preschool teachers ranked important items similarly and by the end of kindergarten, 80% of the kindergarten teachers surveyed ranked all 122 skills as important for children to display.

In comparison to older (in age) teachers, younger teachers were more likely to rate academic skills as very important or essential to readiness (Lin et al., 2003). Though less supported within the field, teacher perceptions also vary by race and ethnicity. For example, compared to White teachers, African American and Latino teachers viewed academic related skills as more central components of school readiness (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005).

Kindergarten teachers are not working and making decisions about readiness in isolation. In fact, Graue (1992) suggested "it is clear it emerges from a set of collegial relationships among staff, within a school-community relationship, and within a larger national education [and accountability standards] context that frames how we look at children and school" (p. 240). Current government and state expectations have led to noted philosophical conflicts among educators. In the focus group interviews, teachers discussed how "push-down" expectations from higher grades increased the academic demands placed on young children and conflicted with providing developmentally appropriate early childhood education (Wesley & Buysse, 2003).

Parents' Perceptions of School Readiness

One of the objectives of National Education Goal One was to promote parents as children's first teachers. Therefore, it is also important to examine how parents conceive school readiness. Generally, parents' views of school readiness are similar to educators as both groups focus on social and emotional components. However, educators' and other professionals tend to have a common language for describing readiness that has not been noted among parents (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Research also suggests that parents tend to be more concerned with academic skills than social and emotional ones (Barbarin et al., 2008; Diamond et al., 2000; Hill, 2001).

Barbarin et al. (2008) examined data from the National Center for Early Development and Learning that explored perceptions of school readiness held by parents of children enrolled in prekindergarten programs. Their analyses of open-ended responses suggested that parents typically conceived readiness for school in terms of nominal knowledge (ability to name objects and identify numbers, letters, shapes, etc.). Having language and literacy skills, being socially competent, possessing general knowledge of self, being able to self-regulate, displaying independence, motor abilities, and having knowledge of numbers were also important (in this order) in parents' conceptualizations of school readiness. Similarly, Piotrkowski, Botsko, and Matthews (2000) found that parents ranked basic knowledge (for example rote counting) as "absolutely necessary" for kindergarten more (76%) than kindergarten (25%) and preschool teachers (48%). In the same study, parents rated basic knowledge more highly than interest and engagement in learning as important for kindergarten readiness as well.

Results from the study conducted by Diamond et al. (2000) suggest that "most parents think that a variety of academic and behavioral skills are important for children's success in

kindergarten" (p. 97). Pre-academic and behavioral readiness represented one construct of kindergarten readiness for these parents. Consistent with other studies, this study also found parents equally distributed importance to social, cognitive, and emotional skills for school readiness. Although parents held a global view of school readiness, they still placed the most emphasis on children's academic abilities when making decisions to delay kindergarten entry.

Parents' constructions of school readiness are also influenced by school staff and fellow parents within the community. Graue (1992) offered findings from a case study of three different school communities. She noted how senses of community guided parents' interpretations of school readiness and early education. Within each community, subtle mesSages were sent and interpreted by parents regarding what school readiness entailed that, in turn, influenced their perceptions and practices toward preparing children for kindergarten.

Generally, studies suggest parent perceptions varied, though inconsistently, by ethnicity (Barbarin et al., 2008; Graue, 1992; Piotrkowski et al., 2000). For example, in a study conducted by Barbarin et al. (2008) low-income African American parents typically ranked social competence and self regulation lower than White and Latino parents. In another study of parents' beliefs about school readiness, Latino parents emphasized interest in learning, communication, and emotional maturity slightly more than African American parents (Piotrkowski et al., 2000). A similar pattern was identified among the Latino parents in Graue's (1992) case study. In Rochester, one of the school communities she investigated, Latino parents were more concerned with their children "feeling good about school" and having positive attitudes about school than were White parents.

Research suggests parents' beliefs about school readiness impact their parenting practices and activities they engage in to prepare children for kindergarten (Barbarin et al., 2008; Diamond

et al., 2000).   In their study of parents' perceptions of school readiness, Barbarin et al. (2008)

reported "parental practices constitute a putative link between beliefs and child outcomes" (p.

693). However, the findings of Diamond et al. (2000) suggest that parental beliefs are not

always linked to specific practices. They reported racial and ethnic minority parents were

significantly more likely to report concerns about their children's readiness than White parents.

However, when White parents had concerns about their children's readiness, they were more

likely to act on these concerns by delaying kindergarten entrance for a year than African

American parents. In this case, race and ethnicity were more closely associated with the practice

of delaying kindergarten entry than parental beliefs about school readiness.

Assessing School Readiness

Assessment is another component of school readiness. "Assessment is the process of

gathering information in order to make evaluative decisions" (Appl, 2000, p. 219). Readiness

surveys using various intelligence tests were widely conducted in the early 1900s (Church &

Sedlak, 1976; Noble, 1954). Survey findings revealed that due to a lack of reading skills, first

graders were "failing" in school (Durkin, 1966). From these surveys and concerns with

children's academic performance, came readiness testing (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). The

Gesell Institute produced much of the early work in readiness testing that was incorporated into

pedagogical practices (Durkin, 1966). Identifying performance on developmental tasks also

became the focus of promoting individual children's progress in school.

It is often the case today that children's readiness for school is assessed prior to

kindergarten and sorting begins before they enter the institution (Diamond et al., 2000). Appl

(2000) discussed four basic uses for assessment: (1) identification, (2) diagnosis evaluation, (3)

program planning, and (4) monitoring progress. Currently there is a debate in the field of early

childhood education. Many are advocating for testing children's school readiness before or upon

entry into kindergarten, while some say that the readiness assessments are neither valid nor

reliable in assessing competency, particularly among children who are not members of the

cultural majority (Bloch, Tabachnick, & Espinosa-Dulanto, 1994; Carlton & Winsler, 1999)

Supporters of readiness testing highlight the promise it holds for identifying for

intervention children who are at risk for developmental difficulties (Lonigan, 2006). The basic

assumption guiding standardized testing is that skills can be accurately measured and interpreted.

"The linkage between emergent literacy skills and later reading skills indicates that children who

are at risk of developing reading problems can be identified before school entry and prior to the

emergence of actual problems in learning to read" (Lonigan, 2006, p. 110). Once identified

through assessment, difficulties can be targeted to promote success. In sum, assessment can be

effective when used for targeted purposes mentioned above (Appl, 2000).

School readiness testing also has limitations. For example, Snow (2006) noted that at

times schools' programs of assessment are used to either allow a child an earlier entry than the

school otherwise allows or to identify a child who is not ready for school (when delayed entry is

recommended). According to the author, using assessment measures to make decisions about

kindergarten entry or school readiness is unfounded for two major reasons: "kindergarten

screening tools have limited and mixed predictive validity for school success and delaying

school entry may not be an advantage in predicting school outcomes" (Snow, 2006, p. 10). For

example, limited predictive validity can be linked to inappropriate usage of screeners and

methodological limitations of correlating outcomes on early assessment measures and young

children's school outcomes. Also, select use of assessments can put some children at a

disadvantage and others at an advantage for learning in schools. Stipek (2006) contended that

though a variety of assessments and observations may be useful in determining practices and program climate, the concern is that they can play out as teaching to the test in preschools.

Research also shows that delaying kindergarten entrance and early enrollment based on readiness assessments had mixed outcomes for children's school performance. In fact, some readiness tests lack validity (Meisels, 1999) and should not be used to deny entry into school and assignment into special educational programs. The ways in which school readiness is assessed have important implications for low-income, minority children (Appl, 2000). Lubeck (1996) noted that "assessment instruments begin to be seen as problematic, as indeed they should, because measures that were normed on European American children have been used for years to label and misdiagnose children from other backgrounds" (p. 158).

Current assessment practices can be misleading in terms of African American students' performance. According to Hilliard (2002) African American children have a unique culture not well assessed using standardized tests. He contended that testing and assessments make errors in determining learning among African American students in four areas: mental capacity, speech, language, and reading ability.

School Readiness and Pedagogy

Lastly, school readiness reflects practice. The idea of infant schools was originally developed in an effort to care for children from the age of one to six while parents worked the mills in Ireland. They were introduced in America in the 1830s. Infant schools in Ireland and England adopted methods of instruction that centered on play, storytelling, manipulation of objects in the environment, and pictures (Cubberley, 1947; Noble, 1954). Reading, writing, and letter recognition were not included in the curriculum observed in Ireland and England; but in

America, some of the first infant schools taught young children reading, spelling, and simple arithmetic (Noble, 1954).

Infant schools were later incorporated into the elementary schools in America. The first kindergarten programs were established in America beginning in the 1860s and were largely influenced by German educational practices. Unlike most of the infant schools in America, early kindergartens focused on learning by doing and manipulating objects through free play and spontaneous activity with various materials. Schools were thought of as "a miniature community in which children learned through their own activity" (Noble, 1954, p. 486). The community environment was incorporated into schools in hopes that this would both stimulate their interest in learning and prepare children to use what they learned in school within their communities.

Kindergarten initially became popular with upper class Americans and was then targeted towards socializing poor and European immigrant children (Church & Sedlak, 1976). By the end of the 19th century there were approximately 1,400 public kindergartens in America (Church & Sedlak, 1976; Cubberley, 1947). The percentage of 4 and 5 year old children enrolled in early childhood education has increased dramatically since the 1970s (Kessler, 1992). Though kindergarten is not mandatory in all states, in 2006 over 4 million children were enrolled in these programs in the U.S. (Census Bureau, 2000a). In 1998, fifty-six percent of children enrolled in kindergarten were in full day programs and 44% were in half day kindergarten programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The same study found that 85% of kindergarteners attended public school and 15% attended private institutions. Kessler (1991) argued that with more children enrolled in kindergarten, public schools began to view kindergarten as a training ground for first grade. She suggested that in some instances academic content has increased. For example what used to be taught in first grade has been incorporated into the kindergarten

curriculum (Kessler, 1992). Thus, school readiness becomes important for children entering

kindergarten in the socially, cognitively, and physically demanding programs of today.

Policy research emphasizes the need for investments in granting children national access

to early childhood educational programs (Dickens, Sawhill, & Tebbs, 2006; Kohen, Hertzman, &

Brooks-Gunn, 1998; Schulman & Barnett, 2005). The basis for these claims is the cost

effectiveness of a prevention policy that focuses efforts on the early years of a child's life rather

than intervention programs required later to address the long term impact in society. Universal

Pre-Kindergarten for all, including middle-income children, is currently being advocated

(Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Dickens et al., 2006; Schulman & Barnett; 2005).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children developed a framework

for educating children in 1986; the most recent revisions were adopted in 2009. The framework

incorporates child development research and best practice to guide educating children from birth

through 8 years of age. The framework is a position statement that has become known as

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and serves as a guide to professionals and the field

of early childhood education. NAEYC characterizes developmentally appropriate practice as

requiring "meeting children where they are—which means teachers must know them well—and

enabling them to reach goals that are both challenging and achievable" within socially and

culturally specific environments that take into account research regarding the ways in which

children learn and develop (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

The position of DAP focuses upon providing the most to those who need it in order to reduce

achievement gaps; promoting curriculum that offers opportunities to develop cognitively,

socially, physically, and emotionally and is aligned and integrated for continuity; and

encouraging intentional teaching and individualized learning by providing a balance of child-

initiated and teacher-guided activities by incorporating play, small group, and large group activities into early childhood programs. Some educators are beginning to feel "torn" between their developmentally appropriate philosophies and the current policy climate of high stakes testing (Wesley & Buysse, 2003).

"All curriculum decisions involve assumptions about the nature of knowledge, about what is valued and considered important, as well as answers to the question of how to live 'the good life'(Kessler, 1991, p. 189)." Some scholars are concerned with early childhood educational practices that focus on "normal" development and "appropriate" practice (Bloch, 2000; Kessler, 1991, 1992; Lubeck, 1996; New & Mallory, 1994). These scholars also suggest that knowledge in and of itself is not neutral. For example, Bloch (2000) suggests that power and politics underlie the construction of "appropriate" knowledge and are often played out in pedagogical practices in early childhood care and education settings required before entering school. This is important because the knowledge that children possess before entering school may or may not be supported by prevailing pedagogy. According to Graue (1992) "as we move to an inclusive model of kindergarten programming, it is necessary to develop broader conceptions of curriculum that would meet the needs of a variety of children(p. 240)".

In short, constructions of school readiness are meaningless without assessment or some method of determining readiness. Relatedly, assessments of school readiness inform and are informed by early childhood pedagogy. The three concepts are viewed as related, not interchangeable. For example, when researchers and practitioners construct what it means to be ready, certain skill sets and abilities are advanced. These skills and abilities are often assessed. Based on assessments, teacher may or may not adjust pedagogy to fit children's developmental

and learning goals. Throughout this paper, I reference all three components of school readiness, both individually and in concert.

How are Children Faring?

School readiness is a universal concern (Snow, 2006). School readiness is an important issue because, on average, research suggests that children in the United States are not ready to learn when they enter primary school. Much of the readiness literature tends to focus on risk and poverty. Social class, race, and gender have been identified as factors placing children at risk for limited school readiness.

Social Class Disparities

In addition to findings suggesting a general lack of readiness among American kindergarteners, research indicates that socioeconomic status (SES) matters in performance on indicators of "school readiness." In 1999, children living in households with incomes below the poverty level had the lowest percentage of readiness skills (19%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). Hair et al's. (2006) study reported children residing in low-income families more often presented characteristics of "school readiness risks" than school readiness competence.

Lee and Burkam's (2002) study of differences in achievement among children starting kindergarten, found that social class background matters. Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort, the authors reported a 60% difference in the cognitive scores between children in the highest income group compared to those in the lowest. To further demonstrate the influence of class on school readiness, middle-income children also are more likely to be assessed as less ready for the rigors of school compared to upper middle-income and affluent children (Schulman & Barnett, 2005). It is important to note, however, that lower

academic performance among African American children, in comparison to their White peers, is consistent across socioeconomic levels.

Racial Disparities

Overall, regardless of class and level of schooling, White children perform better on indicators of academic achievement than African American children (Perry, 2003). According to Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005), not only are there disparities in test scores among American children over the course of schooling, but "sizable racial and ethnic gaps [in achievement] already exist by the time children enter kindergarten" (p. 5). Children who are members of racial and ethnic minority groups are more often represented among the children "at risk" for low readiness and early academic achievement (Hair et al., 2006; Washington, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). For example, although African American children from middle-income backgrounds score higher than poor African American children, they score as well as their low-income White peers and lower than their White peers from middle-income backgrounds. Compared to the national average, African American children's readiness to learn is particularly concerning. For instance, a survey of school readiness, conducted as part of the National Education Households Survey, exemplifies disparities in school readiness by race/ethnicity (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). This survey assessed 3-5-year-old children's academic skills. Minority children were disproportionately represented among children with limited school readiness skills (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). Particularly, in 1999 only 35% of African American children aged 3-5 had 3-4 of the skills used to characterize school readiness. Additionally, Lee and Burkam's (2002) study of differences in achievement among children starting kindergarten reported African American children scored 21% lower than their White peers in math.

The influences of race and social class were confounded in studies whose samples were disproportionately African American and poor. Research examining school readiness suggests that African American, particularly poor African American, children are "at-risk" for school failure and exhibit readiness deficits compared to their White middle-class peers (Connell & Prinz, 2002; Diamond et al., 2000; Haskins & Rouse, 2005; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Swick & Brown, 1994). The overlap of race and class are demonstrated by the findings that low-income African American children scored lower than the national average in math (0.68 standard deviations) and reading (0.56 standard deviations). According to Haskins and Rouse (2005), prior to kindergarten, during Head Start, low-income, African American children score one standard deviation below European American children on IQ tests, are assessed as having lower vocabulary abilities and early reading/literacy skills, are less able to recognize letters, and demonstrate lower math skills. In their review, 85% of 3-4-year-old African American children in a nationally represented study were reported to have scored lower on vocabulary assessments than European American 3-4-year-olds in the same sample (Haskins & Rouse, 2005). Upon kindergarten entrance, low-income African American children score lower on IQ tests (0.5 standard deviations) and in reading and math than European American children (Haskins & Rouse, 2005).

In kindergarten, the "achievement gap" is still present (Washington, 2001). For example, White children score in the highest quartile more often in comparison to African American and Latino students in the areas of math, reading, and general knowledge (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). In the same study, kindergarten teachers more often reported behavior problems and having more difficulty attending among African American children than White and Asian children. One exception to poorer performance among African American children was in

the developmental domain of gross motor. African American children scored higher on

indicators of gross motor skills compared to other racial/ethnic groups (U.S. Department of

Education, 2001).

Gender Disparities

Research examining gender disparities is sparse and less well established. Generally,

studies suggest boys are more often viewed as less ready for kindergarten in comparison to girls

(Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Kohen, Hertzman, & Brooks-Gunn, 1998; Stipek & Ryan, 1997;

U.S. Department of Education, 2001). At kindergarten entrance boys and girls perform similar

academically. However, boys tend to exhibit more social and emotional difficulties and are

reported as less positive in their approach to education (U.S. Department of Education, 2001)

than their female counterparts. Though no cognitive difference existed among boys and girls,

Stipek and Ryan's (1997) classroom observations suggested girls displayed more compliance

and less frustration than boys. They also reported that boys adapted slightly less well in

comparison to girls. In a national Canadian sample of preschool age children, Kohen et al.

(1998) reported a significant correlation between gender and reports of behavior problems. Boys

(19%) scored higher on indicators of behavior problems than girls (10%) in preschool. In a

national U.S. sample of kindergarten bound children, U.S. Department of Education (2001)

noted that boys experienced more developmental difficulties as they transitioned into

kindergarten in comparison to girls. Also, for reasons mentioned above, boys are more likely to

be retained or held out of kindergarten than girls (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005).

Race and gender intersect and present unique challenges for African American males in

the early years of formal schooling (Davis, 2003). This finding, coupled with the fact that

minority students are more likely to have risk factors associated with lower scores on indicators

of achievement upon entering kindergarten (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), suggests that African American males' have unique challenges. An intersection of racial and gender disparity in achievement has been noted among African American males, with low academic performance and behavior problems being central in the discussion (Ferguson, 2000).

<div align="center">Why do "School Readiness" Gaps Exist?</div>

Research generally attributes "school readiness gaps" to individual differences among children in terms of health disparities, neurological differences, genetics, and access to early childhood education programs (Haskins & Rouse, 2005). Some studies, though sparse, point to the social inequality that exists within U.S. society along social class, racial, and gender lines as an explanation for school readiness gaps. Community resources and home-school connections also have been found to influence school readiness and children's development. More typically, current disparities have been linked to characteristics of parenting and familial relationships (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Duncan & Magnuson, 2005; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Parker et al., 1999). Research examining these explanations is discussed next.

<div align="center">*The Role of Social Inequality*</div>

According to Lareau (2000) the impact of social inequality is often underestimated in social science literature studying the linkages between families, schooling, and academic achievement. Social inequality within the larger society closely resembles the demographic identifiers of gaps in school achievement (Entwisle & Alexander, 1999; Lareau, 2000). In other words, systems of stratification, particularly social class, race, and gender, perpetuate disparities in school readiness and academic achievement. In this section of the literature review, the influence of social structures and these systems of stratification on kindergarten preparation and early learning in schools are discussed.

Social Class and School Readiness

Family poverty directly and indirectly impacts young children in terms of the physical, social, educational, and emotional quality of the home environment (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005; Kohen, et al., 1998; Stipek & Ryan, 1997). Studies overwhelmingly cite the fact that poor and low-income homes offer limited benefits, at best, to children's school readiness. Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, and Eggers-Pierola (1995) argued that "some have viewed parenting among impoverished families as the transmission of stable, pathological attributes such as passivity or helplessness" (p.452).

In their survey of the research on the relationship between SES and school readiness, Duncan and Magnuson (2005) found that half a standard deviation of the ethnic and racial gap could be accounted for by differences in socioeconomic resources. Stipek and Ryan (1997) assessed 262 children's cognitive competencies at multiple points in time from 46 different preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Compared to economically advantaged children (middle class family background earning more than $25,000), economically disadvantaged children (poor family backgrounds earning less than $25,000) scored lower on assessments of cognitive competencies (Woodstock Achievement Test). The authors argued that a SES gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children exists prior to entering kindergarten. They stated "children from relatively low-income homes begin school at a considerable academic disadvantage" (Stipek & Ryan, 1997).

Additionally, research reports the negative influence of family poverty on school readiness. For example, low verbal scores were associated with low family income. Using data from a national, longitudinal study, National Longitudinal Study Child and Youth (NLSCY), researchers found that twice as many children residing in families with the lowest incomes had

the lower PPVT-R scores (32%) compared to high income children (13%) within the sample (Kohen et al., 1998). Similarly, they found an association between higher reports of children's behavior problems and family poverty. Votruba-Drazl's (2003) study of the causal influence of income on parenting and the quality of young children's home environment found that income independently influences parenting behavior. This study also suggested that the quality of cognitive stimulation within the home is related to a family's total income during the early and middle years of childhood with low-income home environments being associated with lower cognitive stimulation in the home.

Furthermore, teaching strategies of low-income mothers are not always aligned with those of middle-class families and schools. In low-income families learning at home is primarily an implicit process of observing adults as they engage in their daily routines. On the other hand, in communities where adults are more educated, parents tend to engage in more verbal interactions with children and participate in activities as a way to motivate children to learn specific concepts or ideas (Holloway et al., 1995).

Research suggests that socioeconomic status is associated with how well children perform in schools and is influential on development in the early years (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Kohen et al., 1998). More specifically, poverty and low levels of parental education place children "at risk" for having academic difficulties upon entering school. One study examining the impact of family income-to-needs scores on children's school readiness reported positive associations between these variables (Dearing, McCartney, & Taylor, 2001). For instance, children received higher receptive language and school readiness scores when they resided in families with higher income-to-needs ratios. When income is increased among poor children, they perform on par with their non-poor peers.

Similarly, Stipek and Ryan (1997) conducted a study examining differences in multiple domains of cognition between affluent and disadvantaged children entering school. The study surveyed 233 kindergarteners and 1st graders as they transitioned into formal schooling. The authors found associations between SES and all cognitive assessments to be highly statistically significant. A sizable gap in performance existed—although the size of the gap varied by cognitive test—among low-income and affluent children. On some measures, preschoolers with low-income family backgrounds were at least a year behind their affluent peers. Although family poverty reduced ethnic difference in IQ by 52% in one study, the association remained significant (Brooks-Gunn, Klebanov, & Duncan 1996). In another study, family income and mother's level of education were associated with preschool-aged children's verbal (PPVT-R) scores (Kohen et al., 1998). The researchers found that the lowest income group contained the highest percentage of preschoolers scoring low on verbal assessments (Kohen et al., 1998).

In addition to having adverse affects on young children's cognitive abilities, emotional and behavioral problems are prevalent among poor and low SES children, with externalizing problems being more common than internalizing problems (McLoyd, 1998). Studies report higher scores on assessments of behavior problems for children with low-income family backgrounds when compared to children with middle and affluent ones (Kohen et al., 1998). One study's findings suggested that positive changes in poor children's income-to-needs ratio resulted in positive social behavior (Dearing et al. 2001). Interestingly, overall males and African Americans received lower positive social behavior scores compared to other children in the ethnically diverse sample (Dearing et al., 2001).

Social class also affords access to resources, which impacts children's early learning. This argument centers on parents' ability to access financial, educational, and cultural resources

that provide children with diverse learning experiences (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005). Lee and Burkam's (2002) finding that children residing in low SES families owned 90 fewer books, were less likely to attend center-based early childhood care and education programs, and less likely to have a computer in their homes (29% compared to 85% of high SES families) offers a striking illustration of the impact of social class.

Race and School Readiness

Enslaved African children were prohibited by law from learning to read and write, which is a key historical moment to include in any analysis of African American children's educational experiences. According to Anderson's (1988) seminal work examining the education of African Americans in the south, "between 1800 and 1835, most of the southern states enacted legislation making it a crime to teach enslaved children to read and write" (p. 2), while simultaneously lobbying for public and free education for American children. Although some enslaved Africans and free African Americans learned, it was forbidden by law for enslaved African Americans to read and write. More than fifty years later, inequalities in educational opportunities and resources persist in school environments (Bracey, 2003).

The achievement gap prevalent among African American children has been attributed to the lack of legitimacy their cultural group holds in U.S. society, where one powerful cultural group dominates (Hilliard, 2002). Ogbu (1988) argued that African Americans occupy a caste-like position in America, bounded by structural issues of class and race that can impact children's educational experiences. Perry (2003) argued that there are "extra social, emotional, cognitive, and political competencies required of African American youth, precisely because they are African American, if they are to commit themselves over time to perform at high levels in school" (p. 4). Perry (2003) identified seven dilemmas African American students face in

American school. She argued that these dilemmas add to the cognitive and social abilities needed to be academically successful.

Issues of class and race often coexist because minority families and communities are disproportionately poor. Race and social class intersect to impact young children. In fact, some argue that "historical racial and ethnic inequalities in the United States have created disparate socioeconomic circumstances for the families in which White, Hispanic, and African American children are reared" (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005, p. 36). For example, Brooks-Gunn et al. (1996) conducted a study examining the role of neighborhood poverty, persistent poverty, family structure, and parental education on intelligence test scores for African American and White five-year-olds. Descriptive statistics for the sample of African American and White children illuminated several concrete differences between the two groups. These descriptive statistics indicated that African American children in their study were more likely to be poor (57% compared to 14% of Whites) and score higher on income-to-needs ratio scales (86% compared to 34% for Whites).

To a lesser extent, research also has been conducted to examine the influence of school context and minority students' academic achievement. School environments and curriculum have been noted to influence children's experiences. Some researchers argue that a culture of power exists within U.S. schools that is largely based on the values and norms of the dominant group, or White middle and upper-class families, thereby perpetuating inequalities in education and society (Cooney, 1995). The hidden curriculum, which gained attention during the 1960s and 70s, refers to the dual purposes of schooling; one is formally teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic and the other is informally transmitting values and belief systems to new members of a given society (Giroux, 2001).

Ultimately, some children tend to come to school with more experience in this culture than others (Delpit, 1995), which impacts their experiences in school environments. Delpit (1995) contended "socialization to the middle class social system becomes a critical first step towards learning in the public school setting" (Cooney, 1995, p. 164). According to Washington (2001) there is a mismatch between the language forms and use of younger African American children encounter at home and school. This mismatch was suspected to significantly influence their transition into kindergarten.

As stated above, African American children do not perform as well on indicators of academic achievement as White children. Stipek (2004) argued that the limited resources and poor quality of the schools serving low-income and African American children can perpetuate achievement disparities that exist along racial and ethnic lines. In her study exploring the relationship between school qualities and classroom instruction in 314 kindergarten and first grade classrooms in diverse schools, districts, and academic outcomes, Stipek (2004) found that low-income children and children of color attended schools that lacked resources and had climates less conducive to learning than schools serving more advantaged students. Teaching practices also differed in relation to the race and class of students. More basic skills and didactic, assignment driven instruction were provided in schools with a high proportion of minority and low-income students. In fact, results indicate that ethnicity was a more powerful predictor than SES in terms of predicting didactic pedagogy.

In her classic study, Heath (1986) presented several important findings related to language and cognitive development and academic achievement in her work with families. A major finding of her ten-year study was language socialization that takes place in communities differs by race and class. More significantly, Heath (1986) suggested that only the habits of

families living in the mainstream community of Piedmont "seem to fit the expectations of the school and other mainstream institutions" (p. 159). In other words, in the working class African American and White communities children perform less well in school than middle-class White families due to a misfit. Heath attributed school success to the more complex verbal interactions that took place between young children and adults and more advanced peers in middle-class homes that were closely aligned with those that took place in schools. Instead of questioning, the act of "teasing" often occurred between African American adults and more experienced children. These language practices were not aligned with formal school environments and expectations.

In another study examining teacher practices within schools, Bloch et al.'s (1994) study explored teachers' assessments of students' competencies during kindergarten and first grade. Ethnographic findings from a study of twenty-three children revealed language to be an integral element of teachers' day-to-day assessments of children's academic progress. African American children's language differences were not as clearly identified by teachers as they were for Hmong and Latino children. Teachers considered hesitation in answering questions or following instruction among African American students to be more indicative of behavioral problems and learning disabilities than lack of comprehension of what they were being asked because of language use and conventions misfit. Additionally, African American children's social skills were often negatively assessed and considered serious problems that could hinder academic achievement instead of "developmental issues" as they were considered among Latino and Hmong children. For example, even when an African American boy was academically "average" teachers focused more on behavioral problems then academic achievement during the parent-teacher conference.

Community Resources

In general, findings from empirical studies of neighborhood effects highlight various associations between neighborhood poverty and adverse cognitive and socioemotional development among preschool-aged children (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1996; Chase-Lansdale & Gordon, 1996; Chase-Lansdale, Gordon, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997; Duncan et al., 1994; Jackson, 2003; Klebanov et al., 1998; Kohen, Brooks-Gunn, Leventhal, & Hertzman, 2002). Young children are affected by neighborhood conditions, both indirectly through parenting behaviors and practices and directly by the presence of neighborhood resources. Residing in poor neighborhoods is linked to lower cognitive functioning and, although to a lesser extent, higher parental reports of behavior problems. Contrarily, residing in affluent neighborhoods is linked with developmental benefits to young children's cognition and socioemotional functioning.

Furthermore, the neighborhood resource model argues that one of the ways that poor neighborhoods hinder child development is through the lack of or limited number of high quality resources and services available for the children living there (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Jarrett, 1997; Jencks & Mayer, 1990). Minimal experiences with cognitively, socially, and culturally stimulating activities is a characteristic of poor neighborhoods and is believed to place children at a developmental disadvantage in comparison to peers living in neighborhoods where resources are abundant. The neighborhood resource theory focuses on the availability of local assets and institutions in neighborhoods that address children's developmental needs. The presence of high quality schools, libraries, parks and playgrounds, recreation centers, and other tangible resources in the neighborhood grant children access to opportunities that enhance their cognitive, social, and physical skill development.

Though sparse, research reports a negative influence of limited community resources on school readiness. A neighborhood's social class standing, in terms of affluence and poverty, has been found to indirectly impact children's development and competencies related to school readiness (Kohen et al., 1998).

Kohen et al. (1998) specifically examined neighborhood influences on competencies related to Canadian children's school readiness. As with the findings highlighted above, the authors reported that living in affluent and resource-rich neighborhoods is associated with higher cognitive and behavioral competencies important for school readiness. Specifically they reported correlations between lower verbal competency, as indicated by PPVT-R scores, and all indicators of neighborhood poverty. For example children who scored low on tests of verbal ability and were reported to have more behavior problems were less likely to reside in affluent neighborhoods and more likely to reside in neighborhoods with higher percentages of female-headed households and higher maternal reports of neighborhood dangers and limited neighborhood cohesion.

In their Beginning School Study, Entwisle and Alexander (1999) reported unequally distributed social class resources in Baltimore communities. They contended that access to limited institutional and community resources impacted young children's achievement before they entered school. For example, middle income children tended to attend schools with middle-income peers and poor children largely attended schools with other poor children because of how school boundaries were delineated in relation to neighborhood boundaries. They also noted that when school was in session, poor children achieved as much as or more than their middle-income peers. However, middle-income children gain substantially more than their poor peers academically during out-of-school time. Access to family and community economic and

educational resources provided advantages prior to first grade and during the summer for middle class and affluent children more so than poor children.

Studies examining racial and ethnic differences of neighborhood effects are less commonplace in the current literature. Still, some studies highlight racial differences in how neighborhood poverty impacts young children's development. For example, López Turley's (2003) study examined the differential impacts of neighborhood income on White and African American preadolescent children's test scores, self-esteem, and behavior. She hypothesized that although living in disadvantaged neighborhoods may have adverse effects on children's developmental outcomes, so does residing in affluent, mostly white neighborhoods that afford limited access to resources for African American children. Neighborhood effects are hypothesized to differ between African American and White children within the context of neighborhood affluence. Data for this study were derived from three sources: the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) 1997 Child Development Supplement (which included 3,563 children under the age of thirteen), the PSID Family Files, and the 1990 census. PSID data were matched with corresponding census tract data using geocoding procedures. Neighborhood resources were measured using the neighborhood's median income. The three primary child outcomes assessed in the analyses were test scores (Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement), self-esteem (self-reports), and behavior (parental reports). Here, I focus only on findings related to test scores and behavior problems because self-esteem was not assessed for children aged seven and younger.

The results of the study were reported for all children as an aggregate, which limits the ability to specifically identify results pertaining to preschool-aged children. However,

López Turley (2003) found racial differences in neighborhood effects for African American and White children. Analyses revealed that for test scores and behavior, White children benefit from increases in neighborhood income while African American children do not. In other words, residing in neighborhoods with a high proportion of families with high median incomes improves the cognitive and behavioral functioning of White children, not African American children. To explain the mechanism through which these differences operate, López Turley (2003) examined the correlation between social integration, neighborhood effects, and child outcomes. Social integration was measured by assessing how many neighborhood children parents know by name. This method assumes parents' familiarity with children to be an indication of the scope of target children's peer group associations.

Significant associations were evident only when parents of White children knew more than fifteen neighborhood children, not when African American parents did. The author found that when parents knew fewer than fifteen children in the neighborhood by name, neighborhood income lost significance in the association between test scores and behavior. So, as neighborhood income increases, parents of White children know more and African American parents know fewer neighborhood children. White children benefit more when their parents know more than fifteen children by name, while African American children do not. This finding is only significant for children and families living in their neighborhoods for more than three years. The findings from this study suggest that neighborhood integration and socialization with peers impact child outcomes for low-income and poor African American families living in White, affluent neighborhoods. White children may benefit more from their associations with high income neighbors and peers than do African American children because they are more socially integrated into the neighborhood.

The dimension of race-ethnicity further confounds and challenges optimal development as African American children and White children differ in their exposure to and the impact of growing up in impoverished neighborhoods. White children are less exposed to persistently poor neighborhood environments, and low-income African American children benefit the least from residing in affluent neighborhoods.

Home-School Connections: Kindergarten Transition Activities

The role of school in preparing children for kindergarten focuses on the availability of kindergarten transition activities. These transition activities can be used to connect home, preschool, and elementary schools in order to ease the movement from one educational context into another (Graue, 1992). Some parents sought partnerships and open communication with teachers prior to the first day of kindergarten (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Research suggests collaboration and partnerships between home and school have several potential benefits. For example, "school personnel bring expertise based on theories of child development and experiences with young children in school settings; and parents bring their unique perspectives on the needs of individual children" (McBride, Bae, & Wright, 2002, p. 108) that positively impact school experiences. "Certain practices of family-school partnership initiatives are likely to enhance children's learning skills, while other practices can influence children's school attendance, classroom behavior, and attitudes towards learning" (McBride et al., 2002, p. 122).

Research has also examined parents' communication with educators and schools prior to their children's transition into kindergarten. Benefits are associated with parent-teacher communication and participating in transition activities. Schulting, Malone, and Dodge (2005) conducted secondary data analyses using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999. This nationally representative sample included more than 21,000 children

and 900 schools. The authors reported that transition activities conducted at the school-level were related to kindergarten performance. Involvement in transition activities, especially parent visits to receiving kindergarten programs, predicted higher academic achievement even when controlling for income. Results also suggest that these effects were more significant among low SES students, and parent-initiated school involvement accounted for a significant amount (25%) of the effect of transition activities on academic achievement. Still, there was a modest statistically significant relationship between transition practices and academic achievement in kindergarten with transition activities benefiting middle-class families more than affluent and poor ones.

Some form of parent-teacher communication and/or transition activities typically took place prior to children's transitions into kindergarten. In a study of parents' perceptions of transition activities, almost half of the 132 parent participants reported frequent contact (monthly) with preschool personnel (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007). They reported less communication with future kindergarten teachers compared to preschool teachers. Parents reported wanting written communication from kindergarten teachers, to visit the kindergarten classroom, and to have an informational meeting prior to their child's transition into kindergarten. General findings suggest that parents and teachers communicate minimally prior to young children entering school, despite research highlighting benefits related to academic achievement for low-income children when transitional activities occur and parents and teachers communicate prior to the start of kindergarten (i.e., sharing information and classroom goals) (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003; Nelson, 2004).

Nelson's (2004) study explored "the transition from home to school and explained how parents and teachers create horizontal continuity across contexts" (p. 187). using a sample of

3000 kindergarten teachers who participated in the National Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort study. Nelson (2004) found that teachers attempted to communicate with parents by sending information to children's homes. Sending information home was the most commonly used transition activity (80% of teachers reported participating in this activity). The least common communicative parent-teacher interaction reported in this study was home visiting (only 5% of teachers reported engaging in this activity).

In a study conducted by McBride, et al. (2002) seventy-seven percent of the contacts reported by teachers involved "traditional" activities with parents (e.g., helping parents meet their basic needs, communicating with parents about school issues, getting parents involved in the schools). In contrast, only 1% of teachers' efforts to connect with parents were focused on involving parents in governance and advocacy activities. Another trend reported in this article was that 44% of all contacts were related to addressing administrative issues, instead of pertinent issues related to children's development ("e.g., providing family members with feedback on developmental issues, collaborating with parents to devise strategies to address specific needs of children, and collaborating with local agencies to extend learning opportunities" p. 122).

In the same study, there was some variation among teachers. Parent-teacher communication occurred more when teachers possessed certain characteristics. For example, veteran teachers were more likely than novice teachers to invite children to visit classrooms prior to the start of school, invite parents to visit classrooms, and to use other transition activities. Additionally, early childhood certified teachers were more likely to shorten school days at the beginning of the year, invite parents to visit classrooms, and to have orientations prior to the start of school than non-certified kindergarten teachers (Nelson, 2004). Additionally, teacher perceptions also varied by race and ethnicity. For example, compared to White teachers, African

American and Latino teachers viewed academic related skills as central components of school readiness (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005).

In La Paro et al.'s (2003) study, approximately half of the families reported participating in almost all of activities offered. Ninety-six percent of the children visited a kindergarten classroom and 38% met their future teachers. Families were less likely to report attending kindergarten orientations (31%). The major barriers to participating in transition activities for the families were work schedules (74%), followed by transportation, lack of childcare, schedule conflicts, lack of desire, and feeling uncomfortable in the school. McBride et al.'s (2002) study also explored barriers to parent involvement in partnerships. They identified similar barriers to parent participation in kindergarten transition activities using focus group data. In the same study, less than half of the kindergarten teachers took part in the school orientation, and less than 25% held parent conferences. Generally, kindergarten teachers did not report participation in home-to-school transition activities (record sharing and meeting about curriculum). One major barrier to teachers' participation in transition activities was that work during the summer that was unsupported was required. Additionally, late class lists, perceptions of danger, and discouragement from parents were noted as barriers to participation (La Paro et al., 2003).

The Role of Parenting and Family Life

Research provides data on the impact of parenting and family-school interactions on school readiness and early learning. Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) described parenting as "activities that parents engage in either with or for their children" (p. 140). They highlighted seven categories of parenting that can influence children's school readiness. Nurturance ("ways of expressing love, affection, and care"), discipline (parental responses to perceived inappropriate and appropriate behavior), teaching ("didactic strategies for conveying information

or skills to the child"), and language use (providing materials and experiences to cognitively and linguistically stimulate children within the home) are the categories of parenting behaviors outlined in this review of literature. I discuss these broad parenting behaviors in relation to school readiness.

Nurturance

A component of parenting and family life found to impact young African American children's school performance is parent-child interactions and relationships. In a longitudinal study of sixty-seven mothers and children, Hess, Holloway, Dickson, and Price (1984) found affective parent-child relationships are positively related to school readiness and later achievement in math and vocabulary. In an examination of multiple dimensions of parent-child interaction in the preschool years, Dodici, Draper, and Peterson (2003) found that the quality of parent-child interactions are strongly related to low-income children's literacy development.

African American parenting is often characterized in academic scholarship as authoritative and harsh (Hill, 2003; McLoyd, 1998), thereby adversely impacting development and achievement in schools (Parker et al., 1999). Some studies suggest African American parents exhibit less internal sensitivity, more intrusiveness, less positive regard, and score higher in the area of detachment on the HOME Warmth scale (Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005).

Parker et al.'s (1999) study concluded that aggravation and strict parenting adversely influence children's school readiness. They argued that parent-child interaction characterized as warm and mutual facilitates children's cognitive development. In a rare study examining African American parenting styles and affective behaviors, McGroder's (2000) findings suggest that distinct parenting practices and types exist among African American mothers. In her study of single, low-income African American mothers, aggravation was an important dimension of

parenting patterns that emerged. The most common parenting pattern found in the sample was the Aggravated but Nurturant style. Findings from this study suggest though nurturance is important in parent-child relationship, it does not counter all of the negative impacts of maternal displays of aggravation on young children's social development and cognitive stimulation in the preschool years.

Discipline

In a longitudinal study of the impact of Head Start participation on parent-child relationships and home learning, Parker et al. (1999) found strictness among parents to negatively impact school readiness among low-income children. In a comprehensive review of literature, Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) reported that African Americans have slightly lower scores on parenting measures than their White counterparts. Specifically, they suggest African American mothers spank more often.

Teaching

Providing learning activities within the home environment is important for promoting academic success in the early years (Britto, Brooks-Gunn, & Griffin, 2006; Parker et al., 1999; Votruba-Drzal, 2003). Families usually provide these early learning experiences for young children through interaction, talk, and play, both inside and outside of the home (Kohen et al., 1998).   The quality and amount of time parents spend talking, reading, teaching, and providing cognitively stimulating materials within the home are often used to measure the quality of the home environment (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005).

Overall, research points out deficits in features of African American children's home learning environments. Current literature suggests that less cognitive stimulation is available within the home environments of African American families with young children. Britto et al.

(2006) examined the association between maternal teaching and school readiness among low-income African American children whose families participated in the Newark Young Family Study. In general, the authors found "preschoolers whose mothers provided them with high levels of support and guided participation demonstrated greater school readiness and expressive language use" (Britto et al., 2006).

Votruba-Drzal (2003) examined children's cognitive stimulation at home using a sample of children and families from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) and NLSY Child Supplement. Analyses suggest that ethnic minority families, including African Americans, offered fewer opportunities for early learning compared to Non-Hispanic White families as determined by reading to children, helping children learn pre-academic concepts such as shapes, letters, colors, and numbers, and taking children to museums.

Some qualitative studies present contrary findings in terms of African American family life that suggest pro-social and resilient responses to social disadvantage (Jarrett, 1999). African American parents tend to develop activities from everyday life to teach and prepare children for school (Holloway et al., 1995; Jarrett, 1999). For example, some studies, mostly qualitative, report findings that parents provide children with school readiness activities that are inexpensive and accessible, such as teaching children the alphabet and reading from multiple sources of media (Diamond et al., 2000; Dyson, 2003; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Teale, 1986).

In a study conducted by Diamond et al. (2000) parents reported providing children with school readiness activities by means of reading and encouraging educational programming (these were inexpensive and accessible, i.e., reading and teaching the alphabet). No significant relationships were identified between reported home learning activities and parents' readiness concerns for their children. Dyson (2003) presented an ethnographic study of African American

first graders' use of popular culture in school literacy activities and the construction of their

childhoods. Her study suggests that not only are African American children exposed to

educational media through parenting practices and family life, they drew upon these early

experiences to learn in schools. Dyson (2003) found that school learning was grounded in

children's familial experiences. For example, one student used words, sounds, and visual

representations to complete official school writing projects and collaborative book reading and

song writing (both official and unofficial), complete with titles and ends, that centered on their

prior (home, media, peers) and new (teacher instructed) first grade experiences.

In their qualitative follow up of twelve middle-income African American primary

caretakers of young children (aged 3-6), Suizzo, Robinson, and Pahlke's (2008) analyses suggest

that an important component of socialization and parenting practices among African Americans

involves "promoting educational achievement as a means to overcome barriers or racism"

(p.297). They found mothers actively participated in school related and in home learning

activities to promote academic achievement in the early years. Parents taught children to read,

checked backpacks for homework, talked to teachers, and ensured the principal "knows my

face."

Language Use

Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) note remarkable differences in the nature of talk

among African American and White parents; with White parents talking more to their children

than their African American peers. Language use in the home is associated with children's

vocabulary abilities. Book reading also is a feature of the home environment found to impact

early learning. "Joint book reading is considered important for young children because it

provides the constant exposure to print necessary to facilitate early print awareness"
(Washington, 2001, p. 217).

In one study conducted by Sonnenschein and Munsterman (2002), affective book reading with parents and siblings was associated with increased motivation to read among 5-year-olds. In terms of home literacy experiences, book reading has been found to vary by social class, race, and educational background. Studies suggest that compared to White parents, African American parents are less likely to read to their children daily (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Washington, 2001). In fact, "African American parents increase their involvement in literacy activities once their children enter school, but failure to promote these activities prior to school entry places their children at a disadvantage compared to higher literacy homes. Although middle-income African American families engage in more joint book reading activity, it is still significantly below that of middle SES White families" (Washington, 2001, p. 217). Additionally, studies noted fewer children's books and less reading material available in African American homes (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005).

In a study of 126 low-income African American mothers of two and three year olds, conducted by Britto et al. (2006) two patterns of book reading emerged: (1) story-readers and (2) story-tellers. Most of the low-income African American mothers in the sample (90) were classified as story-readers; only twenty-seven mothers were classified as story-tellers. The authors noted that story readers talked less and used less expressive language than storytellers to children during shared book reading activities. Additionally, children whose parents were classified as story-readers talked less during the story and demonstrated lower expressive language than children whose parents were story-tellers.

Teale's (1986) study revealed a wide variety of written and print materials in low-income and African American children's homes and communities. His sample included twenty-four low-income children between the ages of 2.5 and 3.5 and their families. The study was conducted over the course of 3-18 months. The children included in this study were White, African American, and Mexican boys and girls. Observations suggest that all of the children participating in the study took part in some kind of activity involving writing and reading in their homes with multiple adults and older siblings. Numerous examples of printed material such as magazines, books, newspapers, and religious materials existed in children's homes, though children's books were not as available within their homes.

In another study, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) conducted a longitudinal, ethnographic study using participant observations to explore young children's writing and reading activities at home and in school. They found literacy to be embedded in the everyday lives and experiences of the children in the study. The authors also collected drawing and writing samples that were created by participants. Children drew pictures at young ages and in multiple contexts (home, school, through play with siblings) with different kinds of materials available in a specific place (pencil, pens, crayons, markers, paint/brushes). Again, the benchmark was not necessarily the number of books in the home, which was a key component of HOME observations.

Chapter Summary: Addressing the Gaps

School readiness is a social problem in American society. School readiness as a construct, assessment, and pedagogy remains a work in progress. Findings that highlight social class, racial, and gender disparities are alarming but must be interpreted cautiously. Overall, current research suggests that school readiness disparities that exist among African American

children go beyond general developmental differences. Herein, I explored the meaning of school readiness among educators and African American parents in order to further conceptualize school readiness and theorize social class, race, and gender disparities.

I also explored adults' perceptions of the No Child Left Behind Act. Systematic studies examining teachers' and parents' perceptions of education policies are sparse. It is important to understand parents' and educators' knowledge and views of educational policy and how activities they participate in to prepare African American children for kindergarten are aligned with them. This was a central component of this study. It specifically examined some of the current polices guiding early childhood educational practice. I explored documentary evidence of the impact of National Learning Standards on early childhood education and adults' perceptions of the NCLB Act in one community school district.

Social science research findings are mixed on the impacts of African American family life and parenting on school readiness. Nurturance, discipline, teaching, and language broadly characterize parenting practices and interactions that impact school readiness (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; McLoyd, 1998). These parenting behaviors are found to vary by ethnicity and race. Quantitative studies, generally, report limited provisions of educational activities, verbal engagement, and warm, sensitive interactions between African American parents, particularly mothers, and their children—leading to poor cognitive and behavioral outcomes. These findings are often based upon conceptualizations of White, middle-class norms regarding appropriate parenting behaviors. On the other hand, qualitative studies suggest these measures do not fully assess home learning environments. African American parents' interpretations of how they display affection and express warmth in their interactions with children were less often evident in the literature. In addition to accounting for maternal education, single-head-of-household status,

maternal depression, and various characteristics of the home environment, attention must be given to a variety of maternal behaviors to more fully capture learning experiences among ethnically and racially diverse groups.   Quantitative measures alone do not always assess some of the microlevel characteristics of parenting and home environments.

Qualitative studies point out diverse ways in which parents engage in activities with their children that can offer benefits to early learning and socialization related to entering school. This study explored African American parenting practices using methods that provided intellectual space for parents to define parenting practices in the context of their everyday lives, using their own words. Employing a qualitative case study research design addressed this gap. It offered an in-depth exploration of a bounded case of kindergarten preparation. Parents' and educators' perceptions were important for creating a shared, intersubjective understanding of key beliefs, values, and strategies for attaining valued goals, such as smooth transitions into kindergarten (Holloway et al., 1995). This study sought to draw upon the ordinary experiences and knowledge adults had to examine the "local ways" in which African American children's entry into school was understood (McGinley, Meacham, DeNicolo, & Conley, 2000).

Most of the studies reviewed focus solely on low-income African American children, without discussion of middle-income children's experiences. It has been noted that middle income families also have readiness concerns for their children and programming is needed. Consequently, the heterogeneity of experiences and diversity of needs among African American children and families are downplayed. There is a gap in the literature in terms of exploring within groups differences in readiness and perceptions of school transitions that this study seeks to address. It included an examination of middle and low-income families in concert. Furthermore, although poverty is a significant predictor of racial differences on readiness

assessments, it does not adequately explain the experiences of high achieving low-income children and middle-income African American kindergarteners. Additionally, despite multiple risk factors, some children excel upon entering kindergarten (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). This study explored school readiness advantages and disadvantages within multiple developmental contexts.

A competing explanation for school readiness and achievement disparities suggests that there is a cultural mismatch across home and school settings. Systems of stratification have been found to perpetuate social inequalities that exacerbate a mismatch between home and school experiences of low-income and minority children. Learning is considered intricately connected to an individual's lived experiences (Darder, 2002; Freire, 1993). When the content of the lessons mirror home experiences of one culture in important ways, children are given opportunities to enact what they have already learned at home in classrooms (Delpit, 1995). Some researchers argue that school contents mirror White, middle-class home environments (Giroux, 2001); consequently disparities in achievement result. The sociopolitical context arguably plays a key role in children's school experiences, yet remains largely unexplored. There is a lack of empirical research in this area to substantiate this explanation, especially as it relates to young children's school experience. This study addresses this limitation.

The federal government's urging for evidence-based research has led to several large, national studies examining children's early developmental and educational experiences. A major strength of the empirical studies reviewed above is the nationally represented sample of the datasets analyzed. Large, diverse samples lend themselves to rigorous statistical testing and, if measures are reliable, generalizing beyond the sample to a wider population of children and families. Additionally, large national studies can be replicated and compared cross-nationally

(see Kohen et al., 2002). Analyses using similar measures and designs strengthen knowledge in

the field about school entry and its effect on children and families in diverse geographical

locations.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is argued that a coherent theory of school readiness is lacking in current literature (Snow, 2006). This chapter provides a synthesis of theorizing school readiness, an overview of this study's guiding theoretical framework, and its application for examining school readiness and kindergarten preparation in the broader contexts of social class, race, and gender. Concepts and tenets of ecological theory, cultural capital, critical race theory (CRT), and feminist thought informed how this study was undertaken. A complete discussion of the development and progression of theories is beyond the scope of this chapter. The crux of this chapter outlines theoretical concepts and tenets comprising this framework. It also provides an integrative summary of the four perspectives that emphasizes their intersectionality and contributions to a textured discussion of school readiness.

Theorizing School Readiness: A Historical Recap

In the early years of compulsory education, determination of school readiness grew largely from a maturationist framework. According to this framework, only mature children could benefit from school. The maturationist framework still guided the field in the 1900s. "Reading readiness" was overwhelmingly defined in terms of a child's maturity level and mental age, despite dissenters arguing that the effectiveness of instruction and other environmental factors also played roles in early school performance (Durkin, 1966).

School readiness shifted from a general concern with reading among American schoolchildren to the need to prepare low-income and minority children for the rigors of formal education during the mid and late 1960s. Theoretically, early educational experiences were increasingly viewed as equally important for promoting school success as a child's chronological age during this period through the 1980s. Popular belief during this time was that schools assist

children in overcoming negative influence of their family environments by providing them with

marketable social and academic skills (Church & Sedlak, 1976). Researchers and policy analysts

have begun to connect the maturationist perspective with others perspectives such as the

evolutionary developmental view (Snow, 2006). In this tradition schools are considered socially

constructed environments that should be ready to receive children. Researchers argue that

biologically determined and universal cognitive skills are promoted in environmental activities

and early experiences (Snow, 2006).

An ecological framework has also been put forth to theorize school readiness (Pianta,

2002; Snow, 2006). The National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCDL)

Ecological Model was developed in an effort to understand the process of transitioning into

kindergarten (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cox, 1999). The model takes into account the

influence of contexts (family, classroom, community). Snow (2006) contends "school readiness

is best understood as an interaction between the development status and the numerous elements

of a child's environment" (p. 30). Furthermore, Pianta (2002) notes that the process of readiness

is highly complex and involves multiple relationships and contexts in which young children are

embedded and have experiences.

In current research, poverty and minority group status prevail as prominent risk factors

for developmental and school maladjustments. Research postulated relationships between

background variables such as race, class, and gender and children's performances on assessments

of school readiness. As a result models of "risk" and deficit are overwhelmingly represented in

school readiness literature. In-depth examinations of mechanisms and social processes

impacting school readiness that perpetuate disparities so often reported in the literature are

lacking. Carlton and Winsler (1999) highlight the need for a paradigm shift in order to better

understand readiness. The authors suggest that "assumptions upon which most of the current readiness practices are based are faulty and questionable" (p. 343). They contend current readiness paradigms can have negative consequences for young children. This study's theoretical framework represents an effort to broaden the existing paradigms. It sought to move beyond outlining models of risk to understanding processes and mechanisms of risk factors that perpetuate school readiness advantages and disadvantages.

I drew upon diverse theoretical tenets to further theorize preparing children for kindergarten and related disparities. The ecological model offered a broad framework for examining conceptions of kindergarten preparation in multiple developmental contexts. The concept of cultural capital offered a lens to explore specific mechanisms of social class that impact school readiness. Critical race theory was incorporated to examine issues of race and school readiness. Lastly, feminist thought was incorporated to understand the complexities of gender. Combined, these perspectives provided the theoretical framework.

Ecological Theory

The ecological theory provided the foundation of this study's framework. Researchers note the model's fit for understanding school readiness processes and contextual elements related to preparing children for school (Pianta et al., 1999; Snow, 2006). Here, Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model was drawn upon because it offered a means to pay special attention to family, school, community, policy, and other sociopolitical environments in which school entry was embedded as well as the interplay between these systems. The concepts of ecosystem and levels fit well with this study's focus on highlighting multiple developmental contexts. Also, social interaction, a central feature of the ecological model (White & Klein, 2002), was essential in theorizing school readiness.

Ecosystems and Levels

The ecosystems in which humans exist are central. Interactions within broad biological and social contexts influence individuals' development. Development occurs "in context" of social and environmental dependencies. An ecosystem or environment is defined as "an arrangement of mutual dependencies in a population by which the whole operates as a unit and thereby maintains a viable environmental relationship" (Hawley, 1986, p. 26).

Multiple structures exist within ecological environments. Bronfenbrenner (1979) organized varying contexts into systems represented by "a nested arrangement of concentric structures each contained within the next" (p. 22). Figure 3-1 is an illustration of Bronfenbrenner's concentric structures. The microsystem is a network of "patterns of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical and material features and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality and systems of personal belief" (Bretherton, 1993, p. 22). The mesosystem is described as a connected group of microsystems in which the individual directly participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Exosystems are settings that do not require a child's direct participation, but can indirectly influence development by directly affecting others with whom they interact (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Finally, macrosystems encompass collective norms and values, cultures of larger society and subgroups, and the variations that exist (Bretherton, 1993; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; McAdoo, 1993; White & Klein, 2002).

At the microsystem level, the explanation that parenting and family life influence school readiness was examined. Examinations of the relationships and interactions between primary caregivers and preschool-age children and explorations of young children's activities within their

families were possible at this level. Examining the mesosystem revealed connections and disconnections between home and school perceptions of school readiness and preparing children for school. Kindergarten transition activities were also explored to assess home-school connectedness. Within this system, parents' perceptions and children's familial experiences were considered in concert with educators' and schools' expectations. It was instrumental in examining kindergarten preparation within the larger ecosystem. The exosystem offered space to highlight the indirect ways local institutions and community resources potentially impact school readiness and kindergarten transitions. Finally, examining macrosystems allowed perceptions of the impact of social class, race, and gender on school readiness and transitioning into kindergarten to be examined. Analyzing the four ecological systems provided a textured view of children's experiences prior to and upon entering formal schooling (Pianta, 2002; Pianta et al., 1999). They highlighted how these socially constructed realities influenced kindergarten preparation.

Interaction and Interplay Between Ecological Structures

The ecological model was also useful for theorizing about families and the development of its members (White & Klein. 2002). One assumption of the ecology of human development is that the social interaction that takes place within parent-child relationships is important (Bretherton, 1993; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This was especially relevant in exploring preparing children for kindergarten. Within the ecological model, families are central and considered important allies in encouraging school readiness (Pianta et al., 2002). In their interactions with family members preschool-aged children learn to relate to others, patterns and norms of social interaction, and how to process the intentions and behaviors of others in the future. Educational socialization and learning also take place. Current studies broadly characterize parenting

practices and interactions with young children that impact school readiness. This theory allowed for examinations of micro-level processes that take place between family members and young children during their daily routines and interactions, which can impact school readiness.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) was more concerned with these systems' interrelatedness and the influence they had on development than with identifying processes that took place within one system or another. Accordingly to Bronfenbrenner, "a child's ability to learn in school may depend no less on how he or she is taught than on the existence and nature of ties between the school and the home" (p. 3). For example, when discussing preschool-aged children's ecological transitions from home into school, the congruency between family and educator perceptions can be examined in terms of connections and disconnections between contexts. Figure 3-2 is a pictorial representation of this study's concern with points of connection and disconnection between the levels of systems. The ways that parenting and family life, home-school connectedness, community resources, and systems of stratification and education policy converge and diverge was of primary concern in this study.

In discussions of school readiness, the extent to which family, school, community, and society promoted common goals for school readiness were examined using this theoretical framework. The ecological theory was a major organizing component of the theoretical framework. The concepts of cultural capital and tenets of critical race theory and feminist thought offered lenses to interpret the ecological system and its structures in this case study.

<div align="center">Cultural Capital</div>

The concept of cultural capital was employed to theorize the influence of social class. Cultural capital is a theoretical concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu to explain the disparities in educational outcomes between students of varying social class. Cultural capital refers to

knowledge of valued cultural tastes and practices (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). The concept refers to "attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods, and credentials" (Lareau & Weininger, 2003) socially recognized as denoting high status within society. Appreciating the arts, knowing how to play a musical instrument, and having studied at Julliard are examples of cultural capital. Cultural capital offered a means to explore how mechanisms and micro-level processes of social class influence kindergarten preparation. This study drew upon the notions of culture as a resource and transmission of cultural capital to examine the role of social class on school readiness advantages and disadvantages.

Cultural Capital as Resource

Much of Bourdieu's work on cultural capital focused on "high status" cultural resources and tastes within France that indirectly translated into high educational achievement. He argued that individuals within society gain advantages through possession of cultural capital. Social scientists have also examined the concept of cultural capital within U.S. society (Barone, 2006; Kingston, 2001; Lareau, 2000; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Lareau and Weininger (2003) expanded Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital by contributing the notion that cultural capital "allows culture to be used as a resource that provides access to scarce rewards" (p. 567). Within the American system of education, Lareau attempts to go beyond "classical" tastes in art and music to a more general concept in order to understand activation of capital to achieve advantages within contemporary U.S. society. The concept of cultural capital suggests that social class and cultural "tastes" are closely related (Barone, 2006).

A premise of the concept of cultural capital employed in this framework to understanding disparities in academic achievement is the notion that schools are not neutral ecological settings (Barone, 2006; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Instead, in schools expectations for attitudes and

behaviors are well defined and typically imposed by the dominant class. Cultural capital is exclusive and is "largely the property of the existing elite" (Kingston, 2001, p. 89). When middle class cultural resources are more valued in educational settings than poor and working class cultural resources, educational disparities can result. In other words, possessing cultural capital aligned with schools' expectations is a resource for children entering kindergarten. This study explored the alignment of low- and middle-income families' expectations and kindergarten practices with educators' expectations to theorize the influence of social class on school readiness.

Transmission of Cultural Capital

Cultural capital can be "transmitted from one generation to the next" (Lareau & Weininger, 2003. p. 587). Cultural capital provides resources that interact with schools in ways that can reproduce social inequality (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). Lareau (2000) postulated social class as a primary component of cultural capital that influenced children's education. She contended that social class was a resource that granted parents cultural capital to intervene in their children's school experiences in ways that yielded educational returns. Cultural codes can also be passed on to children through social interactions in multiple contexts. This study drew upon the concept of cultural capital to explore perceptions of school readiness and the transition into kindergarten. Cultural capital offered means to explore the role of social class in parents' perceptions of school readiness and early learning and their abilities to meet educators' expectations for their incoming kindergarteners. This concept also guided this study in identifying the ways in which parents "activate" cultural capital to prepare their children for school within their everyday lives to yield "profits" at kindergarten entrance.

Critical Race Theory

African Americans have had a unique experience in the United States that begins with compulsory education in the 1830s. It was forbidden by law for enslaved African Americans to read and write. According to Anderson's (1988) seminal work examining the education of African Americans in the south, "between 1800 and 1835, most of the southern states enacted legislation making it a crime to teach enslaved children to read and write" (p.2), while simultaneously lobbying for public and free education for American children. Hilliard contended that "the United States was created as a slave nation, complete with deliberate designs to prevent the education of slaves" and consequently "notions of White supremacy and the inferiority of people of color [led] to student segregation largely based on color" (p.90).

Critical race theory (CRT) was used to theorize race. CRT emerged among legal scholars (e.g. Cheryl Harris, 1998) in search of a critical interpretation of race and racism in the law and society. It was later introduced into the field of education by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT specifically offered intellectual space for "uncover[ing] how race and racism operate" (Parker & Lynn; 2002, p.7) to impact the lives of African Americans; while simultaneously taking into account intersections of socioeconomic status and gender. Critical race theory offers a means for analyzing early educational experiences and the "school readiness gaps" between African American and White children that went beyond emphasis on child and family deficits by examining the impact of structural constraints within macrosystems. CRT offered a means to explore how race played out to reinforce school readiness disadvantages and advantages. Three major theoretical tenets of critical "race" theory were central in this study: (1) counterstory telling, (2), colorblind ideology and (3) Whiteness as property.

Counterstory Telling

According to Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, and Embrick (2004), stories are basic elements of communication in which individuals narrate their lives and social relationships. Racial ideology, or " the broad racial framework, or grids, that racial groups use to make sense of the world, to decide what is right or wrong, true or false, important or unimportant" (Bonilla-Silva, et al., 2004, p. 556), is central in understanding the stories people tell about race.   Racial ideology is manifested in everyday life through story telling in which dominant, or common sense, logic, about race gives rise. Within the framework of critical race theory, counterstories offer "a means to challenge the dominant story" about race and racism (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 11) by bringing to bear stories about race told by people of color (Duncan, 2006) in social science research. This study allowed space for multiple voices to be present in discussions of school readiness to include White and African American educators as well as middle- and low-income African American parents.

Colorblindness

The racial ideology of today differs from the Jim Crow era that existed prior to the late 1960s when separate facilities were considered equal and legitimate within the United States psyche (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Colorblind ideology is now the dominant racial ideology governing social structures and relations in U.S. society (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Its function in society is to "make sense of" social life and relationships in the form of narratives and testimonies about race in society (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2004). CRT proponents argue that colorblindness denies the existence of racial discrimination and race as an organizing principle in society today. Colorblind racial ideology suggests racism is an issue of the past and irrelevant to the current social structure. CRT scholars reject colorblind ideology

because race as a social condition impacting individuals in society is ignored. According to Bell (2004) "history's lessons have not been learned, and even at this late day may not be teachable with color-blindness serving as an attractive veneer obscuring flaws in the society that are not corrected by being hidden from view" (Bell, 2004). Colorblind racial ideology underpinning the discourse on the "school readiness gap" can be problematized using CRT. It also shed light on how adults perceived the impact of race on children's transitions into kindergarten.

Whiteness as Property

Lastly, Whiteness as property was incorporated as a key interpretive tool in understanding perceptions of school readiness and transitioning into kindergarten. CRT contends being White conveys benefits and privilege to some while excluding others in educational settings (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Harris (1998) contends that historically:

> Whiteness defined the legal status of a person as slave or free. White identity conferred tangible and economically valuable benefits and was jealously guarded as a valued possession, allowed only to those who met a strict standard of proof. Whiteness—the right to White identity as embraced by the law—is property if by property one means all of a person's legal rights (p. 105).

Harris (1998) outlined the ways in which Whiteness as property, in relation to the legal definition of the term, granted property holders rights of disposition, rights of use and enjoyment, and rights to protect the reputation and status of property.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) highlight the ways in which Whiteness functions as property in educational settings today. Most applicable to this study was the right to exclude on the basis of Whiteness in formal schooling. In general, Whiteness as property played out historically in terms of denial of access to quality public education based on race and the legitimacy of racially segregated schools that were inherently unequal. Racial disparities in early learning, which continue throughout the course of schooling, exist between African American

and White students. Several microlevel explanations have been put forth to explain these gaps. Such explanations focus on individual students' motivation, intellectual ability, and family life. Yet, such arguments do not account for the motivated, high ability African American students from poor, working class, and middle class families who do not achieve on par with their peers in schools. Examining Whiteness as property and privilege is a concept that shed light on this public concern.

Feminist Thought

Feminist thought informed this study. Feminist theories are many and varied (White & Klein, 2002) and consist of several approaches and interpretations. A key element of feminism, across variations, is social transformation and change. It offers a framework to critically analyze and challenge gender hierarchies, particularly women's subordinate position within social structures (Acker, 1990). Within this theoretical framework gender was theorized in relation to how it influences and organizes structures of the ecosystem. The concept of gender was examined as activities and patterns of difference and domination by way of emphasizing distinctions between men and women (Acker, 1992) and in this case girls and boys in societal processes and institutions. Though this study most aligned with African American (Collins, 2000) and Revolutionary African American Feminist (Hamer & Neville, 1998) approaches, two general concepts were incorporated into its framework. I drew upon "gendered institutions" and resources for "doing gender" to make sense of gender disparities in school readiness and kindergarten preparation.

Gendered Institutions

Gendered institutions refer to the presence of gender "in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power in various sectors of social life" (Acker, 1992, p. 567).

This concept provided space for exploring ways in which gender functions as a result of, and to perpetuate, (unequal) social divisions between men and women in the context of institutions. Families and schools are gendered institutions. As Acker (1992) recommended, this study examined how these institutions work to exclude and control, the ways in which images and ideologies legitimize gendered processes and institutions, and the ways in which individuals act upon or in accordance with gendered institutions (do gender). More generally, this study explored the ways in which adults' perceptions and children's daily routines were gendered at home and school.

Resources for Doing Gender

Doing gender refers to "a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine natures" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126). In essence, gender involves a series of context specific performances of femaleness and maleness. Institutions offer resources to engage in gender displays. Families are contexts for gender performances and considered key agents of gender socialization (Schaefer, 2008). They provide children with resources for "doing gender" (Hill, 2002) at early ages. Games, toys, clothes, and household and neighborhood activities are resources for displaying femaleness and maleness provided by family members. Although doing gender is argued to be best viewed using methods other than interviewing, the notion that society provides individuals with resources for these performances suggests a fit with this study. The ways in which adults do gender was integral to interpreting gender disparities and experiences related to school readiness and kindergarten preparation.

Theoretical Synthesis

Each of the concepts mentioned above was important in this study's framework. The ecological model offers a clear strength for studying kindergarten preparation because of the model's concern with human development as situated in multiple, diverse, interrelated social contexts. Also, by examining links between the different systems (i.e., family, school, community, and society) a much more comprehensive account of African American children's early school experiences can be advanced. Families and homes, providers and early childhood care and education programs, neighbors and neighborhoods, and educators and elementary schools are all ecological contexts and social relationships that are integral to children's transitions from home into formal schooling. Critical examinations of social class, race, and gender were examined within the ecological model.

The concept of cultural capital, particularly as developed by Lareau and colleagues, was used to expand this study's explanation of how social class impacts relationships and connections and/or disconnections among multiple developmental contexts. Examining access to and activation of cultural capital in the transition process contributed to understanding class-based differences in school readiness advantages and disadvantages.

Cultural capital as described above did not account for racial disparities. The incorporation of CRT addressed this gap. More specifically, Whiteness as property was used to explore skin color as capital by critically examining historical social inequalities African Americans experienced in the local community. CRT also added counterstory, which highlighted the notion that African Americans often reject racial colorblind ideology that dominates how race is contemporarily constructed in U.S society. Racial ideologies as major sources of advantage and disadvantage on children's transitions into kindergarten were explored.

Intersectionality

Social class, racial, and gender disparities were interrelated and entangled within some of the studies reviewed in the previous chapter. Understanding how race, class, and gender intersect to impact individuals' experiences in society and educational settings was of value to this study. Though CRT's "family tree" has been expanded to include Critical Feminist Theory (Yosso, 2006) an integration of race, social class, and gender is lacking. Intersectionality addressed this limitation. "Intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example intersections of race, and gender, or of sexuality and nation" (Collins, 2000, p. 8) that an individual experiences. Collins (2000) asserts that race, class, and gender oppression do not work in isolation of each other, instead they "work together in producing injustices" (p. 8). For example, being low-income, African American, and male can jointly influence a child's transition into kindergarten. Intersectionality complemented the goals of this theoretical framework and allowed space to examine the ways in which adults perceive social class, race, and gender, in concert, to influence children's school readiness and transitions into kindergarten.

This research endeavor drew from multiple fields of study to include human development and family studies, education, and sociology. By inserting this interdisciplinary argument into current discourse, this study sought to more fully theorize school readiness and kindergarten preparation. It allows for an examination of school readiness and transitioning into kindergarten within multiple developmental contexts while simultaneously and critically assessing these contexts. This theoretical framework provided the groundwork for this study. Table 3-1 offers a synopsis of this theoretical framework and guiding tenets and/or concepts.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design moves beyond broad questions of interest, previous research, and descriptions of theory to detailing the specific assumptions, choices, rationale, and how this study was conducted. First, I describe qualitative research methodology, the rationale for why it was employed in this study, and the approach. Then this chapter proceeds with an in-depth discussion of data collection methods to include a detailed account of data collection techniques. Next, field relations and data management are presented. Lastly, the process of data analysis and interpretation is offered.

Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative inquiry is an umbrella term that describes multiple approaches to understanding human relationships and social action. This approach to social science stems from a critique of efforts in social science to employ "scientific methods" used in the natural sciences to establish claims about humanity. Causal relationships, general laws, and facts are not the foci of qualitative inquirers (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). Instead, their concerns center on understanding social reality in its natural form—everyday life. Qualitative inquiry was best suited to explore this study's research questions in the context of theoretical and epistemological assumptions. Qualitative research methodology best captured this study's concern with voice, taken-for-granted meanings, and issues of power in the lives and experiences of caregivers and educators of young children.

Capturing Participants' Voices

Qualitative accounts in social science research give voice to those that are traditionally marginalized (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Lynn, 2004; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Stovall, 2005). The voices of parents, particularly African American parents, and early childhood educators are

necessary to better understand preparing children for kindergarten. Although African American parents and educators have been included in recent studies of child development and school readiness, the focus has not been on highlighting their ideas and knowledge. Qualitative inquiry offered space for participants to describe their perceptions, experiences, and everyday activities using their own words. African American parents' and educators' voices were centered in this study.

Examining Taken-for-Granted Meaning

Qualitative methodology is concerned with exploring the meanings of mundane experiences in the social world. In-depth interviews and observations illuminated taken-for-granted meanings in people's everyday lives. Furthermore, qualitative methodology lent itself to uncovering taken-for-granted meanings. Despite the lack of consensus of what school readiness means, it is taken-for-granted that all parents and educators consciously make sense of starting kindergarten in the same way. The assumption is that "good parents" and "quality" preschool programs prepare children for the demands of kindergarten prior to the first day of school. Generally speaking, the literature suggests that reading to children, teaching children the alphabet, numbers, and shapes, and encouraging children to learn through play are activities that promote school readiness. Do African American parents of diverse incomes view school preparation in the same way?

Identifying Micro-Level Processes

Quantitative data alone do not fully capture the microlevel, taken-for-granted experiences of African American families and the processes taking place with the contexts that influence child development and school readiness. Additionally, qualitative methodology offers a dynamic, micro-level view of interactions in context (Jarrett, 1997). Qualitative inquiry seeks to

observe and interpret "naturally occurring" phenomena and the meaning individuals taking part in these phenomena attach to them. Qualitative research is very much concerned with everyday life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Several quantitative studies reviewed in the previous chapter focused on assessing maternal education, single-head of household status, poverty status, and various characteristics of the home environment, omitting examinations of other maternal behaviors that facilitate child development. Using qualitative methodologies allows a range of developmental and parental competencies to be identified. This study seeks to contribute a more diverse, comprehensive, and textured view of perceptions and practices that can shape children's developmental trajectories and preparation for kindergarten. Qualitative inquiry addresses a need for micro-level discussions of parenting practices in the school readiness literature.

<div align="center">A Case Study: Both Process and Product</div>

Qualitative case study research was the chosen approach to this qualitative inquiry. This case study primarily drew from Robert Stake's (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research* and was supplemented by Creswell's (2007) *Qualitative Inquiry and Designs: Choosing among Five Approaches*. Qualitative Case study research begins and ends with an issue (Stake, 1995). In the previous chapter, school readiness was discussed as a social problem. It was the issue driving the study from start to end. Using a case study design highlighted the local ways in which the particular community experienced and viewed starting kindergarten (Graue, 1992). It also offered a unique opportunity to situate school entrance "in context" of individuals within the community, a process that Adler and Adler (1987) argue is "the best way to gain understanding of the social world" (p. 11). In addition to the fact that a case study design was aligned with

epistemological and methodological assumptions, it also fit with this study's general purpose and research questions.

The qualitative case study works well when studying a specific issue within a bounded context. In this instrumental case study the "issue" of school readiness was explored in one community school district to "get insight into the question by studying a particular case" (Stake, 1995). Of primary concern in case study methodology is "to understand this one case" (Stake, 1995, p. 4). The goal was to provide a detailed account of particulars and inductive interpretations. Once issues are identified and case study research is deemed appropriate, Stake's procedures for conducting case study research advance to: selecting a case; gathering data; interpreting and analyzing data; and ends with the issue. Below, I detail how this approach took shape within this study.

Case Selection and Description: Middleton Community School District

Creswell (2007) notes case selection poses a special challenge to case study researchers. To address this challenge Stake advises focusing efforts on understanding the case. A single case, Middleton Community School District, was selected. Middleton is a midsized city. The total population in Middleton was approximately 75,741 in 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a). The boundaries of the case remained flexible but focused on exploring happenings within the particular school district/community of Middleton. A local newspaper headline entitled "Held Back" suggested a racial and ethnic school readiness gap existed in this community. This community school district was selected to maximize what could be learned about preparing children for school and examining racial disparities in early learning. The access and familiarity, typical characteristics, and atypical characteristics of starting kindergarten within this community made it ideal for case study research.

Familiarity and Access to the Case

I became familiar with Middleton Community and School District as a student at the

large public university within the city. As an intern with a local organization, I met community

contacts and participated in community and school events. These contacts were influential in

accessing the case, particularly preschool programs and parents. Participating in community

meetings as an intern attuned me to the local policies and schools in the district.

Typifying Characteristics of the Case

Several characteristics of Middleton were similar to other midsized U.S. cities. Social

and economic statistics were typical. Population, education, student achievement, employment,

poverty, and health demographics resembled the national statistics. Social class, racial, and

gender disparities that existed in Middleton were similar to those reported nationally.

Population. Several demographic characteristics of the community were typical of the

United States. Slightly more than 52% of the population was male and just over 47% was

female between 2006-2008 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a). The racial and ethnic composition of

this city was comparable to the country's overall percentages: 72% White, 15% African

American; 10% Asian, 4% Latino, and 2% two or more races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a).

Household composition varied to include married couple, unmarried partners, single male, single

females, and unrelated. However, the majority of the families residing in Middleton lived in

married couple or single, female households were consistent with the national statistics (U.S.

Census Bureau, 2000a).

Education and income. Middleton's population was generally educated at the level of

high school graduate. The American Community Survey data set 2006-2008 suggests that 90%

of the population had at least a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a). This must be considered in light of the public university located within the city.

The federal poverty level for a family of one parent and two children is $15,735 and for two parents and two children $19,806. Families often require twice the poverty level to meet basic needs. Poverty was an issue for children residing in this city. Fourteen percent of the families in Middleton with children under the age of 18-years-old were poor (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a). Approximately 23% of children under the age of 18 were living in poverty in Middleton (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a). Individuals residing in Middleton who did not have a high school diploma comprised the majority of impoverished residents (28%). The household composition was related to families' poverty status. Married coupled families were less likely to be poor (6.5%) compared to single female householder families (31.5%). Middleton's median household income was approximately $38,000. Individuals who earned less than a high school degree also had lower median incomes ($22,000) compared to ($50,000) those with advanced degrees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a). Also, forty-five percent of female-headed households reported median incomes less than $35,000 while approximately 15% of married-coupled families' median incomes were below $35,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a).

Employment. Sixty-four percent of residents over the age of 16 are employed in the labor force. The percentage of unemployed residents in Middleton was 6.5%. African Americans (19%) were disproportionately unemployed in this city (U.S Census Bureau, 2000a). There was a substantial working poor population in Middleton as well. Among the employed, 21% were poor; 22% of employed women were poor.

Sixty-eight percent of parents are employed outside the home in Middleton County. Mothers of young children were employed. Approximately 60% of mothers with children under

the age of six were employed in Middleton. The majority of the county relies on child care options while they work. According to a local community "report card" on indicators of community well-being, the average cost of center-based child care in this county is $7,400 per year. Fifteen percent of families' income was spent on center-based child care for preschoolers. The local Child Care and Referral agency's annual report indicated that this state offers a program that subsidizes child care expenses for families who earn between a $0 and $2,050 gross monthly income.

Health. Middleton's state provides insurance to all children. The same community "report card" mentioned above provided statistic on the health of Middleton residents. For example, in Middleton County, the number of children enrolled in Medicaid or Kid Care had been on a steady incline from 8,900 in 2000 to approximately 13,200 in 2005. There is one federally qualified health center in Middleton. This public health center's goal was to improve services provided to residents in need of medical care and who were underserved. However, some families in the community still had only limited access to health. According to the community "report card", families were challenged with locating physicians willing to accept Medicaid as forms of payment due to reimbursement rates and delays associated with this program. Working families were most vulnerable in terms of providing health insurance and care for their children because some of them could not afford insurance offered by their employers and did not meet income eligibility for state Medicaid programs.

Food insecurity was also an issue discussed in the community "report card". Residents took advantage of charitable and food assistance programs when they could locate them. One food assistance program provided food to 10,200 Middleton County residents to support families and individuals in meeting basic nutritional needs.

Student achievement. According to data obtained from Middleton School District's school report cards, all elementary schools met AYP in 2005-2006. Several schools within the district won awards for achievement on state tests. These awards recognized schools in which 50% of the student population was classified as low-income and 60% of the students in these schools met Annual Yearly Progress (AYP).   AYP was defined in terms of student participation in assessments; school attendance (90%); 62.5% of the students in a school meeting or exceeding proficiency on state standardized tests; and schools having 66% graduation rates.   The state was on academic watch in 2008, which indicated that it did not make AYP for two consecutive years. The district did not meet or exceed the standards in two subjects by a small margin (60% and 62%). In the other five subject areas 66-74% of the students met or exceeded standards.

Racial disparities. Racial differences existed among residents in terms of economic well being in this city. There was an income gap between African Americans (12,000) and Whites (21,034). African Americans in this community had the highest percentage of individuals in poverty (40%) by race and ethnicity, while Whites had the lowest (22%). Additionally, five times as many African American married couple households (20%) were in poverty compared to their White counterparts (5%). Among single female householders, 48% of African American and 12% of White families were poor in the city (U.S Census Bureau, 2000a).

Atypical Characteristics

Middleton School District had two unique characteristics that impact school entry. The school district entered into a Consent Decree with parents in the community.   The district also distinctly assigned schools through the controlled choice process. Both were local circumstances of starting kindergarten in this case.

Consent Decree. Middleton School District's website provided information on the

history and goals of the consent decree. In 1996, a group of families in the district filed

complaints with the Equal Opportunity Office of the U.S. Department of Education against

Middleton School District, outlining racial disparities in achievement and disciplinary action.

Complaints also were made about busing African American children to schools outside of their

neighborhoods and unequal access to educational resources. According to the district's website,

an investigation into these complaints found "statistical disparities between majority and

minority students in the areas of gifted, upper level courses, within-school integration, discipline,

and special education". As a result of these findings, in 2002, the two disputing parties joined a

Consent Decree to remedy educational disparities in the district.

The goal of the Consent Decree was to lessen statistical differences in achievement

within the district that existed, specifically between White and African American students. The

agreement reached between the plaintiff and defendant parties required the district to implement

systems that:

> 1. Eliminate unwarranted disparities in the enrollment of minority students in upper level courses.
> 2. Incorporate innovative, interactive, research-based curriculum and instructional practices that take into account students' diverse learning styles.
> 3. Deliver a professional development plan that provides on-going training and accountability for teachers and administrators in such practices.

The Consent Decree mandated Quarterly Monitoring Reports to assess progress in meeting the

goals outlined above.

The district implemented a PIC plan to manage resources to meet the goals of the

Consent Decree and has since made considerable progress. The percentage of African American

elementary school children enrolled in gifted programs increased; the percentage of African

American children meeting and exceeding standard test score benchmarks increased; and

disciplinary disparities continued to exist but have decreased significantly in elementary schools (less for middle school and not reported for high school) in 2005-2006 school year.

The district reports its progress in achieving some of the objectives of the Consent Decree such as developing an implementation plan to reverse the trend of African American student over-representation in special education and under-representation in gifted and upper level classes. In the 2006 quarterly report, both parties agreed that improvements in student achievement were noted at the elementary and middle schools for African American students and for all students; the District has reorganized the curriculum department, including development of written and aligned curriculum for all grades, development of a district-wide grading policy and implementation of common assessment for all grades.

The district is currently in its last year of the Consent Decree. Lessening disparities in high school will be the focus. The Court Monitor continues to push for equity in the areas aforementioned and successful accomplishment of the agreed upon objectives of the consent decree.

Controlled choice. In response to the Consent Decree the district implemented Controlled Choice to systematically assign schools in accordance with racial fairness guidelines set by the state. Prior to entering public school in this district, families choose three elementary schools in the district that they want their children to attend on their kindergarten applications. Applications are then processed and assignments are randomly generated using a computer program that takes the following into account: parent's choice; school capacity; racial fairness guidelines; presence of siblings in a school; and family's proximity to a school. Results are mailed to families' home addresses once the process is complete. Families who do not receive

their first choice are placed on a waiting list and can request transfer the following academic

school year.

In 2002, 98% of families who enrolled their children in kindergarten early received their

first, second, or third school of choice. According to a recent monitoring report, in 95% of the

cases families are assigned their first choice school. White families registered children for

kindergarten early at higher percentages (96%) than African American families (56%).

Additionally, African American families' early kindergarten enrollment declined in 2003. Five

schools were under-chosen by parents in the district in 2003 and one school was most often

selected as the first school choice. It is noteworthy that the under-chosen schools are in

predominately poor, African American neighborhoods, while the over-chosen school is in a

predominately affluent, White neighborhood. The over-chosen school also scored higher on

standardized tests. Controlled choice has been more quickly implemented in elementary schools.

It was implemented in middle school in SY 2005-2006. It has yet to be implemented at the high

school level.

Selecting Data Sources and Sampling

Deciding who and what to sample was a challenge because the bounded case was a mid-

sized city. The central issue of the case was placed at the forefront of gathering data (Stake,

1995). This narrowed the selection of data sources to those providing specific information

relevant to school readiness and early childhood education. The research questions further

constricted sources of data sought in this study. The aim was to highlight adults' perceptions and

activities as children transitioned from home into school. Therefore, I sought information from

adults in one community school district who were primary caregivers or educators of young

children. Because of the need to understand the experiences of African Americans in this case, race was a key factor in selecting data sources.

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who would willingly provide rich, detailed information on their perceptions of kindergarten entry. Purposive sampling allowed for an examination of this particular case that "illuminate[s] the questions under study" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Stratified purposive sampling was used and aimed at "capturing and describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of heterogeneity" (Patton, 1990, p. 172) and emphasized common patterns that emerged within and between different groups (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Participants were stratified at several levels. First there were two categories of participants, parents and educators. Research suggests that educators and parents place different emphases on components of school readiness and kindergarten preparation. Including both educators and parents enabled these differences to be further examined, specifically in terms of connections and disconnections between these two developmental contexts. Parent participants were stratified by socioeconomic status (low-income and middle income families) and by participation in early childhood programs (center care or home care). Sampling low-and middle-income parents allowed for race and social class processes to be disentangled. Children participating in center based early childhood programs and those receiving home care were sampled to account for differential exposure to and involvement in kindergarten preparation activities across these contexts. See Table 4-1 for a description of how families were sampled by children receiving center care versus home care and social class.

Educator participants were stratified by level of education (preschool and kindergarten) and position (teacher and administrator). Preschool and kindergarten teachers were sampled to

explore variations, similarities, and differences in their school readiness expectations.

Educators' views of school readiness could be influenced by the nature of their job positions and

interactions with various stakeholders. Therefore, both teachers and administrators were

included to explore the range of perceptions that existed among educators in a variety of

positions. Educators were further stratified to include diverse program types to account for

differential emphases programs might place upon school readiness and kindergarten preparation.

Table 4-2 illustrates stratified sampling of educators by grade level and position. Program types

are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Recruitment Procedures

 Gaining entrée. Accessing the worlds of parents and educators was vital to this case

study. My approach to gaining access began with identifying individuals in different programs

and organizations (Burgess, 1984). I had relationships with three local community contacts who

worked with parents and early childhood education programs. These contacts were used to

facilitate access to potential participants. By facilitating, I am referring to providing me with

time and space to explain the basics of the study to educators and parents and recruit their

participation.

 Community workers. During our interview, Miss Sophie spoke with ease as we talked

about the Connection Center and starting kindergarten in this community school district. Prior to

conducting the study, I was briefly introduced to Miss Sophie at a community program as an

intern in this community. After the study began, the Connection Center emerged as a key feature

of entering school in this community and I recruited Miss Sophie to participate in the study.

 Educators. CCRS data showed that assistance was increasingly being used for center

care in the county. A total of 1,083 children were enrolled in nursery and preschool in

Middleton according to the American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a). Fifty-five percent of 3 and 4 year-old residents in the city attended school. Preschool and kindergarten programs were targeted to recruit early childhood educators for this study. Preschool teachers and directors were recruited from early childhood programs. This process began with community contacts that assisted in identifying early childhood education programs serving African American children and families. Two daycares and one learning center were suggested: Sugar Pie Learning Center, Area Park Day Care Center, and Lovees' Daycare. I also targeted the district pre-kindergarten program, Middleton Pre-K, based on my interest in the larger school district. The next step was to contact the directors of each of the programs and invite them to participate. I called each director/principal and set a meeting to discuss the study. During the call, I briefly introduced myself and the study and mentioned who referred me to the program. I asked each of them if we could set up a time and day to meet to discuss the project in more detail. Each director/principal agreed to the meeting and during the meeting agreed to participate in the study.

Kindergarten teachers and principals were recruited from the Middleton School District. Research conducted in this school district had to be processed through and managed by a university office functioning primarily as an intermediary between the university and public school community. After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, the study was processed online by this office. This office forwarded information provided online about the project to schools within the district. Building principals who showed interest in the study contacted this office. The office staff then contacted myself and gave me approval to contact the particular school. Building principals were contacted to set a time to meet and discuss the study. During the meetings, I invited the principal to participate in the project. Kindergarten teachers

were identified by principals for recruitment. I asked each principal to refer two kindergarten

teachers to the study. Principals made referrals and provided email addresses for each teacher.

Kindergarten teachers were contacted via email. The study was briefly introduced, the principal

that referred her was given, and she was invited to participate. All but one teacher responded to

my recruitment email. All of the kindergarten teachers who responded to the email completed an

interview. Educators from the district office and three elementary schools, Time Center,

Waysworth, and Warren Grove, participated in this study. Educators were selected from these

schools in order to represent a heterogeneous sample of teaching experiences in terms of student

demographics and academic achievement within the district.

Time Center had a fairly racially diverse student population. Forty-seven percent of the

students were classified as African American, 27% were White, 13% were Latino, and 13% were

Asian/Pacific Islander. The majority of the students were low-income (approximately 70%).

Overall, 78% of the students met or exceeded state standards for reading, math, and science,

which was slightly higher than the district average. Disparities in achievement existed by

income. A lower percentage of low-income students' (63%) overall performance in reading met

or exceeded standards compared to their peers (71%). Only slight differences in math emerged

(88% and 91%). By grade three, racial disparities were evident. White children outperformed

African American students in reading (84% and 68%) and math (100% and 82%). Negligible

differences in reading and math performance existed between girls and boys.

Waysworth was located in the southern section of Middleton. Its population was less

racially diverse than Time Center's population. Though over 50% of the student body was

White, approximately 30% were African American and almost 15% were classified as

Asian/Pacific Islander. A small percentage of the population was Latino and Native American. In

this elementary school approximately 30% of the population was low-income. Waysworth was a high performing school in the Middleton School District. During academic year 2007-2008, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards on state tests in the district was 76%; Waysworth students performed at approximately 92%. There were some disparities among subgroups. For example, low-income students did not perform as well as their peers overall (71% compared to 88%). By the third grade, the percentage of African American students meeting and exceeding state standards was significantly lower in reading (58% compared to 90%) and slightly lower in math (100% compared to 91%) than White students.[2] Girls performed better than boys in reading but the same in math by the third grade.

Warren Grove also was located in the southern section of the city. The student population was less diverse in comparison to Waysworth in terms of the racial and ethnic composition. Over 60% of the students were White, 29% were African American, 5% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2% Latino. Slightly more children who attended Warren Grove were low-income (33%) than those who attended Waysworth. Warren Grove's students' academic performance in academic year 2007-2008 was higher than Time Center but lower than Waysworth. Eighty-six percent of the students tested met or exceeded state standards in reading, math, and science. Disparities in academic achievement also existed at Warrant Grove. No overall data was available for low-income students. By third grade a lower percentage of low-income students met or exceeded standards in reading (64% compared to 96%) and math (89% and 97%). In reading, 97% of White students met or exceeded standards while only 60% of African American students performed as well. White students (97%) also performed better overall in math than their African American peers (87%). Whites more often exceeded standards

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[2] Data on subgroups were not always available for overall performance by race and was not at all available by gender. In these cases, data on the overall performance of third graders were presented.

than African Americans. In terms of gender, boys outperformed girls in reading (92% and 80%).

In math more girls met and exceeded math (96% and 91%) than boys by the third grade.

However, more boys exceeded math standards (74%) than girls (48%).

Parents. Twenty primary caregivers of African American, 3-5-year-old children were

recruited for this study. Parents who met the above criteria were targeted for recruitment. The

primary sources for identifying potential parent participants were early childhood programs,

organizations, and local contacts. Each program director was given study fliers to post in their

buildings and provided time and space to recruit parents face-to-face. During face-to-face

recruitment, I approached parents of preschoolers and invited them to participate in the study. I

recruited at different times of the day; in the morning during drop off hours and in the evening

during typical pick up hours.

Identifying parents whose children did not participate in an early childhood center was a

challenge. I attended community events hosted by the school district and local library branches

and posted fliers and sat outside of a child care resource agency in an effort to identify and

recruit this subgroup of parents. I had the most success using community contacts and snowball

sampling to recruit parents. Ultimately, I was unable to identify, recruit and interview middle-

income African American families whose preschoolers did not receive center-based care. I

attempted to identify middle-income families through community forums, churches, and word of

mouth. I was unsuccessful in developing a church contact but did find middle-income families

through a local contact—however these families had children who received center care even

when one parent (in these cases mom) stayed home. Instead of finding a sample of middle-

income families whose preschoolers were not in center-based care, I identified children who

attended private preschool. Therefore, I adjusted my sample. This private preschool group

added to the heterogeneity of experiences among African American families. There was still a subsample of families whose children did not receive center care—a low-income group.

Families were classified into low-income and middle-income subgroups. Families who reported household incomes less than 200% of the poverty threshold for their family size, were employed in blue-collar jobs, and whose highest level of education was less than a college degree were classified as low-income (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). Families who reported household incomes 200% of the poverty level, had white-collar jobs, and possessed college degrees were classified as middle-income. Ten poor and working class families comprised the low-income group. Five were recruited from the district pre-kindergarten program and five did not receive center care and were recruited from a child care and resource agency and local contacts. The middle-income subgroup was comprised of five middle-class and five affluent families. Social class was a murky construct. Determining families' social class was not always straightforward. For example, in one family even though their household income was low because the primary earner was enrolled in graduate school, he had earned $60,000 prior to entering graduate school so the family was classified as middle-income. This case was not typical. In general, participants fit into one or the other subgroup based upon the social class criteria outlined above.

Six primary caregivers were recruited from child care and preschool programs. The four parents whose children attended a private preschool program were recruited via a local contact and then snowball sampling. The remaining participants received home care and were recruited through community organizations.

Participant Characteristics

A total of forty-one educators and parents participated in this project. Twenty-one educators took part in this study. The sample was small and diverse. Participants' ages, levels of

education, race, and income varied. Because the early childhood educators and primary

caregivers were overwhelmingly women, the sample was gender homogeneous. All but one of

the educators and all of the primary caregivers were female.

     Educators. Twelve preschool teachers and directors participated. Of these twelve, eight

preschool teachers and four program directors/principals participated. Nine elementary school

educators were included. Of these, five kindergarten teachers, three building principals, and 1

district level administrator participated. Educators ranged in age from twenty-two to fifty-seven

years old. All of the educators had received some college instruction or an advanced degree.

Typically educators received formal training in education or a related field. Only two

participants had not. Of the twenty-one educator participants, fifteen held teacher certification.

All of the educators working with the school district were certified. Eight educators were

African American, eleven were White, one was Hispanic, and one was Indian. Within this

sample, all but three of the educators who worked in the district were White. The sample was

overwhelmingly female; only one male educator participated in this study. Educators'

demographical information is presented in Table 4-3.

     Parents. Twenty primary caregivers participated in this study. Mothers' ages spanned

23-70 years old. Only three women were unemployed. Of the three two were low-income and

one was middle-income. Among those employed, three reported being self-employed. Parent

participants' levels of education varied from some high school to advanced degrees. Sixteen of

the 20 mothers reported having at least some college education. Mothers' marital status was also

diverse with a little over half of the sample married and slightly less than half single. One parent

reported being divorced.   All of the primary caregivers interviewed were African American.

Ten low-income and ten middle-income families were included. Six families were poor and

reported household incomes between less than $9,999 to $15,999. Four families were working

class. Their household incomes were between 20,000 and 36,000. Five of the families were

classified as middle class families and their household incomes were $29,000-$59,999. Five

affluent families reported household incomes of $65,000 or greater.

All of the families had at least one preschool-aged child residing within their households.

Children ranged in age from 3-5 years old. Among the target children there were slightly more

girls than boys—nine were boys and eleven were girls. Fifteen children participated in center

care and education programs. Of the fifteen, four attended a private preschool (First Stop), five

attended the district's pre-kindergarten (Middleton Pre-K Program), and six attended learning

centers (one was enrolled in Sunny Day Learning Center and the other five attended Sweetie Pie

Learning Center). Five children received home care and education. These details also are

presented in Table 4-4.

Paying Attention to Particulars: Data Collection Methods

As suggested by Stake (1995, 2005), data were collected on the nature, historical

background, physical environment, sociopolitical and economic context, information from

related cases, and informant knowledge of the case in order to detail ordinary activities, and

explore the particulars (and typifying characteristics) of the case in depth. In essence, this study

called for "a use of mixed methods, including formal or in-depth interviews, casual

conversations, observations, and the collection of historical archives, newspaper files and other

documentary evidence" (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 9); all of these were used in this project.

Archival and Documentary Sources

A hallmark of qualitative case study research involves describing contexts of the bounded

case (Creswell, 2007). Stake (1995) suggests that this description provides a sense of "being

there." Middleton's Public Library collection was the primary source used to describe and document the policy and community contexts of the case. Data obtained using this method addressed research questions 3, 4, and 5. With assistance from librarians, I searched catalogs and files documenting the historical development of early childhood education (particularly information that related to the primary and elementary school). Sources of information on these topics were scarce. I reviewed old books, newspaper articles, documents, and research studies that specifically examined issues in Middleton.

Documentary sources were identified and selected while becoming "acquainted with the case" (Stake, 1995) while in the field. These sources supplemented knowledge of the case. Included were district and school websites, brochures, and organizational documents and reports. For example, a kindergarten calendar surfaced within different early childhood centers and during interviews and observations. It was either physically present or mentioned in the different settings while in the field. Because it was so present in the field, the community resource and the organization distributing the calendar were included as sources of information for describing school readiness as a social issue in Middleton.

In-depth Interviewing

This study departs from Stake (1995) by employing in-depth interviewing as a primary method of data collection. In-depth interviewing was chosen because of this study's focus on adults' perceptions of starting kindergarten. The quote below illustrates the power of this data collection strategy:

> The foundation of interviewing lies in the mundane observations that individuals can report on what they feel, are, have, tell others about their lives, disclose what their hopes, fears are, offer their opinions, state what they believe in, say what they did last week, how much they spend on food, who they see regularly, and so on; in short, they can impart masses of information about themselves (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1992, p. 102).

Rich, textured information related to the issue was gained using in-depth interviewing. It described and documented how school entry was characterized in African American homes and schools in Middleton. This method also provided a means to address all five research questions. Interviewing was viewed as a dialectic process between the participant and researcher; both were actively involved in creating knowledge. Though the focus was on the participants' responses to an interview protocol of questions, the interview remained flexible and open. During the interview, participants were encouraged to tell me what "they thought" about an issue and to interpret the question on their own. When clarifications were solicited, they were given. In-depth interviewing was a relational act, which required human connection at the most basic level (Oakley, 2003). Interviews always began with small talk. I attempted to find ways to introduce myself and connect with participants. In this region of the country, the weather served as a good conversation starter. The weather was a typical topic of discussion upon meeting participants.

Interviewing was guided by topical lists of questions to be asked as participants shared their perceptions.[3] This approach to interviewing utilized topically organized, open-ended questions compiled in protocols to stimulate discussion between the interviewer and interviewee (Patton, 1990). It encouraged a conversational tone during the interviews that lent itself to free expression pertaining to the topic under investigation among the participants. Protocol questions were developed from research questions and related literatures in the field. I conducted three different interviews with primary caregivers in their homes: perceptions of school readiness, parenting, and typical day. Additionally, five fathers were interviewed using the school readiness protocol. These interviews supplemented those completed by the primary caregivers in the study (who were all mothers). Educators were interviewed once using the perceptions of school readiness protocol. The interviews took place in their classrooms or offices. The

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[3] Interview guides provided in the appendix.

interviews began with general questions regarding teaching experience and school readiness and ended with questions about social class, race, gender, and education policy in an effort to build rapport. These questions were only asked out of this sequence when they were spontaneously mentioned by participants.

Parent participants completed three interviews over two sessions. Initially, the parenting protocol was used in the first session. After a few parents were unable to be contacted for the next session, I switched the order of the protocols. On our first visit, the school readiness protocol was used followed by parenting experiences and daily routine/typical day interviews. The parenting and typical interviews were conducted on the same day. This sequence worked well in developing the rapport needed to probe parent participants for sensitive information regarding disciplining, displaying affection, and the impact of financial resources on child rearing.

A major challenge of interviewing was putting participants at ease during the interview. Some participants were concerned with providing "correct" answers to interview questions. To address this challenge, I verbally expressed that I was most interested in their thoughts and experiences. Nonverbally, I maintained eye contact, smiled, and laughed along with participants at times. Additionally, meeting parents over two different sessions offered time to build rapport. Upon completion of the first interview session, participants became more comfortable and willing to disclose personal parenting and life experiences (Dash, 1989). Parents were excited to talk about their parenting experiences. It was challenging to actively engage in the interview without being leading, especially when responding to requests for input. In one or two instances a participant asked me what I thought or to explain policies. For example, one participant asked me to tell her about the NCLB Act. In this instance, and similar ones, I was vague and provided

a very general response in order to limit my influence on her response while acknowledging her request.

Observer-as-Participant

Observations were taken in conjunction with in-depth interviewing. Each interview had a corresponding observational guide and space for jotting notes about the setting. Jottings were semi-unobtrusive, immediate ways of recording observations in the environment that served to "construct evocative descriptions of the scene" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 20). Observations provided descriptions of the settings and activities that took place within African American homes and schools during interviews. It offered data to address research questions 1, 2, and 3.

Jottings were taken during the interview. To avoid making participants uncomfortable and taking focus away from the interview, I waited until the interview ended to record detailed fieldnotes in research journals. Fieldnotes were completed for each interview session. These jottings and fieldnotes described the setting in which the interview took place (i.e., home, school, offices, etc.), activities taking place within the setting, interview interactions, and theoretical and methodological impressions. I was not a participant observer, completely immersed in family and community life and activities. Instead, my role in participants' worlds as an observer was minimal and observations focused on the context of the interview in a particular time and place. Still, I was present and my interactions with others in the setting also were recorded. This method of data collection was useful in discerning and identifying what was going on in different settings that encompassed the case. Although observations were not extensive, they were used to supplement interview data.

One major challenge of observations as a source of data collection was that the extent and nature of my observations depended in whole or in part on the participants' level of comfort in granting access to settings. The majority of parents were willing to conduct interviews in their homes, and most of the time their preschoolers were present. Two parent participants preferred to conduct the interviews at their places of employment in their offices. One parent preferred to meet at one of her children's dance class for the interview. We completed one interview in the dance studio and two interviews in neutral locations in the community. Her preschooler was always present. A limitation of the observer as participant strategy was that opportunities to observe social settings were limited in time. Observations were scheduled at times most convenient to participants. The best times to complete interviews for educators were during nap time or after school. Though the observations took place in their classrooms or school buildings, teaching practices were not generally observed. Observations were also limited to a physical space. For example, if a parent walked out of the room to attend to a child, I was not able to make observations in another section of the house. It also is important to note that my presence in the setting may have affected participants' behaviors, actions, attitudes, etc. For example, one father reminded his wife that they were "being recorded" during one of the interview sessions when she was instructing one of her children to follow a direction.

Photo Elicitation

Photo elicitation captured and incited interpretations of what words could not provide. This data collection strategy involved "bringing knowledge to bear upon images" (Banks, 2001). This strategy only applied to parent participants. It offered data to examine how parents conceptualized school readiness. Research questions 1 and 3 were addressed.

Each parent was given a disposable camera to document their child's typical day at the close of the school readiness interview. Parents generally returned the camera at the next interview session. The cameras were developed at the researcher's expense. One set of photos and the negatives were retained as data and one set of photos were returned to participants after being developed along with a small photo album. Both participants and researchers engaged in the activity of constructing knowledge. Parent participants were asked to comment on who was in the pictures, what the pictures were taken of, where the pictures were taken, and when they were taken. Participants were also asked to give their impressions of the images upon viewing them.[4] I also interpreted pictures and assigned meanings to images to document the particulars of this case.

Photo elicitation constituted an important element of the overall case because "photos allow detailed recordings of facts as well as providing a more comprehensive and holistic presentation of lifestyles and conditions" (Flick, 1998, p. 152). Photo elicitation was a valuable tool in documenting the case as evidence of some expected and unexpected findings from this study.

A strength and limitation of this method is that participants have agency in what they document photographically. While agency was wanted, social desirability and distraction from the topic presented limitations (Flick, 1998). To counter this limitation, upon providing the cameras I briefly discussed with caregivers how the pictures were going to be used within the context of the study. Taking pictures was an additional task for parents to undertake in their already busy lives. At times parents forgot about taking pictures, misplaced cameras, and/or did not return them for developing. Fourteen out of the twenty (70%) parent participants provided photos for this study.

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[4] See interview and observation guides attached in the appendix

Gathering data to document the case, documentary evidence, began in March 2007. I entered the field to conduct in-depth interviews and observations in July 2007 upon receiving Institutional Review Board Approval. "Our time and access for fieldwork are almost always limited" (Stake, 1995, p. 4); this study was no exception. Consequently, decisions regarding who and what information to explore within the case were made with this limitation in consideration. I exited the field in April 2008, but continued to gather information from archival and documentary sources until September 2008.

<center>Managing Relationships in the Field</center>

This section discusses how relationships with participants and information were managed during the research process. Managing field relationships was important for ensuring good data quality. I offer details of entering and exiting the field, maintaining positive interactions with participants, and managing my personal biography.

<center>*Entering and Exiting the Field*</center>

As stated above, my participation in family life and activities was minimal. I assumed an overt researcher role and announced my research intentions before obtaining participants' consent in order to avoid issues of deception and participants' feelings of betrayal (Adler & Adler, 1987). One difficulty that I encountered entering the field was of general suspicion the Middleton community had of the university. Residents' repeated exposure to university research projects and/or prior negative experiences made some reluctant to participate. While conducting this study I learned the community school district informed schools not to become involved in research projects without first receiving district approval. This might account for why not many public schools responded to the invitation to participate in this study. In another example, I encountered a parent while recruiting at one of the early childhood programs who informed me

that community members were often used as guinea pigs in research studies. She also expressed her disdain for research taking place in the community and was not interested in her children participating. This parent was a graduate student at the public university in the community, but she explained that she would be conducting an autoethnography for her dissertation.

Generally, most people I approached for interviews welcomed the opportunity to talk about (their) children and kindergarten. My interactions and relationships with individual participants were positive throughout my time in the field. Approaching parent participants face-to-face eased my entrance into the field and their lives.

Developing rapport was a fine line to walk (Horowitz, 1989); field relationships have to be negotiated and renegotiated over time (Adler & Adler, 1987; Burgess, 1984). Positive interactions with participants led to requests for greater intimacy and favors in a few cases; particularly with parent participants. In fact, a couple of parents wanted to become friends. One of the parents who expressed an interest in becoming friends with me was new to the community so she had not made many new friends yet. We also were close in age and knew a couple of graduate students in common. We had a very good connection during the first interview so there was a rational basis for such a request. In fact, I wanted to be friends with her as well, but I did not want to develop a friendship during data collection and risk "going native." So, because I was busy with my dissertation research developing a friendship was not feasible. However, we (as well as a few other participants) have been in contact via email. Other issues were addressed "in-context" and upon reflection and discussion with my advisor and a committee member.

Exiting the field was a challenge because of the above example. Most participants and I wanted to stay in touch and continue our interactions after the interviews were complete. I attempted to manage this challenge by maintaining contact via email with interested parents.

This was also a good way to get updates of the happenings with children and families. Maintaining good rapport was important for maintaining contact with parents and their willingness to participate in follow-up interviews and observations and/or future studies. My marital engagement and eventual relocation out of the community facilitated my exit from the field. They provided symbolic and physical transitions to accompany the conclusion of my fieldwork.

Safeguarding Participants

At a minimum, I ensured all necessary measures were taken to safeguard participants' confidentiality and personhoods. Pseudonyms were used for people and places in this study to protect privacy. Written and audio files were labeled with numbers instead of names. A more difficult task was managing the power dynamics of the researcher/participant relationship (Oakley, 2003). I was aware of my privilege of being a graduate student attending the university and asking the questions about school entry. In my quest to undertake research that challenged power inequity in society, exploiting African American caregivers and educators in the research process would be counterproductive. I consistently monitored language and the level of expertise I portrayed during interviews. Even when writing fieldnotes, I avoided using the word "told." I was consciously trying to limit telling participants what to do. I was always working to ensure participants retained agency as experts in their everyday lives.

During the interview process, I often felt like a burden to busy people. It was not long before I realized I did not have complete power of the research process; whether or not I completed this dissertation was not entirely under my control. Conducting interviews was dependent upon the willingness and availability of participants who led busy lives. Therefore, I conducted interviews whenever participants were available including weekends, early mornings,

and late nights. In the moment I was, and still am, very grateful to participants for spending time with me sharing insights and experiences.

Managing Personal Biases

According to Dyson and Genishi (2005), "every person has a biography that precedes her existence as a researcher, incorporating characteristics like race, class, gender, and ability" (p. 57) that comes to bear upon the research process. Researchers' multiple identities are part and product of the humanistic nature of conducting social science research. The guiding epistemology of this study rejects the notion that one's self can be disentangled from the research process; but personal biases can limit the study's creditability. Being an African American woman born into a poor family in Chicago impacted the worldview that I brought to the study.

As suggested by Collins (2003), I attempted to balance the potentially hierarchical relationship between participant and researcher by developing knowledge claims through dialogues that occurred in the process of getting to know participants' perceptions. These dialogues were conducted in the stylistic context that was both familiar and relevant to their ideas and concerns. I was able to code switch depending on the context. My personal experiences growing up poor, my middle class education, my ascribed status as an African American woman, and my interest and knowledge of the field of early childhood granted access to multiple languages to call upon as needed. I weaved in and out of low-income and middle-income African American homes and primarily White kindergarten classrooms with the intent to learn as much as possible.

My biography could not be erased, consequently information could be filtered during the research the process, but this did not compromise the integrity of this study (Lather, 2003). By carefully detailing this case, my personal biases were managed. Of utmost importance was not

confirming my worldviews, but producing a credible body of knowledge of perceptions (Kirk & Miller, 1986) of starting kindergarten.

Managing Data

Data management refers to how data were "handled" throughout the research process. In this section, I describe the ways in which data were managed to enhance the quality of data collected. This involved ensuring trustworthiness. I also explain how data were stored and files were organized.

Increasing Data Quality

Trustworthiness (the premise that the analysis is empirically "true") was constantly considered throughout the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Although the guiding epistemology was openly value-based and concerned with social transformation at the most basic level, still, as suggested by Lather (2003), this study employed strategies to "check the creditability of our data and minimize distortive effects of personal bias" (p. 186). Guba and Lincoln (1985) pose the following question in relation to trustworthiness, "how can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" (p. 290). Questions of neutrality, objectivity, and generalizability were not applicable to the study's epistemological orientation with the understanding that they can work to promote and privilege dominant discourse over the marginalized voices this study seeks to hear (Lather, 2003). But establishing creditability, dependability, and confirmability was important in the pursuit of trustworthy data and evidence that influence reasoning. Qualitative researchers and scholars propose a number of techniques for strengthening data quality. Creswell (2007) notes the use and emphasis given to "validation strategies" vary among qualitative inquiries. However he suggests qualitative studies include at

least two such strategies. Next, I describe strategies this study used to strengthen its trustworthiness.

Triangulation

Triangulation increased creditability of the case. Triangulation involved using multiple: sources of information, methods, and/or theories (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Lather, 2003). Table 4-5 shows the relationship between this study's research questions, theory, and methods. I drew upon multiple sources of information and data collection strategies to document the case. I triangulated information obtained from archives and documents, parents, and teachers. I used multiple methods of data collection. As stated above, these methods included in-depth interviewing, observations, and photo elicitation. Throughout the analysis, I drew upon multiple theories (e.g., ecological theory and critical race theory) as I analyzed and interpreted data to address construct validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Lather, 2003).   Theories were considered guides in interpretation and assertion, but their logic and explanatory power were always considered in context of data. All of the data were considered as parts of a larger puzzle which constituted the case. Consequently, I examined them in concert to illuminate intersections, departures, and negative cases, in order to address issues of creditability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Lather, 2003). See figure 4-1 for a visual representation of the triangulation strategy used in this study.

"Face Validity": Member Checks

Stake (1995) highlights the importance of validating observations by trying out understandings of the case on its members. Member checks involved "recycling analysis back through at least a subsample of respondents" (Lather, 2003, p. 191). Member checks were vital

in "truthfully" representing participants' voices and multiple realities. A summary draft of basic interpretations was provided to participants for feedback at the conclusion of the project.

Audit Trail

Maintaining an audit trail is one way to address simultaneously issues of dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Both the process and the product of the study can be substantiated with "proof" that it has been carried out as claimed. The audit trail consists of "a residue of records stemming from the inquiry" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 319). All documents and archival data were filed in a designated cabinet. Digital and audio-taped interviews were stored in a locked cabinet for safe keeping. Transcriptions, fieldnotes, memos, and notes were stored electronically and a hard copy was filed in a designated cabinet.

Storing and Organizing Data

As discussed above, all data files were stored in a locked cabinet in folders labeled with file names and electronically for easy retrieval. These data were secure, yet readily available for analysis. Additionally, Nvivo, a computer software program designed specifically for qualitative research, was used in this study to systematically organize, sort, and code data for analysis. It also served as a central location to write memos and to visually depict data analysis such as concept mapping (Creswell, 2007).

Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously. The analyses were "guided by the data being gathered and the topics, questions, and evaluative criteria that provide the focus" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p.181). Hunches and preliminary interpretations were made and recorded in fieldnotes at the outset of the study and throughout. Under the heading of gathering data, Stake (1995) recommends making observations and interviewing alongside

selecting vignettes, classifying data, making interpretations, and triangulation. In qualitative

research projects, researchers' prior experiences and knowledge (both practical and pragmatic)

provide the background upon which data interpretation takes place.   It is important to note that

"the interpretation of empirical material always springs from some mode of understanding and

not directly from how reality is" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2001, p. 136). Data analysis also was

grounded in theory, as discussed previously. The focus of qualitative data analysis is "to capture

the complexity of [the] reality we study, and make convincing sense of it" (Strauss, 1987, p.10).

Qualitative data analysis relies on informants' personal accounts, perceptions, and views to

describe and explain common situations or phenomena that occur in a specific context. In a case

study, additional analytic materials in the environment also serve to make sense of multiple

realities.

Though he contends that "there is no particular moment when data analysis begins"

(Stake, 1995) presented the following steps:

1. Review raw data under various possible interpretations
2. Search for patterns of data
3. Seek linkages between program arrangements, activities, and outcomes
4. Draw tentative conclusions, organize according to issues
5. Review data, gather new data, deliberately seek disconfirmation of findings

This study employed Stake's systematic approach to interpretation and analysis. It was an issue-

focused case study analysis. Data were translated into findings inductively and reflexively to

build and illustrate the case. A key focus of the analysis was identifying the main line and

themes emergent from the case and building upon it with particulars within the dataset. This was

accomplished by reading and rereading all of the data (transcripts, fieldnotes, and pictures) as a

whole. While reviewing data, general patterns and themes were retrieved, short notes were

written, and headings were identified along the way.

Data Analysis Strategy

Next, the data were condensed into parts. In this study, coding was primarily used to refine themes and explore linkages among themes. Multiple approaches were incorporated to systematically code data and to inductively explore patterns in the data and linkages among them. I drew mainly upon Lofland and Lofland (1995) and Taylor and Bogdan (1998) for coding strategies. Initial and focused coding and memo writing were techniques used to work with the data. Coding is a process whereby data can be "labeled, separated, compiled and organized" thematically (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p.186) and analyzed. Codes were initially inductive themes pertinent to this case. Codes were then expanded to incorporate research questions. Once broad themes were identified, comparisons and theoretical interpretation of the data were possible (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Memos provided explanations of categories identified through coding (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Relationships, descriptions, comparisons, and conceptualizations of the data were developed through memo writing and interpretation (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Strauss, 1987). Memos were developed to elaborate upon initial codes, themes, and interpretations (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Memos laid a foundation for moving to more abstract ideas or assertions to be constructed (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Memoing was used to summarize main lines of thinking and to compose key findings that emerged through the coding process.

Interpretations and Assertions: Crafting the Case

Thematically sorting and coding data was not the end of constructing the case (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Stake, 1995; Weiss, 1994). Case study analysis entails "efforts to examine some phenomenon in some holistic social unit" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 79). Stake (1995) refers to this as putting the data together again in a more meaningful way. The themes from the data

(archives and documents, interviews, observations, and photographs) and theoretical underpinnings served as analytic threads in the case. These underpinnings were condensed and reduced. Concept maps, diagrams, and memos were used (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Weiss, 1994) to piece the case together. Data underwent several iterations of coding, mapping, memoing and diagramming to develop the mainline of the case and build upon it with particulars. Data displays developed during data analysis are presented throughout this dissertation in the findings chapters.

Findings are not intended to generalize beyond this case. A person must not be able to go into a case and replicate interpretations (codes), but one should be able to understand how interpretations were derived and developed. "Thick description" provided in conjunction with logic is offered herein as evidence for readers to use to draw their own conclusions. The following chapters present *a case* study of preparing children for school in Middleton Community School District.

CHAPTER 5: WHAT IS SCHOOL READINESS?

Research suggests that school readiness is socially constructed across multiple contexts. This chapter examines meaning making and conceptualization of school readiness across home and school ecological contexts. These findings highlight connections and disconnections between educators' and African American caregivers' views of school readiness. The following are presented: (1) school readiness categories and (2) school readiness processes. Eight categories of skills and competencies were identified from participants' discussions of what school readiness entailed. Variations within and across educators' and parents' conceptions of school readiness suggested that program type and social class have the potential to confer advantages and disadvantages to children upon entering kindergarten. The language primary caregivers used to define school readiness uniquely referenced it as a process and a mundane feature of childhood. Special attention is given to this finding in the second section of this chapter.

School Readiness Categories

Categories of what children need to know prior to kindergarten were not easily discerned because no two descriptions were identical. What school readiness meant and what school readiness entailed were intertwined and interrelated. Definitions of school readiness and related skills were multifaceted and multidimensional. The categories were often embedded within participants' discussion of school readiness and transitioning into kindergarten. Despite wide ranging responses, analyses revealed common categories of school readiness skills, concepts, and competencies. Participants' identifications of school readiness skills and competencies were consonant with those identified by existing literature. I drew upon Barbarin et al.'s (2008) clusters and descriptions of school readiness categories to organize these data. Specific skills,

concepts, and competencies identified by study participants were closely aligned with each of these eight categories: (1) general knowledge; (2) nominal knowledge; (3) language/early literacy; (4) inferential reasoning; (5) social competency; (6) independence; (7) self-regulation of behavior; (8) motor skills. The physical health category was emergent from these data and combined with motors skills. Also emergent were the skills, concepts, and competencies provided herein.

Tables 5-1 and 5-2 identify and describe the school readiness categories, emergent skills and concepts included in each category, and the alignment of each category with educator and parent subgroups. Similarities and differences between educators' and parents' views suggest that program type and social class were related to the degree of connection and disconnection across ecological contexts.

General Knowledge

Knowledge of general information was specifically stated as important for children to learn prior to entering kindergarten by several educators and parents. This category refers to a child's knowledge of "information that the child needs for problem solving, self-identification, and handling situations when away from home and parents" (Barbarin et al., 2008, p. 684). Emergent from these data were children knowing: their names, family members' names, addresses, phone numbers, and the ability to stay safe without parental supervision.

Educators

Several educators included general knowledge in their conceptions of school readiness and corresponding concepts considered important to learn prior to transitioning into kindergarten. Within this subgroup, preschool teachers and administrators, particularly those working independent of the school district in community programs highlighted skills within this

category as key. At the kindergarten level, general knowledge concepts were not typically

included in their responses, though there was one exception.

Preschool. General knowledge was highlighted most commonly by preschool personnel.

Administrators and teachers working in daycare and learning centers in the Middleton

community directly stated the importance of children learning personal information before the

first day of kindergarten. For instance, Faith, an owner and director of Sweetie Pie Learning

Center said, "They [children] need to know their names, their addresses, they need to know their

parents names…." before entering kindergarten. Katie, a preschool teacher at a local daycare,

stated that, in addition to counting, children need to know personal information about themselves

and their families. She stated:

> First and last name is definitely important, their age, their birthday, their home phone
> number, addresses, important information like that. Their mom and dad['s] name.

According to Katie, general knowledge was considered "important information" to learn prior to

entering kindergarten. Bridget, also a teacher at the same daycare, contended that knowing

general information was important for helping children transition into kindergarten safely:

> I think another good thing is the address, the phone number, the parent's name is another
> one and they need to know their address just in case, hoping and pray[ing] nobody get[s]
> lost....It's also good to know their address and phone number.

General information emerged as a valuable resource for children to have as they navigate away

from home without parental supervision. Bridget's statement suggests the danger of getting

"lost" could be buffered when children have general knowledge.

Though general information was not typically cited among kindergarten level educators,

Jackie, a first year kindergarten teacher in the district, explained that when children do not have

basic general knowledge of themselves and others, this can limit their ability to learn in school.

She stated:

> I think that there are some basic things that children need to learn before coming to kindergarten, such as how to write their name, they need to know their parent's name, where they live….[Not having] some of those basic skills would impede them from learning; so they should have those.

As a novice teacher, Jackie noted that general knowledge was required at a basic level upon entering kindergarten. She noted that having general knowledge could ease children's transition into school learning. On the other hand, not having these "basics skills" could adversely impact their performance overall.

Possessing general knowledge of self and personal information was considered important, particularly among community preschool teachers and administrators. General knowledge was noted not only because it was a "basic" foundation for early learning, but also as a means of keeping children safe as they transitioned from home into school.

Parents

The theme of "the basics" emerged among parents as central to school readiness and important for children to learn prior to kindergarten. One component of the "basics" was being able to state personal information such as names, names of family members, and addresses. General knowledge was identified as "basic" information. This category appeared in parents' responses across social class subgroups except among a subgroup of middle class mothers whose children attended private preschool.

Middle-income. A few middle-class parents pinpointed general knowledge as important. For example, Nicki, a middle-class mother of two preschoolers, said that children need to know "Their name. Their parents name. Know their birthday, their phone number" in preparation for kindergarten. Tina contended that school readiness means being academically and personally aware. She said in addition to academic knowledge:

> They need to know how to write their names. They need to know their phone number, they need to know their address. Those are some things I think kids going into kindergarten need to know.

General knowledge was included in Nicki's and Tina's lists of concepts they considered important to know prior to kindergarten. Yet, this category was not stressed as commonly among middle-class parents as it was among poor and working-class ones.

Low-income. Compared to other social class subgroups, poor and working-class mothers more often described general information as important for children to learn before transitioning into kindergarten. For example, Niecey, a poor parent, noted that the best way for parents to prepare their children for school is to teach them their personal information. She said:

> I think the best way is, if the parents ain't working, that they can stay at home and teach they kids like how to spell they name, make sure they know how old they is, they address, phone numbers, most important stuff like that.

Additionally, Francis, a working-class caregiver, pointed out that, at the least, children need to be able to recite, spell and write some of this personal information. She said, "They need to know how to write their name. They need to know how to spell their name, you know. And a lot of them, they don't know how to do that."

Parent data also suggested that having general knowledge is important for keeping children safe from danger as they transition into kindergarten. In fact, working class and poor parents identified safety as a component of school readiness. For instance, in addition to academic preparation, Bonnie's comment suggests that she is preparing her child for kindergarten with safety in mind. She noted:

> Well, we've already accomplished her being able to write her name. And she is able to count to fifteen by herself. I've prepared her or have been trying to get her ready as far as teaching her how to write her address and be able to say it just in case she's lost or anything like that. So, those are just the types of things that I have been personally doing.

Additionally, Niecey suggested that having knowledge of self can limit the chance that her child would be abducted by a stranger. She stated:

> I think it's important for them to learn, by them being kids, they gotta know who is who. Like she know mother, father, sisters, aunts. I just don't think she will go with a stranger, but you know some strangers be trying to pull kids.

Similarly, Grace talked to her preschooler about strangers in preparation for the transition into kindergarten. She said:

> She know she can catch a bus, she knows, I tell her, you know, be mindful, be careful about strangers. [I] had the stranger talk with her. And if she's uncomfortable, then to [go] to a teacher or elder or somebody who she can trust. And always let me know what's going on regardless, even if she thinks it's little or something.

General knowledge emerged among parents as vital preparation for school. As children transitioned into kindergarten, middle class and particularly poor and working-class parents expressed knowing personal information about self and family as important. Some participants' rationalizations of this preparation centered on providing children with the skills they needed to be safe away from home and in the presence of "strangers."

Connections and Disconnections

Community preschool programs and teachers were more likely to describe general knowledge as important to learn prior to kindergarten. Middle- and working-class and poor parents' inclusion of general knowledge in their descriptions of school readiness was a point of connection between these home contexts and community preschools. Yet, because kindergarten educator responses rarely included general knowledge this suggests some disconnections between kindergarten level educators and preschool educators, middle-class, working-class, and poor parents.

Nominal Knowledge and Numeracy

Nominal knowledge entails "possession of information that makes it possible to name or label objects in the environment." Because they typically emerged in concert, I combined nominal knowledge and numeracy, which refers to "beginning skills in mathematics." These categories were prominently referenced and also were considered a component of children knowing "the basics" in this study. Emergent and listed in order of most often cited were: identify and recite the alphabet; identify numbers and count; identify colors; and identify shapes and objects. These concepts were generally described by participants as pre-academic or academic components of school readiness.

Educators

Educators acknowledged a shift in early childhood education that resulted in increased focus on "academics" in kindergarten. Consequently, some noted the importance of ensuring children possessed certain knowledge and were exposed to pre-academic concepts prior to entering school. Having some prior knowledge of the alphabet/letters and numbers/counting was considered important to the majority of educators across program type.

Preschool. Preschool teachers considered nominal knowledge as essential for kindergarten. For instance, Annette, an experienced daycare teacher, described some of the pre-academic concepts children need to learn prior to entering kindergarten. She said, "There's things that they need to know as far as their letters, their numbers, as far as writing their letters, their numbers, as far as recognizing their name." Preschool educators' conceptions of school readiness centered upon preschool-aged children's abilities to meet and/or exceed kindergarten expectations for nominal skills. Isabelle, a new preschool teacher at a learning center in the community, stated:

The readiness, I figure it means like, when they go to kindergarten I guess the kindergarten teachers are expecting them to recognize their names and know their letters and just like be aware of things I guess. Like numbers and days and stuff.

Faith, an owner and operator of a learning center, also focused on preparing preschool-aged children for kindergarten expectations:

To me it [school readiness] means taking them one step beyond what is expected…..If they're going to kindergarten and the kindergarten [curriculum] says that they need to know their ABC's and they need 1-20, then that means we [learning center staff] need to take them to recognizing your ABC's, knowing what their letters are going to sound like, knowing some of the words that begin with those [letters].

Faith's goal was to exceed nominal expectations of kindergarten programs. Her comment suggests that in doing so, early literacy skills and competencies were included in her conceptions of school readiness.

Sally, a pre-kindergarten teacher at the Middleton Pre-K Program, identified several concepts she wanted children in her preschool classroom to learn prior to kindergarten:

I also like for them to be able to recognize their name. Recognize the letters in their names. Hopefully have shapes and colors down. Be able to count, hopefully up to 20 and recognizing numbers from 1-10 and beginning to do some more from that.

Sally's conceptions of school readiness included nominal knowledge and numeracy prior to entering kindergarten. Donna, another prekindergarten teacher at Middleton Pre-K, linked academic knowledge with social consequences. She contended:

And then of course they should be academically ready having the different math and literacy and science and social studies skill[s]. Because if they don't have those skills…not only will they have academic problems, they'll have behavior problems. They won't understand what's going on. And when they don't understand they start to act out.

Findings suggest that nominal knowledge was important for promoting early learning and preventing social consequences Donna associated with limited knowledge of nominal skills and concepts.

Elementary. At the kindergarten level nominal knowledge was also pointed out as important for children to learn. As a new kindergarten teacher, Karla noted that "They're ready if they know any letters; especially like the first letter in their name. That tells me something good is going on." Though only minimal nominal knowledge was important to learn prior to kindergarten, being able to identify letters was a "good" sign according to Karla. Nancy, a veteran teacher, suggested students who do not have basic nominal knowledge start kindergarten "behind":

> I think that there are some basic things like colors and shapes that you can teach when they come but the majority of the students come already knowing those things. So if they don't know their colors or their shapes or to recognize their names they start out behind…. And so…they can catch up. But they're already starting their first week of kindergarten behind. And so they're in a catch up game which no one likes being.

To avoid having to "catch up" with other students in the class who come in with basic nominal knowledge, which is generally the case, Nancy suggested teaching children some of these skills and concepts prior to entering school. Possessing nominal skill sets commensurate with their peer group was expected of children upon entering kindergarten.

Pauline, an elementary school principal in another building, discussed the importance of children having previous exposure to nominal knowledge prior to entering kindergarten:

> Well I think they [children] need to know their colors and shapes, you know basic shapes. They need to be exposed to that…I think children should pretty much be able to sing their ABCs even though they don't recognize them. At least they've heard ABCs so when they come to school it's not like a foreign language. It's like if we're going to learn our ABCs and the teacher starts this is "A" it says "ah", they've got that background knowledge to draw on.

Pauline suggested that background knowledge of the alphabet is needed in kindergarten to support emergent literacy practices. Janice, an experienced kindergarten teacher, dispelled what she believed to be a myth and highlighted the importance of having background knowledge before entering kindergarten. She stated:

> They really don't need to know all the letters in the alphabet. That's a fallacy that's out there. That's my job to teach them the alphabet. But what they do need is an understanding of language. People who have read to them cause just by reading to children they learn about how to hold a book, how to turn the pages. They learn how language sounds, a lot of different languages.

For Janice, exposure to language and literacy was more essential than extended nominal knowledge. Generally, nominal knowledge was included in educator participants' characterizations of entering kindergarten in this community school district.

Parents

Similar to general knowledge, prevalent among parent participants was the notion that children entering kindergarten required "basic" nominal knowledge. The importance of having nominal knowledge also existed across social class subgroups.

Middle-income. Connie, a middle-class mother sending her oldest child to kindergarten next fall, provided an example of some of the basic nominal knowledge children need to learn before starting kindergarten. She said, "Definitely the basics—ABC's, 123's. You know, you write your name, recognize letters…" According to Connie, children needed to know basic concepts such as recognizing letters of the alphabet and numbers. Vanessa, a middle-class grandmother, included nominal knowledge in her conception of school readiness as well. She stated that "School readiness [means] she should be able to have alphabets, colors, shapes. A lot of those skills should be with them at a[n] early age, three and up. That's the way I look at it." Vanessa contended that ensuring such nominal knowledge is an important component of preparing children for the "adventure" of learning in kindergarten at an early age.

Pam, an affluent parent of two, noted that being able to identify colors and shapes were minimal readiness requirements for kindergarten. She recommended knowing the following concepts for kindergarten:

> Colors and shapes….I went to a kindergarten class at a school that was supposed to be this great school and there were children who the teacher was starting over, basically teaching them things that some parents, I don't know, taught their children at like two and three years old. You know, meaning the colors and shapes and you know things like that. So, that's a big part of readiness for me.

Pam's statement suggests that nominal knowledge was important for addressing the disparities in knowledge at kindergarten entrance. She further explained that parents could ease some of the "stress off themselves, their child and the teacher," by ensuring children's nominal knowledge prior to the transition into kindergarten.

Low-income. Xenophia, a poor mother of three, began and ended her statement with the "basics" and suggested some nominal skills and concepts important for children to know upon beginning kindergarten. She said children should learn, "The basics….The alphabets, the numbers….Just the basics I mean." Similarly, Nicki a working poor parent, stated children need to know the "basics," to include "ABCs, numbers. You know like the difference between a cat and a dog which one is a cat, which one is a dog you know like that. Just the basics."

Another example was provided by Francis, a working-class mother who has one child in public school already. She said school readiness means "Knowing the basic things to be ready to go into kindergarten. The shapes, your letters, their numbers" in addition to other skills and concepts. Alicia, a working-class mother of two preschoolers, agreed that children need to know some basic concepts. She stated:

> Well, it's good that they know all their ABC's and you know, how to count, you know, and recognize the letters and the numbers. It helps a lot, you know, cause it kind of puts them behind when they don't know most of them things. They'll have to catch up and that kind of affects the child when they behind.

Without this nominal knowledge Alicia contended that children start kindergarten "behind" other children in school learning.

Nominal knowledge was a component of "the basics" primary caregivers viewed as essential for children to know prior to entering kindergarten. Being able to recite and identify letters and numbers and familiar objects were competencies most mothers across social class described as basic requirements for entering kindergarten. Although middle-class, working-class, and poor parents consistently included nominal knowledge, affluent families were least likely to directly identify such skills as important for children to learn prior to kindergarten.

Connections and Disconnections

Across subgroups, nominal knowledge was centrally identified among educators' and parents' conceptions of school readiness. They agreed that "basic" knowledge of letters and numbers was important for transitioning into kindergarten. Children who did not possess nominal knowledge were hypothesized to start out "behind" on the first day of school. General and nominal knowledge were considered fundamental elements for beginning to learn in schools.

<center>*Language/Early Literacy*</center>

The language and literacy category also was emergent from these data. This category encompasses "use of language and emergent literacy such as vocabulary, receptive language, ability to rhyme, link letters to sounds, read, write, etc." Participants cited: emergent reading; vocabulary; emergent writing/spelling; background knowledge and the ability to process and respond to questions as important for kindergarten. Within this category, variations by program type and level and social class emerged most.

Educators

Preschool. Daycare and learning center educators described readiness skills that fit within the general and nominal categories more often than language and literacy. One exception was a new teacher at a learning center, Isabelle, who pointed out:

I know that a lot of kindergarteners don't have to read but I think that it is better if they could read. Like you know just be ahead instead of behind. That's what readiness means to me anyway.

Isabelle's example illustrated that being able to read placed children ahead of the class on the first day of kindergarten.

Unlike the community daycare and learning centers, almost all pre-kindergarten educators employed at Middleton Pre-K Program emphasized language and literacy as key to promoting school readiness. Sally, a preschool teacher at the district Pre-K program expressed the importance of children having early literacy exposure and skills:

I think it's very important that they have pre-literacy skills to where they're aware of the way you hold a book and that you can tell the story through the pictures and that the words when somebody read[s] the words, that [they] tell the story, you can make up a story but that's not what's happening with a book. They have the ability to recognize their name and maybe some of their friends' names, so some of those pre-reading skills that they have.

Samantha, an administrator at the same program expressed the importance of emergent literacy prior to kindergarten in supporting reading development in the following example:

When you have two kids that go to kindergarten at the same time, one has this huge vocabulary with lots of varied experiences and one has a more limited vocabulary then when it comes time to read, comprehension. I mean it's gonna be hard to catch up.

According to Samantha, limited language and literacy emerged as competencies that could place children at a disadvantage in kindergarten because of the implications they have on reading and comprehension.

Elementary. Like pre-kindergarten educators, kindergarten level teachers and administrators commonly expressed the need for children to be "exposed" to language and literacy prior to the first day of kindergarten. For instance, Lindsay, an experienced kindergarten teacher said that kindergarten has become more academic, therefore it is important for children to have some exposure to print and early literacy skills prior to entering school. She said:

> Kindergarten is very different from even when I went to kindergarten. It is very much an academic-based school year to prepare kids for first grade. And so things that are important to me in terms of readiness are have they had exposure to the alphabetical principle. So are they aware that there are big letters and small letters, are they aware that letters make up words?

Lindsay's statement illustrates the importance for young children to be exposed to early literacy concepts in the context of increasing academic kindergarten experiences. Rachel, a district administrator, also highlighted emergent literacy as important for kindergarteners to have upon entering school to include:

> How words are constructed in terms of rhymes and poetry. So when I say knowing words what I'm talking about is hearing words, hearing phonemes, the structure of how words are put together. Knowing patterns, knowing how to handle a book, knowing left to right, all of those things that good readers do and they just do automatically because someone's been sitting and reading to them.

Having knowledge of the use of language and conventions of reading were important components of school readiness from Rachel's perspective. Rachel related emergent language and literacy skills and awareness to becoming a "good reader." Pauline reported that within her building, quite a few children enter kindergarten reading:

> We have a lot of children come in reading. And you know most of the parents swear they didn't sit down and teach them to read they just read a lot to them and they just started to read. And you know that's good, I don't think that's necessary. And I know probably my school might be a little bit of an exception. We tend to have usually 3-4 that come in reading every year. But then we have children who come in and they don't know their colors and they don't know their ABCs. And so you can see where that achievement gap is huge at that point.

Reading is not required at kindergarten entrance. Yet, according to Pauline, some children from middle-class families enter kindergarten able to read, while other children do not have nominal or background knowledge related to emergent reading. Pauline's comment suggests that advantage and disadvantage is evident on the first day of kindergarten in her building.

There was some variation in terms of expectations for language and emergent literacy. In

general, educators did not expect children to be able to read at the start of kindergarten. Instead, for several teachers and administrators, exposure to book reading and vocabulary were highlighted as important for school learning in the early years. Preschool level educators differed in their emphasis on language and literacy in their discussions of school readiness. Educators employed in daycares and learning centers less often mentioned skills and concepts in this category as important for children to learn prior to kindergarten. On the other hand, a district Pre-K administrator and teachers stressed the importance of this category in their conceptions of school readiness. This emphasis was aligned with kindergarten educators' views of school readiness.

Parents

There was some variation in what "the basics" entailed among African American families. Findings suggest that in addition to pre-academic knowledge and competencies, a number of parents expected their children to have advanced early literacy skills prior to entering kindergarten. These skills were the ability to (1) identify letter sounds, (2) write and spell, and (3) read.

Middle-income. Middle-class and affluent parents most often discussed literacy and early literacy skills as important to possess prior to kindergarten. Though kindergarten teachers did not expect children to be able to read on the first day of school, some parents held this expectation. For instance, a readiness goal that Tina had for her preschool-aged son is for him to be able to read when he starts kindergarten. She said:

> He knows his numbers to 100. He knows his colors. He knows…some numbers in Spanish. I think Ms. Faith does a good job getting them ready. But I want to make sure he's reading.

Though he already possessed nominal knowledge, Tina believed early literacy was needed in

order for her son to be ready for kindergarten. Additionally, Shana, a middle-class parent whose

oldest child was transitioning into kindergarten the following academic year said:

> I think it's important for him to read…I do because that's actually teaching him to understand what they're doing. You have to know how to really read to really focus. That's my take on it. So, reading and a lot of times I don't feel like, little kids, I mean they don't have the opportunity. If the parents do their jobs at home it'll be easier for the kids when they go. So that's what we do here at home is to help them focus, read your words and things like that.

Pam, a middle-class mother, noted that being prepared for kindergarten included being able to

read. She stated:

> I personally think that…if they're [children] not reading, I think they should at least be at a level understanding what letter sounds are, things like that. I know my expectations are high, but those are the expectations I've set for my child. My son is four and he's reading….And that is me making sure that he was ready.

Reading was a key indicator of readiness for kindergarten for Pam and she achieved the goal. In

fact, all four parents whose children attended First Stop Private Preschool reported that their

children were already reading or close to it, at the time of the interview. These parents credited

the private preschool program with teaching their children to read. For instance, Melissa chose a

private preschool for her children because of the academics. With the help of teachers at the

preschool she noted that her son could read. She stated:

> So, he's been prepared and he is reading now and most of the kids are reading. All of the girls are reading. And most of the boys are reading. And so I feel like they've [private preschool staff] done a good job in assisting me in getting him ready [for kindergarten].

Gina's preschooler attends the same private preschool program. She also stated that her daughter

was "learning to read" there. Mothers who mentioned language and literacy skills as important

to learn before beginning kindergarten were more likely to be middle-class than working-class

and poor.

Low-income. Though not as prominent, a few low-income mothers did include literacy in their descriptions of school readiness as important knowledge for children to have prior to kindergarten. Bonnie, who has one child enrolled in a gifted program in a local public school, was one of the few low-income parents to include early literacy in her discussion of what children need to learn prior to beginning kindergarten. She recommended children learn:

> Sight words. Sight words I think is important because that helps them to be able to learn how to read. To be able to learn to read, I think it is important to learn the different basic sight words.

Bonnie, a low-income parent whose child attended the district pre-kindergarten program, highlighted pre-reading as important to learn for kindergarten. Though Bonnie did not explicitly state this relationship, her occupation as a child care provider may have attuned her to the importance of language and literacy development. Francis, also a self-employed child care provider, stressed the importance of reviewing sight words in preparation for kindergarten. She noted that "as far as my own children, I go over sight words with them. I have a kindergartner and I have a five-year-old going into kindergarten when August starts." Like Bonnie, Francis had an older child in elementary school in the district. But unlike Bonnie, Francis' son was not in a gifted educational program. Wendy, a mother studying to become a teacher, also had a child in a gifted educational program and included "knowing her numbers, letters, letter sounds" in her description of school readiness.

Several parents described language and early literacy, particularly as demonstrated by children's interest in and ability to read, as an important school readiness category. Middle-income parents most often included language and literacy skills as essential for children to learn prior to entering kindergarten. A few working-class and poor families identified emergent reading in their conceptions of school readiness. These mothers were employed in child care and

education related fields, which suggests they might have access to work-related information regarding reading and school readiness. However, occupation alone did not explain parents' emphasis on reading because middle-income mothers who included language and literacy skills in their conceptions of school readiness were employed in diverse occupational fields. This suggests that social class status was more indicative of whether or not parents' comments included components of language and early literacy than their occupation.

Connections and Disconnections

Community preschool teachers and administrators were more disconnected from kindergarten teachers and administrators' heavy focus on exposure to and experience with language and literacy as being vital for school readiness. This was not the case among pre-kindergarten teachers who had more frequent contact with public schools and knowledge of kindergarten teachers' expectations than those employed in community programs. Also, social class mattered. Middle-class and affluent families' views of school readiness seemed to be more aligned with the school's expectations for language and literacy. Though the language and literacy category was cited among a few working-class and poor parents as important for children to learn prior to entering kindergarten, the connection was not evident across this social class subgroup.

Inferential Reasoning

The inferential reasoning category emerged least in these data across participant and program type and social class. It refers to "higher order thinking skills, processing of information, and creativity that go beyond repetition of drilled material." Sally, a pre-kindergarten teacher, highlighted that in addition to having basic nominal knowledge children should "Show interest in learning and in listening to stories and answering questions."

Answering questions about stories relates to children's abilities to process information. Donna, another Pre-K teacher echoed the need for children to be exposed to inferential reasoning such as "Being able to communicate with a full thought, ability to answer questions about stories." Kindergarten teachers and administrators generally did not state inferential reasoning as a key readiness category in their conceptualizations.

Across social class, parents did not typically include inferential reasoning either. An exception was Laurie, a middle class parent and elementary school teacher, who noted the importance of children being able to make inferences about books through illustrations. She said "To me [school readiness means] being able to look at pictures and then say what's happening in the story."

Connections and Disconnections

Inferential reasoning was not central in discussions of school readiness and related concepts and skills within this sample of educators and parents. General and nominal knowledge and language and literacy emerged from these data more often than inferential reasoning did, despite participant type, program type, and social class. Still, a small group of pre-kindergarten educators and middle-class mothers did cite inferential reasoning in their discussions.

Social Competence

Social skills and competencies were perceived as important for children to learn prior to their transition into kindergarten. Social competence describes a child's ability to "develop positive relationships with peers and adult caregivers." Included in this category was children's interaction or ability to interact well with others. Key characteristics of this theme were: learning to share; working within a group; listening to others; and having respect for authority.

Educators

Educator participants emphasized social readiness in discussions of school readiness. Like the nominal category, social competence was discussed widely regardless of program level and type. In fact, this category usually emerged in concert with nominal and general knowledge as equally and even, in some cases, most important for preparing children for kindergarten learning.

Preschool. Social skills were viewed as essential. For example, Annette, a preschool teacher in a learning center in the local community, highlighted social competency as important in her conception of school readiness:

> I think they need to learn their socialization skills, to start socializing with other children. One thing that we find here if they have no siblings or if they've not been in a preschool, any kind of daycare, pre-school setting that the only child syndrome sometimes is a problem. They need to learn to share. Their maturity has to be there.

Catherine, a daycare director, also noted the importance of social competency. Her statement focused on children's ability to get along with others in school settings. She commented:

> You have to know how to get along with someone. So that's one of the main things I work on, is being able to go to kindergarten and meet new people. Get along with new people. So if you start young and you teach them okay this is how you talk to each other. They learn how these things work within themselves. So that's the first thing I work on.

Samantha, a pre-kindergarten administrator, ranked social competency high on her list of skills children need to develop prior to kindergarten. In addition to language she said "I think a lot of the social things in terms of being able to express your wants and needs. Being able to interact appropriately with other kids and adults" are important skills to have in preparation for kindergarten. Halle, a teacher at the same Pre-K program further explained:

> You know the academic stuff, while that might kind of bother kindergarten teachers, they can work with it. What we hear back from the kindergarten teachers all the time is about the behavior. Can't we do more in early childhood about the behavior? But they should see them when they come in….We've done a lot about the behavior.

Halle's comments highlight the relatedness of school readiness categories. Educators tended to perceive social competence as key for school learning. Behaviors were described as more important than nominal knowledge for transitioning into elementary school among some pre-kindergarten educators.

Elementary. Kindergarten teachers and administrators also noted the importance of promoting social competence to ease the transition into kindergarten. At minimum children were expected to be competent in attending, following directions, and listening to others. For instance, Nancy, a veteran kindergarten teacher, stated:

> I think they need to be able to sit quietly for a few minutes. I think they need to learn how to follow directions. That if an adult asks them to do something they should understand that there is an expectation that you'll do it.

Karla, a new kindergarten teacher, further described some examples of social competencies that ease the transition into kindergarten. She noted that academics can be addressed more readily if children are socially competent:

> Some social skills like how to get along and take turns are important. The academics are just so easily accommodated in here if they have those social skills. It's just so much easier to get those going quickly and right away if they have the social skills. Like they're ready to sit and listen to directions and do what everyone else is doing at the same time. We've had some issues with that.

Karla's statement was congruent with Halle's, a pre-kindergarten teacher. She perceived social skills as more central to school readiness than nominal knowledge. These findings suggest that social skills made learning in school possible.

Zoë, a building principal, discussed children's social competency as well. She said "Waiting your turn, sharing. I think those kinds of behaviors that we take for granted as adults are perhaps not reinforced like they once were in our children" to promote school learning. James, a building principal, observed social behavior of incoming kindergarteners. He stated:

> When we do the meet the teacher night, I'm really observant of behavior and when I'm talking to a student. If they're able to really sit down and engage in that conversation that lets me know that they know, wow, this [is] gonna be my principal. He's kind of the person in charge, I should really be in tune with this conversation.

James takes note of children's social competence and behavior early on. Being able to interact with an adult in a position of authority alerted him to children's social competency and their preparation for kindergarten.

"Appropriate" social behaviors included children's ability to get along with others and attend. Educators often viewed social competence as most important for entering kindergarten. In some cases, teachers and administrators noted that not having "the academic stuff might bother some teachers," but social behaviors that "open children up to learning" are most needed for learning in schools.

Parents

Parents also addressed the importance of preschool-age children acquiring certain social skills and competencies before starting kindergarten. Parent participants stressed the need for children to be socially ready to meet the demands of kindergarten. Specific social skills and competencies talked about were children being able to communicate with others, interact well with others, and cope with different social situations. Social skills were identified among mothers across social class subgroups.

Middle-income. Mothers most often mentioned the need for children to learn to interact well with peers and adults outside of the family. For instance, Connie, a middle class mother, considered school readiness to be primarily a social issue. She said, "For kindergarten, I would think just being able to interact with adults and other children already." Similarly, Tina, a middle-class parent, contended that learning to interact with other children was important to learn prior to kindergarten. She noted "I think they need certain socialization skills. I think they

need to be able to interact with other kids; kids that are like them, kids that are different from them." In addition to having nominal knowledge, Vanessa, a grandparent of a preschooler, noted the importance of learning to respect others prior to kindergarten. She commented:

> Respect, and personally I feel that kids nowadays need to learn honor and respect within their own families and then you can get them to respect others. I think that, I think that's just as important as learning their ABCs because that's where you won't have the discipline problems [so] some much [in] the schools…We have more discipline problems in school than we do teaching.

Vanessa pointed out that respect for others was important for lessening discipline issues and easing learning in schools.

The transition from private preschool into public kindergarten was a concern among some families. Though their concerns typically centered upon the differences in the academic levels and abilities of students in a classroom, Pam, an affluent primary caregiver, felt apprehension about the social ramifications of bullying as her son transitioned from private into public kindergarten. She explained that ensuring children had social skills prior to the first day of school was vital in easing this transition:

> I have a big fear of also the bullying things. Because when you have a child that is ready or smarter or perceived smarter by a child who may not be ready, then you have a tendency of bullying….I think they should be socialized properly, too. It doesn't mean that everybody has to pay a lot of money to send their kid to private school, or anything like that. But at least put them out there. Let them, you know, feel what's going on in this world. Take them to the park and let them at least play with other kids

Still, Pam offered examples of ways to promote social competencies that she contended prepared children for having positive interactions with others in kindergarten and prevented bullying.

Low-income. Poor and working class parents also noted the importance of social competencies in their conceptions of school readiness and related skills. Wendy, a working-class mother, illustrated the social transition her child will have to make once she begins kindergarten. She explained "When she's around other kids, being able to play well, get along, know how to

use her words when she gets with other kids and to me that's the big thing." Xenophia, a poor

parent, said that promoting her son's ability to interact with non-family children and adults in the

school setting prior to beginning kindergarten was important:

> Well, we have to get Mario comfortable, let him be comfortable around kids. Cause he's
> been around kids but it's been his family. [He has] not really been around other kids. He
> doesn't really say a lot cause he's shy.

Xenophia's son's temperament heightened her awareness of the importance of social

competency in school learning and interactions. Denise, who provided home care and education

for her daughter, discussed the importance of talking to children about the social expectation of

kindergarten and the need for children to be able to manage social situations prior to entering

school. She said:

> Well, I think primarily school readiness, I would say, for our children, would have to be
> being socialized with [others]. Because a lot of parents don't really, you know, teach
> their children a whole lot of things when going into that kind of situation. And I think for
> us, make sure that Annie's able to handle different situations.

Data suggest that social skills and abilities were key features of parents' perceptions of

school readiness and knowledge and competencies needed for kindergarten. Parents not only

pinpointed social skills needed to interact well with peers and teachers, but they also described

the need for children to be able to cope with various social situations that might arise.

Connections and Disconnections

The social competence category was a key point of connection across this sample.

Educators and parents, across subgroups, described getting along with others, both children and

adults, as important to learn prior to the start of kindergarten. However, slight disconnections

were identified between pre-kindergarten and elementary level educators and parents. These

educators discussed social competency and academic learning as interconnected and

interdependent. In some cases, pre-kindergarten and elementary educators described social skills

as more critical to learning in school than nominal knowledge. On the other hand, parents'

emphasis on social skills more often stemmed from their concern with children being more

generally adept in handling social situations while away from home.

Self-Regulation of Behavior

Self-regulation of behavior relates to "the capacity of the child to comply with the

behavioral expectations of schools, especially in the classroom." Being able to regulate their

own behavior ranked high on educators' and parents' lists of what children needed to learn prior

to entering kindergarten. Still, the emphasis placed on certain modes of behavioral regulation

differed among educators and parents. The following states of being and competencies were

included in this category: being excited to learn; being capable of separating without anxiety;

exhibiting self-control; being mature; following directions; listening and attending; and feeling

loved.

Educators

Among educators, following directions in a group, complying with "expectations," and

displaying "appropriate behaviors" were emergent acts of self-regulation commonly mentioned

as important for kindergarten. There was some variation across program type for this category.

Preschool. Following school rules and routines was more often discussed by pre-

kindergarten teachers as an important component of school readiness in comparison to

community preschool programs. According to Sally, a pre-kindergarten teacher, school

readiness meant being ready for the basic routine of kindergarten. She commented:

> To me, for being ready to go on to kindergarten I think it's important that they understand
> the basic routine of school. Sort of, you know, how to walk in a line, how to sit safely on
> the carpet, how to clean up, follow simple directions about putting on your coat and your
> backpack and all of that.

Halle agreed that exposing children to school routines was an important component of school readiness. She said "We also need to teach them how to sit. Things like walk in line. That's important. You should see them when they start preschool. Walking in a line is not a concept they have." Such expectations for self-regulation like walking in a line were concepts that Halle was teaching preschoolers in preparation for kindergarten expectations for behavior. Samantha, an administrator at the same Pre-K program, expanded on the importance of self-regulation prior to kindergarten and the interconnectedness of this category with language and literacy:

> It kind of overlaps with language because the ability to sit in a group and attend you know for ten minutes to a story or listen to instructions and be able to follow directions. So it's kind of those two areas I think are really closely intertwined because they need to have those. I mean children, to be successful in a group of twenty with one teacher, they need to be able to listen, understand, comprehend what's being asked of them.

The class size of kindergarten requires young children to have skills to self-regulate in order to "be successful." Samantha's comment suggests that language competency is closely related to children's ability to self-regulate.

Elementary. Self-regulation emerged prominently among kindergarten level educators. They often referred to self-regulation in terms of maturity. For instance, Pauline, a building principal, commented that being ready to learn in the "educational environment" called for a certain level or maturity:

> Well I think, when I think of school readiness I think of children who are prepared to come into an educational environment. And ready to learn in the fact that they're mature enough that they can sit for, you know, fifteen minutes and listen to a lesson.

Additionally, Karla, a kindergarten teacher, said that school readiness centered upon readiness to be in school and familiar with kindergarten expectations:

> From a kindergarten perspective or standpoint, school readiness means when they come that first day that sitting on the carpet listening to someone read is not new to them. Standing in a single file line is not new to them.... And at kindergarten one of the problems that we see is that many kids get off the bus and school is completely oblivious

to them. They've never been asked to sit down and listen to someone read. They've never had to stand in a single file line.

Prior experiences with and knowledge of school culture were considered important for being ready for kindergarten. This included norms around sitting, walking, and listening. Lindsay noted limited abilities to self-regulate were a "red flag:

> Constant and obsessive crying and screaming at the beginning of the year, temper tantrums, being withdrawn, completely withdrawn, not engaged, not interested, tattle telling all the time, not knowing how to deal with some of the situations. Not that any one of these is a strong indicator but they kind of all combine. Not being potty-trained, having violent and disruptive episodes. I had a student who at the beginning of the year all he would do is flip chairs over, throw chairs, crawl under tables, hide, crawl under cubbies, try and lock himself in the bathroom, [and say] I want to go home.

Difficulty self-regulating at the beginning of children's kindergarten year was considered a normal feature of their adjustment into their new environments. However, extremes and combinations of behaviors mentioned above were considered warning signs that could adversely impact learning in schools. James, a building principal, asserted children should be able to self-regulate. He stated:

> I think a general knowledge of respect centered around keeping your hands and feet to yourself. Parents really teaching their kids about appropriate and inappropriate language, appropriate and inappropriate touch.

In sum, children were expected to be able to self-regulate in terms of distinguishing appropriate and inappropriate school behavior and act accordingly.

In general, children's abilities to conform to classroom rules and expectations for behaviors, respect authority, follow directions, and deal with social situations and separation were highlighted as important for incoming kindergarteners to have. Educators suggested that children who face challenges in multiple aspects of this category might struggle in kindergarten.

Parents

Several parent participants across social class were keenly aware of the importance of self-regulation competencies and skills in easing the transition into kindergarten. Children's emotional states before, during, and prior to the first day of kindergarten were discussed as well as their ability to attend and adjust to social expectations for learning in school.

Parents often responded to the question, what things tell you that your child is ready for kindergarten, by highlighting children's excitement to learn and go to school. Excitement and eagerness to learn among children were pointed out as signals of readiness. For example, Niecey, a poor mother, noticed that her child was ready for kindergarten. She said "Cause she see her sister and cousin ready for school and she always want to play school. So that's showing me that she ready to go to school and she trying to show me what she know." Additionally, Joy, an older, middle class, parent of a preschooler said:

> Cause she's anxious. She's really anxious about going and I think it's because she's following in her sister's footsteps. That's why she's anxious. And, Candice wants to learn like her sister.

Additionally, consider the following two comments provided by Xenophia, a working poor mother of four, and Gina, a working middle-income parent of one:

> Mario just got a lot of energy. He want to learn. I mean he's ready to just go to school anyway. So, it doesn't really matter if it's pre-k or kindergarten. He's just ready to go.

> Well, Marie's really interested and excited about learning and she likes to show me what she knows how to do. And, she really likes learning new things, I'm finding out. She's really inquisitive about learning new things.

Most mothers noted their children's excitement for learning. This notation indicated children's internal motivation to learn as an important element of self-regulation and a component of school readiness.

Parents also discussed self-regulation skills and competencies as critical for school learning. Grace, a working class parent whose child did not attend a preschool program, explained how school readiness meant preparing her daughter to meet the social expectations of being in school such as:

> Making sure she's prepped and she's able to take orders and let me think, she's open to, I mean she's listening, she can be worked with. I mean, I didn't have a lot of discipline problems with her, so she's good.

Understanding classroom rules and expectations for social interaction in school settings were considered important for children to learn. In anticipation for kindergarten Xenophia, a low-income mother, stated that "I try to let him know. You know, this is how you supposed to sit. You're supposed to raise your hand. You supposed to start trying to ask questions." Additionally, Gina, a middle-income parent, highlighted some of the self-regulation skills that suggested her preschooler was ready for kindergarten:

> Marie is able to focus and pay attention and follow directions. And she knows the rules about being in a class, with a teacher. You know, wait your turn to talk, listen to your teacher, things like that.

Gina stated that her preschooler had been prepared for kindergarten by participating in various activities and participating in a preschool program to self-regulate and conform to school expectations.

The emotional component of self-regulation was less prevalent, yet emerged from the data as an important element. A gender dynamic emerged in terms of parental concerns around self-regulation. Typically mothers of boys expressed their concerns that their child's ability to self-regulate will adversely impact their transition into kindergarten. Case in point, Tina, a middle-income mother, said that she was concerned about her son's emotional adjustment and ability to separate without anxiety upon entering kindergarten. She stated:

Socially that's my main concern with Richard. Because some times he can be very shy. And ironically, even though Reese is younger, Richard goes through separation anxiety when I take him to school. He's holding on to my leg and doesn't want me to go. So socially I just want to make sure that he's ready to interact with different kids and just kind of able to hold his own. So that's what being ready is to me.

Francis, a low-income primary caregiver, was concerned as well about the emotional maturity of

Sammy, her three-year-old son. She stated one of the things that tell her that her preschooler

might not be ready for kindergarten is:

The whining, cause he does that a lot. Whine, whine, whine. You know and that will be something that will hold a child back. I was held back in kindergarten for another year because I wasn't mature enough to go into the first grade. Still falling out, having temper tantrums, not wanting to do the things that the group is doing, wanting to be non-sociable. And these are things that you need to learn in the kindergarten before you can go on to something else.

Ebony, a poor parent, is concerned that her preschooler's behaviors might be challenging for

school staff. She said:

This disobedientness....The way Jason acts. It's like he'll push his boundaries, you know? He'll see how far he can go and if he gets that far, he's not gonna stop. He's just gonna keep goin'. It's like, sometimes he'll lose control and I'm worried about that. He really can be a handful. He just stuck in what he wants to do and he's not gonna stop. You know what I mean? And, I don't want them [school staff] to get frustrated with him….It's easier for me to work with him on it. I'm his Mama.

Heather, a middle-class parent, pointed out that one of the things that tell her that her son,

Walter, is ready for kindergarten is fewer tantrums. She contended:

Good choices. Just the maturity. Being able to focus, being able to hang in there when he gets frustrated with a task. Less tantrums. [Tantrums] used to be a regular thing; I'm not seeing that to the same degree anymore.

Laurie, a middle-income mother, was an exception. She was concerned about her daughter's

behavior regulation. She explained:

Sometimes her behavior towards me concerns me. But I guess that might be typical of a child that age…So I don't know if that whining and crying because you didn't get what you wanted is a typical everyday occurrence in a classroom setting. So, sometimes stuff

like that. And you know she's a little active. So she's a bit energetic so that might be a
concern.

Similar to some mothers of boys, Laurie also was concerned about her daughter's level of

emotional maturity and self-regulation. She thought crying and hyperactivity might be a

challenge as her child transitioned into kindergarten. Unlike mothers of boys, she was not sure if

her expectations were aligned with school expectations for self regulation.

In general, self-regulation was also important among mothers of boys and girls. Parents

interpreted children's excitement for their pending transitions into school and learning in general

as positive signs of being ready for kindergarten. In general, mothers of boys tended to have

more concerns regarding self-regulation than mothers of girls. Though being able to control

their emotions and actions were more often concerning for mothers of boys, Laurie's comment

suggests that similar concerns might arise among mothers of active girls.

Findings suggest that being socially and emotionally competent prior to kindergarten was

considered as important as having nominal knowledge to mothers who participated in this study.

The emotional component of self-regulation was more commonly discussed in terms of being

ready for school. While a few parents expected some anxiety to occur for their children,

particularly mothers of boys who described their sons as sensitive or very active, children's

excitement about transitioning into kindergarten was noted by parent participants across social

class.

Connections and Disconnections

Self-regulation of behavior emerged among both educators and parents, but the skills and

competencies they emphasized differed. There was some variation between community

preschool educators and other educator subgroups. Self-regulation was not explicitly identified

in their conceptions of school readiness. However, pre-kindergarten teachers' focus on this

category was closely aligned with kindergarten level educators' expectations for incoming kindergarteners to be able to regulate their behavior in accordance with school rules and classroom culture. Parents' discussions of self-regulation centered on children's excitement for learning and their emotional well being as they separated from them and rarely on children's ability to conform to school rules except in the case of sending boys to school. Mothers' concerns about their son's ability to meet behavior expectation paralleled educators' emphasis on self-regulation of behavior.

Independence

This category was closely related to social competence and self-regulation of behavior. It entailed "the capacity for self-care and autonomy in being able to engage in a variety of activities in the classroom without assistance or one-to-one attentions from adults." Emergent competencies were being able to: complete daily tasks without constant adult supervision and intervention; address individual needs and wants; be self-sufficient in a group; and move independently about the classroom environment and routine.

Educators

Preschool and kindergarten level educators viewed independence as important for children's transitions into kindergarten. They pointed out the need for children to be able to zip, snap, button, and move from one task to the next with minimal assistance from the teacher who was usually the only adult in a classroom of twenty children. Independence offered practical, academic, and social benefits to children entering kindergarten.

Preschool. At the preschool level, educators noted the importance of self-help skills and having the ability to move independently about the classroom environment. Bridget, a local day

care teacher, provided an example of children's need to learn to complete tasks individually. She

asked the following questions when assessing readiness:

> Are they able to go and get their own water? How self sufficient are [they] to be able to do things by themselves and to fully dress they self and be able to do certain things like go to the rest room? [Do they know] how to use the bathroom then pull they clothes back up and wash their hands?

Bridget's comment suggests the need for children to have self-care skills such as drinking,

dressing, and toileting without help. This was an example of the practical component of

independence. Mary, a learning center owner and director, noted the following as indicators of

being ready for kindergarten "Tying their shoes, being able to put their shoes on and off, putting

their coat on and off, a lot of independent self-help skills. Being able to go to the bathroom."

This program director believed that being independent and having "self-help skills" were good

indicators of a *ready child*. Halle, a preschool teacher at Middleton Pre-K Program, further

illustrated the need for independence:

> We have periodically, throughout the years got to go watch the kindergarten. So we kinda see what they're [kindergarteners] going to have to do. They all have their little boxes and they have to do their own little activities and put them away and move kinda real independently. You know there's so many kids in a kindergarten classroom. So, I think about that a lot when I'm looking at what they can do now. Can they do that independently? Can they do seat work? You know we don't do a lot of seat work but we try to get them at least ready for the idea of sitting in your chair and…coloring your picture and putting it in your cubby or something like that.

To accommodate kindergarten expectations, Halle encouraged independence among her

preschoolers. One of Halle's goals for her preschoolers was to expose them to expectations for

independence prior to the first day of kindergarten.

Elementary. Several kindergarten teachers in the district verified the need for incoming

kindergarteners to have skills and competencies in the category of independence in their

responses to what children need to learn prior to kindergarten. For example, Pauline, a principal

in the district, agreed that self-help skills are important. She commented:

> I think they need to be potty-trained when they come to school. Not always we find out.
> I think it's really helpful if they can button their coat and tie their shoes and you know do
> those kinds of things because when you get like twenty-four children in a kindergarten
> room it can take forever to get coats button[ed] if they aren't able to do that. Most
> children nowadays can do that.

In classrooms where there is one teacher per twenty-four students, in order to get their needs met

and participate in school learning, Pauline advised that children be independent, though

developmental differences among children should be taken into account. Jackie, a new

kindergarten teacher, offered the following example of the importance of independence for

school learning:

> I have a kiddo who came to kindergarten not being able to do any of those things on his
> own. When he can't get past putting his coat on or taking his coat off on his own, then it
> takes him that much longer to sit down and be ready to learn. Or he can't go to the
> bathroom by himself, then the social development kinda hurts too, because the other kids,
> you know they pick up on those things. And even in kindergarten they'll start to tease
> and stuff like that so it hurts, like, his self confidence and that's gonna spill over into
> every other aspect of learning.

Jackie's real world example suggests that social competence impacts children's ability to learn in

multiple domains. Jackie illustrated the ramifications of not being able to engage in self-care

activities on academic and social adjustments upon entering kindergarten. Janice, a kindergarten

teacher, described being able to address their personal needs as important for children to learn

before starting elementary school. She noted the following as important for the first day of

kindergarten:

> Self-help skills. Knowing how to go to the bathroom by yourself. Knowing how to ask
> for help if you need it. It's amazing the number of kids who need help and they just stand
> there. Teaching a child to ask for help if they need it is really important.

Janice highlights that not only do children need self-help skills but language skills are also required in order for children to request help when they need it. Within the independence category also was children's ability to move about autonomously. Consider the following comment Lindsay, a kindergarten teacher in the district, provided:

> Other things that they know [are] being able to maybe monitor themselves. Being aware of what they're doing. Again, how to ask for help but also, being aware of, you know, if they're finished with a task they can move on independently. Or do they have the ability to wrap something up completely and move on to a new task. That would be important too, because I find that is a struggle for some kids to start something and finish it before [they say] oh now I want to do this or now I want to do this.

Lindsay pointed out the need for children to be able to independently communicate their wants and ask for help when needed. This further suggests the connectedness between language and literacy and independence categories. Like Halle, a pre-kindergarten teacher, Lindsay highlighted the expectation that kindergarteners move independently from task to task with minimal distraction and adult direction.

Exercising self-help was considered a top concern among educators, primarily within the district, as children transition into kindergarten. Findings suggest that with added academic demands comes increased need for autonomy and independence among young children as they begin school. In fact, limitations within these domains were cited to carry over into other categories of school readiness.

Parents

The independence category was not as prominent among primary caregivers as it was among educators who participated in this study. Yet, being independent also was included in some parents' conceptions of "school readiness."

Low-income. Being potty-trained was commonly identified as an important self-care skill to have prior to beginning kindergarten. For example, Grace, a working class parent, said "Like

I say, I guess basically, number one they want them to be potty-trained or whatever and just how

to act with people." In addition to knowing "how to act with people, Grace also believed that

children had to be able to be independent and engage in self-care activities. Wendy, a mother

and student teacher, explained why being independent was important for her child to learn before

entering kindergarten:

> Being able to also be independent a little more than in preschool because when you get to kindergarten, it's a bigger classroom. Because right now it's only like thirteen kids in her class, compared to twenty-four [in kindergarten]. That's what worries me a lot, too. Kayla being more independent and not getting that one-on-one a lot from the teacher and having to do things on your own, being a big girl.

After some discussion with her preschooler's pre-kindergarten teacher, Wendy noted the need to

encourage her daughter to become more independent before her first day of school.

Middle-class and affluent parents did not typically include independence in their

discussion of what school readiness means or what children need to learn prior to entering

kindergarten. As an exception, Joy, an older adoptive parent, had this to say regarding what

children need to learn:

> I think a kindergartner should be able to even dress themselves and be able to try to be a little independent for as far as going [to kindergarten]. I know they're not always independent but if you're teaching your child just general information about what's going on when they go to kindergarten, I think it helps the child to transition to kindergarten in a safer way and not a scary way.

Having the skills needed to be safe was an important component of independence. Joy

highlighted security as a school readiness concern. According to Joy, developing independence

was considered an important life skill for incoming kindergarteners to have in order to safely

transition into school.

Connections and Disconnections

Educators stressed independence across subgroups in their conceptions of school readiness. They pinpointed the need for self-help and communication skills as well as children's abilities to direct their attention and energies independently. The independence category emerged more frequently among poor and working-class parents than middle-class and affluent ones. Therefore, poor and working-class mothers were more aligned with educators' expectations for independence as children transitioned into kindergarten.

Motor Skills and Physical Health

The need for motor skills was another category that did not emerge often among participants in this study in their conceptions of school readiness. The motor skills category encompasses children's "ability to engage in activities that require fine and gross motor skills." A few teachers, across program levels and types, noted motor skill development in their descriptions of what children need to learn prior to entering kindergarten. Some skills that emerged were: writing and filling in spaces using writing instruments; cutting; throwing; catching; and climbing. The physical health component emerged among kindergarten teachers and administrators as essential for school learning. This included the need for children to be nutritiously fed and properly rested.

Preschool. Motor skills were embedded in preschool teachers' descriptions of what children needed to learn prior to starting kindergarten. A daycare teacher, Katie, included fine motor skills in addition to nominal concepts in her description of school readiness. She noted that children should be able to "Hold a pencil correctly. To basically get ready for school [know] how to write their name, how to write it up and things of that nature." Katie outlined several fine motor skills important for school learning. The district pre-kindergarten program specifically

included motor skills in their report cards. Pre-kindergarten teacher, Donna, provided several

examples of the motor skills that she focused on with her preschoolers in preparation for

kindergarten:

> Fine motor things like be able to cut with scissors on straight lines, on curvy lines. Also writing, holding a writing utensil correctly. Being able to draw some sort of recognizable thing even if it's just a smiley face. Then there's some gross motor things like riding a tricycle by themselves, and climbing safely and catching and throwing and kicking a ball, things like that.

Though she did not state skills from the report card, Halle, another pre-kindergarten teacher,

asserted that she did not know what school readiness should mean, but in her experience some

fine motor ability was *now* required upon entering kindergarten. She said "They [children]

should be writing their names. Now they want them to do that in kindergarten." Donna added

that writing is not uniformly expected by all kindergarten teachers. She stated:

> Writing their name is iffy. Some kindergarten teachers, they expect them to know how to write their name before they get to kindergarten. At the pre-k level, it's difficult because their little fingers are not quite ready yet to form the lower case letters. And so each teacher differs as far as what they teach their kids to write….But most kindergarten teachers would like to see them writing their name.

Though expectations varied, some fine motor skills were considered important among preschool

teachers. Additionally, some preschool teachers perceived fine motor abilities such as writing as

an expectation of kindergarten programs in the district.

> *Elementary*. Fine motor skills were discussed by some kindergarten teachers in reference

to emergent writing abilities. For example, Karla said that "It's nice if they know how to draw a

person. Just the basic shapes of a person." According to veteran kindergarten teacher Nancy,

children need some fine motor skill development prior to entering school. She said:

> They [children] should have held a pencil and held scissors before, or held crayons and markers or something so that they have had some experience. They're not still at the scribbling stage but able to fill in a space.

According to Janice, emergent writing prior to kindergarten is "fine" but not necessary for the

first day:

> Well it's nice if they can recognize their own name. A lot of children come in attempting
> to write their name but they start bottom or backwards or whatever. We teach them how
> to write their name soon enough. If you want to work on writing their name and a lot of
> preschools do, that's fine, that's wonderful.

Being able to write their names was not one of Janice's expectations for incoming

kindergarteners though some are able to do so. She explained that children learned to write their

names in kindergarten.

In addition to fine motor skills, several educators included physical health as a key factor

in children's transition into kindergarten. This was highlighted most by elementary school

teachers and district administrators. For instance, kindergarten teacher Janice emphasized

nutrition and rest as important for children to be ready to learn. She stated:

> Every cotton picking day at school it means that they come to school well-rested with
> something in their tummies. Now, that's not always a possibility, I mean, food at home.
> I know because I've made food deliveries. I know that right here in Middleton that is a
> serious problem in our community for some of the children….I've done home visits. I
> know some of these children don't have a bed of their own. They fall asleep where ever
> there's a space, when ever there's time. But if there was a way that children could go to
> bed at a regular time and get restful sleep that would be great. That's everyday.

Access to basic needs such as food and sleep emerged as crucial to learning in kindergarten

according to Janice. Zoë, Janice's building principal, agreed that nutrition and rest are important

components of school readiness. She explained:

> I think there needs to be a whole component with nutrition. Children sugared up,
> caffeined up, eating foods that make them lethargic. I noticed children don't have a sleep
> schedule. They go to bed when ever they want when they're little. Then they come to
> school and they're not prepared. And I think research will bear out that children who are
> rested are able to learn and retain what they learn.

Diet and rest were identified as ways to promote health and well-being that enabled children to

attend and take in concepts being taught in kindergarten. Zoë's statement also illustrates the

interconnectedness of physical health with other school readiness categories. District

administrator Rachel offered an even more direct statement of the interconnectedness of school

readiness categories. She noted:

> When kids come into school you're not just looking at their academic readiness but you're looking at their social and emotional well-being, their health and all of those things come into play for kids when they come into school. So all of those pieces fit and they're in sync then kids are going to be successful learners. If there is one thing that's not in sync, if a kid is not emotionally healthy, the kid is not getting the nutrition that they need on a daily basis, if kids are not being read to and they don't have this word bank that they can retrieve information readily then they're gonna struggle.

Educators at the kindergarten level and beyond who took part in this study included some aspect

of children's physical health and well-being in their conceptions of school readiness, thereby

suggesting health as a key component of school readiness.

Parents

Parents did not typically go into detail in terms of motor skills and physical health in their

descriptions of school readiness. Few middle-class parents mentioned motor skills and when

they did it was briefly and generally noted. For example Nicki included "concentrate[ing] on

their motor skills" as important in preparation for kindergarten. Uniquely, one of the readiness

goals for middle-class mother Laurie was writing. She stated "The only concern that I have

probably is the writing and they're working with her on that. She's not as strong in writing her

letters and things that I think she probably could be." Though Laurie viewed her daughter as

ready for kindergarten, one of her goals was for her to more fully develop her writing skills.

Having opportunities to develop motor skills to include fine and gross motor were

included in conceptions of "school readiness." Primarily among kindergarten and district level

participants, physical health and well-being emerged. They highlighted the importance of

ensuring children were in good health, had nutritious food, and were getting restful sleep in definitions as well.

Connections and Disconnections

Like inferential reasoning, motor skills were not typically included in what participants cited as important for children to learn prior to beginning kindergarten. A small group of educators identified fine and, to a lesser extent, gross motor skills in their conceptions of school readiness. Data suggest that expectations for emergent writing varied in this school district. Though parents were less likely to include motor skills, the exceptions were middle-class mothers. Unlike other subgroups, kindergarten teachers and administrators included physical health and well-being in their conceptions of school readiness as essential.

Across participant type, program level and type, and social class these categories of key skills were identified as important for children to learn. However, there was some variation among notions of what children need to learn in order to transition smoothly into kindergarten among participants, particularly by program type and social class. There was a degree of connection and disconnection between the categories of general knowledge, nominal knowledge; language and literacy, inferential reasoning; social competence; self-regulation, independence, and motor skills and physical health across this sample. To summarize, nominal knowledge and social competence were points of continuity across the multiple ecological contexts. Self-regulation was the only school readiness category that emerged as gendered.

Mundane Feature of Childhood

Parents focused on school readiness as a process and mundane feature of childhood, signaling a shift in developmental stages that provoked both excitement and anxiety as discussed in the self-regulation subsection. Unlike the majority of educators who described school

readiness in terms of skills and competencies needed or expected in kindergarten, parents did not

typically use similar technical language in their meaning-making around the phrase "school

readiness." Instead of discussing skills and competencies, parents broadly constructed school

readiness processes and interpreted the phrase as foreshadowing a stage in development. Data

suggest that entering elementary school is viewed by primary caregivers as a normal transition

and part of life in this community school district. Importantly, social class differences emerged

among African American mothers' descriptions of what school readiness meant to them.

Middle-Income Families

Beginning kindergarten appeared to have a taken-for-granted meaning. Though they

were excited about the pending transition into kindergarten, some parents had not thought much

about "school readiness" and what it means prior to being interviewed for this study. Connie, a

mother who is sending her first child into kindergarten next school year, stated "It just seems like

it's just what you do; you turn five and you go to kindergarten; I never really thought of it as

being that big a deal. Is that weird?" School readiness was taken for granted as a naturally

occurring stage of development. Another middle-class parent also reported not having thought

about "readiness" or the specifics of entering kindergarten before participating in this study.

At the end of the interview, Laura's final comment suggested the taken-for-granted dimension of

school readiness. She explained that she had not thought of some of the questions about

transitioning into kindergarten prior to the interview in this study:

> You asked some thought-provoking questions. I mean I actually haven't given it that
> much thought, some of the questions that you've asked, so that gives me some things to
> think about.

There was more that Laura wanted to learn about preparing her daughter that she had not

"thought much about" before participating in the school readiness interview. One older parent,

Joy, whose preschooler attended Sweetie Pie Learning Center, suggested that school readiness

denoted a new stage of growing up. She commented that school readiness means:

> Preparing them [children] for more or better education as they get older. Kind of gives
> them a head start on some of the things that they are going to be facing in life and going
> on to the first grade.

Among middle-class and affluent parents' meanings of school readiness there was also

variation. For a few affluent parent participants, the pending transition into kindergarten

provoked anxiety. It was not only considered an element of growing up, it could impact their

children's lives and futures in important ways. This was particularly the case among middle-

class parents whose children attended First Stop Private Preschool. School readiness was

discussed in terms of their children transitioning from private preschool into public kindergarten

programs. It was discussed within the local context of controlled choice and the national policy

context of the No Child Left Behind Act. Consider the subsequent comments from Heather and

Pam respectively:

> We can only speak in generalities and not specifics, and I'd rather be able to do that. I'd
> rather be, at this point, talking to specific teachers and I can't cause I don't really know
> where Walter's going. And I won't know until I know.

> I mean, I stayed there [district forum on controlled choice] till it was over asking him
> questions. And people might have thought, gosh what is wrong with her? It's just
> kindergarten. Well, it's not just kindergarten to me. You know it's really important.
> And since they made this big deal of choosing schools and balancing it racially; I mean, it
> is insane.

Heather and Pam's comments suggest that transitioning into kindergarten is an important

beginning to school learning. The school assignment procedures appeared to provoke anxiety

because parents were not guaranteed their school of choice. One negative case example among

private preschool families was Melissa, mother of two preschoolers. School readiness had taken-

for-granted meaning for her. For instance when Melissa was asked what school readiness means

to her she responded, "I haven't really thought about all of this ahead of time. I have to be honest with you."

Low-Income Families

Mothers often described going to kindergarten as a mundane experience in the process of "growing up" and a feature of childhood. Though mothers commented that children needed to be academically and socially prepared for kindergarten in their constructions of school readiness, a more common response among poor and low-income parents was the conception of the transition into kindergarten as a journey into the "world." When asked what does school readiness mean to you, several parents explained how kindergarten signified that children were growing up and taking their first steps out on their own. For example, Alicia, who is a mother of two preschoolers who attend Middleton Pre-K Program, had the following to say about what school readiness means:

> I think it's…more, Gabby's starting to be a big girl now. She's moving on up there, getting ready to try to build a life for herself. You've got to start at the bottom and work your way up.

Additionally, Bonnie suggested that school readiness means being prepared for life's adventures. According to her, it entailed "[Preparing] a child for an adventure of learning. Getting them ready for things that will happen in life, basically." Xenophia also constructed school readiness in relation to life preparation. She said "I think it's preparing them for life and for school, period." These findings were particularly salient for low-income parents whose children attended the district pre-kindergarten program. Starting kindergarten was the beginning of children's school experience and independent efforts.

Transitioning into kindergarten was generally considered a typical event that happens in the lives of children and families. In fact, some parents had not thought about the transition, in

detail, prior to participating in this study. In the local context of controlled choice and the national context of the No Child Left Behind Act, meanings of school readiness varied by families' preschool program. Middle-class primary caregivers whose children attended a private preschool tended to express more concern about their children's pending transition into kindergarten than others. Findings suggest that kindergarten marks young children's transition into the "world" outside of the home that requires "growing up."

Connections and Disconnections

Educators primarily defined "school readiness" as a marked entry into school learning, denoted by demonstration of developmental competencies. Contrarily, African American mothers more generally made meaning of "school readiness" as a mundane feature of childhood and growing up. Primary caregivers overwhelmingly described their preschoolers as eager to learn and excited about their pending transitions into kindergarten, across social class. Having the desire and interest to learn more was the primary way in which parents determined that their children were "ready" for school.

Chapter Summary

What school readiness means and what school readiness entails were intertwined and interrelated. These meanings and descriptions of what children should learn prior to starting school were multifaceted. Overall, nominal knowledge; general knowledge; language/early literacy; inferential reasoning; social competence; self-regulation of behavior; independence; and motor skills and physical health categories were not mutually exclusive. They overlapped in participants' responses, and their interpretations of these school readiness categories were interconnected.

The absence of reference to certain school readiness categories and related skills and competencies did not indicate that participants thought they were unimportant. They could have simply not come to mind during the interview. However, inclusion or exclusion did suggest that certain skills, concepts, and competencies were more or less central among subgroups of participants. Generally, participants emphasized the idea that children learn the basics. Most participants agreed that children should be able to recite and identify the alphabet, numbers, and familiar objects as well as be able to interact well with others in a variety of social situations, show excitement for learning and starting kindergarten, and possess the basic knowledge of self and family needed to keep them safe. Other than that, views varied across subgroups. Self-regulation of behavior and motor skills and physical health was more commonly included in educators' comments regarding readiness skills. Mothers of boys more often described self-regulation competencies as important to learn and/or school readiness concerns in comparison to mothers of girls.

Similarities and differences between educators' and parents' views suggest that program type and social class were related to the degree of connection and disconnection of expectations for school readiness. To begin, in comparison to community preschool program educators, educators employed at Middleton Pre-K Program conceived school readiness in ways that were closely aligned to the elementary level educators' expectations. This was expected because the pre-kindergarten is a district asset. Pre-kindergarten teachers noted more direct and sustained connections with public school staff. The mission also was specifically related to preparing children for kindergarten. Continuity across these two contexts was clear. Connections between the public schools and community programs were less evident though these educators had similar missions—preparing children for kindergarten. Attending the Pre-K program offered

some advantage for children in comparison to other programs because though a selective group of children considered "at risk" for developmental difficulties only received 2 ½ hours of instruction, the program could offer a good amount of continuity across preschool and elementary contexts.

The language and early literacy category most clearly illustrated the connection between middle-class and affluent homes with school expectations and the disconnection between poor and working-class ones. Middle-class and affluent mothers' views were aligned with educators' expectations for emergent literacy. In fact, affluent mothers' focus on children reading by the time they entered kindergarten exceeded kindergarten-level educators' expectations. Middle-class parents' congruency with school expectations for language and early literacy has the potential to confer "academic profits" to their children as they transition into kindergarten. Poor and working-class families' focus on providing their children with "the basics" translates into fewer "academic profits" upon entering kindergarten.

On the other hand, poor and working-class families' focus on independence in preparation for kindergarten suggests that these children may be more able to navigate social situations than their middle-class peers who were more attuned to self-regulation among boys. In this sense, poor and working-class children might enter kindergarten with as much or more "social currency" than their middle-class peers.

Though a subgroup of middle-income parents expressed concern regarding their children's transitions into kindergarten in the local context of controlled choice, primary caregivers generally interpreted school readiness as a process and a mundane feature of childhood. Almost all parents, across subgroups, described their kindergarten-bound children as excited and ready for kindergarten. Families typically described minor scheduling changes as

children transitioned into kindergarten. However, a few parents anticipated major adjustments to their work schedules in preparation for their children's first day of school.

Following Chapter

Parents' conceptions of school readiness are believed to be related to activities they engage in to prepare children for kindergarten. In the following chapter, I explore participants' perceptions of the ways in which social class, race, and gender influence children's transitions into kindergarten. I describe social class currencies, racial ideologies, and gender lenses and the potential impact each can have on school readiness and kindergarten transitions more generally.

CHAPTER 6: SOCIAL INEQUALITY: RACE, CLASS & GENDER

Research suggests the social structure impacts children's experiences learning in schools. Social class, race, and gender are systems of stratification in the U.S. social structure. This chapter examines local perceptions of the impact of these systems on children's transitions from home into school. It offers an examination of how educators and parents conceive, interpret, and/or construct social class, race, and gender in the context of preparing children for kindergarten. Key findings identify: (1) racial ideologies, (2) social class as currency, and (3) gender ideologies. Educators' and parents' perceptions varied within and across participant types and levels. Three racial ideologies emerged from these data. They varied by race and social class. Participants, across subgroups, described social class currencies as having the potential to yield profits upon entering kindergarten. Two gender ideologies emerged that centered upon embodiment and self-regulation. Gender ideologies were also similar across subgroups however educators and participants offered slightly different perspectives and both had the potential to confer school readiness advantages and disadvantages.

Social Class Currency

Social class was considered influential as children transition into kindergarten. Social class affected families' abilities to: meet basic needs and/or provide "extra" resources prior to entering and upon entering kindergarten. In general, participants, across type, level, and parents' social class, noted the importance of having or not having access to financial resources on children's transitions into kindergarten. Educators' and parents' perceptions varied, with some parents noting the advantages and disadvantages of having and not having financial resources, and others reporting little influence on transitioning into kindergarten and parenting.

Meeting Basic Needs

Financial resources were considered important as children transitioned into kindergarten because it influences families' abilities to ensure children's basic needs are met. Social class afforded, or not, parents the ability to promote children's physical health in preparation for school. Differences across program type and level were minimal.

Educators

Generally, educators noted the importance of children having food to eat, a routine where they get rest, parents who spend time with them, and their medical needs met in preparation for kindergarten. According to several educators, having access to financial resources was a crucial factor contributing to families' abilities to meet children's basic needs in preparation for kindergarten. There were slight variations by program type, with community preschool administrators and teachers more often noting the possibility for families to offset lack of financial resources.

Preschool. This emerged primarily among educators who were employed in Middleton School District as educators, to include those working at Middleton Pre-K Program. Community preschool educators less commonly identified meeting basic needs as a currency of social class. One exception was Bridget, a daycare teacher in the community, who offered the following example of how lack of financial resources might affect a child's readiness to learn:

> Well if [a child] don't have nothing at home to eat. By him not being able to eat when he come to school he may be hungry and that child being hungry he, [don't] got that energy to really put into that in reading, doing his homework. Or not even that he may have the energy but he might just feel sad or depressed

Lack of energy and self-esteem were ways the limited financial resources affect children's ability to learn in school according to Bridget.

Instead of noting the impact of having or not having financial resources on children's transition into kindergarten, some preschool level educators discussed the availability of resources to offset limited financial resources. They contended that motivated working-class and poor parents could provide children with stimulating learning opportunities by being resourceful. For example, Annette, a daycare teacher and a parent, described community resources that can help parents in meeting children's basic and educational needs for kindergarten. She said:

> I don't think it does only because again, as a parent and as a teacher there's a lot of programs out there that will help. There is a program out there that give children, if parents can't afford school lunches….If you can, if they can not afford the text books and school supplies, there's programs out there that can help and they are utilized….I mean you can take the simplest things and make a learning tool out of it. You don't have to be a millionaire to go get elaborate things for your children, you can go to any store and get a set of index cards and make flash cards.

Mary, a director of the same program, also noted the vast number of free resources available for families with limited financial means. Mary emphasized that parents had to be aware of resources in order to take advantage of them. She said:

> I feel like there are a lot of resources available for families who don't have the resources. I just don't know if they're using those resources. We have public libraries there's lots of workshops, even the library has workshops so if you're not willing to participate, I mean these workshops are free. I think it's the willingness cause it's a lot of programs that are free that you can just take your kids to.

According to Mary being aware and willing to seek and manage neighborhood resources could buffer the effect of social class on children's school readiness.

Pre-kindergarten educators often noted that social class impacted families' abilities to meet children's basic needs, which was considered a key component of school readiness. For instance, Donna, a pre-kindergarten teacher, contended that though some families are resilient, having or not having financial resources impacts their abilities to meet children's basic nutritional needs. She asserted:

> I think that even if a child grows up in a very poor home, you know as long as they're getting of course their basic, basic needs are first. A child cannot learn if they're hungry. If they're sleepy it's harder for them to learn. But this world is…it's very hard to make a living.

Like Bridget, Donna suggested that meeting children's basic needs was crucial for their abilities to learn in school. Donna discussed the ways in which hunger and sleepiness can distract children's attentions from school learning. Sally, Donna's colleague at a pre-kindergarten program, agreed that basic needs must be addressed in order for school learning to take place. She stated:

> I do think, not necessarily across the board, but I do think because there's a lot of stressors in those [low-income] families, it's harder for those children to just get the general readiness that can happen when the family isn't stressed because there's enough income.

Sally specifically associated social class status with school readiness. Her comment suggests that middle-class and affluent families are better positioned to promote school readiness skills and competencies than low-income families that are under stress because financial resources are limited.

Elementary. Kindergarten-level educators overwhelmingly emphasized the impact of social class on children's school readiness and transition into kindergarten. They viewed parents' first concern for their children as meeting their basic needs. At the kindergarten level, social class was currency for the acquisition of a "healthy family" life that promoted school readiness. Consider the following example provided by Rachel, a district level administrator:

> I think in the best world we would have healthy families. But we're in a world where there's a lot of families are under a lot of pressure and they don't have appropriate health care. We have a governmental system and president who doesn't espouse that same belief that all kids deserve good quality health care and that's a problem because even for working families health care costs are just awful. So if families don't have access to good health care, if they're struggling to just meet the day to day demands of living, if they don't have someone working with them because social services to help support the

family at large so that they can develop good, strong, healthy relationships with their kids. The kids are really in trouble before they get to school.

Ensuring the general health and well-being of children and families was suggested as the best way to prepare children for kindergarten. Rachel illuminated the need for collective actions of communities that supported families in their efforts to meet their most basic needs first. She suggested that this support would promote poor children's transitions into kindergarten. Similarly, Janice, a kindergarten teacher, discussed the challenges poor, working families faced in meeting children's basic nutritional needs. She said:

> If you're a child who eats whatever your family can have then you might not have the vitamins and minerals you need for your brain to develop the way it's supposed to. It doesn't mean you can't learn. But it means that you might need more repetitions to learn the same thing as someone whose synapses are firing quickly. Nutrition is huge. In the homes where mom and dad struggle to make ends meet. Those are the moms and dads who work really hard jobs. They're tired when they get home. They've probably been on their feet all day. The last thing they want to do is sit and read a book or have a miscellaneous conversation about nothing.

Janice's comment suggests that working poor families struggle to balance meeting basic needs and interacting with their children at home in preparation for kindergarten. She noted that often times work related and financial stresses impinged upon parent-child interaction around reading and talking.

They perceived that having or not having access to financial resources to meet these basic needs influenced children's readiness to learn upon entering kindergarten. For example, Zoë, an elementary school principal, illustrated differences that might exist among incoming kindergarten students with affluent compared to poor family backgrounds. She stated:

> It's going to be very different if you have an educated parent as opposed to not educated parent, if you have financial resources to get you the supports you need and provide interesting opportunities for you, learning experiences and if you're struggling to pay the bills and feed your kids. You come with a whole different understanding when you come to school.

Nancy, a kindergarten teacher, agreed that social class played a key role in preparation for

kindergarten. She suggested that if parents are under pressure to meet their families' basic

needs, other activities that might help children be successful in school might not be a priority:

> Well I think not having financial resources affects everything for a family. I mean if it's a family that's motivated, has no money but is motivated then you'd hope they're going to the library and getting books and giving them experiences by talking to them and taking them places that are free. But the reality of [it] is not having financial resources is a lot of times you just worried about the food that you're gonna feed your family and the clothing that they need to wear. And you're not, it's probably not one of the things you can take on is the academic or social worries that families who don't have the basic needs worries can then take on.

According to Nancy, basic needs took precedence over family life at the neglect of promoting

language and early literacy important for children to be exposed to prior to entering kindergarten.

Having financial resource offered families currency for directly meeting basic needs and

indirectly promoted school readiness.

Lindsay, a kindergarten teacher, offered a practical example of the opportunities social

class grants or denies incoming kindergarten students. She described how school supplies can be

a financial burden for families. She said:

> I think it's the biggest thing that I notice is families that struggle to get supplies from our supply list. For example, for Time Center you need PE shoes, they don't want you wearing outside shoes in the gym; you know you can't wear Black shoes that will scuff up the gym. The kindergarteners need a rest mat or a towel or something that they can lay on. You know you can direct families, you can get it at Wal-Mart, you can get it at Target. Some times that still is very, very difficult for some families.

Lack of school resources leaves more expenses for families to accommodate in order for their

children to have what they need to be able to engage in school activities and assignments. For

poor families who are struggling to provide children with food, clothing, and shelter, Lindsay

noted that often times, teachers bear financial burdens. Though the majority of kindergarten-

level educators noted the importance of social class on school readiness, James, an elementary

school principal, was an exception:

> I mean I don't think that you need to have the Internet or you have to have cable TV to read to your kids. You can take them to the library and read books for free. There are book give-a-ways at Salvation Army and The Public Library. Every year they just give books away. So I think if parents know where those resources are at. So financially does it have a impact? I don't think so. I think as a parent you can get your kid ready at home just by teaching some basic skills at home.

Like community preschool educators, James noted that community organizations could support

parents' efforts to prepare their children for school with limited resources. He suggested that

teaching children the basics did not require financial resources.

Parents

Unlike district-employed educators, parent participants rarely mentioned meeting their

children's basic needs as an issue for their families. However, a small subgroup of working-

class and poor parents discussed the impact of limited financial resources upon parenting and

family life in general. The struggle to meet basic needs was most often discussed by working-

class and poor families. Denise, a working-class mother, noted how financial concerns could be

distracting in a family. She explained:

> Well, having resources would definitely be nice because I think it would open up a doorway for us to do a little bit more and not have to stress more about money than about taking care of just...well, not so much taking care of, but just being around the kids. And, I think the fact that, you know, now that since we're a one-income family, it's become extremely difficult. Because we're focusing more on how we're going to pay this, how we're going to keep a roof over our kids' heads, how we're going make sure they're gonna have enough food, how are we gonna make sure they have clothes to wear? You know, so our focus shifts a little bit from focusing all of our attention on being a family and being more focused and appreciative of what we have to, oh my God, I hope we can keep this up.

Ebony, a poor mother, also discussed the trade off between meeting children's basic needs and

participating in activities outside of the home. She stated:

> Sometimes it's like you want to take your family out for a nice dinner cause you don't feel like cooking. Or you just want to take your family out for a nice dinner. Or you got a bill to pay. Which one you gonna choose, the bill or the dinner? Of course, you gonna choose the bill because how your kids gonna eat a nice dinner but they ain't got no lights at home?

According to Ebony basic needs were first priority. She sacrificed recreational activities to ensure her children's basic needs were provided despite limited financial resources available by virtue of her social class position.

Parents generally suggested that there was little that their children *needed* for kindergarten that they could not afford. For example, Xenophia, a working poor mother of four, said that having or not having financial resources did not affect being a mother or kindergarten preparation. She noted:

> It doesn't affect at all because you don't need money to be a mother. You need to keep the bills paid. But as far as me teaching them, I don't need money to teach them right from wrong. School, I don't think finances would be a problem. I mean if I did have it or didn't have it so.

Xenophia did not think social class impacted children's school readiness or her ability to parent. She noted that though ensuring basic necessities and paying bills required money, teaching children in preparation for kindergarten did not.

Laura, another middle-income mother, noted that ensuring that her daughter's basic needs were met was not an issue for their family. She said:

> But, I don't think it will affect her in the way of havin' food and clothes you know shelter, being able to go to school, [or] being able to participate in activities; unless they're terribly expensive.

Though Laura is a middle-class parent, she noted that compared to more affluent families, cost might prohibit her daughter's participation in expensive activities. Additionally, Shana, a middle-class mother, said that having or not having financial resources "Really hasn't affected me too much….I just do what I have to do to make it. Me and Lawrence do what we have to do

to make it." Parents tended to make budgets to make sure that children have what they need for

kindergarten even if financial resources were limited. For example, Francis, a working-class

caregiver, offered the following example:

> No [there are not things that I think my child should have for kindergarten that I cannot
> afford] because I always make a way. My children, they have enough over and beyond
> what they need with just me providing it. And so, I don't ever have any problems with
> getting the things they need, whether it's for school or anything else.

Francis's comment suggests that some families are resilient in providing children with basic

needs for kindergarten. She said that she would "make a way" to meet her children's basic

needs.

Parents maintained a vested interest in providing children with what they needed for

kindergarten and schooling in general to the best of their abilities. At times this involves

accessing personal and community resources. Vanessa, a middle-class grandparent, reflected on

her experiences and how she would find ways to provide academic-related experiences. Vanessa

stated that to provide for educational activities and resources her grandchild needed for

kindergarten:

> Well, what I would do, I would find a way. I would find a way. Like, even with, well,
> with my daughter, she went to space camp. There's no way, at the time I could pay for it.
> There was no way I could come up with a thousand dollars….I would find a way, beyond
> a doubt. If that means taking up a second job or something, I would find a way.

Vanessa accessed her personal resources to provide her daughter with an opportunity to

participate in an activity that went beyond basic needs. She stated that she would attempt to

buffer the impact of limited financial resources by attempting to work a second job for additional

income.

Working-class and poor parents took advantage of free resources available to them within Middleton Community to assist in meeting children's needs. Grace combined personal resources and community resources to buffer the effects of limited financial resources:

> It can hurt to some extent but then again it's a way to get around some of the expenses. And it's like we've been blessed enough to be able to keep Internet around them for the most part and stuff. But also I know there's other places that if I can't have it here at home it's accessible at libraries and there's other free spots and stuff, to do a lot of stuff. And same as reading books. Even if we couldn't have a book in the house and keep it in the house, there's so many resources out here that you can use if you're aware of it.

Grace identified the public library as a resource for accessing books. Like community preschool educators she stressed the importance of awareness in families' abilities to navigate resources to supplement their efforts. Nicki did not view social class as a hindrance to preparing children for kindergarten. She also described resources that she could take advantage of as needed:

> It don't really affect me because it because I just keep on trying. If I can't get it at this place, I'll go here. Or I'll ask this person or I'll like call like the Emergency Care Center. I'll be asking them questions because they help you with a lot of stuff.

Nicki's comment suggests that she was aware of at least one community resource that she could access to help her prepare her son for kindergarten.

Connections and Disconnections

Social class currencies conferred basic needs. Educators suggest that middle-class social standing provided financial resources that offered families the time to focus their attention away from daily stresses of meeting basic needs to focusing on providing children with opportunities that promoted school readiness. Contrarily, when families had limited or lacked access to resources, and basic needs were difficult to meet, children's ability to learn in school was adversely impacted. Parents, across social class, rarely stated that they struggled to meet their children's basic needs. However, there were a few exceptions whereby working-class and poor families noted that basic needs distracted attention away from other activities. Parents,

particularly working-class and poor ones, worked hard to meet their families' basic needs first;

being ready for school was one of those. Several parents commented that they attempt to ensure

children have what they need by managing their personal and community resources.

<center>*"Extra" Resources*</center>

Social class also emerged as currency for affording "extra" resources and opportunities to

promote school readiness and support school learning. Findings suggest that having financial

resources exposed children to various activities while not having financial resources did not.

This was typically noted across participant types, program levels, and social class subgroups.

Educators

Some educators believed that families who had access to financial resources were better

positioned to provide "those extra things" children might need in their transition into

kindergarten. Having or not having financial resources impacted families' abilities to provide

children with extra resources that were believed to promote school readiness at the kindergarten

level.

Preschool. Preschool-level educators rarely mentioned the impact of financial resources

on providing extras. One exception was Faith, the owner and director of Sweetie Pie Learning

Center. She said that even though social class should not matter, it did. She commented:

> I guess not having the financial means to make sure that you [a parent] get your child in a
> school that's gone give them all that they can. Being able to go to private schools, like a
> lot of these other children may….It can be a hindrance not having the financial stability
> to be able to afford those extra things. Rather it be a tutor or putting them in a private
> school where they can get more of a one-on-one type of [instruction].

Faith noted that having financial resources could confer advantages upon children who required

direct instruction to comprehend academic concepts. She identified private schools and tutoring

as extra resources social class afforded children in middle-class families but not working-class and poor children.

Elementary. Kindergarten-level educators suggested that having ample financial resources provided opportunities for children to handle books, visit museums and zoos, and travel, which were considered experiences that provided them with the "background knowledge" they needed to connect with skills and concepts taught in kindergarten. Consider Rachel's, a district level administrator's, comment regarding the impact of social class on children's transitions into kindergarten:

> [Social class] impacts the number of books the kids are exposed to, the number of times they're taken to the museum. There are lots of things that can be done if you don't have the financial resources but are they being done because parents and families in crisis are not thinking about the museum or taking their kids to the ballet. A lot of it too is just exposure, traveling. [Kids] just learn so much by being exposed to things. And so if they don't have the financial resources to do that then they're behind in a sense the kids that are able to do that. But we know that with good instruction and good support that you can close that gap.

Rachel's comment suggests that the exposure and experiences derived from having access to social class resources placed children ahead of their less well-off peers. She suggested that differences in children's exposure to books, cultural outings, and travel perpetuated a school readiness gap. Pauline agreed. She provided specific examples of the ways in which social class has currency for school readiness:

> Well I think not having financial resources definitely affects it because if you're a low-income family and you don't have the money to take your child to the zoo, to museums, and to travel, to leave time and go on vacations and see mountains and the ocean and things. Then when that child starts school, you know, and the teacher's talking about the ocean, they have no connection. The other child who's been to you know Florida, been on the beach, had the experience of finding seashells, playing in the sand and just hearing the ocean sounds. I mean, which one's gonna understand when the teacher's reading the story about going to the seashore. So it really, it does have an impact.

Pauline emphasized the role of financial resources in providing children unique experiences that prepared them for school learning. She suggested that these experiences connected middle class children to concepts presented in kindergarten classrooms and lack of these experiences was a point of disconnection for children whose families lacked financial resources. Lastly, Karla, a new kindergarten teacher, highlighted the tangible resource social class offered in terms of access to books. She explained:

> Having books at home is definitely influential. So having actual money to buy books helps kids be ready. And then they already know reading books left to right. And having parents who are there, not at work, to read those books to them or to read the books that I'm sending home and those kinds of things are helpful….I think it does affect it; mostly just having those resources like being able to take time to go to a museum and having that background knowledge.

Karla noted that having books at home contributed to children's preparation for kindergarten. Children with access to this resource gained valuable early literacy experiences. Social class also afforded families much needed time to physically engage children in reading activities.

Parents

Parents provided insight as to how having or not having financial resources could affect a child's transition into kindergarten as well as being a parent. Middle-class mothers typically discussed how having financial resources afforded their children opportunities and exposure prior to entering school. Working-class and poor parents generally noted how not having financial resources could impact children.

Middle-income. Middle-class parents discussed how having financial resources enabled them to provide their children with various opportunities in preparation for kindergarten. For instance, Melissa provided an example of an advantage of having financial resources:

> Oh God, it makes a huge difference. We're very fortunate that we have pretty decent financial resources readily available to us. And it's something I think helps a lot when

we have choices in what we want to do and what we get to do, and I think it makes a huge difference.

In general, having financial resources translated into a wider range of options available for Melissa's family to choose from in preparation for kindergarten. Vanessa, a grandparent of two, says that having financial resources has allowed them to all participate in a karate class. She explained:

Well...it helps to be able to do these things. To pay for this karate, it helps that I got a job and I can pay for it. Because, it helps you know to be able for them to enjoy it, cause anything you go to now, you have to pay for it. There's nothing free.

Financial resource granted Vanessa's grandchildren access to organized activities such as karate, which could promote school readiness.

Pam contended that having financial resources positively impacted being a parent as well as provided children extra resources they needed to be successful in school. She stated the following:

It's easier on me as a parent. I can move into a better neighborhood to put him in a better school district. Or I can afford to send him to a private preschool that helps me to prepare him to be a well-rounded kid going to kindergarten and things like that. People say, oh money's not everything. It's important. It's really important to be able to do some of the things you want to do. When I want to take him to the zoo [in another state], I can do that….And, some people can't.

Pam's statement was aligned with educators in the district who discussed the important role financial resources played in families' abilities to provide children with cultural experiences. Having financial resources provided Pam's son with a selective neighborhood, private preschool education, and travel to the zoo which could all confer advantages prior to and upon entering kindergarten.

Low-income. Discussing how not having financial resources impacted children and parenting occurred more among working-class and poor families. Some of these caregivers

noted that they were not able to provide children with the extra resources they wanted for their children. For instance, Niecey stated that limited financial resources resulted in her child not being able to attend an after-school program. She stated:

> I wanted to put Belinda in this after-school program that they have at Sojouner Center or the recreation center out there by Middleton Pool. They had fees you had to pay. I think the recreation center was like $20 a day whatever activity there was. And Sojouner it was like $65 or $70 a month for their little thing. I mean it was worth it but at the time I couldn't afford it.

Though she viewed participation in organized activities as important, Niecey could not afford to provide her preschooler with the experience. Wendy offered the following description of how not having financial resources impacted providing her children with a quality education. She said:

> And me, not having the resources, I'm holding her back and I feel that a lot of it's my fault. And, that one right there, I can't put her into a private school where she can get the proper education that she would need. You see, I have to take what they give her because I can't afford to put her there. She just told me she was gifted. Well, I can't afford to put her where she needs to be.

Wendy highlights the indirect influence of social class on children's school experiences. She contended that having or not having financial resources could grant or deny children access to certain schools and curricula. Unlike Pam, who had the financial resources to provide her son with a good neighborhood and private preschool, Wendy did not have them. Not having financial resources had an emotional impact on Wendy's experiences as a mother.

Connections and Disconnections

Buying children's books, traveling, and visiting museums were extra opportunities and "cultural" experiences that having financial resources afforded some children prior to and upon entering kindergarten. These extras complemented school learning by offering a point of connection between curricula and children's lived experiences. On the other hand, children

growing up in families with limited financial resources typically had fewer of the above

opportunities and were expected to "start out behind" on the first day of school because of their

limited background knowledge. Parents in this study provided several examples of the ways in

which social class could be used as currency to acquire "extra" resources that promoted school

readiness. Data also suggest that not having these resources were expected to have adverse

impacts on children and parents.

<center>Racial Ideologies</center>

Race emerged spontaneously in participants' discussions of school readiness. Several

notions of race were multifaceted. Colorblind, ever present, and eminent threat racial ideologies

emerged. This was the only section in which variations among African American and White

educators were evident. Social class differences existed among parents' perceptions of the

impact of race on children's transitions into kindergarten. Educators' and parents' views of the

impact of race on children's transition into kindergarten ranged from minimal to significant.

<center>*Colorblind Racial Ideology*</center>

Race emerged as irrelevant in some participants' discussions of its influence on

children's transition into kindergarten. Colorblind racial ideology neutralizes the importance of

race in school learning while highlighting the impact of another factor. Race was essentially

described as invisible among colorblind participants. This ideology was most commonly cited

among White educators across program levels.

Educators

Several teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the impact of race on school

readiness were minimal. Race was commonly viewed as a non-issue for children starting

kindergarten among White educators at the preschool and kindergarten levels. An interesting

racial dynamic emerged among educators. An overwhelming majority of White educators'

conceptions of the impact of race could be categorized as colorblind racial ideology.

Preschool. Middleton Pre-K Program educators suggested that race is less important

than SES in terms of children's school readiness. For instance, Donna, a White pre-kindergarten

teacher who studied under a professor who explored issues of race in education, described

"culture" as more important than race. She stated:

> The school culture at times can be different than the family's culture. I think that as a
> school it's important to learn about the family's background, where they're coming from,
> what their culture is. Not going out and reading a book and saying oh most African
> American families [are like this]. Finding out what's specific to their family culture. Not
> their racial or their ethnic, but their specific, what they specifically do at home.

Donna noted that the home and school cultures might differ and such differences can impact

children's transitions into school more so than their race or ethnicity. Her statement suggests

that the focus on race was misplaced; home life or family culture were what mattered.

Samantha, a White pre-kindergarten administrator, introduced social class in her discussion of

the impact of race. She said:

> As far as race, it's kind of a touchy subject I suppose. But I think there's more, the SES
> is more of an impact than race and ethnicity….So I don't think it matters what color you
> are. I think it's the experiences you've had. The exposure you've had. That's going to
> make or break your success in kindergarten.

"Color" was considered irrelevant to children's success in kindergarten by Samantha. She noted

that class was a more determining factor than race. Race was rendered invisible. She stressed

home life and exposure to school-related expectations as key factors influencing children

transitioned into learning in schools.

In another example, Sally, a Latina preschool teacher, acknowledged the existence of

racism and prejudice in society as a factor that could impact children's kindergarten experiences.

However, she also identified social class backgrounds as having a more influential role in children's transitions into kindergarten than their race. She said:

> I think [race] matters, when you look at across the board. I think that matters less than the income. I think what happens is because of the way this country is currently, we have a lot of children who are minorities who fall into the low SES and I think that's where we need to be looking to focus our area. I do think that obviously there is racism and prejudice and where your child goes, that can be a factor and can affect, but I think over all, as for basic readiness, it's the socioeconomic status that is more important.

Sally described race as confounded by social class because children who hold racial minority group status are more likely to be poor. It is social class not race that impacts their school readiness. Though not invisible, race was considered inconsequential in comparison to social class. Colorblind racial ideology downplayed the impact of race in educational settings.

Elementary. Like Samantha and Sally, several kindergarten-level educators commented that a family' social class status was more influential in children's school experiences and performance than race. For instance, Janice, a White kindergarten teacher, explained that the impact of social class spanned across racial and ethnic groups and therefore was more of a factor in early learning than race:

> Okay, I'm White. And I truly believe this, but the more that I intentionally make friends of other colors from a variety of backgrounds I know that this may not be the only answer. I really feel that it's a bigger harder job across the broad socioeconomically, which unfortunately in our society right now, does imply perhaps a higher percent of African Americans. But I really, I got a couple of Caucasian families this year that are extremely low socioeconomic and I see those kids going through the exact same struggles as children of African American descent that I've had in the past and similar things. So I really think the socioeconomics is a bigger jump.

Janice prefaced her comment by identifying her own race. This suggested that her perceptions were embedded in being "White" and therefore not identical to issues of race that racial minorities might experience. She described social class, not race, as a key factor affecting children's school readiness. Pauline, a White elementary school principal, also viewed income as

mattering more than race in children's transition into kindergarten. She stated:

> I really don't think race or ethnicity has as much impact on it as probably economic status….I think all children can learn no matter what their race or ethnicity is.   But if their family doesn't have the economics to offer them a lot of experiences, buy books, take them to the library and things. Then that's going to impact their readiness for kindergarten definitely.

Experiences and access to resources were considered most important for children's school readiness in Pauline's example as well. She specifically noted that a family's social class status mattered more in children's early school experiences.

Educator participants also contended that young children held colorblind views about race. They were presumed to be unaware of racial/ethnic differences; therefore race was considered not as impactful in the early grades. Janice, a White kindergarten teacher, provided another example. She noted that children are colorblind in the early school years. She commented:

> My buddy teacher is Ernestine who is of African American….She has shared with me some things. And think it has to be hard for a child if he's grown up in a community, neighborhood that is predominately people who look just like he or she to come in and maybe that is hard. I haven't noticed that 5-year-olds see those differences. I think children start seeing that difference or understanding that difference at a new level about 3rd grade. That's when I have noticed that children seem to become more aware of race.

Race was not considered a concept that young children were aware of as they transitioned into kindergarten. Janice suggested that children's colorblindness lessened the influence of race on their experiences in school. Zoë, a White building principal, also conceived children as colorblind. She contended that all children can learn in the school building where she is a principal. She asserted:

> But see I may be naive, but I don't think children see color. And I think the things to understand whether it's African American or Hindu or Indian or Muslim or Latino, the cultural differences are important. You know to embrace that child where they are. What are their understandings as they come to school and then try to honor their cultural difference while helping them walk with the values you proscribe and in the system we

lay out. I think race was an issue in the past. Certainly the Consent Decree has given an umbrella over everything we do that considers race…..So I think for some it's an issue, I don't see it being an issue here….and that may be naïve. People have their personal biases, but I don't believe it affects the way we teach children. I think all kids get to learn here.

According to Zoë, race is more an issue of the past, though she emphasized the importance of acknowledging cultural differences and values of families and children that might differ from the school's culture and values. She did not think that race significantly impacted children transitioning to kindergarten in her school building.

Race and ethnicity emerged as influential for students who spoke English as a second language. Language was noted as a potential barrier and/or challenge for learning in American schools among ESL learners. For example, Jackie, a White, novice kindergarten teacher in the district, noticed the impact of ethnicity and language on children's transition into kindergarten. She said:

The only thing that I have seen in my classroom is students who are English as a second language. It's a much bigger transition for them because not only are they coming into school for the first time, but a lot of times they speak little to no English which is a whole other cultural barrier that they have to deal with.

In the same elementary school, Lindsay, another kindergarten teacher who was also White, agreed with Jackie. She stated:

Race and ethnicity, I don't know, maybe some of that plays into some of the family experiences. I think from an ethnicity standpoint, our ESL students are very much challenged as well coming in with a language barrier. Their families aren't familiar with the United States or the way the school system works.

Lindsay's statement suggests that language could present a challenge for ethnic minority children and families in the district. Other than that race was not considered a factor impacting learning in the early years.

Ever-Present Racial Ideology

Several participants noted that it was a possibility for race to impact ethnic and racial minority children upon transitioning into kindergarten. This perspective on race is referred to as "ever-present" racial ideology. It suggests that the potential for the adverse impact of race and racism always exist. Ever-present racial ideologies were more common among African American educators across program levels and middle-class caregivers.

Educators

African American educators' and a few White educators' perceptions were not typical of colorblind racial ideology. Instead, a core subgroup of African American educators held ever-present racial ideologies. They explained that race could impact children's transitions into kindergarten and/or school readiness. Educators noted that the impact of race on a child's early school experiences depended on the climate of particular school buildings and perceptions of kindergarten teachers and staff.

Preschool. The majority of the community preschool educators were African American due to sampling. These educators, and a small group of White preschool teachers, describe the impact of race as ever-present. For example, Bridget, an African American daycare teacher, commented that "For the African American, to a certain extent, it's harder for them. Because they don't get the type of support they need in the Middleton School District…." Bridget noted that race influenced the amount of support children received in school. She specifically pointed out the possibility of African American children receiving less support than needed in the community school district. Josie, another African American preschool teacher at a local learning center, offered an example of the difficulty children face as they transition into a school or classroom as a racial minority. She asserted:

> [If] they're transitioning to a school where they are predominately White and they're a Black child then that may cause problems….I don't know just being the odd ball outta the bunch may cause a lot of pressure. It may cause you not to be as active or participate as you would if you felt more comfortable in a place.

Being African American was considered an important factor that shaped children's experiences and influenced their level of comfort in school environments that had a predominantly White student population, according to Josie. She also suggested that being comfortable was key to learning in schools. Additionally, Faith, an African American director at Sweetie Pie Learning Center, noted that the impact of race on school readiness and children's transition into school depended on several factors. Consider her comment:

> It depends on what school you in. It depends on what teacher you have. It depends on what principal you have. Because if you maybe come from a poor neighborhood, if you have the teacher that does not look at color, does not look at gender, your income, that doesn't look at that and they just treat all kids the same, no matter where you come from, who you are, treat them all the same [then race will not impact children upon transitioning into kindergarten]. But then you got some teachers that do realize you're from the projects, that your mom doesn't work, receive welfare or whatever like that, so they treat them differently. Some of them they do and you can actually go in the classroom and see that these kids are kinda left behind long as they not causing no trouble. In some classrooms it makes a difference and it should not if you have that type of job. All children should be treated equally but in a lot of cases they're not.

Mary, an African American daycare director, hesitantly made the following observations about race in the transition into kindergarten:

> The only thing that I can think of is if a child wasn't given the opportunity, if they're African American and they're not given any opportunity, they're not prepared, I don't want to say they might be labeled.

Mary suggested that African American children are more likely to be labeled if they do not display expected competencies and skill sets when they enter kindergarten.

Unlike some of her colleagues at the pre-kindergarten program, Halle, a White preschool teacher also noted the impact race can have on elementary teachers' perceptions of children who do not demonstrate school readiness skills and competencies. She stated:

> I don't think that it [race] should [impact children entering kindergarten]. I think that some times people's expectations are different when they look at somebody. So in that way it could affect, especially if their behaviors are bad. Then they seem to almost fall into that stereotype and then it's like a self-fulfilling prophecy that people say you're a bad little boy. And then they treat them that way and then they act that way even more. So that's the only way that I can think. I mean it shouldn't in an ideal world. But I think sometimes you almost have to really work on their behaviors so that they don't get pegged into being something that'll just get worse.

Halle was an exception among her colleagues at Middleton Pre-K Program. She explained that race, particularly observed in concert with limited social skills, often signaled lack of readiness that could lower teachers' expectations of children. Therefore, Halle stressed the importance of promoting children's social competency and self-regulation prior to entering kindergarten. Though not specifically stated it is assumed that racial minorities were more likely to be subjected to stereotypes than White children.

Elementary. Kindergarten-level educators interviewed were all White. Only two administrators were African American. Both of these administrators described the potential for race to impact children's transitions into kindergarten. For instance, Rachel, an African American district-level administrator said that race should not matter, but it can and has in Middleton School District. She said, "It shouldn't, but if you have a system that does not understand and embrace all kids that could be problematic. And hopefully we've gotten past that in Middleton." Rachel's statement suggests that systemic lack of knowledge of, and appreciation for, racial diversity can adversely affect children entering school. She also noted that "hopefully" the district had made progress in lessening the influence of race on children's school experiences. James, an elementary school principal, said that race could impact children's transition into kindergarten, but not at his school because diversity training was required. He noted:

> Here at Time Center we accept everyone who gets off the bus. They're all treated equally, with a high level of respect. And the bar is set for them to excel academically. And so can race impact it? It could, here at Time Center I don't think it has any impact on how we conduct business or the expectations of any of our students….It could if your staff does not have a understanding of differences in backgrounds….And I think people have to understand that with race comes some differences and to be aware of those differences and to teach kids….And so it could impact if you have a staff member who has never ever worked with an African American student or a Mexican student. It could be problematic.

According to James lack of diversity training and experience working with children from diverse backgrounds among teachers and staff could adversely impact African American and Latino students upon transitioning into kindergarten.

One educator, Lindsay, a White, experienced kindergarten teacher, noted the impact family members' mistrust of White, female teachers had on racial minority children. Though she perceived home life as more important for learning in school, the ever-present ideology of race was embedded within the following example:

> It doesn't necessarily have to do with race or ethnicity. I think it has to do with home life. What their parents' or guardians' experience have been in school, often, not always, rub off on the student. The student can sense things, they can pick up on things, whether it's explicitly said to them or not. And like I said I think some parents feel very disengaged with education and school and mistrusting of teachers, young teachers, White, female teachers. You have to very much prove yourself and prove that you're there to do your job. But I think that very much affects a student's perception of school.

The impact of race materialized within children's home life according to Lindsay. She described how the suspicion parents, assumed to be racial minorities because the school is overwhelmingly African American and Latino, held for White teachers could adversely impact children's school experiences.

Parents

Several mothers noted the potential for their children's race to impact their transition into kindergarten. Data suggest that middle-income caregivers often maintained ever-present racial

ideologies, while low-income ones rarely did so. Middle-class families typically resided in

predominantly White neighborhoods. Although they desired diverse educational settings for

their children, they contended that being African American in these diverse setting, which tended

to be predominately White, could adversely impact children's kindergarten experiences.

Middle-class parents noted the role the racial composition of a school building plays in

children's transitions into kindergarten. For example, Tina was unsure how race would impact

her son upon entering kindergarten. She stated:

> I think that's going to be contingent upon what type of environment he's in….I want
> Richard to be in an environment where like I said, it's a mixture of people; a diverse
> setting. I don't want him to be the only Black kid in the school but I don't want him to
> necessarily be in a school with all Black children. I want him to be in an environment
> that's pretty diverse so I don't know how that will affect him.

Though it was not clear to Tina how race would impact her son, she contended that the "type of

environment" he entered could make a difference. She valued "diversity" but commented that

being the only African American student in classrooms might impact her child as he transitioned

into kindergarten. Similarly, Laura, a middle-income mother, said that being a minority in the

classroom could impact her daughter's kindergarten experience. She said:

> Again, if she goes to a kindergarten where she's a minority it will be obvious that she's
> different you know from the majority. So, that may impact her in that way. It may
> impact her also if she maybe has a teacher who hasn't worked with children of other
> races. That might be some thing that impacts her. And then it could impact her in a
> positive way…. It will because she will be around other cultures that she hasn't been
> around. So, I'm sure that it will impact her. I don't know necessarily that it will all
> necessarily be negative. I'm sure because she would have to identify with her culture,
> her traditions and learning the culture and traditions of others that might not be the same
> as hers.

Whether positive or negative, Laura perceived the racial composition to have an impact on her

daughter's transition into kindergarten. She discussed how she will have to "learn the culture" of

others if she attended a school in which she was a racial minority. Also, consider a comment

made by Pam, a middle-income mother of two:

> In a predominantly White kindergarten, it will have a big impact on him because he's
> different. I'm okay with him being different. But I feel like sometimes they track Black
> kids. I see it. I watch it. They measure them against the White kids. Well, it's like the
> curve is based on the White kids not the Black kids. I think that's why I am putting him
> in Public School because I feel that at least he has an opportunity to socialize with
> children that may not look exactly like him but he can identify with them….People don't
> realize you are dealing with a lot of stuff when you raise your children in a what you
> want to be a culturally diverse environment but it ends up being predominantly White.
> Where do they fit in? And so I really feel like it's a big challenge for kindergarten.

According to Pam, if her son attended a predominately White elementary school, then being

African American could have adverse consequences for him.   Though she preferred a "culturally

diverse environment" in her experiences these settings tended to be predominately White.

Spontaneous discussions of kindergarten teachers included race. In one instance, Joy noted the

positive impact of school environments that were predominantly populated by racial minorities.

She hoped her daughter would be taught by a strong, African American teacher upon entering

kindergarten "I want it to be Mrs. Clementine. She's a strong Black teacher. Strong, Black you

know what I'm saying? Working with kids she doesn't take foolishness but yet still, she's fair."

Joy spontaneously noted the teacher's race without being probed. Based on previous experience

with an older child, she was impressed by the fact that Mrs. Clementine did not take "no

foolishness," or in other words she enforced rules and facilitated behavior deemed appropriate

for the classroom, so she wanted her kindergarten-bound child to be in her classroom.

In addition to the influence of the racial composition of school buildings and classrooms

some mothers noted concern regarding the racial disparities in academic achievement. Connie

discussed her unease with lower performance on standardized tests for African American

students in comparison to their White peers in the district. She noted:

> I didn't know before Anthony told me you can go on line and you can see in the school by third grade, how everybody's doin' as far as levels. And so, we've been noticing that most of the schools, even if they have Black people, by the third grade all the Black people, the majority, are still on level one (below standards) and all the White kids are up in level four (exceeds standards) for reading, math.

Connie did not want her son to be the "token" African American student in class or in a classroom that was composed of all African American children. She noted the difficulty of finding a good mix that produced positive academic results in reading and math for African American children. Melissa was concerned about her daughter being discouraged in school because she is African American. She spontaneously offered the following as a final comment regarding school readiness:

> I understand a need to have extra support for a lot of families. I do understand that and I think it's necessary, however I don't know that it necessarily applies for Jade and I don't want Jade to get into her head that she's going to be held to a different standard because she is Black….I want Jade to achieve the best she can achieve and not let anyone tell her that she is not capable of doing something because she is Black.

Melissa emphasized the presence of stereotypes about minority students in schools that might result in lower expectations or "standards" for them. This was concerning to her and influenced her expectations for Jade not to submit to discouraging remarks from those she encountered in school. Melissa's statement suggests that race and racism were ever-present in school environments and could have detrimental impacts on children's achievements.

Low-income. Wendy was one of the few working-class parents who perceived a possible impact of her daughter's race on her transition into kindergarten. She was pursuing a bachelor's degree in education during the time of the interview and residing in a predominantly African American neighborhood. She said that being African American could adversely impact her daughter's transition into school learning:

> For me, I feel that children that are African American, teachers sometimes have a different outlook on them, like they're all the same. They only know so much. So, I feel

that going in kindergarten…[race] affects how much she can learn, how much she can know. That's not always true. Not everybody thinks African Americans have discipline issues or don't want to learn.…They [teachers] don't expect them [African American children] to do as well as the others. That's what I think.

Wendy noted the ever-present impact of race on teacher expectations for African American children when they entered school. She suggested that those expectations could have an impact on early learning. Her experience as a student teacher in the district might have increased her attention to the issues of race in schools in comparison to other working-class and poor families.

Connections and Disconnections

Generally, African American educators and a small group of White educators noted the possible impact race could have as children transitioned into elementary school. They often noted the impact of race on children's transition into kindergarten depended on the school building. Though race was not considered an important factor for all children transitioning in to all schools and with all classroom teachers, there was an ever-present possibility of race and racism influencing children's school experiences. As African Americans enter kindergarten primarily African American educators noted the possibility of being "labeled" and/or treated differently, especially if the do not display the expected readiness skills. Data also suggest that among several African American parents, race was considered a factor in school readiness. Middle-class families most often described the impact of race on children's transitions into kindergarten as ever-present.

Imminent Threat Racial Ideology

Imminent threat included characteristics of colorblind and ever-present ideologies. Some parents did not think that race would impact children's transition into kindergarten and learning in school at their current developmental stages, though being African American might impact

them as they aged. This racial ideology did not emerge among educators. It was most

commonly noted among working-class and poor parents in comparison to middle-class mothers.

Parents

In a rare example, a middle-class mother, Shana, noted that race should not affect her

son. She said, "I don't think it will impact him too much. I really don't. I think he know who

he his within his self. I don't think it should be a big issue by that time." Shana did not

anticipant race would impact her son's transition into kindergarten because he was "secure" in

terms of his racial identity. Because she said "by that time," imminent threat is implied.

Low-income primary caregivers most often held imminent threat racial ideologies;

middle-income families noted more immediate impacts of race on children's transition into

kindergarten and school readiness. Working-class and poor parents did not anticipate much

impact from race in their children's transition into kindergarten. Like some White educators in

the district, some working-class and poor parents typically described their children as colorblind.

For instance, Xenophia did not think that being African American would impact her son in

kindergarten because she believed young children are colorblind. She provided the following

example:

> I don't think it really impact him at all. Cause kids in kindergarten don't see color. They
> just see kids. They don't see a Black color, White color, Asian or whatever. They just
> see oh you a kid so I'm a play with you regardless. I don't think that impact them at all,
> good or bad, I'll say.

Alicia said that her child was young, therefore, being African American will not impact her

daughter as she transitions into kindergarten. She responded:

> She will be just fine. I mean she know who she is, that she's African American. And she
> know that she has Caucasian friends. But that don't bother her cause they all the same to
> her cause she still young.

According to Alicia being young mitigated the impact of race on children's transition into

kindergarten. She considered young children colorblind and oblivious to race.

However, unlike White educators, poor and working-class mothers noted that race would become more of an issue for children as they aged into later grades. Bonnie hoped that race would not affect her daughter *yet*. She stated:

> I hope that she doesn't have any discrimination when she goes to kindergarten. But I don't think it will impact her as much right now compared to her growing up and becoming like a teenager having to deal with society in that aspect of. If she gets into trouble or the way people see her. As far as her starting kindergarten right now, I don't think that it will impact her.

Bonnie's statement suggests that dealing with stereotypes in school settings was an imminent threat of being African American. She hoped and did not anticipate her daughter encountering racial discrimination upon entering kindergarten, but she described race as a potential factor that could impact her school learning as she grew older. Additionally, Nicki *hoped* that being African American would not have an effect on her son when he enters kindergarten because he is still young. She stated:

> I'm hoping it's not gonna be a problem which really it hasn't been a problem in, the race thing. I haven't heard about there being a problem over there [older child's elementary school]. I guess cause they're younger, they're not old. Older people act stupid and do stupid stuff over there but right now, it's just really not a big deal. But, I know it [race] will be [an issue] when he get older by him being a Black male. Stuff probably will be harder on him.

Though youth lessened the impact of race on children's interactions with other children upon entering kindergarten, race posed an imminent threat for her son. She noted the intersectionality of race and gender. Her comment suggests that as her son grew older, being an African American male could adversely impact his experiences.

Connections and Disconnections

Several working-class and poor mothers held imminent threat racial ideologies. Being African American was primarily perceived to be an issue for children as they got older unless

they encountered teachers or schools that made race an issue. Like some White educators, working-class and poor African American parents considered young children colorblind and therefore exempt from the impact of race on their school experiences. But unlike White educators, these parents expected race to play a more important role in the educational process as children grew older. Race posed an imminent threat to children's future academic achievements and school performance.

<div align="center">Gender Lenses</div>

Participants generally expressed an ideology of gender equality in school learning; they believed girls and boys needed to know the same concepts and possessed similar competencies and attitudes in preparation for kindergarten. At the same time, three primary gendered lenses were identified from these data: regulating girls' bodies, fundamental differences, and equal opportunities. Participants described several differences they observed and concerns between girls and boys prior to and upon transitioning into school.

<div align="center">*Regulating Girls' Bodies*</div>

This theme emerged in mothers' descriptions of what children needed to learn prior to school because of her or his gender. Parents provided examples of behaviors and attitudes that girls and boys needed to learn that differed among mothers of boys and girls. Findings suggest that what girls needed to know centered upon being aware of their bodies, etiquette, and safety precautions. This was a typical concern for primary caregivers across social class subgroups.

Middle-income. Middle-class parents of girls focused on ensuring their preschoolers could regulate their behaviors and bodies. For Vanessa, a grandmother of two, teaching girls "proper" etiquette was an important component of child rearing and preparing them for kindergarten. She stated:

> I teach her little girls do not sit with their legs open, little girls do not do this. And so she'll know. And she's learning well with that. And I really think a lot of etiquette should be taught to little girls at an early age; not when they get older and more suggestive or whatever. I think earlier age, etiquette is [of] utmost [importance] to me. It's one of the top priorities in teaching a child.

Joy, an older parent, noted the need for her daughter, Candice, to keep herself safe from harm.

As the parent of an outgoing child, she said:

> Well, go back to the same thing, how to take care of her body, mainly and, how to stay away from harmful things. Teach her that you don't go in closed places with anybody. You don't be with anybody you don't know. You don't just turn yourself a' loose. If somebody's there, you ask. Talk, and some kids are afraid to talk. I like for her to talk and tell me what you know if something happens, what happened and stuff like ... Those are safety things that I like to instill in my kids, especially Candice. She's a kind of outgoing little girl, so I have to you know let her know things aren't appropriate, the things that she does.

Melissa, a mother of two young children, did not perceive anything different in what her

daughter needed to learn for kindergarten because she was a girl. But she did highlight the need

to stay safe:

> I don't think that there is anything specific for her because she's a girl. The general rules apply. Don't let anyone touch you in an inappropriate way and that kind of basic safety issue.

Melissa's statement suggested that girls had to be prepared to protect their bodies outside of the

home as they transitioned into kindergarten. She discussed staying safe as a key component of

school readiness for girls.

    Low-income. Working-class and poor families also considered preparing girls to regulate

and protect their bodies as important for them to learn prior to transitioning into kindergarten.

Wendy was teaching her daughter to stay safe. She noted that in rearing her daughter safety was

a top concern:

> The safety issue is one of my issues because Kayla is one who will start walking ahead of you. Like, if you're walking in a store or something, she'll yell, just being a little girl, just singing and dancing, and keep walking. And, there's one incident where we turned a

corner, and at that corner, a man there at the corner started talking to her until I came around the corner. I was like, okay, if I could have been maybe a second later, I don't know what would have happened. But, he continued to follow her. So, this was in a grocery store. So, I know I just have to be more careful. I have to tell her, you can't walk off.

Wendy's concern for her daughter's safety was related to gender. Alicia extended her concern for her daughter's safety upon transitioning into school to boys as well. She stated:

Whether a girl or a boy cause there's so much going on out here now-a-days that you can't trust nobody, the school or nobody else. So, when you leave out the door, I'm putting you in somebody else's hands but you have to know these things and be taught these things that it's not okay for Johnny to go in there [the bathroom] with you. Cause when they at school, they supposed to be watched but they get through the cracks too.

Safety was a key caveat of gender that emerged from Alicia's comment. She suggested that providing her preschooler with information to protect her body was needed prior to kindergarten entrance.

Fundamental Differences

Some participants suggested that girls and boys were fundamentally different from each other. Boys were considered predisposed to being active and physically aggressive. On the other hand, girls were described as having "natural" abilities to attend, or sit and listen, for extended periods of time. The fundamental difference gender lens suggests that boys and girls are inherently different. Participants often contended that these differences influenced children's school readiness.

Educators

Educators did not typically discuss gender as a fundamental difference. However, there were a few exceptions. For instance, a pre-kindergarten administrator, Samantha, said that boys and girls need to learn the same concepts and skills prior to entering kindergarten. Still, she noted the following gender differences:

I'm just thinking about you hear the term he's all boy kind of thing. Well, so it might be whether maybe girls might be predisposed to have, to be the good student more so than boys. But I don't think the skills they need are different.

For example, Janice, a veteran kindergarten teacher, noted that in her experiences:

I don't know what the research says, hard core data. But there is a serious difference between boys and girls and their readiness to come to school….So having had three predominately male classes in the last year boys learn differently than girls do….I think they need to wiggle more. I think they really don't like picking up pencils as much as little girls do. Now I do have, that's not across the board flat out. Because I got a little girl this year that doesn't like to write and I got a little boy that loves to draw and write. But across the board the years where I've had more boys, I've had a much more active class, a noisier class, a class that took more time with fine motor. But they were my classes that really took off in other areas.

In Janice's teaching experiences boys learned differently and developed fine motor skills later in comparison to girls. They also moved more. She also noted there is always some variation, thereby suggesting that gender differences are not universal truths.

Another building principal, Pauline, said that although all children need the same readiness skills and competencies, maturity is a concern for boys. She contended:

My experiences [have] often been that boys are more immature than the girls when they're five. So my explanation is if you have a boy and they have a summer birthday. I'd probably hold them back and start them when they're six….To get them a fair advantage to mature and be ready because otherwise it seems like if they're immature then we usually spend a lot of time in kindergarten working on behaviors and that kind of thing. Whereas if they're a little bit more emotionally and physically mature they're more apt to just come in and be ready to take off with their learning.

Pauline encouraged families to give boys more time to "mature" due to the notion boys were fundamentally more immature than girls. This immaturity was linked to more difficult transitions into kindergarten.

Parents

Parents of boys described what boys needed to learn prior to entering kindergarten in terms of behavior and attitudes. They often described boys as more active than girls. This

fundamental tendency towards being active was a school readiness concern. In several cases

parents noted fundamental gender differences in rearing and preparing children for school. For

instance, Pam, a middle-class mother, described her son's need to focus as something that her

son had to learn prior to entering kindergarten because he was a boy. She explained why in the

following:

> Focus, Mark loses focus. He can sit down to start working on something, if somebody
> else is talking or there's something, a distraction, he is instantly like enamored with
> what's going on. Like, he has to pay attention to something else. He loses focus. Now,
> that's something I don't know how to work on. So, that's why he's been in
> Taekwondo….So, that's helping him to focus. I really think it's something with boys.
> And boys, I believe in my heart, I don't know, it may not be proven anywhere, they're
> much lazier than girls, especially in earlier years. And, they don't develop as fast….You
> have to ride a boy.

Heather, a middle-class parent, perceived unique challenges for boys in school in comparison to

girls. She commented:

> I'm trying to prepare my boy for that because I think it's a little bit more challenging for
> boy….Well, boys are different. And I think schools are set up for the way girls are. And
> I'm a teacher so I see a lot of these things. Girls sit forever in a circle. Now, my son
> does okay in that because he's been sitting in a circle since he was nine months old. But
> not every boy does that. And, it's not natural for them to want to sit and listen. They
> want to be active. He wants to be active. And on days at school they go outside and they
> play or they go to the gym which is just right across the walkway. When it's too cold to
> even do that, I'm being told oh Walter's had a hard day and made some poor choices.
> Well, Walter needs to run.

Heather's comment suggests that she viewed gender differences as fundamental and naturally

occurring. She described her son's activeness as a normal for boys.

One working-class mother suggested that boys and girls were fundamentally different in

terms of their levels of activity and nature of play. Bonnie commented:

> One strategy I know of for sure you definitely have to watch out for the boys. Most boys
> are rough, rough play and stuff like that. Most girls aren't that rough. And so, they tend
> to get hurt easily if they're playing with boys. I think that would be the main thing that I
> would tell my girls.

Though she did not claim that all boys played rough, Bonnie's gender ideology focused on fundamental differences between girls' and boys' play. She said that she had to teach her daughters to stay safe in the presence of boys who played rough.

<center>Equal Opportunities</center>

Some participants, particularly educators, suggested that boys and girls had different opportunities to engage in activities that promoted learning in schools. They noted that girls and boys demonstrated different competencies at kindergarten because their experiences differed. Some participants suggested that traditional-notion gender norms and socialization promoted school readiness among girls more so than boys.

Educators

Educators noted that traditional gender socialization offered girls more opportunities to meet school expectations for self-regulation than boys. Generally, educators suggested girls were better at learning in schools because the active and aggressive behaviors displayed primarily among boys are oppositional to school expectations and norms.

Preschool. According to some preschool educators, girls were described as being better at attending than boys and adjusting to school learning and expectations in the early years. For example, Josie, a preschool teacher, perceived gender norms within society as influencing young children in concrete ways. She commented:

> It's like with boys, they're pushed at such a early age to not do certain things and to not do certain things cause its thought that it's abnormal for a boy to wanna [do]. Like we had a boy whose favorite color was pink and we were just like it's ok. Boys get to school and they start thinking almost like school is for girls because it just seems like boys are more pushed towards like climbing and building and stuff instead of reading and writing. So I mean it's good to have them write and draw, do artistic things and stuff like that just like you would have a girl to do.

Josie suggested that traditional gender norms provided girls and boys with different opportunities to learn and express themselves. She contended that girls tended to do better with learning in school because they were afforded more opportunities to read and write. The opposite was true of boys who were encouraged to pursue more physical domains. Halle, a pre-kindergarten teacher, further illustrated this:

> Boys sometimes have a harder time sitting still and things like that, which will be more of a problem for them probably in kindergarten. But not things that they need to learn. Girls tend to do better in the early [years], girls than boys, because they're better at sitting and listening. Boys have a lot more energy usually.

Halle exemplified equal opportunity gender ideology. She noted though both girls and boys needed to have similar developmental competencies at kindergarten entry they differ in their abilities to self-regulate. In the early years she stated that girls had an easier time adjusting to school norms and expectations for classroom behavior than boys. Boys and girls were said to learn differently. Donna, a pre-kindergarten teacher, did not want to speak in generalities about gender, but noticed that boys tended to be more active than girls. She commented:

> I mean boys and girls differ so much and I don't wanna put gender like, I don't want to stereotype by gender. I mean typically some boys are more active than girls. Boys you know like to rough house and stuff like that. But I think that all children need to learn how to control their bodies.

Though Donna said that boys and girls are different, her statement suggests that these differences arise from different experiences. She noted that self-regulation is a competency both girls and boys needed opportunities to learn.

Elementary. Several kindergarten-level educators noted the different competencies that children brought to their early school experiences that varied among girls and boys. Karla also described girls as generally being more attuned to sitting and listening when they enter kindergarten. Though she believed that it was equally important for all children to be able to

attend, she said, "I think girls have an easier time of learning those social skills like mostly sitting. Sitting and listening for ten minutes. But I think it's equally important for them. It's equally important." Educators also suggested that prior experiences were a factor in the differences in children's school readiness competencies upon entering kindergarten.

When asked what boys should learn prior to kindergarten, educators discussed some boys' tendency to be overly active, aggressive, and immature upon entering kindergarten. These behaviors and attitudes did not fare well within schools. Lindsay, an experienced kindergarten teacher, also noticed the tendency for boys to be physical in their play as an area to address prior to entering kindergarten. She explained:

> I guess the only other thing that sticks out is boys tend to be more aggressive in their play and I think in general a lot of boys are more aggressive than girls in their play. Even it's pretend play or play on the playground or playing with objects. They tend to be really rough. And so having a conversation with those boys before school saying here are appropriate ways to play at school. Not everybody plays like you, not everybody likes to wrestle. We can't be touching other people. I think that that's huge. We see a lot of aggressive behavior on the playground by our male students. Not that it is all intentionally to hurt somebody, there are those instances, but just very rough. And they don't know the difference between rough play and appropriate play.

Lindsay has noticed "very rough" play among boys who attended kindergarten at her school building. She stated this aggressiveness was a limitation for boys' in terms of readiness for school. Lindsay's recommendations suggest that boys could be and should be taught to regulate their behaviors. Zoë, a building principal, linked gender differences in experiences with self-regulation to school performance. She said:

> I think boys you accept the rough and tumble, but that doesn't go over in school too much. So I think we want to give them an opportunity to focus and do work that requires them to be quiet. We don't ask boys to read as much, I don't think, as we ask girls, or we don't expect that. But let's make sure that when we're doing all of these things that we understand the different way that your child learns.

Zoë recommended having expectations for boys and girls that are conducive to learning in school. She noted that unequal opportunities to attend resulted in boys' behaviors being incompatible in school in comparison to girls.

Parents

Parents did not typically discuss unequal opportunities as having an impact on children upon entering kindergarten. However, there were two exceptions: Tina, a middle-class mother of three boys, and Grace, a working-class mother of two girls. Tina did not approve of societal stereotypes around gender but found gender playing a part in how she was raising her son. She stated:

> It's kind of hard and this is where I get kind of torn because you have the traditional gender roles and although I wish it weren't like that I also have to be realistic and I want him to be prepared to be in the world. So I noticed when it comes to certain things and I know my oldest son is really bad about this, just Richard stop acting like a baby. Or stop acting like a little girl or you whining or crying too much. So I will say there is less of a tolerance to show emotion in some respects. Just the other day I told him be aggressive. I forgot what we were doing. I said Richard be aggressive. And I heard myself say that and I knew I was saying that and I knew what I was doing. I was buying into that whole thing but I don't want Richard to be perceived as weak…There is a certain toughness that I'm trying to teach them. Be aggressive or Richard are you okay? Shake it off don't cry. So I will say there is a difference to raising boys. I do teach my boys to be a little bit more aggressive, to be tougher, to show less emotion at certain times and that whole thing.

Tina encouraged her son to be aggressive. However several educators noted that aggressiveness was oppositional to school environments. Grace did not note any things that girls needed to learn for kindergarten any more or less than boys. She avoided gender stereotypes in her response:

> I don't like to do gender things. I want her to know that there's boys and there's girls but no not specific things just because she's a girl. I don't really like that. I try not to make things too gendered. I let her know that she can do anything that any male can do and vise versa.

Grace attempted to offer equal opportunities for her daughter to engage in activities. Though she did not specifically discuss school readiness, her comment suggests that opportunities children were provided with promote gender differences. Girls and boys were not fundamentally different.

Connections and Disconnections

In sum, educators believed that what children needed to know prior to entering kindergarten did not differ according to their gender. However, differences in the competencies displayed by boys and girls in kindergarten were identified, with girls being better at self-regulating than boys in the early years. The general recommendation was that all children be provided opportunities to develop competencies that would promote school learning. Though not all of the parent participants noted differences in preparing children for school and rearing them by gender, the majority did. Gender was viewed as a factor in what children needed to learn prior to kindergarten and how parents were raising their children. Mothers of girls focused on safety and sexuality, while mothers of boys focused on regulating behaviors and emotions in their efforts to get children ready for kindergarten.

Chapter Summary

A small number of educators and parents did not think that social class had a strong influence on children's transitions into kindergarten or their readiness to learn. Social class conferred tangible and experiential school readiness advantages and disadvantages. Having access to financial resources enabled middle-class parents to extend their focus beyond meeting their children's basic needs to providing them with extra resources and experiences that were valued by educators and closely aligned with school learning. Contrarily, not having access to financial resources heightened working-class and poor families' attention to meeting basic needs

that involved bypassing providing children with the "extras" with which middle-class children entered school. Among parents, none believed that there were things that they could not afford to provide their children for kindergarten. Some participants highlighted the ways in which resourceful parenting could buffer the adverse consequences of low social class status. Resource seeking was considered a viable means of compensating for limited income. They discussed how they would "make a way" to get the basics and school was considered a basic need.

Perceptions of the impact of race on children's school readiness and transition into kindergarten were diverse. Three racial ideologies emerged. White educators in the school district overwhelmingly suggested that race is less important than social class in terms of children's school readiness. These educators maintained a "colorblind" racial ideology. White educators in the district pre-kindergarten program and public schools did not see race as important in children's transition into school; like working-class and poor parents they considered young children colorblind. African American educators and middle-class and affluent parents held ever-present racial ideologies. They noted the impact educational environment could have on children in the early years if teachers were not trained to work with racially diverse populations of children or held stereotypes regarding African American children's abilities. Working-class and poor mothers' racial ideologies emerged as imminent threat. They suggested that though race was not considered a factor for colorblind children entering kindergarten it could impact school experiences as children aged. Interestingly, social class "advantages" did not eliminate African American educators' and middle class parents' sensitivity to the potential impact of race and racism on their children's school experiences. Race emerged as a potential source of advantage and disadvantage as children transitioned into kindergarten. At the least, African American parents conceived race to impact their children

more often than White educators, which suggests some discontinuity between home and school contexts.

Responses to what boys and girls needed to know prior to kindergarten were gendered. With a few exceptions, mothers of girls and boys emphasized different concerns for boys and girls upon entering kindergarten. Mothers of girls focused on protecting girls' bodies and physical selves to keep them safe from harm. Controlling and protecting bodies were central in participants' discussions of gender. Though participants generally believed that boys and girls both needed to learn the same things, different competencies and lack thereof were noted between girls and boys when they entered school. Some participants described gender differences as fundamental and suggested they were innate characteristics of girls and boys. Mothers noted that boys were naturally more active; therefore, they focused on preparing boys to control their bodies and regulate their emotions in compliance with school rules. Educators and a few parents suggested that unequal opportunities promoted differences in children's school readiness skills and competencies. Findings suggest school readiness disadvantages were linked with gender socialization of boys and advantages were more often identified for gender socialization of girls. Girls' abilities to attend were school readiness advantages while boys' inabilities to attend were disadvantages.

Following Chapter

The local impact of national education policy is the focus of the next chapter. The "pushed down" effect of National Learning Standards and the No Child Left Behind Act on early learning and childhood education practice are discussed.

CHAPTER 7: EDUCATION POLICY

This chapter examines the policy context of Middleton Community School District. It investigates documentary evidence and local perceptions of education policy. I specifically include (1) historical changes in kindergarten; (2) a discussion of the state learning standards; (3) the impact of the NCLB Act; and (4) educators' and parents' perceptions of the NCLB Act. National Learning Standards were translated into early learning standards, thereby directly impacting early childhood education in Middleton. Findings suggest that today, kindergarten more closely resembles 1st grade of the recent past. The NCLB Act directly and indirectly resulted in increased academic and social expectations of incoming kindergarteners when compared to the past fifty years. Perceptions of the NCLB Act were nuanced and centered upon the pillars of accountability and curriculum alignment. However, changes in kindergarten had gone unknown to a subgroup of poor parents. Gaps in knowledge regarding current kindergarten expectations and curricula have the potential to perpetuate school readiness disadvantage while being in the know of current education policy has the potential to confer school readiness advantages.

Historical Changes in Kindergarten

Archival data suggest that kindergarten in Middleton changed over time. PTA-sponsored kindergartens began to emerge in Middleton as early as 1937. Within this district, not all of the schools had PTA kindergarten programs. In the 1950s, children typically began public school as first graders.

A small paper handbook entitled *Getting your Child Ready for School* was a key archival source of information. This parent handbook was created by first grade teachers in the district in 1950. The handbook emphasized the important role parents should assume in helping children

adjust to formal schooling. Specific instructions for preparing children for first grade were:

provide children with opportunities to socialize with peers; provide opportunities for children to

complete routine activities such as tying their own shoes and toileting independently; teach

children their personal information such as their first and last name, telephone number and

address, and other safety habits; and ensure children are immunized and healthy. These first

grade preparation practices resemble kindergarten expectations of today.

The parent handbook also provided a daily first grade schedule of activities, goals, and

learning objectives. At this historical moment, reading readiness was a focus. The authors stated

"Because learning to read is such an important phase of a child's school life, it is necessary that

he [or she] is not exposed to this experience until he [or she] is ready to read. It is most

important that we give careful thought to the time for him to begin reading." The handbook

highlighted the following as signs of reading readiness:

1. Expresses himself clearly and freely in sentences
2. Tells and dramatizes stories and experiences
3. Is able to keep a sustained interest in an activity
4. Listens and follows simple directions
5. Can distinguish between likenesses and differences
6. Has a desire to read

The handbook suggests children were not expected to be able to read prior to entering first grade

at this time. In fact exposing children who were not "ready" was considered detrimental to

reading readiness in the first grade.

According to the PTA kindergarten chairperson quoted in a local newspaper article in

1960, "nearly all people are willing to pay tuition [to] have their children in kindergarten." The

article suggested that by the 1960s kindergarten was becoming more popular in the local

community, specifically among families who could afford to pay tuition. Despite limited space

to house kindergarten program, the Middleton Board of Education unanimously approved their

implementation in the school district in 1961. Public kindergartens were opened in 1962. After

which, a survey reported 67% of first graders attended kindergarten. Yet, the quality of

kindergarten programs and schools capacities to house them still varied widely. An article

written in a local Middleton newspaper in 1987 suggested that by the 1980s the emphasis placed

upon children participating in early childhood education programs increased nationally and at the

state level. There was also a growing debate regarding the appropriateness of all day

kindergarten in Middleton School District at this time. Some members of the school board did

not view increased academic demands on young children as suitable. They contended that

children benefited from the time half-day kindergarten programs provided them to adjust to

school before being in full-day first grades. In 1988, all-day kindergarten classes were provided

by the district at the state's expense.

Today, kindergarten remains an option for families but it is not required. Though

kindergarten is not mandatory in this state, 953 children were enrolled in kindergarten in

Middleton in 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Kindergarten, not first grade, often marked

children's formal entrance into elementary school. A child is required to be five years of age by

September 1st to enter kindergarten.

<div align="center">National Learning Standards</div>

State and local policy has been shaped by the educational reform of the 1990s. The

NCLB Act has impacted how states have developed and implemented educational goals in order

to meet government requirements. Some components of educational reform include the

development of National Learning Standards that were adopted by states across the country. The

goal of the National Learning Standards was to become a more systematic method for devising

"clear and specific standards to communicate to students, teachers and parents exactly what is expected for students to learn" and for assessing whether standards were met.

According to this state's Board of Education records, the first thirty-four state learning standards that set the foundation the current learning standards were developed in 1985. These basic goals guided expectations for student learning in schools statewide. The state Board of Education made a case for state standards by noting that state standards could accomplish the following: giving students knowledge that is adaptive in a technologically changing world; targeting of limited resources to make the most positive impact on student learning; promoting across state collaboration, thereby improving practice; and promoting fairness that fosters high expectations for all students.

In 1995 the state initiated a Learning Standards Project to refine the state learning standards. Seven writing teams were selected to develop standards for seven major content areas (English Language Arts, Foreign Language, Fine Arts, Social Science, Mathematics, Physical Development and Health, and Science). Commentary from key stakeholders and the public were also considered in the development of the learning standards. Seven refinement teams comprised of parents, educators, practitioners, and business leaders also reviewed the learning standards. These standards serve as a framework guiding learning in schools. The standards outline: goals for student learning; specific standards for students to achieve; and benchmarks that assess students' progress in meeting standards.

The Early Learning Standards were developed in 2000 to correspond with the K-12 state's learning standards. The development and implementation of these learning standards directly impacted early childhood education. The following principles guided early learning according to this state's Early Learning Project website:

1. Early learning and development are multidimensional
2. Developmental domains are highly interrelated
3. Children are individuals who develop at different rates
4. Children will exhibit a range of skills and competencies in any domain of development
5. Knowledge of how children grow and develop, together with expectations that are consistent with growth patterns, are essential to develop, implement and maximize the benefits of educational experiences for children
6. Young children learn through active exploration of their environment in child-initiated and teacher-selected activities
7. Families are the primary caregivers and educators of young children.

Though the standards were originally developed for elementary and older students, these principles are similar to NAEYC's statement of developmentally appropriate practice outlined in Chapter 2. This suggests that they have been adapted to be developmentally appropriate for younger learners.

The early learning standards include all of the seven content areas that make up the state standards with one additional area, social/emotional. There were thirty-two learning goals for this state, each with corresponding standards and multiple benchmarks for early learning. The early learning standards were developed to guide early childhood curricula. The standards and benchmarks clearly outline how progress can be assessed in several developmental domains.

Archival data collected from Middleton School District's website in 2009 suggest that the 2008-2009 kindergarten curricula were aligned with the state learning standards in reading, writing, and mathematics. Curricula and their fit with state learning standards were outlined by the kindergarten curriculum map on the district's website. The kindergarten reading and language arts curricula included *Good Habits, Great Readers*, *Words Their Ways*, and guided reading instruction. Writing was also included in the curriculum. The writing resources used in instruction were *Touchstone Texts* and Spelling and Conventions Chart: K-2. The math curriculum centered upon calendar time, number work, identifying patterns, sorting, geometry,

and measurement and data collection activities. Curriculum resources corresponded with these math areas. Additionally, the kindergarten curriculum contained instruction in science that explored the five senses, farm life, and experimenting with materials. The social studies component of the curriculum consists of three units that focus upon classroom, family, and community culture.

The Middleton School District website also provided information on assessment. Kindergarteners' progress was assessed throughout the year and reported each quarter of the academic school year. The district's kindergarten report card tracked children's progress in meeting the state learning standards. The seven content areas to include: reading and language arts, math, fine arts, social science, physical development and health, science, and social skills. Foreign language is not a component of the kindergarten curriculum, nor is it assessed. Several components are listed under corresponding content area and students receive a developmental score ranging from 1-4 for each skill assessed. Children's performance on state-aligned performance standards and district curricula are scored from 1 (performing below grade level) to 4 (exceeding grade level) in nine areas: mathematics, writing, reading, fine motor, health, social studies, science, social skills, and listening/speaking.

Under each heading there are several performance indicators listed. For example, the reading category included understanding print concepts, letter-sounds and rhyming words. Some math concepts were counting, understanding one-to-one correspondence, identifying money and its numerical value, and understanding patterns and graphs. Health includes self-care; listening and speaking includes participating in discussions and listening to others; and social skills identified are displaying self-control, following the rules, and showing interest in learning. There is also a space for children's attendance to be recorded, parent's attendance at parent-

teacher conferences, comments, parent's signature, teacher's signature, and whether or not a

student will be promoted to the next grade or retained.

<div align="center">Local Impact of the NCLB Act</div>

Archival and educator interview data suggest that the historical changes that have taken

place over time and the NCLB Act have indirectly impacted early childhood education in

Middleton. A major theme that emerged from these data was the law had a "pushed down"

effect on early childhood education. Findings suggest kindergarten closely resembles first grade

of the 1950s.

<div align="center">*Pushed Down Effect*</div>

The "pushed down" effect refers to expectations and curricula from higher grades driving

expectations and curricula of lower grades. School readiness expectations, curricula content and

structure of kindergarten, and assessment have been pushed down into early childhood

education. These data specifically support the pushed down effect in preschool and kindergarten

in Middleton School District. Figure 7-1 offers a pictorial flow chart of the impact of the NCLB

Act within the Middleton Community School District.

School Readiness Expectations

Chapter 5 highlighted school readiness skills and competencies incoming kindergarteners

needed to learn prior to the first day of school.   Several of the school readiness categories were

identical to those outlined in the Getting Ready for School handbook distributed to families of

incoming first graders in the 1950s. Additionally, several educators made note of the changing

expectations of early childhood education, particularly kindergarten. They attributed the NCLB

Act with indirectly impacting what characterized school readiness and kindergarten expectations

in this study. This was particularly true among educators employed by the district in the pre-

kindergarten program and public schools.

Preschool teachers' comments suggested that since the implementation of the No Child

Left Behind Act, academic expectations for four- and five-year-olds increased. For example,

Sally, a pre-kindergarten teacher at Middleton Pre-K Program, said that school readiness

expectations changed:

> By no means has it affected us the way that it has affected older grades because obviously
> nobody has decided that preschool needs to standardized test. So, it wouldn't work.
> Where it has affected us, I feel that the readiness skills that we are expected to have
> children know before they go to kindergarten have really increased.

Sally described an increase in school readiness skills incoming kindergarteners were expected to

possess and display on the first day of school. As kindergarten expectations increase, the district

pre-kindergarten program must respond to increased demands. Samantha, a pre-kindergarten

administrator, discussed how she attempted to balance expectations pushed down into pre-

kindergarten and her philosophy of developmentally appropriate practice by embedding these

academic concepts and skills within the context of their school day. She said:

> I guess the expectations of kids when they get there [into kindergarten] are changing and
> so we're trying to, you know, prepare kids the best we can for that. In early childhood
> we're still trying to preserve that [developmentally appropriate practice]….We probably
> have more emphasis now on letter recognition and things like that. But we're trying to
> embed it in our day.

Samantha noted an increase in the nominal knowledge a preschooler must acquire prior to

entering kindergarten as a byproduct of the NCLB Act and pushed down expectations.

Kindergarten educators noted expectations pushed down from higher early childhood

grades. Pauline, a building principal, also discussed the indirect impact the NCLB Act has had on

academic expectations in the early years. She said:

It's just another layer that we have to look at to try to make sure those children are reading on grade level by 3rd grade. So then it kinda all backs up and then the pressures on 2nd, more pressure on 1st, more pressure on kindergarten so. I don't think we really look at it per se and say oh this is where it's impacting what our expectations are for school readiness. But probably indirectly it does. It should.

Nancy, a veteran kindergarten teacher, noted that "The more ready a student is the more successful they're going to be. Lately, there's a maturity to it because there's so much being pushed down to what kindergarteners are expected to do." Karla described a higher level of reading expected of kindergarteners since the enactment of the NCLB Act. She said, "I've seen just recently, now the kids need to be reading at a level 3 when they leave kindergarten according to the curriculum. Like I said before, some kids aren't ready to be reading like that." Despite the fact that some children were not viewed as "reading ready" the expectations still existed. The Getting Ready for School handbook suggested that children were not expected to read prior to first grade. Karla's comment suggests that this expectation had since changed.

Curricula

Educators described curricula changes since the enactment of the NCLB Act. Although community preschool teachers generally described the NCLB Act as having had little impact on their classroom practices, administrators noted the need to change their curricula in response to the law. However, teachers and administrators employed by Middleton School District contended that the NCLB Act indirectly led to curricula changes in early childhood education. They noted increased focus on "academic" learning and often times at the expense of social and emotional development and exploratory learning.

Preschool. Community early childhood education and care programs reported little impact of the NCLB Act on their classroom practice and philosophies. Several teachers working at daycare and learning centers in this community often perceived NCLB to have minimal

influence at the most on school readiness and their early childhood classroom practices. For example, Isabelle, a preschool teacher at a community learning center, did not perceive the NCLB Act to impact her classroom practices. When asked if the NCLB Act impacted how she conceptualizes school readiness she said NCLB has not impacted how I think about school readiness "Because I always been doing what I do now. So when it's time for my children to move and make the transition they're ready." She did not discuss any changes in her program's curriculum since the enactment of the NCLB Act.

Unlike her peers working in community programs, Halle, a district pre-kindergarten teacher, did perceive a shift in early childhood education since NCLB. She noted that center time had declined due to pushed down curricula. Halle stated:

> We have adopted a math curriculum and a reading curriculum starting this year. So we're working those things into our day. We also try to get 45 minutes of center time which never really happens now anymore with the new curriculums that we're also doing….Center time is what used to be the heart of early childhood….As kindergarten pushes down into early childhood, more and more of that gets taken away from us and we do more direct instruction.

Halle pointed out that the pre-kindergarten program in this district adopted a curriculum that is aligned with elementary school standards. Though she did not object to curriculum alignment, she was concerned with the subsequent reduction in center time these curricula led to in her classroom. She described center time, a time for child-directed exploration, as being "taken away" from early childhood education curricula.

Community preschool administrators' practices and perceptions of school readiness were indirectly impacted by the NCLB Act. They referenced the law as motivation to "do more" with their preschoolers before they enter kindergarten. For example, a director of a learning center, Faith, noted that the NCLB Act "makes me wanna push my kids even farther; it really does….It makes me push my kids here [at the learning center] to be a step ahead and even two steps

ahead." Faith's comment suggests that the NCLB Act was guiding her to curricula decisions.
She expected her preschool bound children at Sweetie Pie Learning Center to be more than
prepared to meet the expectations for kindergarten upon transitioning. Additionally, Mary, a
daycare director, contended:

> I think we should step up more and I think it kinda makes me wanna do more with my
> curriculum. We still need to work on providing the early learning standards but that
> means a lot of training for my staff and the staff aren't understanding what the early
> standards are it makes it hard for them to deliver it…We need to do more with our
> preschoolers to get them ready.

Mary's statement suggests the NCLB Act heightened her awareness of and commitment to
preparing preschool-age children in her program to meet or exceed kindergarten expectations. In
fact, one of her goals for her program was to implement curricula guided by the early learning
standards.

Elementary. This study's findings suggest that under the NCLB Act academic
expectations of older grades had accelerated early childhood curricula. This was particularly
evident among kindergarten-level teachers and administrators. For example, Nancy, a veteran
kindergarten teacher, said that expectations for children entering kindergarten have changed
dramatically. She contended:

> There's more academics expected. So I guess maybe it has impacted cause I say to
> parents now they have to be reading by the end [of kindergarten] so they have to be
> ready, be thinking about reading when they come in [to kindergarten]. They can't be
> thinking about whether I'm going to blocks or housekeeping. And although they get to
> do that, that's not a large portion of the day anymore. A large portion of the day is
> reading and math and how to be in a group and how to work independently and things
> that fifteen years ago were a part of first grade.

According to Nancy, in comparison to the past kindergarten was beginning to resemble
yesteryear's first grade learning environments and expectations. She explained that this change
in kindergarten had increased the need for children to be socially and emotionally mature enough

to attend to reading and math when they enter kindergarten. Nancy's statement suggests that play, a hallmark of early childhood education, had been cut to accommodate increased expectations for reading and math skill development in kindergarten. Additionally, an experienced kindergarten teacher, Lindsay, highlighted the notion that early childhood education has changed. She explained:

> I'm definitely more aware that our [kindergarten] day needs to be 97% academic and where ever everything else fits in, that's where it fits in including recess, rest time, and snack. Our day is so long for the kindergarteners that we have to have some down time. Half of them are complaining that they're tired by the end of the day. They fall asleep during certain activities. They're exhausted. It's a very long day since we have the extended day; we have to fit that in somewhere. Free choice center, I mean those 3% of the day needs to fit in somewhere. But if something needs to be cut, it's that exploration, that free play time or interaction with the kids.

Lindsay's statement suggests that there is a new early childhood education that is mostly academic. Social explorations and play have decreased in response to pushed down expectations of the NCLB Act. Her comment also suggests that children were having a difficult time adjusting to long days of academics and required "down time."

Karla, a kindergarten teacher, offered the only concrete example of how the curricula changes were pushed down into homes. She stated:

> It's the fact that I'm sending books home with them that they need to read at home…and writing things that they need to start taking home already in kindergarten. In 1st grade, they have actual homework that they're taking home to do because they don't have time in the classroom to do that activity. They send it home and it's just another thing lying on the parents that really, in my opinion is school responsibility. They push things down so far that it's not possible anymore.

Karla's statement implied that parents also had to continue to work with children at home on school work that could not be completed during the school day. According to her, the amount of homework kindergarteners received had increased since NCLB. These data suggest that parents

are expected to assume a central role in teaching children basic concepts in preparation for

kindergarten and once they enter kindergarten in preparation for the next grade.

Educator participants working within this public school system offered vivid illustrations

of how the NCLB Act impacted early childhood curriculum and everyday classroom structure.

They noted how the focus on academic preparation in the early grades has lessened time

available for exploratory learning and creative play—which had been a primary feature of early

childhood education in the recent past. Several educators noted the shift as problematic and

developmentally inappropriate.

Amplified Assessment

Assessing children's "progress" in the early years has increased. District educators, at

the preschool and kindergarten levels, report more assessment in the early years as a

consequence of the NCLB Act. Data suggest more assessment measures were required and

assessments were time consuming.

Preschool. Educators at the pre-kindergarten level reported paying closer attention to

progress and data now than prior to the NCLB Act. For instance, Samantha said "data" has

become increasingly important in early childhood. She explained:

> Not that we weren't accountable before [the NCLB Act] but I mean like our assessment
> that we use, it's a developmental checklist but we have software where we can [track] the
> children's progress in there. And I mean we're looking at data also. I mean in terms of
> how kids are doing. What progress are they making? Do we have groups of kids who
> aren't doing as well as other groups?

Samantha noted the growing importance of assessment and maintaining developmental data in

her pre-kindergarten program since NCLB. In addition to a developmental checklist, they have

software to assess children's progress over time. This was a change noted as an indirect result of

the NCLB Act. According to Halle, a pre-kindergarten teacher, testing measures and

requirements have risen. She said that the number of assessments given to preschoolers

increased since she first began teaching at Middleton Pre-K Program:

> When I first started we were doing, the first year I think we did one test. We did the Get Ready to Read and that was the first year they'd done it. And now we have Creative Curriculum Evaluation. We're still doing the Get Ready to Read. Some times we do our School Improvement Plan testing thing. We're doing a lot of testing. And I think that's where we see No Child Left Behind. And it takes a lot, cause when you test preschool kids you can't do what you can do with older kids and give them all their little sheets and they fill it out. It takes me one on one with 15 children in a 2 and ½ hour period. It takes me a long time to get through all of them. It takes away from teaching them. So that gets frustrating and I don't know what good it does when you're testing them. I mean I don't really know how that really helps. I know it gives the government their numbers to use, but it's frustrating for us.

Halle's statement suggests that assessments were time consuming in the early years. She was

frustrated by what she viewed was an excessive amount of time spent testing at the expense of

instruction in early childhood.

Elementary. Documentary evidence and educator data suggest that once children enter

kindergarten assessment persists. During the 2008-2009 academic school year kindergarteners

were assessed within their classrooms on identifying letters, print-related knowledge, word bank,

and knowledge of writing. Assessments also included portfolio and unit checklists and spellers.

There are also standardized evaluations of reading in kindergarten in the second and third

quarters of the year using the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). The state requires

English Language Learners be assessed in the third quarter (District Website, retrieved June

2008).

Comments made by administrators and teachers employed by the district about the NCLB

Act suggest that children's assessment in early childhood amplified since the enactment of the

law. According to James assessment impacted curricula and instruction locally. Since the

NCLB Act he described an increased awareness of testing and the progress of students and

school buildings. He offered the following:

> We don't center all of our instruction around the test, we know that it's a part of
> education right now. We do all that we can to make sure our students are prepared. We
> try to get them excited about it. But it's not the defining factor on whether our school is
> doing a good job of teaching our students or not. That's how the state and the
> government bases your performance. But as a district, they really look at are you moving
> students from point a to point b….[However] there's a lot of pressure from the district.
> Next week, they're giving out awards for all of the buildings that made AYP. And the
> ones that didn't make it, unfortunately, their names will be highlighted in the
> [newspaper]. These are the four school that didn't make AYP. And so you know, it has
> its pros and cons and you just keep working.

Though the focus on assessment related to the enactment of the NCLB Act was concerning,

James decided to work within the parameters of it as much as possible. Though school buildings

were not solely assessed based on performance on standardized tests, whether or not they made

AYP was noted by the school district and cited in the local newspaper.

Janice, a veteran kindergarten teacher in the district, offered a vivid illustration of

assessment in the context of kindergarten classrooms:

> It took me three weeks to get the screening done. Because at the kindergarten level every
> single screening piece I do is one-on-one. So that means all the other twenty-two
> children have to be productively and independently engaged for me to pull this one child
> over….So I have different times a day where I hope that they're all settled and doing
> what they're supposed to and I break the screening down to it's like two or three minutes
> per child. I call a kid over, we quickly do it…. I call another one over, quick do it, send
> them back. I get up. I go around put all the fires out. Get them redirected. Call another
> child over, quickly do a screening send them back. It takes me 3 weeks to collect all the
> data I'm being asked for to do the report card and to fill out the reports. It's stressful.

Janice described kindergarten assessment as time-consuming and stressful. Her comment

suggests that children have to work independently while teachers complete screenings. Findings

suggest amplified assessment required teachers redirect time away from classroom teaching for

extended periods of time to complete assessments.

Connections and Disconnections

Educators working within daycare and learning centers had different perceptions of the influence of the NCLB Act on their pedagogy. From their perspectives the law minimally, if at all, impacted their classroom practices. However, district-employed educators not only noted "pushed down" expectations, curricula, and assessment since the enactment of the NCLB Act, they also described an increased focus on academics at the expense of exploratory learning in early childhood education programs in this district. Findings also suggest the number and frequency of formal assessments has increased in early childhood education within the district. Increased assessment was related to a decline in time dedicated to classroom instruction.

Perceptions of the No Child Left Behind Act

This section describes parents' and educators' perceptions of the NCLB Act. Perceptions are organized around the pillars of the NCLB Act (accountability, curriculum alignment, freedom, and choice). Findings suggest the law aroused mixed reactions within Middleton Community School District. Participants' views of this law were multifaceted and diverse. Generally, educator participants viewed the NCLB Act as having merit, while parents' knowledge of the law was vague. However, several educators and parents expressed concern with how the NCLB Act has been implemented and played out at the local level in the area of accountability. To a lesser extent, educators at the district level discussed the law's influence on curriculum and local freedom. Choice was rarely mentioned.

Accountability

Accountability is a pillar of NCLB that several educators and some parents viewed as worthy of attention. Of the four pillars, this one was most often mentioned by participants in this study across subgroups. The majority of the educators and parents noted the need for schools

and teachers to be accountable for students' progress. However, they simultaneously argued against standardized testing as the means for ensuring accountability.

Educators

Educators typically agreed with the need for accountability and described it as a pillar they understood. They viewed accountability as the general goal of the NCLB Act. It was described as a means to ensure all children had equal opportunities to learn. However, some educators were skeptical about the success NCLB had ensuring accountability.

Preschool. Educators, particularly those working in community center based programs, described the NCLB Act as not meeting its goals. For example, Faith, director of a local learning center, contended:

> It's [NCLB] a joke….Because in kindergarten classes or in the school system period you have those kids that are slow to catch on….So these kids, are running around, they're doing things because they're bored. But you got this other child over here that's totally lost and the left behind so I really think it's a joke. I haven't seen it to be what it's supposed to be, I should say that.

Another point of disconnection between the NCLB Act and participants' perceptions was how accountability played out at the local level. Though accountability made sense to participants, when it was perceived as synonymous with standardized testing, it was considered limiting. For instance, Halle, a pre-kindergarten teacher, said "I mean a lot of teachers are just very frustrated by what apparently just means more paperwork and more testing" since the NCLB Act. More specifically, Bridget, a daycare teacher, stated:

> Well to a certain extent the No Child Left Behind Act is good, but my main key points on that is they [students are] gone be taking standardized test[s]. So they're [schools] getting them ready for standardized testing and they're [students are] missing out on being able to learn different subjects. They getting them ready for that test and only that test.

According to Bridget, the NCLB Act had increased emphasis on standardized testing in schools to a point where students were taught only what was tested at the expense of other subjects.

Elementary. Elementary educators also agreed with the need for accountability. For example, James, a building principal in the district, had this to say: "Overall, I think I understand the premise of it [NCLB]. And that was that simply schools, administrators, teachers need to be held accountable for student performance." Additionally, as a district-level administrator, Rachel contended:

> The accountability part of No Child Left Behind in terms of ensuring all kids are reading and they got, not only the literacy skills, but the numeracy skills that set them up to be successful, I think is wonderful.."

Karla, a kindergarten teacher, suggested that the premise of accountability advanced by the NCLB Act was intuitive. She stated, "It's [the NCBL Act] good in theory. Sounds…like something that would make sense. Like, of course we don't want to leave kids behind and let them fall through the cracks."

These educators also noted the pitfalls of accountability under the NCLB Act. Veteran kindergarten teacher Janice's comment illustrated nuances of perceptions of the NCLB Act. She suggested accountability resulted in excessive emphasis on testing to the detriment of learning. Janice stated:

> I think it's [NCLB] a disaster, if you really want to know. The concept of not leaving any child behind is a wonderful concept and I think that there are things that need to be done to help children. But I think that the way No Child Left Behind is set up is not the way to create success…I think measuring children by test scores is not the way to go. I think that taking money away from schools that are failing is not the way to be successful.

Although Janice described the concept of accountability in positive terms, she stated that overall the NCLB Act was disastrous. She identified measuring learning via standardized tests as one key reason why it was not well-received.

Parents

Parent participants tended to view the NCLB Act in general terms. Though they did not use specific language such as accountability, a few noted the need for equal educational opportunities. Some attributed the NCLB Act with providing such opportunities while others noted that the law had not been successful in addressing disparities in academic achievement. There were variations across social class subgroups. Poor and working-class parents described the NCLB as promoting accountability for student learning more often than middle-class families.

Low-income. Poor and working-class mothers tended to emphasize the need for accountability. The NCLB Act was considered positive because of its potential to ensure that schools were accountable for leaving no child behind. For example, Alicia, a mother and a community bus driver, said that the NCLB Act is a good thing. She asserted, "Well, I think it's a good thing cause enough [of] our kids [have] gotten left behind." Bonnie, another mother, asserted, "It's appropriate. I think that it's good, as far as to help and push along those children that might be struggling. So, I think it's good." Parents concurred with the general premise of leaving no child behind; they perceived the NCLB Act promoted this. Findings suggest that in this community school district being accountable for student learning is understood as an important feature of the NCLB Act and valued at the local level.

Francis had a slightly different view of the NCLB Act and its emphasis on accountability in comparison to the mothers above. The NCLB Act was not positively received by her:

> The No Child Left Behind Act, I believe, is the worst act that they could have ever came up with. Because these teachers for one, are overwhelmed. The classrooms are overcrowded and a lot of these children aren't getting the basic skills that they need to go on to the next grade. And the teacher just marks them off like they do know. And when

they get to the second grade, the third grade, the fourth grade, they have not learned anything more than what they learned in the third grade or the second grade.

Instead of promoting accountability for student learning, Francis's statement suggests that children did not have access to the resources they needed to be successful in school She noted that in the context of the NCLB Act children were passed from one grade to the next without regard for whether or not they had mastered basic prerequisite skills and competencies. In this instance the pillar of accountability was not perceived as being fulfilled.

Middle-income. Middle-class parents more often viewed the NCLB Act as ineffective and overly emphasized student performance on standardized tests as evidence of learning. Several parent participants believed that the NCLB Act was not working. This was typically the case when parents could not identify positive changes in school environments and student achievement. Consider Vanessa and Connie's comments, respectively:

It's just that, it's a act. It's just that. No Child Left Behind is an act. I mean, it's not working. I just don't feel it's working. We still have the problems in the school. Drugs is all over. The government will still build more prisons than they do schools. So if the No Child Left Behind Act was working, why we still building all these prisons?

I really don't understand it [NCLB]. So it sounds good in theory but it doesn't seem to be working. Most government-imposed things are usually a bunch of crap. That's how I feel about it.

According to these mothers, the NCLB Act was not working because poor learning environments and low academic achievement remained evident in the district. In fact, Gina, a middle-class parent whose child attended the private preschool, was concerned that accountability of the No Child Left Behind Act led schools and teachers to focus on children who were not achieving standards. She feared that her daughter, who she perceived to be a high achiever, would not be challenged in classrooms where children's knowledge bases varied. Gina said:

There's a great big disparity between what kids will come [into kindergarten knowing]. They're not all coming in at the same levels. No Child Left Behind doesn't stay focused

on the really bright kids. I don't want Marie to get bored and start acting out and lose her enthusiasm and motivation for learning that she has now. That's what I really worry about.

Gina contended that schools and educators were more structured toward ensuring low-achieving students gained requisite knowledge and skills as required under the NCLB Act. She suggested that this diverted attention away from providing high-achieving students with the individualized instruction they needed to be actively engaged and intellectually stimulated. She did not interpret the accountability as a goal for all children, but for those who were not achieving standards outlined by the NCLB Act. Gina was concerned that her high-achieving student would lose the gains she obtained in private preschool upon entering kindergarten in the context of the NCLB Act.

Like some educators, middle-class mothers also explained that the emphasis placed on standardized testing in the context of NCLB's pillar of accountability was not the best way to determine student learning. For instance, Pam, a parent who was sending her eldest son to kindergarten in the following academic year, did not approve of a focus on accountability so heavy that it resulted in "teaching to the test," believing it overly emphasized testing to the detriment of learning. Pam said:

> It [NCLB] is the biggest joke in the whole wide world. That is how many children are being left behind because of this whole No Child Left Behind? And what's happening is, our school systems now, nobody's teaching for the child's benefit. They're teaching to pass a test. Everybody's teaching to a test. Well, everybody's numbers have to be this. The report card has to look like that. And that is all, I think, a result of this No Child Left Behind.

Pam disagreed with what they perceived to be a heavy focus on standardized testing without regard for what was important for children. She viewed teaching to the test as a byproduct of the NCLB Act.

Curriculum

Curriculum alignment was only identified among educator participants. Therefore this section focused on their perceptions. In addition, unlike accountability, this pillar was not included in all of the educators' discussions of the NCLB Act. In fact, curriculum alignment was mentioned by educators employed by the Middleton School District. Some educators in the district perceived curriculum alignment as a positive outcome and indirect result of the enactment of the NCLB Act. They pointed out ways that the NCLB Act refocused attention to curriculum and pedagogy at the local level in response to state and national standards.

Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten administrators viewed curriculum alignment in positive terms. For example, Samantha, a director at a pre-kindergarten program, suggested that progress has been made in aligning curriculum within the district. She stated:

> The good thing, I think, about No Child Left Behind is that it has tightened things up or forced systems to tighten up in terms of alignment of curriculum. And I think having high expectations, looking at subgroups and making sure that all kids are achieving and trying to eliminate what disparity you can. Those kinds of things are awarenesses that are positive that have come from [NCLB].

In addition to other "positives" Samantha perceived the NCLB Act to have indirectly "tightened up" curriculum alignment within the district. Pauline, a building principal, further explained:

> I think it's [NCLB] impacting the classroom. I think we, at least I think in this district in particular, I know in my building the teachers look at the Illinois Learning Standards and try to make sure they are covering those. And if they follow our district curriculum it's aligned to the Illinois Learning Standards. So if they do a good job of following the curriculum time lines they're doing their jobs and they shouldn't have to worry that their children won't do well on the test, other than their sped [special education] children. So, I think in that way teachers are probably much more aware of what they are supposed to be teaching and are really paying attention to that more than probably they did before No Child Left Behind.

According to Pauline, a byproduct of the NCLB Act was heightened awareness of the Learning

Standards. She suggested that teachers were more in tune with the district's curriculum and

timelines, particularly within her school building.

Jackie, a first-year kindergarten teacher, provided a concrete example of curriculum

alignment taking place within her building. She offered the following description:

> The first thing that we've [kindergarten teachers] done, is we have specific curriculum
> that is aligned against the State Standards which is aligned against national standards.
> And the curriculum is set up to follow those and the things children need to know by
> certain periods of time. And we break that curriculum into semesters and then months
> and then weeks and units. And we follow that to a "tee" every single day.

Jackie clearly articulated curriculum alignment. Though she, a new teacher in the district, did

not attribute it to the NCLB Act, experienced educators in the district such as Samantha and

Pauline did. Pauline also said that if classroom teachers aligned their curricula with the district's

they would be successful reaching the standards of achievement required by the NCLB Act.

Local Freedom

Accountability and curriculum alignment was related to local freedom, a third pillar of

the NCLB Act. Findings suggest that in the context of standardized testing and aligning

curricula, local freedom was not evident. No educator responded that they had more freedom to

make decisions in their classrooms or school buildings since the enactment of the NCLB Act in

this study. Instead, some educators expressed concern with what was perceived as impingement

upon professional agency in the context of the NCLB Act. Like curriculum alignment, this

concern was prevalent among both preschool and kindergarten-level educators employed by

Middleton School District.

Educators discussed having to make decisions between providing developmentally

appropriate activities for young children and reaching expectations and demands of the NCLB

Act. For instance, Samantha, a pre-kindergarten administrator, discussed how the NCLB act has

indirectly impacted school readiness expectations. She explained how she attempted to balance

expectations "pushed down" into pre-kindergarten with her philosophy of developmentally

appropriate practice. She said:

> I guess the expectations of kids when they get there [kindergarten] are changing and so we're trying to prepare kids the best we can for that. But I mean in early childhood we're still trying to preserve that [developmentally appropriate practice]….We probably have more emphasis now on letter recognition and things like that. But we're trying to embed it in our day.

Samantha's comment suggests that increased emphasis on letter recognition and other nominal

knowledge was not interpreted as developmentally appropriate. Although Samantha did not

possess the freedom to disregard higher kindergarten expectations, she attempted to balance

them with what she viewed as developmentally appropriate practices of embedding nominal

knowledge instruction within the context of children's routines.

Kindergarten teachers also noted that expectations of first grade had increased.

Therefore, they were expected to teach children skills that were counter to their notions of

developmentally appropriate practice. Janice, a kindergarten teacher in the district expressed her

frustrations with the NCLB Act in the following:

> Well some times it makes me sad. Because in their attempt to set standards so that we don't leave children behind, some times I think they lose sight of the fact that these are children. First they're children. They're not statistics and not every child is ready to do everything. Children don't grow the same. They don't mature the same. Kids are not cookie cutters. And the temptation of this law is to assume that kids are cookie cutters and they're not. It puts a lot of pressure on teachers I think…makes us feel responsible for things that I don't know how we can be responsible for but we're trying to fix it anyway.

Janice noted that she felt pressure to teach skills and competencies she considered inappropriate

for certain children in order to meet standards outlined by the NCLB Act. Her statement

suggests that teachers had limited professional agency within individual public school buildings

and local freedom did not extend into classrooms. To further illustrate this point, Karla, a new

kindergarten teacher, shared her thoughts on "pushed down" expectations for children to be

reading at a certain level by the end of kindergarten. She noted the following:

> Some kids, five-year-olds…they're starting when they're just turning five and they're leaving when they're starting first grade now they're just turning six. They're just, they're not ready to read. Their brains have not matured. They haven't gone through the phase yet so that they're ready. And that, I mean, that puts them at a disadvantage already just because they're not developing as fast as somebody else. That's just ridiculous. So the more stuff that I can teach her the better. But this year I had to cut back on play time which is, I think, is very important in kindergarten.

As a professional Karla did not agree with the increased reading expectations for young children.

However, she described an obligation to ensure that her kindergarteners met this expectation to

make certain her students were not left behind in the context of the NCLB Act. She explained

that she "cut back on play time" even though professionally she viewed it as an important

element of early learning to promote reading development. Lindsay also had to reduce free

exploration to accommodate academic requirements. She said:

> But if something needs to be cut, it's that exploration, that free play time or interaction with the kids. So that's really difficult too especially because I say they're five. They need that. I understand they need that. But where in my day does that fit? It doesn't because I can barely get to what I need to get to academically.

These data suggest that local agency proposed by the NCLB Act did not allow space for

flexibility in the classrooms. Participants' comments highlighted the ways in which professional

agency and philosophy had to be juggled in attempts to meet expectations for the next grades.

Choice

Choice, the final pillar of the NCLB Act, focused on increasing parental choice regarding

their children's schooling. I explored whether or not parent participants mentioned having more

or less choice in descriptions of the law. Data from this case study suggest the law was not well-

understood by some parents. Not a single parent talked about having more freedom to make

educational choices as an impact of the NCLB Act. Data did not reveal any discussion about choice—neither increased level of choice nor parent decision making in the public educational process.

Several mothers were familiar with the NCLB Act and had provided comments regarding accountability, but none mentioned choice. In fact, in some cases parents had a vague understanding of or none at all of the NCLB Act. Though middle-class mothers typically reported having a general understanding of the NCLB Act, Melissa, a middle-class mother of two preschoolers, said that she did not know much about this law. She stated, "I don't know a great deal about the No Child Left Behind Act. I do feel it is important for every child to receive an education. But I don't know anything about it, specifically." Her knowledge was sparse.

These data suggest that locally, this law had not reached a segment of poor, African American parents of young children. For example, in response to the question "Tell me what you think about the No Child Left Behind Act," Niecey, a poor mother of four, said, "I ain't too familiar with that one [the NCLB Act]….I don't know nothing about that one." Ebony, another poor parent, responded similarly:

> I didn't get the information on that [the NCLB Act]. I heard about it but I've really not gotten into it because I never really got the information on it. I never got the details on what it was really about. So, I don't have a take on that.

Ebony's comment illustrates that the NCLB Act and its pillar of choice had not been clearly communicated to some parents. A few mothers, such as Ebony, did not have enough information about the NCLB Act to discuss it. Limited knowledge of the NCLB Act had the potential to perpetuate school readiness disadvantages in the context of changing expectations of incoming kindergarteners.

Connections and Disconnections

Perceptions of the NCLB Act were nuanced. Participants who included statements about the goodness of the law in theory, also perceived limitations of it. Figure 7-2 Several participants viewed the accountability pillar of the NCLB Act as a positive step in the direction of lessening disparities in academic achievement. At the least, educators and parents generally noted that it was important to ensure all children had opportunities to learn in schools. Educators and some parents stressed the need for accountability but they did not agree with what they viewed as the law's tendency to over-emphasize standardized testing as a means to assess learning. In terms of curriculum development, a small group of educators noted and provided examples of increased curriculum alignment with State and National Learning Standards. Finally, findings suggest parents were not enjoying more choice when it came to public education. In this sample, poor parents were less familiar with goals and concepts guiding the NCLB Act compared to middle-class parents and educators working within the public school district.

Chapter Summary

Kindergarten has undergone key historical changes over time. This district began with a few private programs in the 1930s to full-day public kindergarten programs in the late 1980s. Children also are typically younger when they enter school than they were sixty years ago. Kindergarten, not first grade, generally marks entry into formal schooling today.

National Learning Standards directly impacted children going to kindergarten in Middleton. They provided a framework for what children were expected to learn prior to and upon entering kindergarten and outlined learning indicators. The National, State, and Early Learning Standards played key roles in setting expectations for children entering kindergarten.

Findings further suggest that current kindergarten expectations, curriculum, and assessments resemble the first grade of the 1950s.

The NCLB Act was a prominent feature within this community school district. As foreseen by scholars in the field, data suggest the No Child Left Behind Act had a local impact on early childhood education. It directly and indirectly influenced early childhood education. There was a growing demand for achievement in reading and math "pushed down" from higher grades by district, state, and national entities. According to district-employed educators, school readiness expectations had increased, kindergarten curricula have become more academic, and assessment amplified. Educators typically disagreed with pushed down expectations of the NCLB Act.

Though the goals of the NCLB Act were considered important, participants' perceptions of accountability, curriculum, freedom, and choice were nuanced. Educators and parents believed that NCLB was not working because they had yet to see proof of children not being left behind in schools. Despite professional orientations and developmentally appropriate philosophies, district-level educators had to adjust their practices and expectations for school readiness and incoming kindergarteners. Findings suggest that some of the pushed down effect of the NCLB Act could potentially disadvantage children who are developing at the lower end of the continuum. On the other hand, children at the upper end of the developmental continuum can gain school readiness advantages.

Preschool was noted as important in easing children's transition in kindergarten and promoting their development in multiple domains though community programs did not have access to national policy and are disconnected from district expectations. Children enrolled in programs in which educators have limited knowledge of changes taking place in early childhood

education could potentially suffer from school readiness disadvantages, while children enrolled in programs in which educators are aware of these changes have the potential to achieve advantages from their participation. Parents also were overwhelmingly disconnected from components of national education policy. Though these policies stressed the importance of families' roles in children's education, parents knew little about them. This was particularly true among poor parents. Families that have limited or no knowledge of changes in school readiness expectations and kindergarten could result in school readiness disadvantages in terms of preparing children to meet these expectations. On the other hand being knowledgeable of current expectations has the potential to confer school readiness advantages.

Following Chapter

Both parents and educators in this study suggest that children are not only expected to learn in school, but at home as well prior to entering kindergarten. Families were expected to do more to prepare children for these increased expectations for children to perform in schools. The next chapter explores institutional logistics and community resources families navigate in the kindergarten preparation process.

CHAPTER 8: INSTITUTIONAL LOGISTICS AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Families had to navigate institutions as they prepared for children's transition into kindergarten. Implementation of transition activities and supports connecting families and children to school offer continuity across home and school contexts that benefit children. This chapter explores often taken for granted, yet important, roles families assume in attending to the institutional logistics of preparing children for kindergarten and the community school readiness resources available to assist their efforts. Identified herein are: (1) institutional logistics and (2) community school readiness resources. Each will be discussed as they related to middle- and low-income families. Parents, across social class, attended to three institutional logistics in preparation for pending kindergarten transitions. Four community school readiness resources were identified, including and varied across participant and program types, to support families in the community. Advantages and disadvantages related to preparing children for school were associated with families' navigation of institutional logistics and resources.

Institutional Logistics

Attending to transition logistics was a significant role that families assumed in preparing children for kindergarten. Families across social class had to address institutional logistics of compulsory schooling in Middleton Community School District such as: administrative appointments, choosing elementary schools, and arranging transportation. Social class variations emerged in terms of choosing schools and the primary mode of transportation parents identified.

Administrative Tasks

Parents were responsible for meeting administrative deadlines and requirements for kindergarten. Middleton School District required families to register and enroll children in school prior to the first day of instruction. Proofs of residency, birth certificates, and medical

records were required prior to the first day of school. Logistical administrative tasks related to preparing children for kindergarten involved ensuring that children received immunizations and physical exams and were registered. Families were generally aware of these administrative requirements.

Middle-Income

Physical and dental exams and immunizations were appointments that were scheduled by families. Mothers were aware of immunization requirements and scheduled medical appointments for their children accordingly. For example, in response to what appointments do you have to make before your son begins kindergarten, Tina answered "I need to make sure he has his immunizations." Tina recalled the need for immunizations and noted that she had to be sure to make an appointment for her son to meet this requirement. Middle-class mothers were not only aware of the need to schedule medical appointments for their children, but they were also aware of the need to do so early. Pam replied that they had completed immunization requirements for kindergarten months before the first day of kindergarten. She said:

> Well, he's already had his shots. I brought his immunization up to date. Because, I talked to his pediatrician. [He said] Some of the immunizations that they have because there are going to be a big mass amount of kids going to kindergarten this year, that need to immunized, they were going to be running out of some of the vaccinations. So, I already had him vaccinated in the fall.

Pam met the district's requirements for immunizations in order to avoid possible shortages that might delay her son's school attendance.

In addition to medical records, parent participants also described kindergarten registration as part of the administrative preparation process. Joy was also cognizant of the health and administrative regulations in place to ensure that children are "ready" for school. She said that before her preschooler begins kindergarten she "Has to have a physical.   I have to register her in

the school I need to or want to register her in anyway. So, that's part of the preparation and to be sure she's ready." Middle-class mothers typically referenced medical and registration appointment needed for kindergarten preparation.

Low-Income

Working-class and poor parents reported several administrative tasks that they attended to in preparation for their children's kindergarten transitions. As was the case with middle-income mothers, working-class and poor mothers also met requirements for physical examinations and immunization by medical doctors and dentists. Based on previous experience, Nicki knew that a physical examination was required for kindergarten. She said that her son, "Just have to get a physical. I believe that's all my daughter had to do and she's in kindergarten now." The district required children receive both physical and dental exams prior to the first day of school. Xenophia noted these requirements. She said that before her son began kindergarten, "He have to have a dentist appointment, a physical… I think that's it dentist, physical. And make sure all his shots are up to date." According to Francis the following were required for entrance into kindergarten:

> Shots, they need to get the shots. They need to go to the dentist. They take like pre-tests for them before they go into the kindergarten to make sure [they know] what level that they're on to divide the kids up cause they have different groups in the classrooms.

Francis also identified institutional logistics such as ensuring children were vaccinated and had dental exams as elements of basic preparation for kindergarten. Francis described a pre-test for incoming kindergarteners that might be a required administrative task as well.

The logistics of registering for kindergarten in the context of controlled choice school assignment also emerged among working-class and poor families. For example, Bonnie, a working-class mother, registered her child for kindergarten early. She stated:

> Well, at her parent/teacher conference that just passed a week ago, I was actually able to register her for kindergarten. So, basically now I'm just sitting and waiting for them to send me my letter in the mail to let me know that she is going to be sent to Suncrest. That was my school of choice.

Registering children for a school in this community was a detailed process for some families, especially those who were sending their first child to kindergarten. Registering her child for kindergarten was one of the administrative tasks that Wendy had to attend to:

> I have to register her, find her a school and make sure where she is going. Just preparing her, talk to her, letting her know she's going to a different school. It's bigger, more kids. I just let her know try to do more things on her own, you know.

In addition to school registration, Wendy noted that she needed to ensure that her child was mentally, socially, and physically ready to begin kindergarten.

Preparing children for kindergarten required attending to administrative tasks such as providing records of immunization, physical and dental examinations, and registering for school. Data suggested that parents were generally aware of these basic requirements for entering kindergarten. The requirement of registering for kindergarten was common knowledge in this community school district. Across social class, parent had to navigate several institutions to conduct administrative logistical preparation for school.

Choosing Schools

Within this case, children were not assigned to their neighborhood schools, though proximity to a school was considered in the assignment process. During the registration process, parents applied for three schools in ranked order. Though the placements had not been distributed through the controlled choice process, parents talked about which school they preferred for assignment. Several schools were identified among study participants' top three choices. Table 8-1 displays social class subgroup clustering among schools of choice.

Middle-Income

Middle-class families' elementary school choices were: Waysworth, Cedar North, Warren Grove, Brownswell, and private schools. Waysworth, Cedar North, and Warren Grove were located in the southern neighborhoods in the Middleton. Brownswell was located in the northern section of the city. Most mothers who selected these schools lived outside of these neighborhoods, while a few lived within the neighborhoods. In general, middle-class families most commonly identified two schools, Waysworth and Cedar North, among their top three choices.

Middle-class parents typically did not choose schools because of the neighborhoods that they were located within. Rather, they often had specific reasons that centered upon their concern with the physical space, curriculum, academic performance, and reputations of schools. For example, although a private school was a top choice for Gina, Cedar North also offered a viable option for kindergarten because:

> It's a new building. And it's got technology; it's got resources; it's got space. Space, that's big because older buildings don't necessarily have space. There can be computers around. So, if the kids are working on a big project, they can go out of their classroom and have places where they can spread out a big project on a big table. And so, I really like that about it.

The physical layout of the school was considered important to Gina. Another rationale for choice was schools' reputations. Consider the following comment from Melissa, a mother of two preschoolers:

> Well, I'm sure you know about the School for Choice Program, so I don't know for sure which school she would end up going to. That was my first choice, Cedar North. It's a year-round school. The curriculum seemed pretty tight. The people seemed very on point when I went to the school tour. There's not really one in my neighborhood. I'm outside of that whatever mile radius, so the closest one to me is Pinesville.

Melissa chose Cedar North because it offered a balanced calendar, or year-round instruction, and

superior curricula. Pam's first elementary school choice was Waysworth and her second choice

was Cedar North:

> My first choice is Waysworth. And, Cedar North [is my second choice]...because I am a
> numbers person. So, I look at test scores first. That's the first thing I look at. And, they
> are killing it [performing well] on their test scores. And I know that this is a place he will
> do well academically and socially. I look at their statistics….I look also like their
> discipline reports and things like that. I talk to other parents that go there, what kind of
> issues [are they] having at this school? One of my friends' husbands, he works there. And
> so, he's like, they really don't have a lot of problems with discipline. You don't have a lot
> of problems when you have a school full of children who are academically thriving.

Pam was deliberate in choosing schools in which students excelled academically and socially.

Like Pam, Vanessa focused more on student performance and reputation than proximity. For

instance, Vanessa, a grandparent of a child entering kindergarten in the fall, planned for her

granddaughter to join her brother at Cedar North. This school was not in their neighborhood.

She stated "It's out in [a] predominately White neighborhood. But it seems to be a good

school….It's a long way away and she will have to be bussed." Despite the distance, Cedar

North was Vanessa's family's first choice because it was a "good school." Connie also included

Waysworth as one of her top choices because if its reputation:

> Waysworth is in the running but mainly because [of the] peer thing, so we don't even
> really know. We have a school that is right here, Gloribrook. And when we tell people
> where we live, they automatically say Waysworth. So, we went to visit [Gloribrook] and
> I noticed that it was majority African American. And then the principal also told me that
> they have like eighty percent of the poor. So, I'm sure that has something to do with why
> no one even mentions this school. We haven't been able to visit [Waysworth] yet.
> They're in the richer part of the neighborhood so I'm sure they have more.

Connie was new to the community and the mesSages she received about Waysworth highlighted

its good reputation. Though she favored Gloribrook's arts-based curriculum for her son, Connie

attributed the invisibility of it in comparison to Waysworth to the racial and social class

composition of the student population.

Tina, another middle-income mother, planned to send her child to Waysworth, their neighborhood school. She stated:

> I've still heard good things about Waysworth. I'm trying to decide between Waysworth or if he'll go to a private school…..That's what we're trying to decide. I think not knowing much, those are my two choices that I'm looking at most favorably. But once I get there and go to the open houses and learn more that could change.

Though she was still in the process of deciding on schools, she "heard good things" about Waysworth and planned to include it as one of her primary school choices. Private school was also considered a viable elementary school option.

One middle-class parent did not include Waysworth or Cedar North as one of her top three picks. Instead, Joy's first choice for her daughter's kindergarten program was Brownswell, which was the only elementary school located on the northern side of the city. The majority of the population is Latino (46.5%) and African American (40%). Less than 15% were White and Asian/Pacific Islander. This school also was overwhelmingly low-income (83%). Joy explained why Brownswell was her first choice in the following:

> The reason I put her sister in there is because they're the only one that have foreign language. And, since Sweetie Pie is teaching Spanish, I wanted her to continue Spanish and the same way with Candice. I wanted her to continue her foreign language… [Brownswell Elementary School is] way on the other side of town….They all have to catch a bus. Unless I'm late then I'll take them.

Joy's preschooler will be transported to kindergarten by bus to a school outside of the neighborhood to ensure that she attends a program that offers continuity in language instruction from the learning center she attended. The academic reputation of the school was not mentioned in this example.

Low-Income

Among working-class and poor parents, schools of choice were generally in their neighborhoods. Alicia's first choice was Time Center because it offered continuity for her

preschooler as she transitioned from Middleton Pre-K Program into elementary. She chose this

school because:

> Oh, it's over here in my neighborhood. Actually I'm a previous school bus driver. I drove for Middleton School District for nine years. And I've never…heard anything bad about the school. And I was really debating about did I want to put her in year-round or put her in regular because [of] my job and stuff….So, but when they [Connection Center staff] told me it was just regular school. So I was like, okay I'll just stick here. It's just right down the street from my house. But I don't know really how the kids are. I know some of them was pretty rough, though.

Despite the fact that the school did not provide the year-round structure she desired and some of

the children were "pretty rough," Alicia selected Time Center as her first choice mainly because

of its close proximity to home. Reputation also played an important role in Alicia's decision.

She suggested that Time Center did not have a negative reputation in the district that she was

aware of. Xenophia planned to enroll her son into Time Center, and he would "Still be in the

speech program" and receive similar services that he received as a pre-kindergartener at

Middleton Pre-K. Another one of the things she liked about Time Center was that it was located

in her mother's neighborhood and in close proximity to her place of employment. She said:

> I like the neighborhood because my mom, they live close to the neighborhood. They live like right up the street from it. I like how they staff is real good. I mean, people who used to go there, they kids went there, had no problems. Good things about it. I mean they did a complete turn around. I think it was a few years ago. I don't know if it was the test scores or something. They made a complete turn around and it's real nice.

The turn around noted by Xenophia referred to the district-imposed reorganization of the

structure and staff at the school when the school did not meet AYP. Since then, the school's

reputation had become more favorable. Working-class and poor mothers seemed to be

concerned with the proximity of the school to their social networks. Nicki said that her

preschooler will attend Suncrest, which is in her neighborhood, for kindergarten. She stated:

> It's a nice school. Actually I went there when I was younger. Now my daughter is there. I go up there because they be having school stuff like reading programs and stuff. And

it's a real nice school. I mean the teachers are wonderful. The counselors is wonderful. They all have respect. I talk to them. They help you with anything if you have a problem at home, like you need something. Well they'll help you. They don't criticize you or nothing like that. So I be up there a lot doing different stuff with my daughter. So most of the little teachers there know me so I like the school. It's a real nice school. I can't wait 'till Tony go there.

The close proximity of the school and the generational history that the family had was one of the deciding factors for Nicki. The positive relationships she had with the teachers was also a reason why she looked forward to enrolling her son in Suncrest for kindergarten. Niecey's schools of choice, Time Center and Suncrest, were also located in close proximity to her home. She explained that the school that her daughter will go to for kindergarten is:

Probably Time Center. It's school of choice so I don't know. Whichever school have an opening. It's either Time Center or Suncrest. I think them the only two…..Time Center is like right up here on Maybelline Street and Suncrest is like maybe five blocks from here.

Niecey also planned to enroll her daughter in a neighborhood school if possible. Time Center was her first choice.

One exception to working-class parents choosing schools in their neighborhood or near their family members was Wendy. She was a student teacher at the time of the interview. Wendy was considering two schools outside of her neighborhood, Red Brick Lane and Warren Grove. She described these choices in the following:

Out of all the schools I've just narrowed it down to two…Red Brick Lane compared to Warren Grove…. I'm looking for is a school where I can send [her] where she's not going to have to deal with a lot of kids really picking on her. That's my real concern when I'm looking for a school….I went to Warren Grove and I worked there for maybe about two weeks and I really liked it. I said, oh this is really nice, something different and smaller. But the only thing I was concerned more about is that there were just maybe two, three African Americans in each classroom. Because of the neighborhood. So, that's the other thing that concerned me. But I like the school but it's not really that diverse….There's more diversity at Red Brick Land compared to Warren Grove.

Wendy's primary concern was choosing a school that offered her daughter a comfortable learning environment, to include opportunities for positive peer relationships and racial diversity.

Unlike other working-class and poor families, Wendy's top choices were located on the southern side of Middleton.

Connections and Disconnections

All of the parent participants in this study had to choose three schools for possible assignment. The schools parents chose typically varied by social class. Parents' schools of choice overlapped within social class subgroups but not across them. Middle-class mothers chose Waysworth and Cedar North most often as elementary schools they wanted their children to attend for kindergarten. Both of these schools were located in neighborhoods in the southern part of the city and had reputations for academic performance. On the other hand, poor and working-class mothers preferred Suncrest and Time Center, as they were more often located in the northern section of the city and reportedly had positive social relationships between staff and parents.

Transportation

Transportation also was an important logistical consideration. Families also made decisions about how children would be transported to and from school in the process of preparing children kindergarten. Parents who expected their children to attend school nearby said that their children would be walked to school or dropped off by a parent. Children who attended school outside of their neighborhood were most likely to be driven to school by a parent or transported by bus.

Middle-Income

Middle-class families generally chose schools that were outside of their neighborhoods. They typically planned to transport their children to and from school once they began kindergarten. For instance, in response to the question "Who will drop your child off and pick

your child up from school?" Melissa said "I will probably be doing that myself." Shana

provided another example. She said "Right now it might be both of us [transporting their child

to kindergarten] because we [my husband and I] work at the same place." Laurie was primarily

responsible for transporting her children to school since her husband commuted out of town for

work. She stated that "I drop the children off at school and pick them [up]." Pam was opposed

to having her son ride the school bus alone. Pam planned to transport her child to and from

school. She stated:

> He will not get on a bus. Right now I don't trust anybody driving him around. And so, I think at five years old, that's a very young age and still, again, the emotional and maturity level of a child at that age, I think I just couldn't ... unless he had an older sibling that was on a bus with him, I could not allow him to. So, I will definitely be dropping him off and picking him up.

These findings suggest that families were required to arrange transportation for their children.

Middle-class mother tended to take on this task by personally transporting children to and from

school.

Vanessa and Joy, a middle-class grandmother and older mother respectively, provided

two exceptions. Both of them reported that their children would begin to ride the school bus

once they started kindergarten:

> And she's excited about going with [her older brother] Jamal and they riding the bus together. And they making plans as to how they're going to ride the bus together. And with them riding my church bus, they got it down pat.

> She rides the bus right now. She's also in a learning center. I do all the transporting other than to and from school. She goes on the bus.

Vanessa and Joy planned to have their children transported to school via school bus. Both of

their preschoolers had prior experiences riding the bus and were going to be riding with older

siblings which might have impacted their decisions.

Low-Income

Despite the fact the working-class and poor families often reported that their schools of choice were within their neighborhoods, they identified transportation via bus as the primary mode of transportation. Therefore, coordinating bus transportation required navigating institutional resources. For instance, Alicia made plans for her child to travel to school on the bus and to be picked up by the daycare provider because of work demands. She explained "Now that she's going to kindergarten, the bus is going to be dropping her off at daycare because I'll be getting ready to go to work. I work nights." Alicia had to coordinate transportation with her child care provider and district bus services because of the constraints of her work schedule. Working-class and poor families residing some distance away from their school of choice planned for children to be transported to kindergarten via school bus.

There were some exceptions regarding parents' preference for bus transportation among poor and working-class families. For example, Bonnie, a parent living within walking distance of the school, decided to transport her child to and from kindergarten. She planned to walk her daughter to school when she entered kindergarten. She said, "I actually live within walking distance from the school so I will walk her to school and walk back with her when school's out." Nicki also lived within walking distance of her school of choice. When asked who would transport her son to and from school she replied "I will." Like Bonnie, Wendy preferred to transport her children to school. She stated:

> Depends on if I'm working yet. I'm the type I like to take my kids to school. I don't like them riding the bus. So, if she does not take a bus, I usually take my first-grader. I've [taken] her [to school] every day.

Though work schedule could influence her transportation needs, Wendy preferred to transport her children to school personally instead of using the bus services.

Connections and Disconnections

Making decisions about transportation to and from school was a readiness logistical activity that parents had to consider as they prepared children for kindergarten. Parent participants planned to personally transport (driving or walking) kindergarteners or coordinate school bus transportation. Data from this study suggest that parents considered distance from school, work schedules, and personal preferences in their plans for transporting children to and from school. Middle-class mothers transported their children personally more often than poor and working-class families, who more often noted that their children would be transported via bus.

Parents were responsible for ensuring logistical readiness, which was required in order for children to be allowed to attend kindergarten. Administrative appointments, choosing schools, and coordinating transportation required forward logistical planning. Families had to navigate several separate institutions prior to the first day of kindergarten to include medical offices and school district offices and buildings. Though attending to institutional logistics was required across social class subgroups, middle-class and working-class and poor families chose different schools for their children and preferred different modes of transportation to and from kindergarten.

Community School Readiness Resources

Middleton published a community pamphlet that lists over 500 local resources and social service organizations located in the community and neighboring cities in the county. Examples of the categories of resources provided in the "look book" were: education, health care, recreation, nutrition, human resources, domestic violence, public safety, religion, employment, and culture. Of particular interest to this study are programs and services for preschool-aged

children, such as library and parks. The newly remodeled city library hosted a variety of free activities for residents of Middleton. Middleton Library sponsored programs for preschoolers that included art and story shops. The city also had a smaller branch library and a mobile library that served children in the community. The Middleton Park District included over fifty parks. The park district offered music and preschool programs for children. Unlike the public library, these programs were typically provided for a fee ($45-$140 per session) to children and families in the community.

Educators' and parents' data were analyzed to better understand how parents navigate places in the neighborhood that offer them guidance about sending their children to kindergarten. In some instances, educators and parents had difficulty identifying neighborhood resources for preparing children for school. Instead of neighborhood resources, community-wide ones were most noted by participants. Participants generally were able to identify several community resources families could utilize to get questions answered about kindergarten. They offered a range of community resources that included: public libraries, not-for-profit organizations, the public university, the public health department, and the Internet. The most commonly identified community school readiness resources were: Connection Center; Arch Place; public schools; and family, friends, and acquaintances.

Connection Center

The Connection Center was a key community school readiness resource in Middleton. Participants in this study referenced it as a place families could get help or questions answered about getting children ready for school. The Connection Center oversaw the controlled choice process for Middleton School District. It was the central location for school assignment and building-specific information in the community. All families of incoming kindergarteners were

required to apply and register their children for school. Families apply for three different elementary schools in ranked order, and they are processed through the Connection Center, via a computerized system. A recent district report noted that over 95% of kindergarten families received either their first, second, or third school of choice.

The director of the Connection Center, known in the community by her first name, Miss Sophie, was interviewed. She had been the director of the Center "since the inception" in 1998. Miss Sophie explained that, in response to the consent decree and to community need, the Connection Center had become more than a place to register children for kindergarten in the district. It was also a place families could go to get help when they needed it.

Miss Sophie described several initiatives and activities offered by the Connection Center, including collecting and distributing winter clothing to children in need and sponsoring community wide programs to acknowledge children's school achievement and historical contributions of African Americans. The Connection Center also offered two key school readiness services to assist families in preparing children for school: a welcome brochure and on-site physical examinations. The Connection Center provided families with brochures during registration. The brochure welcomed families into the district, described the kindergarten registration process, program options, and entrance requirements. The brochure also outlined ways for families to prepare children for school at home and what they would learn upon entering kindergarten. Miss Sophie provided the following description of resources for families the Center offered:

> Each March you know that is going to be kindergarten registration. Families look forward to that and everybody comes in and they sign their kids up. It allows us to know the number of kids we're going to have coming into a kindergarten class, the number of teachers that need to be hired. It also gives us an opportunity to give information to the parents, things that they can work with their kids over the summer before kindergarten. So, we do it in the month of March. You've got anywhere from five to six months.

You've got information in there that will tell you this is what you can do to prepare your child for kindergarten.

In addition to providing information about schools in the district, the Connection Center also provided specialized information to families regarding preparing their children for kindergarten.

The Connection Center also assisted families with meeting administration logistical requirements for kindergarten. The Center's brochure as well as the webpage informed families that physical and dental exams were required for all incoming kindergarteners. According to Miss Sophie, the Connection Center provided needed assistance for low-income families that had difficulty getting the physical their children required at the health centers in the area that accepted Medicaid. The provision of on-site physicals was another tangible resource the Connection Center offered low-income families. Miss Sophie explained:

Many children would have been out of school if they did not have their physicals. And the hospitals and stuff was not accepting Public Aid cards. So, families could not go and get physicals for their kids. But in working with the [public university] and a group....They ended up getting doctors to volunteer and we had physicals done here at the center. [We] found some children who had Spina Bifida where the curvature of the spine. One child was blind in an eye that they didn't even know about.

The Connection Center responded to health care needs by partnering with local organizations and institutions to coordinate this service for kindergarten-bound families in the community.

Participants were generally aware of the existence of the Connection Center. Several participants identified the Connection Center as a place where families could get assistance preparing their children for school. Focus on this community school readiness resource varied slightly by program type and social class.

Educators

Choosing a school and understanding kindergarten teachers' expectations of children as they enter school were popular readiness questions and concerns. Educators overwhelmingly

responded that, though not a neighborhood resource, the Connection Center was a place where families could go to get assistance as their children transitioned into kindergarten.

   Preschool. Preschool educators identified the Connection Center as a community school readiness resource. Only one community preschool teacher and one daycare administrator included the Connection Center as a neighborhood resource. For example, Annette, a preschool teacher at a learning center in the local community and a parent whose children attend school in the district said "I know in Middleton they also have a Connection Center, I've never utilized it myself so I don't know. But I know they have many programs in there that they do help with parents." Mary, a director of the learning center that employed Annette, also identified the Connection Center in her response as a place families could seek out when they have questions about kindergarten. She said "It's called the Connection Center, that's in Middleton, they can go there and ask" questions about kindergarten.

   It was most often cited by preschool educators at the Middleton Pre-K. Samantha, an administrator at the Middleton Pre-K, identified the Connection Center as a source of kindergarten information. She responded "I think probably the family information center is where they're [families] directed for Middleton School District" when they have questions about sending their child to kindergarten. Sally, a pre-kindergarten teacher in the district, provided more specific information about the Connection Center. She noted though it is not necessarily a neighborhood resource

> The district does have the Connection Center…They're the ones who do the kindergarten registration and all placements and everything. But they have people specifically there who can answer questions about the schools of choice. It's in a central location.

Sally's statement suggests that though it is not "necessarily in the neighborhood," the Connection Center was a readiness resource for families in the district.

Elementary. Educators at the kindergarten level were most aware and likely to identify

the Connection Center as a place where families could get readiness questions answered.

Experienced kindergarten teacher Lindsay viewed the Connection Center as a good first stop for

parents who have questions about kindergarten. She commented:

> The Connection Center is a big resource. That's actually the place that finds kids
> schools. They also have just a wealth of general knowledge about the school system,
> building. I would say that's a really good first resource.

Janice, a kindergarten teacher in the district, also noted the function of the Connection Center in

the following excerpt:

> That's what the Connection Center is for. But that's not exactly in a
> [neighborhood]….So that's not accessible to all families. [But] the Connection Center
> screens and divides everything else out.

Zoë, a new building principal at Waysworth, also identified the Connection Center as a

community school readiness resource. She stated "Even though I'm a new kid on the block, they

all go through the Connection Center. It's the central magnet for placements in our schools."

James, also a building principal, described the Connection Center as a central community

resource for parents of kindergarten-bound children. He said:

> That's kind of our home base. That's where they as a new parent moving in you will find
> out where there are seats available. And we pay really close attention to racial fairness
> guidelines. And so no building [has] more than 43% of any race. And so a new parent
> moves in and we're at 43% and they're African American, Time Center may not be an
> option for them. But that's something that the district monitors really closely.

James identified the Connection Center as a "home base" neighborhood resource for families in

the community school district. According to James, the Center monitored school assignments

and provided families with information on available slots within local schools.

Parents

Parents, like educators, described the Connection Center as a community school readiness resource. Parents who had older children attending public schools in the district often cited the Connection Center as a place to get assistance with kindergarten questions and concerns. For example, when asked if there were places in the neighborhood she could go to if she had questions about sending her child to kindergarten, Francis, a working-class mother, stated "The Connection Center." Bonnie, a working-class mother with one older child in elementary school, said "And then I also know that I can go to the Connection Center and talk to those people, as well" if she had kindergarten-related questions. Though she had not contacted the Connection Center, she identified it as a community school readiness resource.

Some even discussed having contacted the Center for school assistance. For instance, according to Heather, a middle-class mother:

> I have talked to the Connection Center with questions. And the fact that I don't know where he's going is frustrating and so it's hard to say for sure, this is where you're going [to a kindergarten].

Though she did not provide a detailed account, Heather offered an example of accessing this community school readiness resource. She contacted the Connection Center to get assistance with kindergarten questions. Despite this contact, Heather's statement suggests that her concerns regarding which school her son would attend remained.

Connections and Disconnections

The Connection Center was highlighted by district-level educators as a place families could go to get questions about kindergarten answered. When the Connection Center was identified by educators and parents it was noted in addition to other resources. Additional examples of parent-identified readiness resources will be provided in a following section.

Community preschool educators less often identified the Connection Center as a place where parents could go to get questions answered about kindergarten. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers tended to identify it as a resource for preparing children for school more often.

Arch Place

Parents and educators reported that Arch Place was another community-based school readiness resource in Middleton. Arch Place was a locally-based division of a national organization. Rhonda, an Arch Place administrator, provided descriptions of the function and key school readiness-related activities of this community organization. Arch Place had a five-year initiative that focuses on promoting social and emotional development of young children and to:

> Improve school readiness for at-risk children in early childhood centers by strengthening center-based early childhood programs, enhancing teacher skills and classroom environments by offering on-site technical assistance, providing support to families of children in preschool, and providing the opportunity for children to receive more one-on-one interaction. [It] ultimately hopes to support parents and caregivers as they prepare their children for school and life (Retrieved from organization website, December 9, 2008).

Rhonda described multiple programs Middleton Arch Place funded and developed to support families and children in the community, including a prenatal care program, access to immunization through the public health center, developmental screenings and services, and childcare centers.

The Kindergarten Calendar was a resource developed by Arch Place that directly related to promoting school readiness. The Kindergarten Calendar was created from the findings of the organization's early childhood education community needs assessment. This calendar offered

suggestions for parent-child activities that could promote school readiness. Rhonda described

the calendar in the following:

> We do a survey every two years of the kindergarten teachers in Middleton County. We did one in 2002 and again in 2005. And both times the teachers overwhelmingly said that what their greatest concern or their greatest frustration was that children were not coming to school ready to be there socially or emotionally and that their behaviors were getting in the way of their academic learning, as well as in the way of their peers' ability to learn. And then they said that parents needed more information about child development and what they can do at home. And so that's why we do the calendar. And it's been very well-received.

In response to local concerns of educators, calendars targeted families of four- and five-year-old

kindergarten-bound children in preparation for kindergarten. Rhonda described the widespread

distribution of the approximately 8,000 free calendars to families and early childhood education

and care providers. Rhonda suggested these calendars were accessible; it was a tangible

community resource for families as they prepared children for kindergarten. The calendars were

distributed within the community by way of libraries, preschool programs, extension offices,

home visitation nurses, child care providers, and other local organizations and agencies.

Educators and Parents

Arch Place was not typically identified as a community school readiness resource among

educator and parent participants in this study. However, a small few, across participant type and

socioeconomic level, described the Kindergarten Calendar as a key community school readiness

resource. For example, Mary, a daycare owner and director, pointed to the Kindergarten

Calendar as a transitional activity employed in her program. She said:

> Arch Place gives out these notebooks to help families do different activities each month or each day out [of] the month to prepare them….We will pass those out to the families [of] the kids who are entering kindergarten.

Mary provided an example of how preschool programs incorporated the calendar and linked

families to this tangible school readiness product. Calendars were also available in at least one

public school because Janice, a kindergarten teacher, referred to the Kindergarten Calendar as a

resource for families preparing children for kindergarten. She described the calendar as follows:

> Last year our principal got these really cool calendars for us which were produced by a
> local group….And this calendar just had a bunch of really fun ideas of things that
> families could do together that were all free. It was just something you could do at home.
> And you probably had the stuff around the house someplace. They were suggestions, sort
> of like how to talk to your kids, what to talk about. And then for August it did start
> talking about putting your child on a routine where they go to bed. Establish a bedtime
> routine.

Though Janice did not directly cite Arch Place as a community school readiness resource, the

Kindergarten Calendar was definitely identified as one. Her comment suggests that providing

families with these calendars can promote school readiness.

Although educators expressed the importance of Arch Place as a resource, parents did not

typically include Arch Place or the Kindergarten Calendar in their descriptions of community

school readiness resources. One exception was Gina, a middle-class mother of a kindergarten

bound child. Gina received the Kindergarten Calendar from her daughter's First Stop Private

Preschool classroom teacher. She contended:

> I don't know who puts this out but it's a calendar and it's a wonderful, wonderful
> calendar. And it's got all these little activities you can do with your child and it breaks it
> out over a year. And they're really great suggestions and some of them would have been
> things that we would do anyway but some of it is stuff I wouldn't have thought about. I
> mean, now that I see it in context, I know it's really important but just thinking about
> doing it, I would not have…I mean I'm just too busy.

Similar to Janice, Gina did not know Arch Place by name or that they produced the calendar, but

she did suggest that the Kindergarten Calendar was a community resource that she utilized in

preparation for her daughter's transition into school. The calendar attuned Gina to engaging in

activities that she would not have thought of to prepare her child for kindergarten.

Only a few participants in this sample identified Arch Place and/or the Kindergarten

Calendar as community school readiness resources. These data suggest that the calendar was

available in Middleton at the preschool and kindergarten level. Gina's comment specifically suggested that the Kindergarten Calendar promoted engagement in parent-child interaction and school readiness related activities in preparation for kindergarten.

Connections and Disconnections

Like the Connection Center, Arch Place was recognized as a community resource which provided children and families with access to a diverse array of resources to assist them as children transitioned into kindergarten. The Kindergarten Calendar emerged as a key school readiness product developed and produced by Arch Place. Though discussion was limited in scope, participants, across types, identified the Kindergarten Calendar as an important asset for families and preschool-aged children in the community.

Public Schools in the Community

Public schools were identified as both neighborhood and community resources for families who had questions about sending their children to kindergarten. Several educator participants, particularly at the preschool level, recommended that families contact schools of interest in the district to have kindergarten-related questions answered. Similarly, parents, across social class subgroups, identified the local school district and school buildings as places they would go to have their questions answered.

Educators

Preschool. Though some community preschool teachers and administrators were aware of the Connection Center, they typically identified local schools as community school readiness resources more often. In preparation for kindergarten, preschool educators suggested that parents visit local schools of interest to obtain information. For instance, Faith, a director of a

learning center in the community, reported that if parents had questions about sending their

children to kindergarten, they should go to different public schools. Faith stated:

> I went to all of them; they welcomed parents to come in and ask questions. To me, the best recommendation is go to the schools and observe for yourself because I don't care what anyone else tells you, you need to go observe for yourself.

Faith's statement highlighted the notion that individual school buildings were "the best"

community school readiness resources for families. Isabella, a preschool teacher at Lovees'

Learning Center, also suggested that parents utilize the local schools as neighborhood resources

for questions about kindergarten. She explained:

> I think the schools. I mean the kindergarten schools. I know you can talk to [staff] about what to expect when you go and those things. I know one teacher who does that but she is at the [public university]….But she just talks to them. What to expect if you were to go [to kindergarten] and stuff like that.

Isabelle identified public schools as a key resource for obtaining information regarding

kindergarten expectations. Katie, a preschool teacher at a local daycare, identified the public

health department and the daycare as places families could get questions answered in addition to

local schools. She commented:

> If someone was to ask me I'll tell them to go probably, I don't know, to like one of the local schools or something to get information. I would try to recommend one of the local schools or something.

Katie most clearly highlighted public schools as community school readiness resources,

especially when families had specific questions about kindergarten.

Schools were not generally described as community school readiness resources among

pre-kindergarten educators in this study. When parents had questions regarding kindergarten,

educators generally advised parents to contact the Connection Center. For example, Sally, a

preschool teacher at Middleton Pre-K offered the following:

Depending on the elementary school, if you were to call up to ask questions, someone might talk to you. But I would say more likely than not they would refer you to the Connection Center.

Sally's statement suggests that there is some variation regarding the type and nature of information school buildings provided families. She noted that the default resource was the Connection Center.

Elementary. Like pre-kindergarten educators, kindergarten-level teachers and administrators rarely identified schools as places in the community parents could utilize for assistance with kindergarten questions and concerns. The Connection Center was tasked with this function. Janice, a kindergarten teacher, said "They could call the school. I'm afraid what would happen is they would be referred to the Connection Center." She suggested that though parents could contact their neighborhood schools to have their questions answered, their calls might be redirected to the Connection Center for further assistance. Again, the Connection Center was the default community school readiness resource.

Preschool teachers and administrators more often pointed parents in the direction of the school buildings to find out information and get questions answered about kindergarten. Schools were key community school readiness resources among these educators. On the other hand, district-employed teachers and administrators rarely identified schools as community resources. When they did, they noted a possibility that families would be redirected to the central information hub for the school district, the Connection Center.

Parents

Like community preschool educators, parents often identified local schools within the district as places in the neighborhood that could assist them with questions relative to kindergarten preparation. Though the type of question influenced the resource parents said that

they would access, parents most often identified individual school buildings as a resource for assistance with kindergarten readiness.

   Middle-income. Tina, a parent of a preschooler attending a learning center, had not yet had a question about sending her son to kindergarten, but if she had a question "More specifically related to curriculum or something like that I may contact the school. I may contact the district to see what the general policy is."   Shana also talked to educators about her son's transition into kindergarten.   She stated "I have talked to Ms. Faith several times" at Sweetie Pie Learning Center. Shana maintained ongoing communication with the director of her children's preschool program and talked with educators she encountered in her everyday life. Gina also considered her daughter's preschool teachers as school readiness resources. She stated "I talked a lot to her teachers at First Stop Private Preschool" about kindergarten.

   Low-income. Public schools and the district office would be Francis's first stops for assistance with transitioning into kindergarten:

> Well, the schools. I ask questions. I seek information with the Middleton District Office.
> I've called them before to see the choices of the different schools and what different
> programs they have there.

In addition to public schools, Francis identified the district building as a community school readiness resource as well. She also noted that she contacted the office to find out information about school buildings and programs. Bonnie had an older child in the public school that she planned to send her preschooler to for kindergarten. Because she had a previous relationship with her, Bonnie identified the principal of Suncrest as a school readiness resource. She stated that after talking if over with her husband "If I have any other questions, I would talk to Ms. Jonas, which is the Principal at Suncrest [Elementary School]. I would talk to her about any questions." Bonnie identified her neighborhood school, and more specifically the building

principal, as a place, and person, she could go to get assistance with questions and concerns she had about sending her daughter, Katrina, to kindergarten.

Like Shana and Gina, Alicia also identified her child's preschool program as place that could provide her with assistance as needed. Alicia used the prekindergarten teachers and staff as a neighborhood resource for information about sending her daughter to kindergarten. She stated:

> I usually just call up to the school [pre-kindergarten] and ask questions up there. I get to talk to the caseworker up there and ask her questions or something…or the secretary. She's pretty helpful. She's the one that told me when the registration and everything was.

Alicia described Middleton Pre-K Program staff as a community school readiness resource. In fact, she provided an example of how a staff member provided her with information regarding kindergarten registration.

Connections and Disconnections

Schools were considered community school readiness resources in Middleton. Educators and parents identified them as places families could go to get help with a kindergarten-related question or concern. Schools were more often cited among teachers and administrators of daycare and learning centers than the public school educators as resources. Across social class, schools were also readiness resources. Families noted that they would contact schools for curriculum and program-related questions. In addition to contacting public schools, some parents talked to preschool staff when they encountered kindergarten related issues or questions.

<center>*Family and Friends in the Community*</center>

Embedded in their discussions of contacting the school, parents used their connections and relationships with adults to include other parents, friends, and family members, to address their questions and concerns regarding preparing children for kindergarten. Though few

educators identified other adults in the community as resources, parents often pointed out that if they had questions about sending their children to kindergarten they would contact family members, friends, and/or acquaintances.

Educators

Educators did not typically cite family, friends, and acquaintances as community school readiness resources. But a few educators, across program level, connected families to other parents to provide assistance as their children transitioned kindergarten. For example, Faith, owner and director of Sweetie Pie Learning Center, connected parents in her program with knowledgeable others:

> One of our parents of a child that we had here, she was the principal. So [parents in our program] could go there. And a couple of our parents that had been teachers have gone into principals at different schools so a lot of people know them from their kids being here so they know them so they can also talk to them. And like I said some of them are teachers so they can actually talk to them to find out about the different schools and what they suggest and which teachers they would recommend and so on and so forth.

Sweetie Pie Learning Center offered a variety of teachers and principals for families whose children attended preschool there to contact if they had kindergarten-related questions. In fact, Faith encouraged families to talk to these parents who were also educators because of their specialized knowledge in the field and of the community school district. Additionally, Pauline, a public school principal at Warren Grove, linked parents together in some instances. She said "Depending on what their question is, I mean we sometimes can connect them with another parent or parent of a kindergartener" to get assistance. Though she identified the Connection Center as a place for admissions questions, she noted parents as community readiness resources as well.

Parents

Some parents could not identify any resources in their neighborhoods to assist them as their children transitioned into kindergarten. Though several identified the connection center and public schools as key community school readiness resources, most parents included referring to knowledgeable adults in the neighborhood as important sources of information as well. Middle-class families tended to identify acquaintances more often while working-class and poor parents more often included family members in their discussions of school readiness resources. Friends were noted as resources across social class subgroups.

Middle-income. Middle-class families identified friends and acquaintances as community school readiness resources. Their associations with individuals in the field of education in their everyday lives provided sources of information about the school district and the transition into kindergarten. In addition to contacting schools, Tina noted that she would talk to family and friends if she had questions about sending her son to kindergarten. She said "I mean I have a couple of friends that are kindergarten teachers; I may use them as references. Or I may talk to other parents who have kids; it just really depends on the question." As a hair stylist in the community, Shana came into contact with several educators. She said "I talked to other teachers who come in the salon where I work at. I talked to several different people. I even talked to a principal." Shana took advantage of acquaintances she had in the community to have her kindergarten-related questions and concerns addressed. Gina described some of the adults she encountered while participating in activities with her daughter as community resources in the following:

> Some of the swimming teachers that Marie had have been kindergarten teachers….And one of Marie's little friends, we were at her birthday party in September and one of the little girls that came, her mom was a kindergarten teacher. And so, I was pumping her for

information and she was so sweet. I gave her my email and she sent me her email and said, if you have more questions, you contact me.

Gina took advantage of her relationships with other adults she met to ask questions about sending her daughter to kindergarten. Pam met an acquaintance in her neighborhood that had specialized knowledge of the controlled choice process. She described him as a resource for getting her questions and concerns regarding the transition into kindergarten addressed:

> There is a guy that I met. He lives in, actually over here by us, that is, he's over the whole process [controlled choice] and everything. And he was very, very helpful. I don't know his name but he was very helpful. He answered so many of my questions when I went to their forum.

Upon meeting a neighbor in a school-related setting, Pam felt comfortable asking questions during the forum regarding registration and the controlled choice process.

Low-income. Some working-class and poor parents identified family members as their first lines of support in the transition process. For instance, if questions or concerns regarding kindergarten arose, Bonnie said "Well, first I would talk to my husband and we would talk, try to discuss what we think is best." Bonnie identified her spouse as a school readiness resource. In addition to public schools, Nicki identified family members as sources of kindergarten-related information:

> I'll call one of my aunts. I got a lot of aunts. We got a lot of kids in the family so we like been through all the schools and everything. So if I have a question I like to call one of them.

Nicki's statement suggests that her family was a first line community resource. She contacted her aunts who had experience with the school district for assistance when she needed it. For questions that they could not answer or when she needed more information, Nicki contacted the public schools in the district. Grace also talked with knowledgeable family members to assist in easing her son's transition into kindergarten. She said when she had questions about sending her

daughter to kindergarten "I started off with my mother. She's a teacher. She worked in Middleton Schools and now she works in New Town. My mom referred me to Miss Sophie." Not only did Grace's mother provide her with information, she also linked her with the Connection Center, as a key community school readiness resource, to receive assistance with the kindergarten transition process.

Some working-class and poor parents identified friends as community school readiness resources, though this was rare. For example, Francis said "I have friends whose kids are older who have been there so I speak to them also" when she had questions regarding the kindergarten transition process. Francis's friend was considered a viable source of information because she had prior experience with sending children to kindergarten. Xenophia spoke with her friend, Lena, when she had questions or concerns regarding her son's kindergarten preparation. She offered the following example of friends as school readiness resources:

> We [she and Lena] had talked about the program [Time Center]. And then I asked her will [speech services] carry on to kindergarten and she's like, yeah. They'll work with him all through until they see that he's okay to be on his own.

Xenophia's friend, Lena, provided her with school-specific information regarding the availability of special services. Xenophia incorporated this information into selecting a kindergarten program for her son to ensure he received service continuity.

Connections and Disconnections

Informal social networks of families, friends, and acquaintances served as key community school readiness resources. Though not as commonly identified by educators, across social class subgroups parents often described the ways in which their relationships with others provided them valuable information regarding school readiness and kindergarten preparation. Several primary caregivers offered examples of how their friends, family members, and

acquaintances shared their local knowledge of schools, services, and community resources with them when they had questions about sending their children to kindergarten.

Chapter Summary

Data indicated that there were several administrative tasks that families had to accomplish before their children entered kindergarten. Across social class subgroups, parents had to navigate logistical requirements associated with kindergarten that included attending to appointments, choosing schools, and arranging transportation to and from school. There was little variation among parents in terms of their knowledge of medical, dental, and registration requirements. Middle-class families who noted that medical and dental appointments were pending or completed could attain some advantage in comparison to those who had not secured required health exams and immunizations.

The schools families chose varied by social class levels. Middle-income and affluent families selected Waysworth and Cedar North more often for their structure, curriculum, and academic reputations. Poor and low-income mothers typically selected Suncrest and Time Center as their first choice, mainly because of its close proximity and their familiarity with these schools. They typically selected these neighborhood schools as their first choices because of their proximity to home and other family members' and parents' familiarity and past, positive relationships with staff. Reputation of the school was important for all families but middle-class mothers focused upon academic reputations and working and poor mothers on social reputations. These variations had the potential to confer advantages and disadvantages. For example, middle-class children gained an advantage from the schools their parents chose as their top three. The schools tended to have higher percentages of children meeting and exceeding expectations on standardized tests. But within all schools identified as top choices social class, racial, and gender

disparities existed. On average White students outscored African American students despite the school they attended in the district. Middle-class families discussed the possibility of enrolling their children in private schools if they did not receive one of their schools of choice. This was not an option for most poor and working-class families.

An advantage for working-class and poor parents was the intergenerational relationships and social ties they maintained with school staff their school choices offered that middle-class families' choices might not provide. This is important because research suggests that feeling comfortable in a school setting is positively related to parent involvement and children's performance.

Families had to make decisions regarding transportation. Middle-class families had to coordinate family and work schedules in order to personally transport their children to and from school. Families who planned to have their kindergarteners bussed to school, which were typically working-class and poor, had to coordinate transportation with the district. Working-class and poor families were more likely to have to attend to this logistical task because they more often reported that their children would be transported to and from school via bus.

Several educators and parents identified community school readiness resources that existed to assist families as children transitioned into kindergarten. Most often cited were the Connection Center, Arch Place's Kindergarten Calendar, public schools, and family, friends, and acquaintances in the community. Kindergarten-level educators commonly pointed out the Connection Center as a link between families and school. It was considered the central location for families to access when questions and concerns arose about kindergarten. The Center was also the site of kindergarten registration, and staff were considered the "people" to talk to for information about public schools in the district. Some preschool teachers and mothers also

referenced the Connection Center as a key readiness resource, though to a lesser extent.

Community preschool educators and parents typically included the Connection Center in concert

with contacting individual school buildings for help. These participants also more often deferred

to public schools and families, friends, and acquaintance as community resources for preparing

children for school. Findings suggest that family, friends and acquaintances had experience

and/or knowledge related to sending children to school in this district and were available in the

context of everyday life.

Following Chapter

Community preschool educators and parents identified public schools as a community

resource. In the following chapter, more specific descriptions of the roles of schools and

educators in preparing children for kindergarten are offered.

CHAPTER 9: EXPECTATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Implementation of transition activities and supports connecting families and children to school offer continuity across home and school contexts that benefit children. This chapter is organized around: (1) kindergarten transition activities and (2) parents' expectations of schools. Preschool, kindergarten, and district-level activities had the potential to meet parents' expectations for communication prior to and on the first day of school. Across social class subgroups, parents' expectations for schools centered upon active communication.

Kindergarten Transition Activities

Parents expected communication from teachers and schools. This section describes preschool preparation and kindergarten transition activities educators employed to assist families in the transition process and communicate kindergarten expectations. Data suggest that various kindergarten transition activities took place within Middleton School District. Kindergarten transition activities occurred on three levels: preschool, elementary, and district. Though the district sponsored city-wide activities, activities also were often program and building specific across kindergarten, pre-kindergarten, and community preschool programs.

Preschool Level Transition Activities

Preschool-level educators in this study highlighted ways in which they attempted to ease the transition into kindergarten for children and their families. Community preschool programs' transition activities were more informal than those provided at the kindergarten and district level. Middleton Pre-K Program tended to describe both informal kindergarten transition activities and more formal events that took place across contexts. Curricula activities, symbolic ceremonies, parent conferences, and informal kindergarten talk were activities preschool teachers and administrators described as kindergarten transition activities.

Preschool teachers and administrators discussed activities that they employed to ease children's transitions into kindergarten that were embedded in their programs. For example, Faith, a director of a learning center, contended the program activities exposed preschoolers to the physical settings of public schools and kindergarten expectations:

> They've been doing the breakfast and lunch program at one of the public schools so they are venturing out so they kinda get a feel of what a school building is gonna look like. Some of our parents are teachers so they come in and they talk to them and stuff. So we try to have our parents be as much involved and we send materials, homework home and reading materials so they can read and give their input.

Faith embedded transitional support within Sweetie Pie Learning Center by way of multiple program activities for children and families. Mary, another learning center owner and director, pointed to transitional activities embedded in their curriculum and program activities as well. Mary said:

> Our curriculum does that basically, most is our curriculum. I think we may send homework home for them. We'll send the monthly concept homework home. We might send flashcards home. We'll send maybe a color sheet home and the parents have to help their children with that.

Mary's curriculum was organized in ways that gradually exposed children to readiness skills and opportunities to develop nominal knowledge and social competency across program and home contexts. Katie, a preschool teacher at a local daycare, described activities she provided families with to assist in their preparation. She explained:

> We did have like a folder for the parents to take home with like the different activities, like letters and stuff, the parent to do, for their children to do. Like homework, I say like homework, not basically like homework but we call it homework and we tell them like have them go over the stuff with their child. That way when they come back they'll already be familiar with it.

Katie's provision of materials in the form of "homework" was expected to promote parent-child interactions. Her statement suggested that take-home folders could ease children's transition into learning in school and expectations upon entering kindergarten.

Community preschool programs also offered symbolic indicators of transitioning into kindergarten such as graduation ceremonies. For instance, Faith, a director of Sweetie Pie Learning Center, described graduation ceremonies as an important transition activity:

> When they're graduating from the two-year-old room or to preschool…We buy the caps, we buy the gowns and we give them a little gift and stuff like that. And we take pictures of them and we sing a graduation song and all that.

Similarly, Annette, a preschool teacher at Lovees' Learning Center, noted her program's annual graduation ceremony as an example of a transition activity their staff provided:

> At the end of the school year they do a graduation. They have a little preschool graduation and Ms. Mary even has little caps and gowns that they wear. They receive a certificate. We try to give them something personal from the teachers saying how much we enjoyed them in our class. We try to pinpoint, we've actually started doing portfolios with each child so we, they have pictures and we can also write little blurbs about each child so they have something to take with them.

For Annette, the graduation ceremony and gift marked the end of their preschool experiences and a new beginning that could ease children's transition into kindergarten.

Pre-kindergarten educators described several transition activities that took place in their program that involved communication across contexts. Donna identified child-centered activities that Pre-K educators engaged in to ease their transitions into kindergarten. She offered the following:

> We also have a transitional coordinator that does activities. Like she might read a story to the kindergarten-bound kids about kindergarten, what to expect. She might do a slide show. And towards the end of the year we start talking, the teachers start talking to the kids. Now you're going to kindergarten. This is what's gonna happen at kindergarten so be ready I want you to start doing it now so you'll be ready to, you know when it comes later.

Donna's statement suggests pre-kindergarten teachers engaged children in "kindergarten talk" in preparation for their pending transitions. Middleton Pre-K staff also discussed the transition process with parents during their conference prior to entering kindergarten. According to Halle,

a preschool teacher there, "And then the final parent-teacher conference, we talk to the parents about how we think their child will do in kindergarten. Anything special we think they need to do over the summer."

Middleton Pre-K staff coordinated with the Connection Center to provide on-site registration for families of kindergarten-bound children in their program. Donna, a pre-kindergarten teacher, noted that "When it comes time for kindergarten registration the Connection Center comes here and they provide help with families registering." In addition to the convenience of registering on-site at Middleton Pre-K Program, Samantha, an administrator, encouraged families to register their children for kindergarten early. She stated:

> The deadline is March 31st and if a family doesn't register by then, everybody else who's registered gets their choices and you get what's left over. So we really go after the families that haven't registered to encourage them. [We would ask them] do you need help? Can we take you to the Connection Center, if they haven't attended here during teacher conferences so?

Pre-kindergarten teachers also had conferences with kindergarten teachers in the district. For example, Halle, a pre-kindergarten teacher, identified meeting with kindergarten teachers to provide background information for incoming kindergarteners as a kindergarten transition activity:

> We as a group of early childhood teachers meet with a representative from each grade school….Kindergarten, you know, grade level or whatever. And we prepare a little packet on each child. And we try to explain if the kid has any special needs, things that we think they need to know about the child heading into kindergarten.

Though kindergarten teachers rarely discussed transition activities at the preschool level, Karla, a kindergarten teacher, also mentioned these conferences as a transition activity that was coordinated between the pre-kindergarten program and public school staff. She contended:

> The kids who do attend Middleton Preschool, we have transition meetings. So the preschool teachers and I get together and they'll give me like a folder of information on

> the students that are coming into my class and Warren Grove….And so, those students are well-transitioned I think. But the other students come in, come in blind.

Karla's statement suggests that kindergarten teachers received more information about incoming students who attended the Middleton Pre-K Program than they did about other children. Her statement suggests that children's level of exposure to school via transition activities and resources varied. Teachers potentially knew more about some children than others.

Connections and Disconnections

Preschool-level activities were rarely mentioned by kindergarten-level educators, though preschool educators focused upon these in their discussions of kindergarten transition activities. Community preschool-level educators identified informal activities and systems their programs had in place to assist families as children transitioned into kindergarten more often than did their peers at Middleton Pre-K Program. Community preschool kindergarten transition activities were embedded in their curricula along with various activities marking children's transitions. On the other hand, in addition to individual conferences with parents and engaging in kindergarten talk with preschoolers, data suggest that pre-kindergarten educators were more likely to collaborate with district and elementary school staff than community preschool educators. They conducted on-site kindergarten registration events and participated in one-on-one conferences with kindergarten teachers to assist families and children prior to the start of school. They provided activities that incorporated parents, kindergarten teachers, and kindergarten-bound children. Overall, preschool-level activities that entailed parent-teacher conferencing and providing families with materials to promote school learning could address parents' expectations that educators communicate children's progress and ways families could assist them in targeted areas.

Elementary-Level Transition Activities

Kindergarten teachers and elementary school building principals described kindergarten transition activities that occurred prior to children entering school. Activities at the kindergarten level consisted of welcome events, school and classroom orientations, and individual meetings. Preschool-level educators did not typically include elementary school kindergarten transition activities in their descriptions. One exception was Samantha, a pre-kindergarten administrator, who noted that "The schools themselves have open houses and you know for parents who are interested in kinda doing their homework before it's time to register." The open house events were considered a building-level activity.

Round-ups and kickoffs were elementary-level transition activities that oriented children to kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers and administrators tended to identify these transition activities. For example, Janice, a kindergarten teacher in the district, described the kindergarten round-up in detail. She said:

> After the schools of choice have assigned us our students we have an evening where we invite all of the families. We would meet in the gymnasium and [the principal] would just welcome them to Waysworth and give a few basic kinds of directions about when you actually register and the traffic flow and how generally things go at Waysworth. And that takes about fifteen minutes, just some of the procedures here so that the parents don't walk in the first day clueless. To send their little precious five-year-old off to all these strangers that's a really scary thing. So we invite them to come in.

After schools were assigned, which occurred late spring, Janice described the welcome event that took place at Waysworth to orient families and children to the school building and classroom procedures. Janice's colleague, Nancy, added to Janice's description of kindergarten transition activities at Waysworth:

> Here we try to meet with the students who are gonna come in. We have an [event] called Come into Kindergarten in the spring. And so the parents who choose to come and bring their students then we meet them. We talk about getting ready for kindergarten. Then they come to each of the classrooms and we do a little project with them….And then in

August they come when they know who the teacher is and they meet individually with the teacher for twenty minutes and they see the classroom and hear about the specific program in that classroom.

In addition to the welcome event the school building sponsored, Nancy described the individual conferences that took place in August between families and their children's assigned kindergarten teacher that orient children to the classroom environment and expectations.

Karla, a kindergarten teacher at Warren Grove, identified conferences that occurred prior to the beginning of the school years as one of the few kindergarten transition activities for children and families. She stated:

Before school starts [we have a] conference where I give the parents like a packet of information saying here's what they need to bring in. Here's what we're going to do. And here's our schedule and here's everything that I can think of that you need to know as much as possible. But that's the day before, two days before school starts.

According to her building principal, Pauline, building staff formally orient parents and students to kindergarten via these individual conferences before the first day of school. She contended:

Well we have activities, the kindergarten teachers meet with [parents] before school starts. We have conferences and the parents and the child get to come into the classroom and see the room. And they sit and talk about some of the things that'll be happening. Trying to get them a little bit oriented and calm any fears. So we do that prior to school starting every year. Then our PTA usually has a potluck, usually the first week or so of school for the parents [and their children and kindergarten teachers].

Families had individual conferences prior to the beginning of the academic school year in preparation for their transitions into kindergarten. Pauline also noted that, informally, parents and children gather as a group to get to know each other once kindergarten was underway. The potluck activity was coordinated by the school's Parent Teacher Association during the first week of kindergarten.

Some elementary schools' kindergarten transition activities took place on the first day of school. James, a building principal, discussed the formal orientation to kindergarten

expectations and procedures that took place on the first half day of kindergarten. He described:

> On the first day of school we invite half the kindergarteners to come for half the day. And then the 2ⁿᵈ day we do the other half. We do that because having all twenty come on the first day is overwhelming. So we give just ten students the opportunity to put their things away, walk through a day. I actually do an assembly where we kind of go over how things are done at Time Center. We give them a tour of the building. We walk them through the lunch line. We talk about how to eat the lunch. We show them the playground. And that's been beneficial. And then on that 3ʳᵈ day we get all twenty. We also invite parents to stay on that first day.

The abbreviated first day of kindergarten provided both children and parents with an overview of the school building, expectations, and routines. James suggested that this acclimated children and families to the school setting that eased emotional adjustment because "if their kid's having some difficulties, mom and dad are there and it helps to alleviate that day one break down."

Connections and Disconnections

Elementary school buildings created activities that bridged home and school contexts. Though the names and types of activities varied from one building to the next, there were activities that assisted children and families as they transitioned into kindergarten. However, elementary-level activities took place in late spring at the earliest. Several kindergarten transition activities did not take place until days before the academic school year began. Therefore, parents' ability to extensively incorporate information received from educators regarding preparing children for kindergarten was limited.

District-Level Transition Activities

District transitional activities existed within this community school district. District activities included community forums and school tours. District-level activities had the potential to assist families with the logistics of selecting and registering children for school, which parents were required to do across social class subgroups. Pre-kindergarten- and kindergarten-level

educators identified district-level kindergarten transition activities. For example, Sally identified

the district wide open houses as a kindergarten transition activity. She stated:

> Starting in January they have little open houses at the schools. So we provide parents with fliers and information about those and the district then has set up times and I believe you can go one place and get on a bus and they will take you around too. So the district itself have these open houses that parents can go to.

The district sponsored an open house event for parents to attend and learn more about schools in

the community in order to make informed decisions for school assignments for kindergarten.

Pre-kindergarten administrator, Samantha, further explained the district-level transitional

activities available for families within Middleton:

> I think there's [several] elementary schools in Middleton. And parents are required when they register their child to put down their top three choices of which school they would like their child to attend. So that requires them knowing something about you know, more than one school, you know to be able to do that.

Samantha noted various activities the district offered to support families in making choices about

what schools their children will attend. Additionally, Donna recalled the following:

> The school district does school tours when it gets close to time for kindergarten registration. They send families out; they call it community forums. And families can sign up to take tours of the different elementary school which I think is really good.

According to Donna, the district also provides opportunities for families to tour schools of

interest. As a district-level administrator, Rachel discussed some of these district-level activities

that existed in the following:

> We have community forum set up, again, where elementary parents come in and Pre-K parents can come in and we give them an overview of the district of the controlled choice process and everything like that so that they are as informed as they can be. And then if they have questions we have school visits where they can go and take tours, meet teachers, and then they make a choice about where they want their kids to go and then if they have questions they can call me anytime.

According to Rachel, a district administrator, these transition activities have not always existed

within the community. But her comment suggests that kindergarten transition activities have

been implemented to ease children's transitions into kindergarten at the district level.

The district appeared to be making concerted efforts to assist children and families as they began kindergarten. Pre-kindergarten educators and the one district-level educator most often identified the district-level kindergarten transition activities that existed in Middleton. Community preschool and kindergarten teachers and administrators less often referred to the community forums and open house activities that took place to assist families and children's transitions into kindergarten.

Connections and Disconnections

Educators reported several transition activities available for children and families to assist them. Activities primarily targeted parents though there were a few that involved children as well. Though these activities exist at the preschool, elementary, and district levels they varied widely, particularly between community preschool educators and educators who work within Middleton School District. In many cases, some children still "come in blind" because they participated in few to no transition activities prior to the first day of school.

Parents' Expectations for Schools

Parent participants described the roles they expected teachers and school staff to assume in the kindergarten transition process. Local perceptions of the role of teachers and schools in preparing children for kindergarten were diverse. Though expectations varied, parents across social groups generally expected kindergarten teachers and administrators to clearly communicate their expectations for children and families prior to the first day of kindergarten. According to primary caregivers in this study, educators' roles in preparing children for school were to communicate expectations for incoming kindergarteners and their families, to help assess children's progress in various school readiness categories, and to suggest ways for families to

assist children at home.

<div align="center">*Communicate Expectations*</div>

Several mothers, particularly middle-class ones, noted that the role of schools and

teachers was to communicate expectations for both incoming kindergarteners and their families.

Kindergarten expectations for skills and competencies and for parent participation were included

as important for educators to communicate to parents.

Middle-Income

Middle-class parents typically expected schools and teachers at the kindergarten level to

clearly communication their expectations for children before they began school. For example,

Tina noted the importance of educators outlining classroom policies and procedures to assist

families in their transition into kindergarten. She stated:

> I expect to get some type of, whether it's from the open house, outline of what they'll be
> doing, what the policy is for contacting the teacher, the best way to reach her, kind of
> expectations. I mean there're a lot of things that I hope once the school is selected that
> we'll hear actually before the first day of kindergarten. I hope that dialogue begins
> before.

Tina's statement suggests that public schools were expected to provide families with information

regarding kindergarten activities and classroom procedures upon being assigned to a school.

Pam also highlighted concrete information that she expected educators to communicate to

parents in preparation for children entering. She stated:

> I think they put so much stuff on the board and then they send you these books, the
> Readiness for Kindergarten and things like that. But, I expect them to be honest. And,
> tell me what is it that you're really, really are expecting of your students. What level of
> participation do you want from your parents? Do you want us to volunteer? You know,
> those kinds of things. I think those are things that are really important.

Pam wanted educators to communicate their expectations for parents as well as their students.

She also discussed how important it is for educators to be forthcoming in their communications

with parents regarding their expectations.

Communicate Progress and Ways for Families to Help

Communicating children's progress was identified in concert with recommending strategies for families to use to assist children in enhancing school readiness skills and competencies. Working-class families most often included these as roles for teachers and schools. Also, their comments suggested that preschool-level educators are expected to play a central role in children's transitions into kindergarten.

Low-income

Working-class and poor families identified the need for educators to communicate about their children's progress, especially in preschool, so that they could assist their children as needed to promote school readiness skills and competencies. For example, Alicia expected educators to inform her of her daughter's progress:

> Just what she need help on, things she's lacking that I can do at home to help her out. If there's any kind of little activities that the school offers far as things they have on printed page that they can give out to parents to help with their kids, send them on. Send it to me. I'll work with her with it to the best that I can. And every little thing helps.

Alicia's comment suggests that communicating progress and areas for parents to work on with their children emerged in concert. She also welcomed activities from schools that she could use to work with her child at home. Clearly stating children's progress as well as the skills and competencies in need of further development was also one of Xenophia's expectations for schools and teachers. She looked forward to educators communicating

> What they think he need to learn? What he can do better from last year from pre-k that's gonna improve his learning ability for kindergarten. Such as like if he need to learn his alphabet, his colors. What can I do to help him?

Xenophia looked to educators to inform her of her child's educational progress and suggestions for best assisting him in addressing challenges identified.

Talking to preschool teachers and receiving resources from them were common among mothers. Niecey expected preschool teachers to provide informal communication as to her child's progress and ways she can work to address any pending issues. She asserted:

> Hopefully they will tell me, I mean just to see where Belinda is when she do start, hopefully they'll like contact me or pull me over to the side when I pick her up. Hopefully they'll let me know what Belinda needs to work on so I can help her. Because I don't want everybody ahead of her and she like real low like she don't know what's going on.

Wendy communicated with her daughter's pre-kindergarten teacher in preparation for kindergarten. She said:

> Well, what I expect[ed] when I went to her last [pre-kindergarten] conference [was] what's she's been working on, where she is now, how prepared is she, what does she still need to work on to get ready for kindergarten? And once she's in kindergarten, what do they work on? What will she be doing? Things like that.

Wendy considered it the role of preschool program educators to convey her daughter's progress as well as inform her of areas that she needed to improve upon in order to be "ready for kindergarten." Once in kindergarten, Wendy expected communication related to classroom activities and structure to take place.

Connections and Disconnections

Overall, parents viewed the transition and school learning process as collaborative efforts. Though educators were not expected to do it all, particularly in the early years, mothers across social class viewed communication as a function of schools and teachers. Variations across social class revealed that middle-class parents expected to be honestly informed of kindergarten expectations for children and families from teachers and schools in advance. Working-class and poor families more often expected educators, particularly at the preschool level, to communicate their children's developmental progress as well as provide suggestions for what they could do at home to help prepare their children for the demands of kindergarten.

Chapter Summary

Multiple kindergarten activities and systems were in place to assist families and children as they transitioned into school at the preschool, kindergarten, and district levels. These kindergarten transition activities had the potential to address communication expectations parents held for educators. Elementary-level kindergarten transition activities granted parents access to kindergarten expectations and school policies. These activities were aligned with middle-income parents' expectations that schools communicate expectations and procedures to families before the first day of kindergarten.

Preschool-level activities included conferences regarding children's progress and ways families could work with children on skills and competencies as needed. Importantly, these activities also provided children and their families with symbolic and concrete knowledge of their pending kindergarten transitions. These activities were closely aligned with low-income parents' requests for clear communication of children's progress and how they could assist their children with being "ready" for kindergarten.

District-level activities provided information about schools and the transition process. Still, findings suggest institutional resources only partially ensured children entered school with similar knowledge of expectations for kindergarten. Some children entered kindergarten with more or less continuity across home, preschool, and kindergarten contexts.

Across social class, parents perceived themselves as partners with schools and teachers, and communication was key. Primary caregivers expected open and honest communication from schools. They expected teachers to communicate information regarding their children's performance, at both levels, and best practice for families to help their children succeed in school.

Following Chapter

I explore perceptions of families' roles for ensuring children have the skills and competencies identified within the school readiness categories as important for transitioning into kindergarten. Educators and parents outlined key kindergarten preparation practices that families should engage in to prepare children for school.

CHAPTER 10: EXPECTATIONS FOR FAMILIES

Participants described family members as important players in preparing young children for formal schooling. In fact, preparing children for kindergarten was primarily perceived as a parental responsibility. Here, educators' and parents' perceptions of families' roles in promoting emergent skills, concepts, and competencies considered important for transitioning into kindergarten are presented. Four concrete preparation practices were identified from these data: (1) provision of preschool, (2) direct instruction, (3) active engagement, and (4) social engagement. Key school readiness categories revisited in participants' discussions of preparation practices were: general knowledge, nominal knowledge, language and early literacy, social competency, self-regulation, and motor skills. Preparation practices have the potential to bestow advantages and disadvantages differentially upon entering kindergarten. Tables 10-1 and 10-2 illustrate educators' and parents' descriptions of these kindergarten preparation practices.

Provision of Preschool

Participating in center-based preschool programs was noted by several participants as the best way for parents and family members to prepare children for the transition into kindergarten. Provision of preschool refers to making opportunities to participate in organized early childhood education. This practice emerged across participant and program types and social class subgroups. Data suggest that provision of preschool was an essential preparation practice identified for families to utilize that promotes the social competence and self-regulation school readiness categories.

Educators

Educators suggested that parents prepare children for the demands of kindergarten by providing center-based, preschool experiences. This practice emerged across program types as important, though less often among kindergarten teachers.

Preschool

At the preschool level, educators discussed the importance of parents ensuring children participated in preschool programs. For example, Catherine, an administrator at Area Park Daycare Care, stressed preschool as fundamental for school preparation despite naysayers:

> I hear people say that daycare is not a good thing. But I don't believe that. I know daycare's a good thing. If a child's in daycare from age 2-5, that's three years of learning, three years of getting along, three years of emotions, social [development]; all those things children need whether they're going to school [kindergarten] or not. But it's even more so important if you're going to school. You need to have those basics at the beginning.

Catherine's comment suggests that preschool provides the basic academic and social skills and competencies children need in general and particularly as they transition into kindergarten. Additionally, when children are enrolled in an early childhood program Faith, owner and operator of Sweetie Pie Learning Center, explained the need for families to participate in preschool activities, including those symbolic of the transition into kindergarten. She said:

> They need to be involved with them in preschool. So many times we have parent-teacher conferences, we have parent meetings, different activities that we want our parents to be involved with and some of them don't feel that it's important because they are the younger ages….But it means a lot to us…All of the years are important.

Faith suggested the importance of families not only enrolling children in preschool in preparation for kindergarten but also participating in preschool-related activities. Donna, a pre-kindergarten teacher, agreed with Faith. In fact, she described ensuring children had consistent preschool attendance as a way for parents to prepare them for school. She stated:

Attendance is important at Pre-K. It's not just daycare, they learn academic things, they learn social things. They get exercise. You know they do gross motor, physical things. So I think parents, if they made sure they got their children to school as much as possible that would be the first step.

Donna explained that regular attendance in the pre-kindergarten program promotes multiple categories of school readiness to include nominal knowledge, social competency, and motor skills.

Elementary

Elementary educators also noted the importance of preschool experiences. Some teachers and administrators noted how preschool environments promote children's social competency and self-regulation. According to Jackie, a kindergarten teacher, preschool programs provide children with knowledge of school culture and expectations prior to entering kindergarten that promotes self-regulation. She said:

From observation, the students that had experience in any type of preschool or organized setting where they were given instructions and expected to follow them, such as sitting on the carpet and playing games constructively with rules [were more successful upon entering kindergarten].

Public school administrators suggested preschool programming was essential for preparing low-income children for school. For instance, Rachel, a district-level administrator, stated:

Preschool programs are critical for your most at-risk kids. Kids from middle-income parents and higher have an advantage if you look at the research and at the number of words that kids that have really good lap time [parent-child interaction particularly around reading] come in with for kindergarten versus kids who don't, have that advantage, they're already behind. So what you have to do then is play catch up and that was the whole premise behind Head Start.

According to Rachel, enrolling children in preschool programs offers a way for families, particularly poor and low-income ones, to prepare their children for school. She added that preschool gives low-income children the head start they need to gain similar advantages middle-class children have upon entering kindergarten. Pauline, a building principal in the district,

agreed and suggested more public support for working parents to prepare children for school. She contended:

> Well, I think preschool is very important. Preschool experience, I think should really be required by law…..I really feel like we're missing the boat when we don't offer free preschool to people so that their children have the opportunity to have those language experiences and go on those little field trips and work together and play together.

Pauline called for more public preschool programs to assist in preparing children to meet the demands of kindergarten. In addition to social competency, she discussed the important role enrolling children in preschool plays in promoting language and early literacy through provision of varied social experiences such as field trips.

Overall, educators, particularly administrators, stressed how participation in preschool programs eased the transition into learning in schools. Though they suggested more support be offered, the onus was on families to ensure children are provided structured preschool experiences in preparation for kindergarten.

Parents

Enrollment in preschool was considered the responsibility of families among parent participants. Some mothers, across social class groups, described providing preschool-age children with organized preschool experiences as a way for parents to prepare children for kindergarten. These experiences offered opportunities for children to learn nominal concepts and develop social skills and competencies related to being in school.

Middle-Income

Provision of preschool emerged among middle-class parents. For instance, Laurie simply stated that one of the best ways for parents to prepare children for kindergarten was to "Have them participate in a preschool program." Also, consider the following comment offered by Vanessa, a grandmother of two:

> I personally like preschool. I don't know who came up with it, but I think that's the best idea going right now because we don't have a solution to any other [problem]. I think because we can't depend on groups of people to train in the home so we send them to preschool to learn their education.

Vanessa advocated preschool participation as a means of preparing children for kindergarten.

According to her, preschool is a good way to promote school readiness when parents are less

likely to engage in direct instruction at home. According to Melissa, her daughter's preschool

experiences prepared her well for kindergarten. She provided an example of the benefits of

attending First Stop Private Preschool program in the following:

> I haven't really given a whole lot of thought as to getting her ready specifically for kindergarten. She's been in her daycare, preschool, or whatever you'd like to call it, since she was eight weeks old. And they've had a very consistent program that they've done since they were babies, you know. She was bringing home art projects when she [was] eight weeks old.

Melissa's comment suggests she had not considered or stressed the need to prepare her child for

kindergarten. Enrollment in preschool was her preparation practice. Tina suggested provision of

preschool experiences prepare children for the social expectations of kindergarten. She said "I

think just making sure that they're [in a] daycare situation is such that they're around different

kids." But Connie, a mother of two, noted that preschool is not a given for all children because

not all families can afford it without subsidy. She stated:

> It never occurred to me that [not] all kids go to preschool….So if every kid could have a preschool option that would be [good]. Kindergarten would be that much easier to get ready for, right? Go to preschool. I forgot it was a privilege, it's not a given.

Connie believed the transition into kindergarten will be eased if all children have access to

preschool. Though it seemed intuitive initially, she came to a recent realization that not all

children are afforded the opportunity to attend early childhood education programs. Connie

described preschool as a "privilege." Preschool also emerged as a privilege among middle-class

families who could afford to pay for preschool. For example, Laurie explained:

> I mean for me a middle-class, working American I don't qualify for subsidy for preschool….So for Jasmine to be in the program that's she's in I paid. You know and some people they have child care resource that helps with that. But I pay.

Though providing children with preschool experiences was identified as one of the best ways for parents to prepare their children for school, Connie and Laurie's comments suggest that this preparation practice required resources. Families who qualified for and took advantage of child care subsidies or had financial resources were better positioned to provide their children with preschool experience in preparation for kindergarten.

Low-Income

Similar to middle-class parents, poor and working-class mothers also emphasized provision of preschool as a key strategy families could utilize to prepare children for kindergarten. For example, Francis, a working-class mother, discussed the need for educational programs. She said that "Putting your child in a good program to get them prepared and ready to go into kindergarten" is the best way for parents to prepare children for school. Similarly, Bonnie stated that "It helps when they get to preschool, I think. That's something that the teachers do at school also, reading to your child." Bonnie suggested that early literacy was promoted in preschool. Wendy's preschooler was enrolled in the district pre-kindergarten program and in preparation for kindergarten she increased communication with preschool teachers:

> What I have done for all of them, like this last year of preschool, I was like more involved, more concerned about like asking the teacher how she'd been doing. [I wanted] to know is she going to be ready? What I need to work on to make sure that she will be ready for kindergarten?

Wendy's example pointed out how preschool experiences are translated into home environments in preparation for kindergarten. She used her child's participation in preschool as an opportunity

to interact with preschool teachers to identify concepts and skills that she could work on at home to prepare her daughter for kindergarten.

Parents highlighted the important role parents could play in preparing children for school by ensuring children had preschool experiences and opportunities for social engagement. This preparation practice emerged as key across social class subgroups. Yet, a few parents noted that though it is an important resource, not all parents are equally equipped to provide center-based early childhood care and education experiences for their children.

Connections and Disconnections

Provision of preschool was discussed as a preparation practice across all subgroups. Among educators, administrators were particularly adamant about the importance of preschool for preparing children for kindergarten across program level. Though it was noted as a way for parents and family members to prepare preschool children for school, they advocated for increased federal and state funding for preschool for all, especially for low-income children. Parents' identifications of preschool as important, across social class groups, were generally well aligned with educators' views regarding this preparation practice. These findings suggest that parents were ultimately responsible for ensuring children have experience being in school prior to kindergarten.

Direct Instruction

Participants discussed the importance of parents "working" with children at home to prepare them for kindergarten. Direct instruction refers to intentionally teaching children, both one-on-one and within a group, specific concepts described as important to learn prior to transitioning into school. This preparation practice involved family members teaching children: their names, phone numbers, addresses, alphabet/letters, numbers and counting, and to write

names. General knowledge, nominal knowledge, numeracy, and to a lesser extent motor skill

development were corresponding school readiness categories promoted by direct instruction.

Educators

Direct instruction activities were most often identified by preschool-level educators as

concrete ways for parents to prepare children for kindergarten. For example, Bridget, a teacher

at Area Park Daycare, suggested parents allocate time to teaching their children general and

nominal knowledge prior to the first day of school. She asserted:

> I think parents and family members could start helping, again, teaching them how to spell
> their names, teaching them their first and last names, phone numbers and address. And it
> don't take nothing but 15-20 minutes outta the day, a little time just to set aside to spend
> time to help them with their numbers and alphabets and colors and things. So they
> [parents] gone have to set aside some time to work with the kids on one-on-one things.

Bridget's statement suggests parents should teach children to recite and identify personal

information and the "basics," such as the alphabet and colors, on a daily basis in preparation for

kindergarten. Though she instructed general and nominal concepts and skills at Area Park

Daycare, Katie said the best way for families to prepare children for kindergarten was to

reinforce what children learned while attending preschool. She contended:

> I think it's important for parents to see what the teachers are doing with the children.
> That way they could go over the same information that they go over in school. Just going
> over their colors and shapes and everything and practicing writing their name and all that
> other stuff.

Katie suggested parents reinforce key concepts taught by preschool teachers at home using direct

instruction. Annette, a preschool teacher at Lovees' Learning Center, concurred with the

emphasis on the role of families reinforcing preschool learning through direct instruction:

> I think the communication needs to be there. It needs to be open so they [parents and
> preschool teachers] can be on the same page so that the things that [children are] working
> on in [pre]school they can also take home and work on it at home. Repetition is very
> important to them; that's how they learn. That's how they retain things….If we're

working on it here and they're working on it at home they're gonna grasp the concept a lot quicker.

Annette stressed the benefits of parents working with children at home on concepts being instructed at preschool programs. She explained how repetition of concepts was considered key for early learning. Donna, a district pre-kindergarten teacher, also identified direct instruction as a means for parents to prepare children for school:

> The last thing would be for parents to make sure they work with their kids at home with some of these skills. And it's not as hard as some people might think. It's very easy. I send home activities and newsletters for them to do. They don't have to buy any special materials. So making sure that they are educational partners with us. We only have them for two and a half hours a day. They have them for the rest of the week so. Making sure they work on things at home definitely that would be an important thing too.

Donna's comment further highlighted the general perception that parents should work with children at home to supplement what they learn at the preschool programs to help prepare them for kindergarten. In fact, she gave examples of the strategies she used to encourage direct instruction among families of preschoolers at Middleton Pre-K Program. She also explained that it was particularly important for families to "partner" with Pre-K staff to prepare children for school because of the limited amount of time preschool teachers have to instruct readiness skills and concepts in their half-day programs.

Elementary

Kindergarten teachers did not typically include direct instruction as a preparation strategy in their discussions as often as preschool-level educators. However, an exception was Zoë, a building principal. She described direct instruction of nominal knowledge as a key. She noted "I would think that practicing sounds and the shapes and the colors and the counting."

These data imply that families are expected to assume a central role in teaching children basic general and nominal concepts and encouraging emergent writing and literacy in preparation

for kindergarten. Educators in this study, particularly preschool teachers, suggested that parents provide children with direct instruction at home. This preparation practice was typically recommended in support of skills, concepts, and competencies being taught in early childhood care and education programs.

<div align="center">*Parents*</div>

Direct instruction also emerged among parents as a family preparation practice. Mothers suggested parents provide basic instruction to preschool-age children at home in order for them to be ready for kindergarten. Direct instruction was more often identified by working-class and poor mothers than middle-class ones.

Low-Income

Working-class and poor mothers were most likely to include direct instruction as a way to prepare children for kindergarten. For instance, Ebony's son was not participating in a center-based preschool program but she worked with him at home. She said "I guess what I do is I try to work on him with basic things you know a lot of colors, a lot of numbers…" in preparation for kindergarten. Niecey also pointed out specific ways families can "work" with children to assist their early learning. She said:

> I think the best way is, if the parents ain't working, that they can stay at home and teach they kids like how to spell they name, make sure they know how old they is, they address, phone numbers, most important stuff like that. That's what I try and do with her, like everyday, like thirty minutes or an hour, just to spend time with [her] and let her know that you fina start school and you gotta know your name and age and all that.

Niecey suggested parents practice nominal and general knowledge concepts with children at home. She also noted the need to engage children early in thinking about kindergarten expectations. Also, consider the following comment provided by Bonnie, a working-class mother:

> Well, there are certain activities that I feel you should do at home. You know, it's important for children to learn how to write their names. You know that's an easy activity that you can do at home. Just playing games, you know things with colors and numbers, things of that sort of nature.

According to Bonnie, families were obligated to teach concepts and competencies mentioned above at home. She identified "easy," interactive ways for parents to teach children, such as playing games with colors and numbers and name writing, in preparation for kindergarten.

Alicia, a single mother of four including two adopted preschoolers, proposed parents do the following in preparation for kindergarten:

> Practice their ABC's, their numbers with them. Try to teach them how to write their letters, make the circles, you know, whatever. Try to teach them how to do it at home as well as at school because the teacher's can't teach it all to them. It's hard to try to mingle it all in but you kind of try to give at least fifteen or twenty minutes, you know, if nothing else to try to work with them cause, that's how our kids fall through the cracks.

Alicia's comment illustrated direct instruction as a means of promoting nominal knowledge and numeracy and fine motor skills. Alicia acknowledged that balancing work and single parenthood was a challenge, yet described providing direct instruction as an important preparation practice that could prevent children from "fall[ing] through the cracks" upon transitioning into kindergarten.

Connections and Disconnections

At the preschool level, educators emphasized direct instruction of nominal and general knowledge skills and concepts as an important preparation practice for families. When children were enrolled in preschool programs, educators recommended parents reinforce what children learned in these contexts at home. Teaching children the "basics" was one way in which parents were expected to be "educational partners" with early childhood education staff. Direct instruction emerged among working-class and poor parent participants as an "easy" way for

families to prepare their children for kindergarten. Middle-class families in this sample

recommended activities to prepare children that less often involved direct instruction.

<div align="center">Active Engagement</div>

Active engagement refers to purposeful efforts to occupy children in activity or

interaction. This category included: listening, spending time with, reading to, and conversing

with children. This preparation practice emerged among educators and parents as essential for

promoting language and early literacy. Active engagement was recommended as a way for

parents and family members to ease children's transition into kindergarten across subgroups.

<div align="center">*Educators*</div>

Educators stressed the importance of actively engaging children in print and conversation

before they entered kindergarten. Exposure to literacy and language was considered a parental

responsibility that needed to be fulfilled to promote learning in the early years. Educators across

program types discussed actively engaging children as the best way for parents to prepare

children for school.

Preschool

Active engagement promoted language development. At the preschool level, teachers

and administrators noted the importance of allowing space and opportunities for children to

express their thoughts and ideas. For example, Bridget, a daycare teacher at Area Park,

discussed the importance of families listening to children. She stated that it was important for

parents to "Kind of just listen to the child, listen to what they're thinking about, what's on their

mind" to promote their "being able to communicate well" once they transitioned into

kindergarten. In addition to active listening, Catherine, an administrator at the same daycare,

explained the importance of engaging children in "talk" in preparation for kindergarten:

> Talking….There's a lot of things that goes on in little minds. And I love to talk to children. Especially at an early age, that there's so much there. And I think so many people think that because they're small that they just don't know what they're doing. They truly do know what they're doing. Just listen to them some times.   Even at age two. Listen to them talk. I think a lot of people underestimate their kids.

According to Catherine, talking and listening to children were key activities parents could engage in with their children in the early years to promote school readiness. This active engagement promoted language development as children used words and gained experience communicating with others. Isabelle also said that by spending time with children and "Talking to their children…Talking to them about what's going on" families could best prepare children for school.

Preschool educators employed by Middleton School District commonly discussed the importance of actively engaging preschool-aged children in language and literacy prior to kindergarten as well. However, they tended to focus on reading as the primary mode of engagement. For example, Halle, a pre-kindergarten teacher, said that parents should, "Read, read, read, read, read. The more they read to their kids the better, I think." Similarly, Sally stated:

> The biggest thing we always tell everybody is the simplest thing you can do is read to your kids. I think reading every day to your kids and if you can, ask them questions while you're reading [like] what do you see here or why do you think that happened, is one of the cheapest and simplest ways to gain a lot of those [school readiness] skills.

In addition to reading, Samantha, an administrator at Middleton Pre-K, also emphasized language engagement. Like Sally, she suggested families use questioning in their conversations with young children:

> Read and talk to their kids a lot. And when I say talk to their kids I know you say well all parents talk to their kids. But there's different types of conversations. If the language is just directives like 'go sit down, go get on your pajamas, go brush your teeth' versus a reciprocal talking about things and asking questions to expand their language and providing experiences that again will expand their language and vocabulary. So I think,

you know, you can do that in your everyday life, but then using books to do that as well is real positive.

Samantha's comment suggests that active engagement in talk is required for preparing children for school. She discussed the importance of parents having "reciprocal" exchanges with children and asking probing question to expand language. She also pointed out how book reading and providing experiences in everyday life can promote early literacy.

Elementary

Reading and talking were prominently identified among elementary-level educators. For instance, Janice, a veteran kindergarten teacher in this school district, emphasized reading and talking as the best ways for families to prepare children for kindergarten. She suggested the following:

> Read, read, read; anything. Read signs as you're walking through the park. Read, just read. And the other one is talk to them about what you're doing. If you're busy cooking supper and your kid comes in flop them up on the counter next to you and just talk to them. Just talk to them about what you're doing because that whole process that teaches them order and sequence. Without even knowing it you're teaching them order and sequence and logical connections.

Janice explained that as society becomes busier, families have become less active in promoting emergent literacy and inferential reasoning within the context of daily life, such as family meals. She suggested families go back to those times and "read, read, read" and talk to their children in preparation for kindergarten. Karla, another kindergarten teacher, also discussed the importance of families reading to children and engaging in activities with them in effort to prepare them for kindergarten. She said:

> Sitting with them and reading things and writing and just talking to them. They talk about how important just having the background knowledge is. Even at the grocery store if you're pointing out the peaches versus apples. Because they're going to come across a book in here when they're reading that says this is a peach. And it's so much easier to read it if you've already seen a peach and ate a peach or just looked at a peach and said

peach. So just talking to your kids and bringing them places and having conversations is so helpful.

Through everyday activities, Karla suggested active engagement provides background knowledge that makes learning in schools "easier." Her statement also suggests an interconnection between language and literacy. According to Karla, through active engagement families can bridge everyday life experiences and talk with learning to read in school. Additionally, district administrator and former early interventionist Rachel said families have a "huge" responsibility

> Because kids need to be read to, they need to be talked to so that they can hear words. Words are so important, you know, for cognition later, you know when they get ready to come to school and read. So that first it starts with the parent or the guardian because that lap time is critical.

Rachel says that parents and families play a key role in preparing children for school. In the above example, engaging children in print and verbal enterprises was considered "critical" to learning in school.

Active engagement emerged as a prominent preparation practice among educators. Reading and talking with children were viewed as important means of supporting their transitions into kindergarten and early learning experiences. Though this preparation practice emerged across program types, community preschool teachers and administrators focused on the importance of listening to children while educators who work in the district placed a stronger emphasis on parental book reading and "reciprocal talk."

Parents

Active engagement also emerged among parents. Several mothers, particularly middle-class ones, noted the importance of actively engaging children in print and conversation before

entering kindergarten. Parents suggested and reported spending time, reading, and talking to children about the transition into kindergarten as ways for families to prepare to learn in school.

Middle-Income

Reading to children was highlighted by several middle-class primary caregivers as a key activity for promoting "school readiness" and easing transitions into kindergarten.   Shana provided examples of ways that she prepared her preschooler for school at home. She described a parent's role in getting children ready for school in the following:

> Staying up to par as far as their reading. We concentrate on him as far as his letters, his numbers. We make sure he's up to par on everything. We take him to the library, we buy him books. And I think that is important. You need to do things at home. So you can't just throw him in school and expect for the teacher to do everything. The parents also have to assist in it.

Shana and her family engaged in activities such as visits to the library that promoted nominal knowledge and early literacy school readiness categories. She stressed the role of parents and family members as partners in promoting positive early learning experiences prior to the first day of kindergarten. Laurie's recommendations to parents were diverse, but the importance of active engagement in literacy and language was evident in the activities she identified. In addition to having children participate in a preschool program, she suggested parents

> Read to them. Talking to them, talking and singing songs. And talking is just a little bit different, as an educator that is my opinion. Being a parent and educator I know the amount [of vocabulary] a child is gonna have is dependent on how much talking the parent has done with them.

Laurie drew upon her professional training as a teacher as she prepared her daughter for kindergarten. She connected active engagement in the forms of reading, talking, and singing with children's vocabulary acquisition. Heather, a parent and middle-school teacher, provided another example. She pointed to reading as central in preparing children for school. She stated:

> Well, when they're babies, you need to read to them. It's that simple. Just read to them when they're babies. You look in books and you continue to do that and you enjoy it. Obviously, if they see you reading newspapers, magazines, books yourself, they're gonna understand this is just part you know, [of] living. So, it's no big deal. So, you need to read to them, they need to see you reading and then you need to keep reading to them. Continuously you need to keep buying books, you need to keep going to the library. You need to keep bringing in new material. That's gonna keep them excited.

For Heather, reading should be visible at home and incorporated into everyday life as a means to promote early literacy.

Tina perceived reading as important for her son to learn prior to entering kindergarten. Yet, she discussed the difficulty she had promoting this readiness goal in the following example:

> It's hard for me because some times I feel like I don't have the time. I want him to be able to read, and it's just investing that time where we're reading books. And just being consistent too, which is hard just time wise. I feel like I don't have the time by the time we get home, eats his dinner, it's time for baths and then it's time for bed. And then trying to find time in between there where you're hitting the reading hard. I just feel like I don't have enough hours to do everything I want to do with him.

Tina's statement illuminates the challenge some parents encounter in actively engaging children. She explained that though she considered reading important to learn prior to kindergarten it was difficult to actively engage her son in literacy activities due to her busy work schedule and everyday life.

Low-Income

Working-class and poor parents also described active engagement activities as an essential preparation practice, though they did so to a lesser extent than middle-class mothers. These mothers noted the importance of reading to children at home in preparation for kindergarten. For instance, Xenophia, a working poor mother, suggested parents "Just at home, just everyday, read to them [children]." Consistently reading to children was highlighted in Xenophia's comment as a key preparation activity. Bonnie also recommended parents "read to your child." She further noted "I feel it's important" in preparation for kindergarten. Both

Xenophia and Bonnie identified reading as a key preparation strategy. As mentioned above, this emphasis on reading was aligned with promoting skills and competencies within the language and early literacy category of school readiness.

Grace, a mother who provided care and education for her daughter at home, stressed the important role that families play in preparing children for school. She provided an example of active engagement that centered upon reading and talking to her child:

> Personally, I started off just reading, from day one, pictures books, just anything that catch they eye. Work with colors and just feed them any information you can. Don't try to go over and above but, it's easier when you start early to [encourage] them to have the quest for knowledge on their own. It's annoying some times when they come to you and ask you 150 questions, but in the long run I'm hoping it will work out.

Grace's efforts to incorporate active engagement in her interaction with her daughter were purposeful. She did so by reading to her daughter and engaging her daughter's questions by "feeding" her varied forms of information.

Connections and Disconnections

Active engagement emerged across subgroups. Educators and parents pointed out the importance of exposing children to language and literacy through reading and talking to young children. District-employed educators and middle-class parents explicitly stressed the importance of families actively engaging young children in language and literacy activities early and consistently. Community preschool teachers and administrators also considered active engagement as essential for preparing children for school. But district educators pointed out the importance of "reciprocal talk" and emphasized reading more often than those employed in daycare and learning centers in this sample. Middle-class parents' recommendations to families were closely aligned with active engagement strategies provided by kindergarten-level educators. Though working-class and poor mothers also included active engagement activities as one of the

best ways for parents and family members to prepare children for school, this occurred on a

much smaller scale.

<div align="center">Social Engagement</div>

Social engagement encompasses purposeful efforts to provide children with opportunities

to interact with others. This preparation practice included activities such as traveling, attending

community and cultural events, and participating in organized activities. Social engagement

promotes the social competence and self-regulation school readiness categories.

<div align="center">*Educators*</div>

Some educators expressed the need to involve children in informal and organized social

activities in preparation for kindergarten. For instance, Zoë, another building principal, offered

additional options for social engagement that preschool offered. She recommended:

> Parents need to have the child practice working with others, whether it's through a little
> scout group or a swim team. Something where they're involved with other children in
> order for them to learn to play and share and cooperate; which they have to do a lot. As
> soon as they get to school, they work in teams. [Parents] need to provide opportunities
> for them to engage with other children.

Social engagement was considered key as children move from home and interacting primarily

with parents into school and collaborating mostly with their peers. Zoë suggested organized

activities such as girl and boy scouts as means of preparing children for the social demands of

kindergarten. In addition to preschool experiences, Isabelle, a preschool teacher at a learning

center, added that families can engage in other social activities outside of their homes in

preparation for kindergarten. She suggested:

> Actually spending quality time, traveling, taking [children] to museums, zoos and reading
> at times, like at bed time, having a routine so that way they know what to expect and feel
> like somebody cares so they won't have the lot of the behavior problem comes from
> where you don't have somebody who is always available in your life.

Isabelle's statement suggests that engaging children in informal social activities such as visits to museums and zoos as well as routine reading were considered important in promoting self-regulation upon entering kindergarten. The underlying assumption is that social engagement is an expression of love that builds children's sense of self as they transition into kindergarten.

Parents

Middle-class parents also highlighted the need for social engagement. For instance, Tina, a middle-class mother of three, said that in addition to enrolling children in preschool to prepare them for the social demands of kindergarten, families should provide opportunities for social interaction. As an example, she noted that she took her preschooler "To the mall with Laurie and Jasmine, things like that; being around other kids" to provide him with opportunities to develop his social skills. Though Sweetie Pie Learning Center provided opportunities for social competency, Tina supplemented her son's preschool experiences through participation in community events with peers of the same age. Gina also supplemented her daughter's preschool experience with other activities:

> She's in a private preschool now. That's very organized and that's been really good for her. Since she just turned five, we have her in swimming and tumbling as well. And the teachers love having her in class because she is able to focus and pay attention and follow directions.

Gina's example highlights the self-regulation skills promoted in organized activities such as swimming and tumbling.

Denise, a working-class mother of two, provided care and education for her daughter, Annie, at home. Though Annie did not participate in preschool, she stressed the importance of seeking out opportunities for social engagement prior to children starting school. She recommended parents

> Get them [children] involved in activities where there's a lot of other kids. Like, we take her to the library. We take them on field trips. We get them talking to other adults that are not so much in a teaching field but are able to provide some kind of knowledge that she can understand.

Socially engaging children in activity was considered key. Denise suggested that activities such as visiting the library and taking "field trips" provided opportunities to develop social skills and competencies required to interact with others in school environments.

Connections and Disconnections

Social engagement was not identified as often as the other three preparation practices. Still, a few educators and middle-class parents pointed out that traveling, involving children in organized activities, and participating in informal "fieldtrips" are activities they recommended families take part in to prepare children for school. Both educators and parents noted the importance of family members providing children with opportunities to develop their social skills by interacting with children and adults outside of their homes.

Chapter Summary

Four preparation practices emerged as the best ways for parents and/or family members to help prepare their children for school in this study. Though some skills and concepts were cited across preparation practices, they typically emerged more often in concert with one practice or another. Parents were described as key to facilitating the transition from home into school by teaching children the "basics," actively engaging them in literacy and language, providing preschool experiences, and engaging them in social activities.

Providing preschool experiences was noted as a strategy for preparing children for school across participant type, level, and social class. This preparation practice provided children with experience being in school that promoted social competency and self-regulation. Ensuring children had preschool experiences was noted as an important parental contribution that could

ease children's transitions into kindergarten. Participants' comments suggested that preschool programs assisted with teaching children "the basics," but educators and parents noted that preschool was a privilege that not all families are able to take advantage of because universal preschool did not exist in this community. Therefore, provision of preschool was primarily perceived as a parental responsibility.

Preschool-level educators and working-class and poor families stressed the importance of parents partnering with program staff and reinforcing basic information instructed at preschool within their homes. Working-class and poor parents noted ways in which they used direct instruction to convey general knowledge, nominal knowledge, and fine motor skills to their children in preparation for kindergarten. Preschool-level educators, particularly community-employed ones, and some working-class and poor families stressed the importance of parents partnering with program staff using direct instruction.

Educators employed by the school district suggested that the best way for parents to prepare children for school was to engage them in activities and expose them to language. These views were most closely aligned with middle-class and affluent families' perceptions of the roles of parents and families members in preparing children for kindergarten. These primary caregivers stressed the importance of reading and talking to children in preparation for kindergarten. According to district-employed educators and middle-income parents, active engagement promoted the language and early literacy school readiness category.

Of all the preparation practices, social engagement occurred least often in participants' responses. When it did it emerged among both educators and parents because of the importance attributed to the development of social competency. Social engagement was also discussed in concert with provision of preschool.

Working-class and poor families are more likely to enter kindergarten with more experience in direct instruction of school readiness concepts. Though preschool teachers and administrators noted the importance of families providing direct instruction to children to prepare them for school, kindergarten educators did not. Instead, their responses related more closely to middle-class families' emphasis on active engagement.   These findings suggest that middle-income homes more closely resembled school contexts than poor and working-class homes. Children from middle-class homes are more likely to enter school learning with prior experiences that resemble the school expectations for talking and reading than their poor and working-class counterparts. Middle-class children's active engagement has the potential to confer more school readiness advantages. Contrarily, working and poor children have more experience prior to entering kindergarten with direct instruction. This has the potential to confer school readiness disadvantages to low-income children transitioning to kindergarten programs that employ active engagement. Findings also suggest access to preschool programs is a privilege in and of itself, and participating in those that promote active engagement confer added advantage upon entering kindergarten.

Following Chapter

Perceptions and recommendations for preparing children for school were presented in previous chapters. Next, I examine the ways everyday activities can promote school readiness categories identified in Chapter 6. The following chapter focuses on the potential for family routines and activities to indirectly bestow school readiness advantages and disadvantages.

CHAPTER 11: FAMILY LIFE

Family life is often considered critical in children's development and academic achievement. The previous chapter identified several school readiness categories directly affected by family activities. This chapter explores indirect ways in which family life and activities can promote school readiness categories. It examines: (1) daily routines and rhythms and (2) adjustment to family routines. Routines and activities offered a multitude of opportunities for children to develop skills and competencies in the following categories: nominal knowledge; language and literacy; social competency; self-regulation; independence; and motor skills and physical health, in their everyday lives. Children's preschool routines offered continuity as children transitioned into kindergarten so family routines were expected to remain stable. However, work conflicts had to be negotiated. Findings suggest variations across social class were minimal but had the potential to have advantages and disadvantages for children upon entering kindergarten.

Daily Routines and Rhythms

This study was particularly concerned with everyday life and how children interacted within. Participants were asked to chart a typical day during the week and weekend for their children. They described these activities during an interview and many took photos of their children to document their activities. Daily routines and rhythms centered on: morning routines, mealtimes, and bedtime routines. More importantly, typical weekday and weekend routines had the potential to enhance skills and competencies viewed as important to learn prior to entering kindergarten. Social class variations were most telling in terms of children's participation in organized activities, cultural activities, and travel.

Typical Weekdays

On weekdays, children's schedules were typically adult-directed. Participants overwhelmingly cited parents and significant others, to include child care providers and educators, as primary decision makers who structured children's daily activities. Caregivers provided vivid descriptions of children's morning, mealtime, and bedtime routines. Findings suggest typical weekday activities provided children with opportunities to promote school readiness categories in the routine activities of everyday life.

Providing Care

Children spent as much time in the care of child care providers and educators as they do with their families during the week. Parents' work situations varied. Therefore, the amount of time children spent in provider and home care varied as well. Children in households with two, or single, working parents spent the majority of their waking hours outside of the home and in the care of child care providers and early childhood educators. Figure 11-1 illustrates the average number of hours children enrolled in Sweetie Pie Learning Center typically spent in provider and home care. Figure 11-2 illustrates the number of hours children enrolled in First Stop Private Preschool spent in provider and home care.

On average, children enrolled in Sweetie Pie Learning Center and First Stop Preschool Program spent the most hours in center-based care. Both programs were full-day and middle-class families were patrons. In middle-class families, both two-parent and single, primary caregivers worked in all but two cases. In one of the two cases, Heather, a middle-class mother, was home on maternity leave after giving birth to her second child and planned to return to work..

Figure 11-3 presents the average amount of time children enrolled in Middleton Pre-K Program spent in provider and home care. On average, children enrolled in Middleton Pre-K had their waking hours more equally split between provider care and home care. Middleton Pre-K Program was half-day. Two mothers were employed outside of the home, two mothers worked from home as child care providers, and one was unemployed. However, Middleton Pre-K children whose parents were employed outside of the home spent more of their weekday with daycare providers while mothers worked.

The subgroup of children who received home care spent little to no time in provider care. One exception was Nicki's preschooler, Tony. His grandmother provided care for him while his mother worked during the weekday. Nicki's mother shared a household with her and cared for Tony at home. Preschoolers who stayed home were typically younger as well. Three of the children who received home care were three years old.

Connections and Disconnections

While in their care, early child care providers and educators structured children's routines and activities during the week. Children of working parents typically spent most of their waking hours in provider care. On the other hand, unemployed and self-employed mothers who worked from home spent more time caring for children and structuring their typical weekday activities.

Morning Routines

Waking up in the morning was a varied activity among families. In some instances parents woke their children. In other instances their children woke them to begin the day. In general, morning routines provided opportunities for children to engage in self-care activities across social class subgroups. Children often brushed their own teeth, dressed themselves, and

ate their breakfast independently. These activities promoted the independence school readiness category.

Middle-income. Several middle-class families described their children's engagement in self-care activities during their morning routines. Consider the following example from Laurie:

> I normally get her up after I've gotten her sister up and have her start getting ready. Then I wake her up and she'll get dressed, brush her teeth. We'll get ready to go to school.

Laurie noted that her daughter dressed herself and brushed her own teeth in the morning. These activities have the potential to promote competencies within the independence school readiness category. Joy's daughter had to take some time to wake up, but she washed on her own in the morning. Joy stated:

> I get them up at about seven o'clock and she may sit in the bathroom for a half an hour if I let her because she's waking up. And [I] make sure she's brushed her teeth and washed her face and hands.

Joy's preschooler was able to brush her teeth and wash with minimal assistance. Pam's son conducted personal hygiene and dressed himself in the morning. She noted that "While they're eating, I may go upstairs and you know lay out his clothes for him to wear. He knows he has to go up and brush his teeth, wash his face and put his clothes on."

Opportunities to engage in self-care activities did not always take place during morning routines. In fact, waking up in the morning was not always easy for every family member. Connie's husband, Anthony, supervised their preschooler's morning routine. He noted that he dressed his son to save time in the morning. He stated "I get Noah up anywhere between six-thirty or six-forty five. I dress him. He has a hard time getting dressed in the morning so just to expedite things, I'll dress him."

Low-income. Similar self-care activities emerged in working-class and poor parents' discussions of their morning routines as in middle-class families. For instance, on a typical morning Francis's son:

> Gets up, he uses the bathroom and then he gets in the bathtub. He gets out the bathtub, he brushes his teeth, lotion the body down and then he gets dressed. All this takes place in about fifteen, twenty minutes span-time.

Alicia's preschooler dressed herself in the morning. Alicia described her daughter's routine in the following way:

> She got to sit there first, then she goes to the bathroom, then she comes back to the table and then Gabby eats. It probably take Gabby about fifteen minutes, twenty minutes to eat. And then she gets her wash-up and puts her clothes on. She dress herself, put her clothes on. And then she goes and get her chair. And she sits right in here [near the television]. And she takes her orange juice and drinks it while she gets her hair combed.

Alicia's comment illustrated her daughter's independently performed activities. It also reflected the agency her typical routine afforded as she moved from one task to the next.

Working-class and poor children did not always dress themselves in the morning, especially when they were not fully awake. For example, Xenophia described her son's morning routine in the following:

> He brush his teeth, wash his face, use the bathroom. Then maybe 6:30, 7 o'clock or 6:30, he gets ready. We get him dressed. Some times he dress his self. Some times we dress him because he be half asleep.

Xenophia's son did not typically dress on this own but he did conduct other self-care activities such as brushing his teeth and washing in the morning.

Connections and Disconnections

In general, data suggest weekday mornings provided opportunities for preschoolers to become competent conducting self-care activities and moving independently across social class

subgroups. Parents supervised and offered assistance as needed. Being independent was noted by participants as key to successful kindergarten transitions.

Mealtime Routines

Parent participants included the occurrence of breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks in their descriptions of their children's typical days. Children who attended early childhood education and care program and/or provider care ate breakfast in some instances, and typically lunch while there. Dinner was provided at home. Though some parents only documented appropriate times, others described family activities that took place during mealtimes. Not only did mealtimes provide the physical nutrition that promoted the physical health school readiness category, it could also promote social competency.

Middle-income. Several middle-class parents stated that dinner provided opportunities for family members to engage as a unit. For example, Pam ensured her family ate together. She offered the following description:

> During the time from the time I drop him off, until I come back, I have ninety nine percent of the time, prepared dinner. So, dinner is typically ready by five, five thirty, at the latest. But we don't necessarily sit down to eat right when we come in. My husband will come home, usually after five so we wait for him and we'll eat as a family.

Though her husband's work schedule might limit his participation, eating "as a family" was typical during the weekdays. Mealtimes also provided opportunities for social engagement. Shana said that "We have dinner when we get home. While we're doing dinner, we still do social time." Dinner was a "social time" for families to talk and spend time together. Sometimes, Gina's mealtimes were social as well. She noted:

> We eat dinner together everyday….Some times we have picnic nights. And going out is not a big repertoire. If we order pizza, we'll have a picnic. So we put a tablecloth on the floor and we sit in front of the TV and we watch Noggin.

Though they did not eat out often, mealtimes were always family-centered and at times involved social acts of having a picnic and watching television.

Mealtimes were not always structured by adults during the week. Some parents took children's lead in providing meals. For example, Tina noted that her preschooler was a picky eater, therefore his meals were more unstructured:

> Richard will probably eat something between like 7, 7:30. It really depends. My youngest son Reese needs to eat on a schedule. Richard is the type where he'll eat when he's hungry. I don't force him.

Tina took her cues from Richard in terms of providing meals. Therefore mealtimes were described as less structured and flexible. Other parent did not specify rituals or routines around eating in detail, but they also included them in their descriptions of children's typical days and usually without being probed.

Low-income. Working and poor families less often provided descriptions of social activities during mealtimes though they usually included breakfast, lunch, and dinner in their typical weekday charts. Denise described dinner time as a routine. She said "By five-thirty, we have dinner. So, we're all sitting down eating dinner." Denise's statement suggests that her family typically eat dinner "all" together.

Children also initiated meals in low-income families during the week. For example, after a long day of play, Nicki's son, Tony, tells her when he is ready to eat. She stated "He'll tell me, I'm hungry. I ain't eat nothing." Nicki's statement suggests that her son initiates mealtimes throughout his typical day. Ebony also followed her son's lead in providing meals. She explained "He never wants breakfast right away. So, thirty minutes later, he'll tell me he wants breakfast. Then, we go fix him some breakfast. Then he'll sit down and watch TV while eating

it." Even though most of the day was adult-directed, watching television during breakfast added to the notion that mealtimes were often child-directed in some households.

Connections and Disconnections

Mealtimes were similar across social class. Parents and child care providers typically structured children's mealtimes on weekdays. Mealtime routines often offered children opportunities to be social while eating "as a family." Not all family had structured meals though. Some were less structured and child-directed.

Bedtime Routines

In several instances bedtime routines typically entailed washing, dressing for bed, and settling down to sleep with a story and/or night prayer. These activities had the potential to enhance skills and competencies in the literacy and language school readiness category.

Middle-income. Book reading prior to bedtime emerged within several middle-class families. For instance, Laurie said that in preparation for bed "We'll take a bath and get on pajamas. Sometimes her sister will read her a book if it's not too late by the time they finish taking a bath" prior to her daughter going to sleep. Reading was incorporated in Gina's daughter's morning activities. Gina explained "Sometimes they read a story." Reading in the morning could promote language and literacy. Tina occasionally read stories to her son at bedtime. She said "Some times, depending on how tired I am." Though fatigue factored into whether or not they read books before bed, Tina noted it as a ritual. Melissa read more to her children at bedtime in the past than she does now. She said:

> Well, we used to do a really good job at reading stories. We haven't been doing a good job at that lately. But, when it's bedtime, we go upstairs, brush teeth, take a bath, get jammies on, get in the bed. We say our prayers and go to bed.

Though reading is not routine as it once was, Melissa did promote literacy and language at one

point. But the incorporation of prayer suggests its robust nature as a bedtime ritual among some

families. Consider the following example from Joy, an older parent:

> Then go into the routine of changing into our pajamas and doing our little Bible lessons
> and stuff. And, she's very good. She knows the Lord's Prayer. She knows the Twenty-
> third Psalm. She can recite those by herself. So, we'll go through Bible stuff like that.
> Then it's to bed.

Joy and her preschooler read and recited from religious texts before going to bed. These

activities promoted language and literacy development skills and competencies.

Low-income. Working-class and poor families also incorporated language and literacy in

their bedtime routines. For example, Bonnie noted book reading in her daughter's bedtime

routines. She said "At nighttime, I normally will read them a story and they'll fall asleep with

me reading a story." Denise provided another example. In addition to reading several books

during the day, reading was also incorporated in their bedtime routines:

> After dinner, around six forty-five we start getting them ready to take a bath and brush
> their teeth, and brush their hair and get their pajamas ready. So, they do that until about
> seven-forty, seven-fifty, somewhere in there. And, then eight o'clock is their bedtime.
> So, we read a book, say prayers, they go to bed.

Book reading was a conventional language and literacy activity cited as important for emergent

literacy and language. Saying "prayers" also has the potential to promote language development.

This facet of everyday family life is often taken for granted. Wendy's family read from the Bible

before bed. She noted that in addition to trying "to have a family conversation, talk" after

bathing, "We get ready for bed. I let them watch some TV. And, we pray, and we read the

Bible. And then, then go to sleep." Language and literacy were embedded in book reading and

religious activities.

Connections and Disconnections

Bedtime routines included several activities such as washing and dressing for bed, watching television, reading, and prayer. Middle-class and working-class mothers more often included book reading in their descriptions of children's bedtime routines. Consistency of bedtime stories varied from one family to the next.

Children's Activities: Home

Children's weekday activities included informal play and organized activities. Informal activities typically took place at home during the weekday. Children's playtime was scheduled by parents but child-directed. Children's weekday activities included: television watching, educational activities, and playing with games and toys. During "free time" children chose their own television shows, games, and toys. Children's home activities promoted nominal, language and literacy, self-regulation, and motor skills

Television watching. Watching television occurred often in parents' discussions of their children's typical weekdays. Television watching was incorporated in children's morning and bedtime routines as well as time in between the two across social class subgroups.

Watching television was one of Gina's, a middle-class mother of one, daughter's morning activities. Gina explained:

> After a little while they come, they come into our room and we watch TV. We watch PBS Kids in the morning for a little while. Then we go and get dressed and take a shower and then Marie'll watch TV while we do that.

PBS Kids is a network that provided programming for children aged 2-7. Watching "PBS Kids" was a morning activity Gina's family engaged in that could promote language and literacy. In addition to watching Sponge Bob in the morning while getting dressed, Tina's son's bedtime routine also included watching a movie. She said "And they're in the bed watching a movie or

some video until they fall asleep. I mean pretty much before they go to bed, they're gonna watch a movie."

Though television watching occurred during morning, mealtime, and bedtime routines, it was regularly featured during children's playtime as well. According to Pam, another middle-class mother, her son, Luis, watched television during free time. She said "About seven o'clock I think Power Rangers come on and he has to watch that." Like other children, Luis had a television program that he watched routinely. Shana's son enjoyed educational television and computer programs. She offered:

> He'll watch Leapfrog, like story time. That's his educational movie that he likes. Or Reader Rabbit. He does that on the computer. He likes the typical Disney [programs]. He like Backyardigans or the Barnyard or something like that. But more so Spiderman, like the action figure type of guys.

Shana's son enjoyed a diverse assortment of television programs. Backyardigans played on PBS Kids. Educational ones were first mentioned in her statement though she said her son enjoyed action figure programs more. Not all children watched television during the week. In fact, Heather, a middle-class parent, prohibited it. She said that her son "doesn't get television" during the week.

Watching Dora and Diego were incorporated into Alicia's, a working-class mother, daughter's morning routine. Alicia contended "She sits in the living room and she likes to watch Dora, Diego, whoever's on. Okay, now we getting to start getting ready for school." In another example, Niecey, a poor mother, described television watching when discussing her daughter Belinda's typical weekday. In the morning, Belinda liked to watch cartoons and then Niecey said "In between 7 and 8:30, she in the house watching TV….Usually be watching cartoons. Or her and my daughter, my nephew will be watching 106 and Park together." Consider the following comment provided by Ebony, another poor mother who cared for her son at home:

> If it's the school night like a typical night, I lay out his clothes, get in the tub and then it's off to bed. And, they watch a movie till they fall asleep and I go and turn the TV off.

Television watching was embedded in Ebony's son's bedtime routine. Children often fell asleep watching television.

Educational programming was also included in working-class families' descriptions of television watching. For instance, Grace said that her daughter "Some times watch Noggin" during the weekday. Noggin is a twenty-four hour cable television channel targeting preschool-aged children that promotes early learning. It is technically commercial-free programming though some ads were shown. Some parents noted that their children watched educational programming on television as well. For example, Francis, a low-income primary caregiver, said that:

> Sometimes he might sit down and they'll watch a movie, a DVD you know Lion King you know whatever. There are a lot of educational videos you know that I have and they watch. Sesame Street you know Dora.

In addition to watching Disney movies, Francis also included educational programming as a weekday typical activity her son engaged in at home.

Not all children watched television consistently. For instance, Bonnie, a working-class mother, said that her daughter "Doesn't really like watching TV all that much cause she likes to keep moving. She has to be doing some thing all the time." Bonnie's daughter preferred more active engagement to watching television. Additionally, Denise, a low-income mother, allotted one day out of the week for television watching. She said "Wednesday is the big day for them because that's movie day. That's when they get to pick out a special movie and they get to watch two movies on that day. That is a big deal because two movies period from not like not having to watch anything all week, is like they're just really ready for that."

Educational activities. Like television watching, educational activities emerged across social class. Children were given time to do their "own thing" during the week. This "free time" usually took place after returning from child care and/or an early education program and prior to dinner and bedtime. They activities children chose during their free time included educational ones.

Educational activities took place in concert with other ones as well as alone. Tina, a middle-income mother, provided an example of her son's solitary activities that took place at home. She said "And then he's kind of doing his own thing. He's either playing on the computer or he's playing with his Leapster." Both of these activities could promote the nominal knowledge and language and literacy school readiness categories. "Playing with his Leapster" could also promote the self-regulation school readiness category. Heather, a middle-class parent, said that her son, Walter, also had a Leapster. She said "He does have a video game system, V-Tech, all educational games and he has a hand-held Leapster, same kind of thing. And, he's got books. He's got little workbooks where you know you can do little academic things. Laurie is a middle-income mother. Educational activities were included in her description of her daughter Jasmine's favorite games. Laurie said:

> But, for the most part, she really loves the Memory game and puzzles and yeah puzzles and she likes to work on some of her homework books. But she really likes and she plays games on the computer.

Laurie's daughter's computer games included preschool learning activities. Melissa, a middle-income parent, also said her daughter, Jade, enjoyed computer activities. She said "But, we did find out that she likes to do crossword puzzles….We found a crossword puzzle on the computer. She loves that." The inferential reasoning school readiness category could be promoted through her computer activities.

Bonnie, a working-class mother, pointed out that her daughter enjoyed educational activities at home. Some examples of these activities were:

> She has a V-tech that plugs up to her TV where the games that she plays on it is learning the alphabet, learning her colors, shapes, things of that nature….She'll color. We'll sit down together and she'll color pictures and she likes to hang them up on her walls. Whatever books the school sends home, we'll read those and the different activities and stuff that they send home for her to do, we'll do those.

Coloring activities promoted fine motor development. Reading books promoted the language and literacy school readiness category. It is also important to note that Bonnie intentionally supplemented Pre-K activities within the context of everyday life when her child engaged in educational activities sent home from the preschool program. Grace's daughter engaged in activities that also promoted fine motor skill development. Grace said that "[She] usually tend to like to write all the time. Write or color. She just sit at the table. Some times she gets on the computer and she'll do Barbie.com. Nick Jr." Though her activities are diverse, she is developing fine motor skills by writing and coloring and literacy and language as she navigates the computer.

As a daycare provider, Francis's preschooler's educational activities were scheduled. She said "My daycare kids come and so they have playtime for a little while. We have circle-time at nine, where we sit down. We read books. We might sing songs." Denise's preschooler also received care and education at home. She described and scheduled educational activities during the week as well:

> Thursdays is school day, so that's actually when we have like a pre-k through first grade book that has like matching numbers, letters. Or we have a computer game where they can learn the alphabet or learn their numbers and shapes and colors and how to put stuff. And, she's really good at that one. It's a Dora Backpack thing. She's really good at that, so we do that kind of school thing on Thursdays, so they can kind of learn things.

Educational activities were embedded in their typical day and were even scheduled during a specific day of the week.

Toys and games. Children elected to and had access to recreational time and activities. Parents offered long lists of favorite games and toys their children informally played with during their typical weekdays. An interesting gender dynamic emerged. Though boys and girls read books, completed puzzles, and played with computers and board games, the kinds of toys mothers of boys and mothers of girls described as their children's favorites varied.

Mothers of girls often identified dolls as one of their children's favorite toys. For instance, Vanessa, a middle-class grandparent, said her granddaughter, Julie, "She likes her dolls. And, she like to play with the Legos. But, she don't like to pick 'em up." Dolls were a favorite among other girls as well. Joy said this about her preschooler: "Oh, she has dolls she'll play with." Though they chose not to play with toys much during the week and at home, dolls were a favorite. One of Laurie's daughter Jasmine's favorite toys are "Baby dolls. And she has a stroller and she pushes the baby now and then." Laurie's daughter's repertoire of favorite toys and games is diverse, but Laurie said that "she really likes baby dolls" and even "has a stroller" to push them around. Melissa's daughter was an exception. She did not mention dolls as one of her daughter's favorite toys. Melissa said "Jade never been that big of a toy-person. She doesn't really like toys so much."

Working-class and poor mothers of girls also noted dolls as their children's favorite toys. For instance, in addition to a host of games, Denise included the following, "Her kitchen set. That's her friend. Her grandma got her a Native-American doll, whose name is Paloma." Lastly, Wendy's daughter also enjoyed playing with her Dora Doll. Dora was a popular children's television program that featured a female main character. Wendy said "She plays with

her doll. She have a Dora house and Dora kitchen, a Dora chair, couch." Wendy's daughter

Kayla's favorite toys were her Dora doll and accessories.

Across social class subgroups, mothers of boys more often described superhero dolls as

their children's favorite toys. For example, Shana, a middle-class mother, said son, Maurice,

enjoyed playing with "Spiderman and Sting from Fantastic Four. And Spiderman and Batman

and he like his cars." According to Pam, another middle-class mother, her son Luis played with:

> I kind of give him free choice. He usually wants to play a game. Let's play Trouble or
> let's play this and if I'm too tired, I may not do that. I try to do at least one round with
> him just because. He has like a transformer-like that he'll play with every once in a
> while. It has this Spiderman thing.

During free choice, Pam's son played Trouble. He also played with action figures at times.

Heather, also middle-income, offered the following example of what her son, Walter, plays with

on a regular basis: "He has a ton of toys. His favorites, though, are cars and motorcycles."

Working-class and poor mothers of boys also described action figure dolls as favorites.

For example, Xenophia's son "loves Power Rangers. It's the Red Ranger he loves." She said he

also "loves trucks, football. He's starting to get into the little guns now, like water guns." Power

Rangers, water guns, and playing football were not mentioned among mothers of girls as toys or

games their daughters favored. Cars were also toys that were more commonly favored among

boys. In response to the probe "Does your son have any favorite toys that he likes to play with,"

Ebony said "Oh, yeah. Lightning McQueen Car. It talks, it lights up. That's his favorite. And

there's this little truck he pushes around."

Connections and Disconnections

In general children's home activities were diverse. Data suggest that families offer

multiple forms and variations of materials within the home that can stimulate development.

Children's home activities were similar across social class subgroups. Middle- and low-income

primary caregivers provided examples of their children watching television and engaging in educational and recreational activities. Findings suggest in some instances children's activities were gendered. Boys' and girls' choice of toys varied with girls favoring baby dolls and boys favoring superhero dolls and cars.

Children's Activities: Neighborhood and Community

In this section I discuss some of the typical activities that children were involved with in their neighborhoods and communities. A few parents considered neighborhood activities as limited in this community school district. Some mothers explicitly noted this limitation while others implied it. Findings suggest parents generally had positive perceptions of their neighborhood. Mothers generally reported that they liked their neighborhoods because they were child-friendly. Child-friendly neighborhoods had same-age peers living nearby and safe places for children to play such as parks. Children's neighborhood activities primarily involved playing with other children. Their neighborhood activities have the potential to promote the social competency, self-regulation, and motor skills and physical health school readiness categories.

Middle-income. In their discussions of their neighborhoods, parents often made reference to the extent to which neighborhoods were child-centered or had resources and activities available for children. For example, Melissa said "I like my neighborhood. It's a nice, quiet neighborhood. I love having a park right across the street. That's very nice. I like it here."

Parents looked favorably toward child-centered resources and saw the absence of them as a disadvantage of their neighborhoods. As a mother in a family with young children, Tina considered the fact that not many other children resided in her neighborhood as a limitation. She noted:

It's not the most ideal. Like I said it's a nice neighborhood, but there aren't a lot of children. My children are the only children on the block. And I think if I were older it would really be ideal because I barely see my neighbors. I know several of them. But it's not necessarily the most ideal place for little kids. Like I have a couple of friends that live in Monroe and they just talk about how yes, a lot of young families out there and a lot of kids. And I want that for my kids. I want them to be able to go outside and just play. And so as I think about whether or not I'm going to be in this area and where I live right now is something that I'm conscious of. It has to be some place kid-friendly.

For Tina, having a core group of peers within the neighborhood was ideal. She was looking for a more child-friendly neighborhood to relocate to so that her children would have opportunities to play with neighborhood children.

During the weekday, most children took part in unstructured "outside" play within their neighborhoods. Unstructured "outside" play involved playing with peers, riding bikes, and visiting parks. For example, Tina, a mother of three, noted:

Some times…what they do in the neighborhood is there is a park right across the street from us, there's a good [thing]. So they go over there and they play. But that's really the extent of it. Or they ride their bikes up and down the block or Richard will have his little big wheel.

Though there are not many children her preschooler's age living within their neighborhood, Richard rode his bike and played in the park across the street with his siblings. Shana's son's neighborhood activities were limited to playing with his neighbors. She stated:

Playing with the next-door neighbor's kids. That's it. He's really too young. I really won't let him do too much…with just the fear of everything else that goes around. But that's all. Just playing with the neighbor's kids and that's it.

Shana cited age as a factor that limited her child's involvement in neighborhood activities. Weather conditions limited children being able to engage in neighborhood activities. For instance, Connie stated "Even in winter no, it's the same thing. I mean he'll go outside if it's warm. He'll go outside by himself. He got a bug vacuum I know he's dying to use but he can't because of the weather."

In addition to playing at the park, middle-class parents whose children attended private preschool were also involved in organized activities close by or outside of their neighborhoods. Some of these activities included: tennis, soccer, martial arts, swimming, tumbling, and ballet classes. For example, Vanessa and her grandchildren participated in a karate class twice a week. She said "Every Tuesday and Thursday….She do the karate. She do her little kicks. And, I think she's the youngest I think." Vanessa enrolled her grandchild in karate class at an early age. In fact, her granddaughter might have been the youngest person in the class. Melissa's daughter took part in a structured community activity as well. She stated that her daughter's "Ballet class is a major consistent activity….That's the only extracurricular activity that we do." Pam's son participated in a martial arts activity. She described it in the following excerpt:

> He's in the Leadership Program in Taekwondo. And we do that three days a week. The traditional program in Taekwondo is twice a week but the Leadership class, you take an extra day. And, that's where they really focus on their skills, courtesy and things like that and helping to build self-esteem. Things that I'm already doing but I really think it's really positively reinforced by this Taekwondo program.

Pam described how her son's participation in this organized activity reinforced his self-esteem and focus. Gina also pointed out several ways in which her daughter's participation in organized activities from a very young age promoted positive outcomes. She noted that:

> We spent a lot of time in kindermuzik….And we got her in that probably when she was six or eight months old. She couldn't walk. She was just learning to walk when we got her in that. And you sing songs and they give you little CD's, little children's CD's and they're really visual and really physical…. [I] think those things getting started were really good because it gave her a good sense of ownership, that she could spend organized time with Mommy and Daddy and sit down and be disciplined enough to listen to music or participate in a group….We have her in swimming and tumbling as well.

Gina's daughter was involved in several organized activities since she was an infant. Positive outcomes of her daughter's participation included a sense of ownership, discipline, and the ability to attend. These promoted the self-regulation school readiness category.

Low-income. Neighborhood activities and resources for children were valued

components in their descriptions of their neighborhood. Nicki, a low-income parent, described

her neighborhood as quiet and she liked the fact that there were lots of children living in the

neighborhood. But she also highlighted some of the "bad parts" about it. She stated:

> For the most part it's quiet, except when it's really hot outside, people come out….It's
> really quiet but sometimes it get a little hectic. The older adults or whatever, they feel
> like doin' stuff….But it's a lot of kids. A whole lot of kids...they be like all around here,
> a street full of kids. So, it's a lot of stuff for 'em to do and it's a lot of kids for 'em to
> play with and stuff. Overall the neighborhood is good but like all neighborhoods, it's got
> its bad parts. You know what I'm sayin,' crime and stuff like that. But overall it's a
> pretty good neighborhood. It's a lot of kids around and it's a lot of parks. And like
> different areas for them to play in.

Nicki viewed her neighborhood as being "pretty good" overall, despite the violence and crime

that takes place primarily during the summer months. The presence of same-age peers and

parks in the neighborhood made it a child-friendly place to live.

To further explore some of the activities young children participate in within their

neighborhoods, parents were asked to discuss some of the activities that their children were

involved in within and outside of their neighborhoods. Alicia's daughter played outside "And

after she eats, and then they goes outside and they play." Similarly, Xenophia's son played with

the neighborhood children: "About five o'clock he goes out to play whenever we get home. It's

roughly about five o'clock. He'll go outside and play with his sister and the neighborhood kids"

on a typical day. Nicki's son loved to play "outside." She said "He'll be outside all day."

A small group of low-income parents reported that children were not active within their

neighborhoods for various reasons. Niecey has designated the park in front of their house the

only neighborhood activity that her child was involved in. She explained:

> She just love to go the park and play….This one [park] in front. Well, she went to that
> one maybe twice. I don't like her to go over there because I can't see her from over

there. And if she aint going with her brother, I mean her cousin or her sister, then I prefer
her to stay over here.

In an effort to supervise her daughter while she's in the neighborhood, she restricts her

movement within it to two parks, unless she is accompanied by an older relative.

Connections and Disconnections

Parents' perceptions of their neighborhoods varied. Child-friendly neighborhoods were

highly favored and considered good neighborhoods. Across social class subgroups, parents

valued the neighborhoods that offered peers close in age and safe places for children to play.

Structured activities were not the norm for preschool-aged children. However, some middle-

class children, particularly those enrolled in the private preschool program, routinely took part in

structured activities outside of their neighborhoods. These affluent parents noted concrete

advantages of their children's participation in organized activities at early ages. Unstructured

outside play was particularly common across social class subgroups. However, findings suggest

low-income children were more involved in unstructured, self-directed activities within their

neighborhoods.

Typical Weekend

The weekend was generally less structured, more flexible. Children spent the majority

of their waking hours in the care of their families. Children's weekend routines were typically

child-directed during the weekend. Children were actively involved in organizing their weekend

activities. However, parents tended to organize "family time" and activities on the weekend. In

several instances family activities were child-centered and family-friendly.

Providing Care

Unlike typical weekdays, parents provided almost all of the care for children during the

weekend. However, in a few instances, working-class parents' children were cared for by a child

care provider on the weekend. Still, the amount of time spent outside of home care was much less central on the weekend in comparison to weekdays. Generally, morning routines, mealtimes, and bedtimes were child-directed on the weekend. Social class variations did not emerge in providing care for children on weekends.

Morning Routines

Children's morning routines were slightly different on the weekend. They were often child-directed. On the weekend, children typically woke up and began their morning routines without or with limited adult supervision. They selected television programs and chose activities independently. The independence school readiness category was promoted during children's weekend morning routines.

Middle-income. Children's morning routines often consisted of waking up early and watching television. Consider the following examples from Laurie and Connie:

> Jasmine likes to get up early and we like to sleep in. So normally, that's when she gets the chance to watch her Disney show, Nickelodeon show because we want to sleep and she wants to be up. And so, that's when she gets to watch her shows.

> Phillip wakes up on his own and early on Saturdays for cartoons by himself before we even say anything. [He wakes up at] seven…. And he watches cartoons until noon cause that's the time those go off on PBS.

In both examples, children woke up independently and began their day watching their favorite television shows. Though the networks differed, Nickelodeon and PBS, both stations provided programs that targeted children. Heather's son's weekend mornings were action-packed according to her. He began his day excited about his opportunity to watch television and play:

> He's you know ready to party. So, he wants that. He wants the TV on. And, he'll just kind of do all of his little activities in front of the television. It's his party time. Right. So, the TV's in our bedroom. He doesn't have a television that's actually connected to anything, other than his game. So, my bedroom becomes party central. He'll have his colors, his books and everything piled up around the television. You know there's lots of jumping and bumping and all that good stuff. But, we put on Noggin and a kids' channel.

In addition to television watching, Heather's son engaged in several different child-directed activities to include "jumping and bumping" around the room. However, Heather limited television watching that took place in her bedroom to Noggin.

Low-income. Children residing in working-class and poor families also directed their weekend morning routines. For instance, Francis stated that on a typical weekend

> They wake up, I don't wake 'em up. I just let 'em wake up on their own…[I tell them to] go back to sleep, go get in the bed. I don't care if you turn the TV on but we're not gonna be running around cause the weekend is the only time that I really get to sleep in. And, they're not gonna run amuck until about nine…The oldest they know how to, you know, get the cereal.

Morning activities were child-directed and involved watching television and eating cereal. Francis did provide some restrictions on her children's activities to include not being allowed to "run amuck" early in the morning. Some children slept later than usual because they stayed up late the night before. For example, Nicki said "Cause he'll sleep all mornin'. He'll sleep till like noon. Like I told you, if we didn't have him here, he'd still be asleep. I woke him up." Even though her son was allowed to sleep late, Nicki restricted him from sleeping past noon. Alicia also allowed her daughter the liberty to "sleep in" on the weekend. She stated:

> Saturdays I just kinda like let her sleep long as she want to cause that's her day. She have a rough week through the week, you know, by me having to get her up at night and bring her home from daycare and stuff and then she goes to school, too….I don't make her get up or nothing like that unless we going to church or something.

Saturdays were considered her preschooler's day to direct her activities by Alicia. She permitted her daughter to sleep without being awakened unless they had to attend a planned event.

Connections and Disconnections

Children decided what television program they would watch, what games they played, and when they ate breakfast in the morning across social class. Data also suggest these activities

took place informally. Times and schedules for morning routines were flexible and child-directed. Still, parameters were set by parents to guide children's activities despite limited physical supervision.

Mealtimes

Weekend mealtimes included breakfast, lunch, snacks, and dinner. Meals took place informally during the weekend and were not typically scheduled. Breakfast was most often cited in parents' descriptions of their mealtimes. Families typically had meals outside of the house on the weekends.

Middle-income. Once everyone was awake, parent participants said that they typically had breakfast. For instance Joy, a middle-class mother, routinely prepared Sunday breakfast:

> Sunday I'll fix their breakfast. Usually on a Sunday, we'll get grits, eggs, pancakes, or, you know, all that kind of stuff. I'll fix them a big breakfast. So sometime on Sunday they don't get dinner until [5 or 5 o'clock]. Now that's a day they only get two meals because breakfast is late and then supper. They're not hungry.

Connie and her husband provided their preschooler several informal meals throughout the day:

> I'll get up and cook breakfast. He eats breakfast on the weekends [at] eight, nine o'clock. And, then it's lunch. If he's hungry, he'll start asking. By one o'clock. And, in between there, he's done had an apple, he's had a snack. He's asking all day. Like, he'll eat all day.

Connie's son typically requested meals throughout the day on the weekends. She took his lead in providing meals on the weekend. Heather's son's mealtimes were similarly provided when requested:

> And, we'll get him a snack and it's usually not cereal; he's you know ready to party. Snack, meals I provide either when he tells me he's hungry or I can pretty much tell when he's hungry. He'll eat it and then run back to the television.

Mealtimes were less structured and flexible within several middle-class families on the weekend. Times for breakfast, lunch, and dinner were less often mentioned in parents' descriptions.

Low-income. Bonnie said that on the weekend "We have breakfast together as a family at eight." Denise's family also has breakfast together on the weekend. She stated: [My husband] pulls out the pancake batter and they start making pancakes and eggs and you know just a bunch of different stuff. So they're involved and they can cook." Cooking provided an interactive activity for Denise's family to engage in. Francis and her friend have Sunday dinner together routinely. She provided the following description:

> On Sunday we always have a Sunday dinner at somebody's house, whether it's my house or my best friend's house. But that's every Sunday. There's always a big Sunday dinner. So, we keep that up.

Mealtime was combined with a social gathering or getting together with Francis's best friend.

Not all families have a hot breakfast on the weekend. Alicia said "We eat breakfast. It doesn't have to be a hot breakfast." Niecey noted that on the weekend "I cook them something to eat or we'll go get something to eat."

Connections and Disconnections

Mealtimes were often flexible and child-directed on the weekends. Like morning routines, mealtime routines also were similar across social class subgroups. Parents typically provided meals upon request. Sometimes children prepared their own cereal and snacks. At other times, families prepared special weekend meals that provided opportunities for social interaction and family time.

Bedtime Routines

Across social class bedtime routines were similar during the weekends. However, like morning schedules, children had more liberty to determine their own bedtimes on the weekends. In several families, children were allowed later bedtimes on the weekends in comparison to weekdays.

Middle-income. Some middle-class parents said that they allow children to have later bedtimes on the weekend. For example, Gina allowed her daughter to determine her weekend bedtime. Gina said this about her daughter: "She says she doesn't like to sleep. And she always tells me that she doesn't want to sleep and she wants to stay up all night. But then she passes out when it's time to go to bed." Similarly, Laurie described her daughter as a night owl on the weekends:

> Well, Jasmine's a night-owl, I would say. But she's an early-bird, too. Because her dad is home on the weekends, she tends to stay up with him. And they hang out and watch movies and do whatever so until she falls out.

Children tended to stay up later and *fell asleep* instead of being *put to bed* on typical weekends.

Other parents tended to maintain consistent bedtimes during the week and weekend. For example, Heather said that her son's weekend bedtime varied depending on the weekend activities:

> It's seven because we're tired. And we've had enough bumping and jumping and not going to sleep and it's been wild intensity. If it's been kind of a calm day, then it will be about eight. If we've gone somewhere, then it could be later. Like, if we've gone to a friend's house, then it could be later. But, normally seven-thirty's bedtime; we try to stay close to that on the weekends.

Melissa agreed with Heather. She attempted to enforce naptimes and bedtimes on the weekend that were aligned with their preschool routines:

> They go down for quiet time from noon till two. That's their school schedule so I try to maintain that at home, too….And usually on the weekends we'll stay up a little bit later. Like, instead of them going to bed at eight, they may go to bed at nine.

Low-income. Children in working-class and poor families also had later bedtimes on the weekend. For example, Niecey said that "Saturday we usually get up around noon because everybody stays up late. We get up about noon." Children stayed up later on the weekend and

woke later in the morning. Children also have more influence on their bedtimes on the weekend.

Nicki commented that her preschooler stayed up later on weekends watching television:

> They'll watch movies all night. So, girl, he will sit up all night and watch scary movies on the weekends, especially. He likes scary movies for some reason. And, I find that like, very strange, cause he three years old.

Nicki's example illustrated the flexibility of bedtimes on the weekend. Some bedtimes remained constant on the weekends. Bonnie's daughter's bedtime was similar on the weekend and during the week because they had to wake up early to attend church services on Sunday. She noted:

> We normally take a bath. Then at seven or seven-thirty, we brush our teeth, comb hair and then we get ready for bed. It typically ends around eight-thirty, nine o'clock; we get in the bed and get ready for church.

Bedtimes tended to be similar when activities and events were planned for the following day. In Bonnie's case, church was a routine weekend activity that required scheduled weekend bedtimes.

Connections and Disconnections

Bedtime routines did not appear to change from weekday to weekends. However, bedtime changes were noted across social class subgroups. In some cases, children were allowed to stay awake later, typically watching television. In a few cases, families preserved bedtimes all week long.

Family Activities

Children's weekend activities were similar to the activities that took place during the week. They engaged in television watching, educational activities, and playing with games and toys. Parents typically supervised and organized family activities on the weekends more often than they did on the weekdays. Participants described typical weekends as opportunities for relaxation and recreation. According to Laurie, a middle-class parent "Weekends are more a family time." Similarly, Bonnie, a working-class mother, noted that during the weekend "We'll

go visit family; just you know just go do some kind of family activity with the kids." In addition

to visiting and spending time with extended kin, parents identified several activities that they

engage in as a family on the weekend. In addition to the activities that take place within a typical

day, families engage in seasonal or occasional events as well. Three categories of family

activities emerged from these data: entertainment, cultural and special interests, and travel.

Though multiple categories were identified from each caregiver's response, they are presented

separately below. Family activities provided varied experiences and exposure that could

promote school readiness categories and ease children's transitions into school learning.

Entertainment

Entertainment was a category that took place occasionally and took place both within and

outside of the families' homes. Informal and formal gaming and playing, watching movies,

going to the movie theater, going to the local shopping mall, having a meal at restaurants, and

going to recreation parks and play areas were family activities identified as entertainment.

Entertainment emerged across social class.

Middle-income. Some parents described the informal activities they did on a regular

basis as a family. Gina, a mother of one child, noted several activities they engaged in as a

family. She stated:

> We watch Noggin. We play computer games. Marie's getting really good at it. She's
> getting good at some of those [PBS or Noggin] games. Then yesterday we played was it
> Old Maid? Or was it Crazy Eights? And, Marie and Daddy play Checkers a lot. And,
> we go swimming. And, she's starting to learn how to ride a two-wheeler….And then, we
> go down in the basement Marie likes to do that. So, we have lots of games we play down
> there.

Watching educational programs and playing games were activities that Gina engaged in with her

daughter as a family. These activities were informal and family-centered. Additionally,

Connie's family participated in activities around the neighborhood. Though she was new to

town, she stated:

> I mean we go out to eat but bicycling was like our thing. I don't know how it's going to
> work out now that we have Byron. Not till he gets big enough to get into the seat or
> whatever. But yesterday he went puddle stomping.

Though having a newborn baby precluded some family activities, Connie offered examples of

activities that the family enjoyed on a regular basis.

In addition to informal family activities that took place at home and within the

neighborhood, Shana's family instituted "family fun day":

> We had a family fun day a couple of weeks ago. Just, I took them out of daycare and we
> just hung out the whole entire day, from morning to night. I try to do stuff like that so
> they can just be with us cause some times it's hard. They be at daycare all day and we be
> at work the majority of the time. So, I try to do it so we can spend a little bit more time
> [together].

Shana sought activities that were age-appropriate for her children within the community. Pam

said that her family did not have many activities that they engaged in on a regular basis. Still,

she described activities that occurred on occasions:

> Luis, he loves to stay in hotels. So, as a treat for something he's done, we'll stay in a
> hotel together. And, that's a big deal to him. But, you know, and other than going out to
> an occasional dinner, you know things like that. But, it's harder now that Miguel's here
> because…it's a distraction with eating at the restaurant and all that.

Pam pointed out several activities that they engaged in as a family to include overnight stays at

hotels. Though these activities were not typical they were important components of family life.

The local mall has a play area for children, a carousel, and video arcade. Therefore, the

mall was a source of entertainment for families. For example, Tina stated:

> On a regular basis we try to take them, and I forgot, we took them to the mall. And they
> like to play and because my children are very active, they have to get it out. And the
> days that they don't go to daycare since they're at home half of the week they have a lot
> of energy. I mean they're running around jumping, bucking, playing. So we have to take
> them somewhere for them to get it out. So we try to go to the mall. And Richard really

likes video games unfortunately. So we'll let them play video games and then let them go into the playground.

The mall had several activities to entertain children. The mall had a play area that provided

Tina's sons with space for physical release that home did not afford.

Low-income. Working-class and poor families described similar types of entertainment

activities that emerged among middle-class parents. Denise stated that:

Oh, yeah. Play music. Yeah, they're really big with their instruments. [My husband] has gotten them both a bass like his, and a keyboard and its own kit. So, we pull it out and have like a family jam session.

Denise's comment suggests family activities were based upon their special interests in music.

Another example was provided by Grace. She discussed informal family activities such as

reading, playing games and eating out:

We don't do nothing….Yeah, board games, video games, reading. That would be real regular, reading. Reading and writing now cause she likes to write. Go through all our stuff and read our stuff. TV, movies….And if usually if we go on Sundays, we'll eat out somewhere. Whether it be you know at grandparent's house or we go to a restaurant or something. Sit down and do that.

Though initially Grace did not perceive the family as active, she provided several activities that

they did as a family at home and with other family members. Eating out for family meals was a

typical form of entertainment among working-class and poor families. Bonnie's example

pointed out several activities as well:

On a regular basis, we go to the movies, we go skating, we go bowling, we go on summer trips out of town, we go shopping together and then we play like Monopoly and we have Twister and then you know, different board games and things of that nature.

As a mother of four children, including two preschoolers and a toddler, Bonnie and her family

engaged in many different activities on a regular basis. These activities took place inside and

outside of the home.

Nicki pointed out entertainment activities that her preschooler took part in within the community. She noted going to the mall as one of their family activities:

> Oh, we go to Rolling Round Rolling like once every two weeks you know like to the malls and let them play in the play area. Take them to the park and stuff. The basic stuff you know that kids want to do.

Nicki followed her children's lead in terms of determining activities for the family to take part in. Other parents mentioned other play areas such as parks and Rolling Round Rolling, which was a local recreation center for young children. Niecey noted these as family activities that she and her children participated in. She noted "Oh, Lord, Belinda 'em [and them] love McDonalds. They play in that little play pen. I took them to Rolling Round Rolling. Oh, Lord, spent too much money. But they had fun then." The activities Niecey described were child-centered though the entire family took part. Wendy and her family also engaged in activities together within the community. She said "We just like to go places. Or, we walk the mall. Or we go out to dinner, the movies, things as a family." Wendy's family routinely engaged in child-centered activities in Middleton.

Cultural Outings

Cultural outings were also family-centered. Middle-class parents described visits to zoos and museums as activities they participate in as a family on a regular basis. These activities tend to take place less frequently then other forms of entertainment.

Middle-income. Several middle-class parents mentioned visiting zoos, museums, and the like as regular family activities. Melissa also included cultural excursions in her list of family activities:

> In the summer, we like to take road trips and go to the zoos or different parks we'll take the kids to; normal family-type stuff. [Apple] Orchard is a big hit. We go there a lot in the summertime.

Most of the cultural activities Melissa's family was involved in took place during the summer months. Some family activities were indeed seasonal. Vanessa also mentioned "We go to [Apple] Orchard. It just depends on the season." Gina and her family visited the local planetarium. She said "Some times I'll go to the planetarium" with her family on the weekends.

Tina planned to incorporate cultural activities into their family's entertainment. Still, she said:

> As he's getting older I would like to take him on more cultural excursions, you know to more museums. Now we go to the movies some times….I think I've kinda been waiting for him to turn five just to get him involved in more activities in terms of introducing sports to him, possibly playing a musical instrument and more cultural excursions; more museums, things like that.

Tina considered "cultural excursions" family activities that she intended to do more as her preschooler aged. Though Middleton did not have a zoo, aquarium, or large museums in the city, a few parents identified similar cultural and special interest activities they took part in as a family. Some mothers also traveled to participate in cultural activities that were unavailable in their city.

Working-class and poor families rarely cited cultural activities as family outings. Denise was an exception. Denise described their occasional outings to the petting zoo as a family activity that took place. She said "There's like petting zoos and stuff like that, so we go to those."

Religious Activities

Several families reported church attendance as a typical weekend activity that they took part in. Parents, across social class, described routine religious activities they engaged in as families. They highlighted church as a structured activity that children participated in with their family on the weekend.

Middle-income. Middle-class parents described church services in their descriptions of children's weekend activities. Children often participated in religious activities specific to their age groups such as children's choir and other Sunday School activities. According to Laurie, one of her daughter's neighborhood activities included "Going to church, being part of children's church." Also consider the following example from Joy:

> We are at church every Sabbath. They have activities in church. Sabbath School, which is like a Sunday School [and] varied Adventures, which is like a Girl Scout/Boy Scout thing at church. And, they sing….Well, they have their own little section. They close out the service.

In addition to attending activities together as a family on Sunday, children also participated in religious activities independently. Pam also included religious activities that took place on the weekend as family time. She said:

> Service is at 9:30. It's only an hour so it's 9:30 to 10:30. He loves it cause he loves being in the children's nursery or ministry. And we leave and come home by 10:30, almost eleven.

Though their weekends were flexible and did not regularly include planned activities, according to Pam church services were consistent weekend occurrences.

Low-income. Working-class and poor parents described religious activities as routine on the weekend. These activities emerged as structured neighborhood and community activities their children participated in. Grace said though religious activities were not routine "We're trying to get back to going to church on Sunday. We have to work on that. But we're working on it." Xenophia's preschooler attended church services each Sunday. She explained "We go to church in New Town. Stay to church maybe about 1:30, maybe two o'clock. We eat lunch….Pretty much we try to go to church every Sunday." Religious activities were routine activities in Xenophia's family. Bonnie provided the following example of the central role religious activities played in her family:

> We go to church on Sunday. We have Sunday. Well, we have Prayer at 8:30 in the morning on Sunday. We have Sunday School at nine a.m. till 10:30. And then, we get a thirty-minute break in between Sunday School and our Morning Worship Service, which starts at eleven. And we get out after all the announcements and choir singing and stuff. We normally get out around one.

Church services were a regular feature of Bonnie's preschooler's typical Sunday. Her comment suggests that young children were active in these structured religious activities.

Traveling

Some families who participated in this study traveled. Parents described taking trips, "mini-vacations," and vacations to different cities and states as a family. These family activities occurred less often and typically were seasonal.

Middle-income. Middle-class parents identified travel as a family activity more often than poor and working-class mothers. Tina provided an example of a train trip her mother took her preschooler on:

> A couple of weeks ago though they [children] were in Chicago with my mom, my mom took him on his first train ride because Richard loves trains. So they just got on the Metra in Chicago and rode downtown and then they kind of walked around and then rode back.

Tina suggests visiting family was a typical weekend activity even when this involved traveling to different cities. In addition to the field trips that her family participated in with her daughter's preschool program, Sweetie Pie Learning Center, Laurie and her family traveled during Spring Break. She offered the following:

> We travel. When we go out of town for like Spring Break or summer vacations or we travel like to Tennessee...stay in a resort. And go for a few days and then like go to attractions that they would have there. Like one thing that she loves, the Dixie Stampede. We went to the Dixie Stampede. So, that's something that she's done. So, we've been to places like Branson and Tennessee. She's pretty well traveled for a four-year-old.

Traveling out of state and going to resorts were seasonal family activities that contributed to Laurie's preschool-aged daughter being "pretty well traveled." According to Pam, she and her

family rarely participated in regular family activities. Still, she identified the following activities:

> I can honestly say that we don't really do anything on a regular basis. We'll go on like little mini-vacations; even if it's to Chicago, where we have all our family. But…family vacations it's like once or twice a year where we'll go somewhere like that and just relax and enjoy ourselves but we don't really have activities.

Though infrequently, Pam and her family traveled and took mini-vacations from time to time to visit extended family members outside of the city.

Low-income. Poor and working-class families traveled as well. But their travel did not typically include overnight stays at hotels and resorts. For example, poor and working-class families took their children to Chuck E. Cheese, a children's pizza parlor and game center. Visits to Chuck E. Cheese required traveling to a neighboring city. Niecey noted these as family activities that she and her children participated in on special occasions. She said "For [Belinda's] birthday we went to Chuck E. Cheese. Oh my God, she had a ball." Niecey took her family to a Chuck E. Cheese for her preschooler's birthday. In fact, the Chuck E. Cheese play center was often reserved for special occasions such as birthdays. Consider Wendy's comment: "Helena loves Chuck E. Cheese. So, we just went there for her birthday. So, go to Chuck E. Cheese."

Unlike other working-class and poor families, Wendy and her family also traveled out of the state as a family. In addition to involvement in local community activities Wendy said "Like, we just came back from Georgia this past week. We went there. So, we try to do something, trips with them." Wendy's family traveled for varied experiences.

Connections and Disconnections

The weekend was reserved for "family time." Family activities varied but emerged as an important component of family life. Though middle-class families tended to offer more cultural

activities, poor and working-class families were just as likely to participate in informal and

formal children-centered activities as a family both within and outside of home and to travel to

neighboring cities. The frequency and distance of travel were generally less often and shorter

among poor families compared to working- and middle-class families. Several families, across

social class subgroups, participated in religious activities as a family during a typical weekend.

<div align="center">Adjusting Family Routines</div>

In addition to children adjusting to kindergarten, some families anticipated adjustments to

their daily routines and rhythms. The amount of change expected varied from family to family.

Some parents did not anticipate much change in their daily routine once preschoolers began

kindergarten.

Middle-income. Some middle-class parents anticipated changes to their everyday lives

once their children entered kindergarten. They expected adjustments to be made to their routines

and schedules once their children transitioned into kindergarten. For example, Shana, a mother

sending a child to kindergarten for the first time, anticipated drastic changes in her everyday life.

She said:

> Oh, it will change dramatically cause I want to make sure that I'm there. Me and my
> husband both want to make sure we're there for him. Go in classrooms, if we have to go
> and sit. I will make sure. It will change dramatically.

Shana's comment suggested that her son's kindergarten transition would require time from their

daily routines to be redirected to support their participation in school-related activities. Melissa

anticipated challenges with her work schedule and her daughter's pending transition into

kindergarten. She explained:

> The major change will be on my days off. I'll have to still get her to school at a
> particular time. Because I work twelves, on the days that I don't have to be at work at
> eight, we take our time. We may not get to daycare till ten or whenever. Although they
> do ask that the kids get there at nine because they have a curriculum. We bend that a little

bit just so that we can spend a little more time together. And obviously [I] won't be able to do that once she starts kindergarten.

Melissa will have less flexibility to spend extra time with her daughter when kindergarten begins due to her work schedule.

Some families described preschool as a precursor to kindergarten that provided similar structure. Therefore only small adjustments were expected. For instance, besides more structure in her son's activity, Heather believed their kindergarten schedule would not change much from their current preschool one:

> I think if there's homework in kindergarten, we'll do more structured things. Right now, there's stories, there's Leapster, he's got a book series that we're working on. I think maybe it will be more structure; we'll be at the table and we might cover more than just literacy, which is what we've been kind of working on for years. But, other than that, not too much difference. He's already in preschool.

Heather's son currently attended a center-based preschool program and engaged in learning activities for the majority of the day. Therefore only minor changes in their everyday lives were expected upon his transition into kindergarten.

Low-income. Poor and working-class mothers noted adjustments that might be made as their children transition into public school. For example, Grace discussed how changes in morning routines would result upon children entering kindergarten. She stated:

> The biggest thing is I'm nocturnal. So I'm used to sleeping in and the biggest thing is getting her up and getting on the bus, that's the biggest thing. But the biggest thing is getting her up and getting her used to a routine where she has to be up in the morning since you used to be able to sleep until eight or nine and now it's seven.

Alicia's work schedule must be adjusted before her daughter begins kindergarten in order for her to be prepared. She explained:

> Well, once she starts kindergarten, then it's gonna change big because I'm gonna have to change my work hours...because I don't want to have to pick her up late at night. And, you know, she won't be able to get proper sleep. So, I'm going through that now to get my hours changed….Well, I want to go try to get them up to like round about nine

o'clock in the morning or something like that, where I'll get off at least about eight o'clock. You know, cause we do splits. You know, I drive for Mass Transit and we got splits in between our shifts, so, I'll have to work all day.

In preparation for her daughter's transition into kindergarten, Alicia was in the process of attempting to have work hours adjusted. Though Xenophia did not expect her everyday life to change drastically, she made preparations to address work conflicts. She asserted:

It shouldn't change really that much. Now, I work like six [am] to 2:30 [pm]. So if I'm not able to get him on the bus, he has his sister or his cousin to get him on the bus. And then I'll get him off the bus. I mean, we have something that's worked out for both of us so, or the daycare, either one.

Xenophia worked out transportation to school with other family members and his daycare provider in preparation for her son's kindergarten transition. Therefore, she did not expect major changes to their schedules to occur.

Similar to middle-class families, some working-class and poor families expected to make minimal adjustments to their daily routines at the start of their children's kindergarten year. For instance, Niecey did not expect much change in her everyday schedule once her preschooler started kindergarten. She stated "I don't think it [schedule] will too much change, because like I said, she ready….I don't know I might have to stay the first day with her and then maybe she'll be all right." Though initial changes might occur, such as accompanying her daughter in class during the first day, major shifts in daily routines were not expected.

Connections and Disconnections

Though not a prominent theme, in general, parent participants anticipated some changes in their daily lives once children entered kindergarten across social class subgroups. Adjustments in activities, family routines, and work schedules had to be considered in preparation for this transition. This involved juggling family life and work demands as parents made scheduling decisions.

Chapter Summary

Weekdays were structured by adults while children had more liberty to organize their

weekend schedules. Children spent a significant amount of their weekdays in the care of child

care providers and early childhood educators, particularly when parents worked outside of the

home. Though the Pre-K program was more aligned with district expectations, children spent

more time in community programs and with child care providers. Middleton Pre-K parents split

care and education during children's waking hours. It is important to note that some children

who attended the day care and learning centers also received only 2 ½ hours of instruction in the

district pre-kindergarten.

While children were home, findings suggest that African American family life offered

children opportunities to develop some of the key skills and competencies participants

considered important for kindergarten outlined in the school readiness chapter. During

children's typical routines, they were involved in self-care activities, engaged books, media, and

language, interacted with others, regulated their behaviors, played independently, and developed

motor skills and physical health. Gender differences in children's activities were minimal. Both

boys and girls watched similar television programs, engaged in educational activities, and played

games and with their favorite toys. However, the kinds of toys that mothers of girls and boys

identified as favorites were clearly gendered with girls favoring baby dolls and boys favoring

"action" and superhero dolls and cars. Inferentially, baby dolls provide girls with opportunities

to attend. Boys' action hero dolls and cars offer opportunities for them to be active during

pretend play. In schools, being able to attend and sit still was more noted as important for

learning. Being active had to be regulated.

Poor and working-class children as well as some of their middle-class peers engaged in much of their unstructured activities in their neighborhoods with peers and family members riding bikes and playing in the park. Middle-class families who enrolled their children in a high cost preschool program, also involved their preschoolers in organized and structured activities in the larger community to include swimming, ballet, tennis, and Taekwondo. These families typically involved their children in organized activities and sports more often than other families. Children's involvement in structured religious activities on the weekend transcended social class and offered similar opportunities for children to develop school readiness skills and competencies.

All parents reported that their children regularly engaged in activities as a family. Social class differences emerged in terms of the families' frequency and ability to visit museums and zoos, and travel long distances to take part in recreational activities. Financial resources afforded families, or not, opportunities to provide children varied experiences and "exposure" that several kindergarten-level educators pointed out as an important preparation practice. Participation in cultural activities cost money (zoos, museums, and organized activities); in this sense not all families could afford "school readiness" precursors. Though working-class and poor families traveled to neighboring cities for recreational activities for special occasions, these activities do not yield as much social profit in schools as having vacations and mini-vacations to different states.

Kindergarten transitions were not expected to dramatically alter family life in most cases. Children's preschool experiences were often noted as a reason why schedules and routines would remain constant. However, some parents had to adjust their family routines and work schedules. Navigating these institutional logistics and resources was discussed further in Chapter 10.

Following Chapter

The next chapter examines parenting experiences and offers more concrete preparation practices embedded within the context of everyday life. The ways in which parent participants nurtured, disciplined, taught, and provided learning materials to their children and their potential to promote school readiness skills and competencies are discussed.

CHAPTER 12: PARENTING

Racial differences in parenting are outlined in the literature as a key explanation for the school readiness gap between African American and White children. Family routines and rhythms offered children multiple opportunities to engage in activities that promoted school readiness skills and competencies throughout the day. This chapter presents findings on (1) parenting experiences. Parenting experiences were generally positive though challenges also emerged. Mothers reported similar parenting experiences across social class, though slight differences emerged by marital or relationship status. It also describes (2) parenting practices identified within these data. Three categories of parenting practices emerged. Primary caregivers routinely expressed affection during parent-child interactions. Parents disciplined children using similar types of punishment and rewards. Mothers purposefully incorporated teaching and language activities into parenting practices in preparation for kindergarten. These practices also were similar across social class.

Parenting Experiences

As with the sample of primary caregivers, parenting experiences were diverse. Despite the heterogeneity of families, these women reported similar parenting experiences across social class subgroups. Parenthood emerged as both joyous and challenging. This duality was evident among most families. However, single parenthood emerged more often as a challenge among working-class and poor parents than it did among middle-class ones.

Middle-income

Middle-class mothers generally described their parenting experiences positively. They noted that they enjoyed parenthood. For example, Gina, mother of one, appreciated parenthood. She said:

> I really like being Mom since I have a good, stable marriage and good living situation. We both have good jobs. We both have good families. And that makes it so much better. If all that was bad, I'm sure it'd be different. I would imagine it would be hard to enjoy it if you had a terrible marriage….I love being Mom. I do.

According to Gina, having a stable marriage and career limited feelings of stress and contributed to her ability to "love being Mom." Melissa, mother of two, also felt affection for being a parent. She too noted personal stability as a reason why she was able to enjoy parenthood:

> I love being a parent. I mean, I don't know if this has anything to do with it too, but I'm an older parent you know. I didn't have my babies when I was twenty. I waited until I thought I was financially able to provide what I wanted for them. So, I really enjoy it.

Melissa related her postponement of parenthood until she was older and financially stable to her ability to enjoy being a parent.

In their discussions of their parenting experiences some middle-class parent participants highlighted both the joy and stress of parenthood. They described parenting as stressful and hard work despite stable home lives. For instance, Shana, mother of two preschoolers, responded that her parenting experiences have "Been great. Some times it's stressful. I mean it's time consuming. It's a lot of time. You got to have a lot of energy. Economically it's very expensive. But in all I enjoy it." Shana enjoyed parenting even though it was stressful in terms of physical energy and the time it required. The dual nature of parenting experiences was illustrated by her statement. Heather, mother of two, provided the following comment that suggests a duality of parenting. She said "Well, it's a good job. It's hard work. It's a job. I'm tired. But I'm going to be a parent until my child is a parent and I know we'll talk about it and laugh together." Heather described parenting as both a "good" job and "hard work."

Parents typically accepted the stress associated with parenting. Vanessa parented five biological children, three of her nieces, a stepson, and a host of foster and adopted children over the years. She described her parenting experiences in the following way:

I've worked eight-hour days. [Then] come home, cooked, cleaned, school with my kids. I've been a jack of all trades…. So, as [a] parent, I think I put myself into it. You have to have three meals a day. Sometimes, as I look back on parenting, I just took it as this was my duty.

Vanessa's statement suggests that her parenting experiences had been complex and at times encompassed juggling multiple responsibilities. She interpreted the multiple child rearing tasks that she engaged in as her parental duty.

Low-Income

Like middle-class parents, working-class and poor mothers also described their parenting experiences affectionately. They typically enjoyed parenthood. Bonnie is a mother of four children, a third grader, two preschoolers, and a toddler. Consider her parenting experiences below:

I like having kids. I love spending time with my children. Let's see, they keep me going. A lot of times, if I'm ever feeling down on days, you know they tend to try to do something to make me feel better….

Bonnie enjoyed parenthood and being in the company of her children. Similarly, Ebony, mother of five, said that she loved being a parent:

I love being a parent. I swear I never get tired of it. I really, really love it. I really do. And, for me to be so young and have four children, some people are like, Oh my God! But no, it is really, really wonderful. And, when you have kids, you'll understand. You really will, seriously. Cause, I mean, I never get tired of my children. I just love them so much.

Both Bonnie and Ebony expressed love for their children and enjoyed having them in their lives.

Though parents enjoyed caring for their children, parenting was often described as "difficult." Additionally, Grace discussed the emotional challenges of being a parent. She explained that parenting is

Some times it's difficult. But it's rewarding at times too. Emotionally, emotional. Some times I feel like I have these little minds and real people who looking up to me and I have to be perfect. And so some times I think it's stressful. It's a challenge. Not a easy thing.

Some times they keep you on your Ps and Qs. It's a difficult job, but I love them so it's worth it.

Grace's comment highlighted the dual nature of parenthood as both joyous and challenging.

Grace's love for her children compensated for the difficulties she encountered as a mother. In

another example, Niecey, a single parent of four, also suggested that parenting was not always

easy. She said "Some times I wish I could go back to being a kid. Cause it's hard. It's hard."

Single parents described some of the challenges they experienced as mothers. For

instance, Francis, a single mother of three, described her parenting experiences as stressful:

It's stressful because I am a single parent, raisin' two boys and a girl. I mean I run into a lot of obstacles with it. But I just have to have strength. I pray for strength every day just to give me the will and that I can strive. And I ask for patience because I'm a person that has very, very little patience. And I have to pray for that some days because the kids will get to me. That's why we have quiet time. Mommy needs quiet time. But I mean you know it's a joy being a parent, too, but the majority of it is stress.

Francis is able to manage the stress of single parenthood by conjuring "strength" and having

"quiet" time alone. In light of these management strategies parenthood emerged as "a joy" as

well. Nicki also managed the difficulties of being a single parent. She explained:

But it's been a lot of times I was like, man why does it happen to me? Why do I got kids? It's not that I don't want 'em but it just nowaday they make everything harder. And life get hard. It's been hard by their fathers not being in their life for the most part. Which, now they are like interacting. But, it's been hard but it ain't been hard to the point where I couldn't do it.

Even though Nicki described parenthood as hard, she felt that she could manage the stress

obstacles she encountered.

Connections and Disconnections

Primary caregivers in this study generally described their parenting experiences as

enjoyable and challenging across social class. Though they "loved" being parents, middle-class

mothers also discussed the stress of managing time and energies they encountered in their daily

lives. Working-class and poor mothers, particularly single mothers, described "difficulties" they experienced as parents. However, they noted the love they possessed for their children made parenthood worthwhile.

<div align="center">Parenting Practices</div>

Parenting practices were organized using Brooks-Gunn and Markman's (2005) conceptualizations: nurturance, discipline, teaching, language, and materials. Teaching, language, and materials were identified in concert and were combined into one category in this study. Previous research suggests these parenting practices account for some of the variation between African American and White children's assessments of school readiness. Some parenting practices (specifically discipline, teaching, language, and materials) had the potential to promote nominal knowledge, language and early literacy, social competency, self-regulation, independence, and motor skills and physical health school readiness categories.

<div align="center">*Nurturance*</div>

Nurturance involves "expressing love, affection, and care." Nurturance emerged as a key feature of families' everyday lives. Each mother provided examples of the ways in which their children expressed love and affection towards them. They also described their expressions and reciprocal exchanges of affection that took place in parent-child interactions. The most common forms of affection were verbal and physical displays. Symbolic forms of affection were also evident among parents interviewed. Loving parent-child interactions had the potential to promote children's ability to transition into kindergarten with little or no anxiety.

Physical and Verbal Displays

Parents nurtured children by verbally and physically expressing love in their interactions. Caregivers exchanged "I love yous," hugs, and kisses with their young children across social class subgroups.

Middle-income. Middle-class parents described physical and verbal displays of affection in their discussions of how love was expressed in parent-child interactions. In addition to more outward displays of affection (e.g., saying I love you or hugging and kissing), affection also involved requests for affection, physical closeness, and compliments. Vanessa, a caregiver for her two grandchildren, illustrated this point in the following comment:

> And she'll kiss me and she'll hug me. And when they see me, Grandma! They come runnin' and huggin'. Reggie has gotten to the place now that, Grandma, he gonna run hard as he can and jump up on me. I said, pretty soon you gonna knock me out. But that's the way they show and we watch TV together or somethin', they'll lay on me and say, you know and lay their heads on my lap or on my shoulder or even go to sleep, that kind of stuff.

Vanessa's example indicated that showing affection went beyond saying I love you and included more subtle displays of affection such as watching television with their head on her lap or shoulder. Though they were not hugging, their physical closeness was a sign of affection. Shana also commented on the verbal and physical affection shared between herself and her son. She noted "He tells me. He hugs me. He kisses me. He compliments me. When he wants to help me that's how he tells me. He'll say, I'll help you cause I love you."

Affection was often a component of family rituals and routines. Several parents described displays of affection that take place on a daily basis. For example, despite the fact that Connie was not reared in a family that exchanged affection often, she embraced this as a ritual within her family of procreation. She offered the following as an example of being very affectionate with her son:

> At night we did a story or whatever and kissed. Yeah. And when he leaves in the morning, we get a kiss. Anthony [my husband] is doing [this] as well. Cause, I didn't grow up like that. Like, kiss hello and kiss goodbye and hug. I don't come from a real affectionate family but I've been trying to do it. That's why I have been doing it, you know, for my family.

Exchanging greetings, hugging, and kisses had been incorporated into their everyday lives. It also marked daily transitions and the coming and going of individuals within the family. Melissa responds similarly to her children during these transitions. She offered the following example:

> The first thing to do when I pick her up is I say, Jade! and she says, Mommy! And she runs over and gives me a big hug and that's how we greet each other. And that's every day, every morning when she gets up, every night when she goes to bed, forty times during the day. We're just constantly hugging each other.

Physical and verbal displays of affection are incorporated into families' daily routines. It was embedded in greetings and rituals throughout the day. In a few cases, parents rendered special attention and physical affection to children who were ill or not feeling well.

Low-income. Verbal and physical expressions of affection also occurred among poor and working-class families. For instance, one way that Denise's daughter showed her that she loved her was through verbal and nonverbal communication:

> She'll look at me and she always have to make eye connections. I don't know why but she always makes eye connections. She's like, Mommy, I love you. And, it's the sweetest thing in the world cause you can see her peering into your soul like, you need to understand that these words coming from me are real. I love you, Mommy. So, that's what she does and that's just the cutest thing in the world. And if she's been in trouble, too, so it's kind of like, if she's done something that she shouldn't have done, then she'll do that, too.

Denise's comment showed the duality of saying "I love you" and how her daughter uses the phrase in different situations. Yet it is clear that saying I love you is one way that this family shows affection. Wendy's daughter shows love using verbal and physical displays of affection. According to Wendy, "She tells me, Mommy, I love you. You're the best mom. Or she give me a hug, kiss."

Physical and verbal affection also were routine in some working-class and poor mothers' responses. Francis noted that she routinely showed affection to her children during bedtime. She explained:

> Well, I mean I guess I'm very affectionate toward him all the time. At night, when they go to bed, they all get hugs and kisses. And Sammy is always the last one up after the lights is out. Love you. Or good night.

In addition to bedtime routines, families also incorporated displays of affection when children and/or parents entered or left home. For example, Bonnie described the transitions from home to school and vice versa as times in which she gave hugs and kisses. She stated:

> Well, every day before she gets on the bus for school, every day before she gets on the bus for school, I always tell her I love her and give her a hug and tell her to have a good day on her way. Every day I do that.

Symbolic Displays

Not all displays of affection were tangible. Some mothers highlighted symbolic acts as signs of affections. Symbolic acts of affection typically involved providing care and consideration in parent-child interactions. These acts were less likely to be cited in comparison to physical and verbal displays of affection but also emerged across social class groups.

Middle-income. Mothers and children initiated symbolic acts of affections. For example, Connie said that breastfeeding was one clear sign of love. In response to the question do you think your son knows you love him, she responded:

> I breastfed him for like two years, gave up that period of my life. Anthony [husband] always [worked] more. It was me and Noah for the first three and a half years of his life…..So, yeah that was my little doll. He knows I love him.

Connie's statement suggests that providing intimate care and closeness in the early years were considered acts of love in her interactions with her son.

Parents' descriptions of children's displays of affection were typically symbolic. These included the desire and willingness to bestow handmade gifts or store-bought gifts upon their parents. Consider the following example provided by Tina:

> But he was outside, him Wilson, his older brother took him and Tommy his younger, to the park and Richard came back and he had this weed. And he was like here mama. I got something for you and I swear to God I almost cried. I was like oh my God. He was like here mama I got something for you. And I just thought it was the sweetest thing.

Tina was moved to near tears from the symbolic display of love her son offered. She noted that her son was her "sensitive child." Tina's statement suggests that impromptu acts of love occurred in the context of her interactions with her son. Vanessa provided another example. She contended that her grandchildren's homemade cards on special occasions were displays of affection:

> When it's my birthday, they'll try to give me something, make me a card. [They] love to try to give me something. And they're pretty good at that. They show they love that way. And Mother's Day, they make sure they get me a card, Valentine's Day or something to let me know that they thought of me on those days. Then it's the Grandma card, or whatever and just stuff like that.

Children's resourcefulness and eagerness to give parents gifts and "to think of them" on special occasions or simply in the context of everyday life symbolized their love according to parents. The need for physical closeness was also a symbolic gesture of affection. Joy noted:

> She's all over me, night and day, if I let her. If I go to the bathroom, they're sitting outside the door. I can't go anywhere in the house, in a few minutes, even if they're sitting there watching TV, in a few minutes, they're where I am. I guess cause I'm close to them.

Kisses and hugs were not exchanged, but according to Joy that act of her children being "all over" her symbolized an act of physical closeness.

Low-income. Working-class parents also described symbolic acts of affection in their descriptions of ways love was expressed in their parent-child interactions. For example, Bonnie offered desire for physical closeness as a symbolic act of affection. She said the following:

> She comes and sits on my lap. She likes to play with my hair. She gives me kisses. She tells me she loves me and she holds my hand. And if I'm standing somewhere, she'll come grab my leg and stand by me. Those are the kinds of things that she does.

In addition to physical acts such as kisses, Bonnie described several other symbols of affection that centered upon her daughter's initiation of physical contact and closeness. Francis also provided such an example of physical closeness as a gesture of love. She stated that her preschooler was

> Always under me. Every time I turn around, I'm stepping on him. Or he likes affection and attention. And I give that to him, lots of hugs and kisses. He likes that so I continually give that to him. And he shows it back.

Francis's statement illustrated the diverse forms of affection in parent-child relationships. Her son continuously sought closeness throughout the day. Francis interpreted this as affection. She also accepted his requests for affection and reciprocated acts of love in their interactions.

A few working-class and poor families described a paradox in their parent-child interaction in which children recanted love and affection at times. Grace said that her daughter knew she loved her, though when she asked her daughter if she loved her at times she received mixed responses. Grace recounted the following:

> I've asked her flat out. And she says yeah but some times I'm mean to her. [She said] you could really be nicer. So she used to try to play me like, if you did love me then you would [do so and so]…The older she get I tell her one day she gone realize if I didn't love her I wouldn't tell her stuff. I'll let her do whatever she wanted to do.

Grace's statement illustrated two points. Children had agency in displaying affection in parent-child interactions and at times they strategically granted and recanted love. Secondly, Grace interpreted her parenting practices and care she provided her daughter as a symbolic gesture of

love that her daughter would grow to appreciate. Additionally, though Niecey described her

daughter as very physically affectionate towards her, there was another side to her daughter's

affection. She said:

> Belinda has this mood swing and one minute she can be come to you and say I love you.
> When you get mad, I don't love you. You ain't none of mama. You mean. Stuff like
> that. And when you hear your child say that, like stuff be roaming in your head.

Neicey's comment suggests that recanting love took place in her interactions with her daughter.

Although she usually did not internalize rejection, this paradox was concerning for her.

Connections and Disconnections

On average, all caregivers, across social class subgroups, provided examples of nurture in

their parent-child interactions. Both parents and children displayed and engaged in physical and

verbal and symbolic acts of love and affection in their interactions. Affection was often

embedded within family routines and impromptu occurrences of everyday life. Though there

were some instances when children rebelled against parents by recanting love and affection, this

was not typical within these families.

Discipline

In addition to nurturance, discipline was another component of parenting that was

believed to impact young children. Discipline refers to parental responses to child behaviors that

they consider appropriate or inappropriate. This study examined the ways that primary

caregivers punish children for displaying undesirable behaviors and attitudes and reward them

for exhibiting desirable ones. Discipline strategies parents employed often depended on the

situation and were similar across social class subgroups. Discipline promoted the self-regulation

school readiness category.

Punishment

African American parents used several strategies to deter behavior they considered inappropriate. Though responses varied, commonalities were apparent across families' social class status. The following strategies and the progression of punishments that emerged were: verbal reprimand, separation, appropriation of privileges, and physical chastisement as ways parents punish children for doing things they should not do. Punishments were allocated based upon the nature, severity, and frequency of the behavior or attitude. Mothers noted that the form of punishment administered depended on the nature of behavior or attitude they were attempting to discourage.

Verbal reprimand. Middle-class caregivers most often referenced verbally reprimanding and talking to their children to counter undesirable behaviors. Verbal reprimands included talking sternly, "giving speeches," scolding, and warnings. Verbal reprimands and talking were generally applied to stress parents' expectations for behavior and disposition. For example, Tina, a middle-class mother, used talking to discipline her son. She said "A lot of times, just really kind of talking to him sternly and letting him know what the expectation is. Like Richard you need to stop that" was enough to redirect and regulate her son's behaviors. Joy, another middle-class caregiver, scolded her child about keeping her bedroom neat. She stated:

> I may scold her about those drawers in there hanging open and clothes hanging out of them. Or [I say] I'm sick of you leaving stuff all around on that floor in your bedroom. But it's mostly verbal, not punishment, per se.

Joy's comments suggest that verbal reprimand was used to address undesirable behavior such as not maintaining a neat bedroom. In this case scolding her was not actually viewed as "punishment, per se" but is noted as a disciplinary strategy. Parents tended to talk to children before escalating redirection strategies from verbal reprimand to more serious forms of

punishment. Pam, a middle-class mother, offered the following example of punishment

escalation from verbal reprimand to separation:

> Well, it all depends on what it is he's doing. He sometimes has a smart mouth. I'll start
> initially talking to him. Luis, you don't talk to me that way. And Luis can be so
> sensitive. If he feels that it hurt me and it really upset me, it will bother him. But then
> there are times when he's extremely stubborn. He will not apologize. So, I will send him
> to his room.

Pam's initial reaction to redirect her son's behavior escalated when he did not respond with a

change in his behavior.

Working-class and poor families did not typically include verbal reprimands in their

discussions of punishment. One exception was Grace, who incorporated "talking" with

separation. This example is offered in the following section.

Separation. Separation refers to placing a divide between children and actors and/or

activities by limiting their movement within a designated space and time. Parents, across social

class subgroups, often identified giving children time to "chill out" or "get themselves together"

to offset negative behaviors. Giving children time outs, instructing them to "sit down," and

sending a child to her or his room are examples of separation techniques identified. Separation

was typically used to encourage children to regulate their behaviors and cease behaviors viewed

as inappropriate in various situations. Tina, a middle-class caregiver, offered an example:

> Actually yesterday he was very, very hyper. He was so hyper and jumping all over my
> couches and I was like Richard stop that. And so then I made him go and sit down. Like
> Richard you need to sit down and calm down and get yourself together. So actually just
> yesterday he kinda got into trouble.

Instructing Richard to "sit down" was a strategy of separation that resulted in immediate

cessation of the undesired behavior and allowed him to self-regulate by giving him time to "get

himself together." Heather, another middle-class parent, said that she imposed "Time out" as a

discipline strategy.

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Niecey, a poor mother, employed separation as well. She sent her daughter to her bedroom as a form of punishment when she did not follow directions. Niecey noted:

> She got smart. I had told her to do something. I believe I told her to take her shoes upstairs. And she was like, why I got to. And Lu-Lu [Neicey's older daughter] shoes down here. I'm like who is you talking to? So I made her go to her room and she stayed up there for about thirty minutes cause she knows that's a no-no.

Challenging adults' directions could lead to being separated as a form of punishment. Francis, a working-class caregiver, utilized time out, a strategy she used in her work as a child care provider, with her preschooler. She explained:

> I use a lot of time-outs. They don't like the time-out chair. (Laughing) And so they can kick and scream and do all they want but they're sitting in the time-out chair for what they did. So I use a lot of my daycare strategies with my children.

Despite the amount of protest, Francis's comment suggests she consistently reinforced time outs with her children. It was a preferred behavior modification strategy for her.

Separation was followed by verbal reprimand in a couple cases. It was used as a form of debriefing that occurred after separation had been administered. Consider the following examples provided by Gina, a middle-class parent, and Grace, a working-class mother, respectively:

> Time out and sometimes it just gets ugly. And so we talk about it and then we always tell her afterwards that we still love her. I have to tell you we started doing that because one day she figured it out. She was like three, almost four. We put her in time out and she knew we were mad at her. She looked at me and said, Mommy, do you still love me? Of course I do. And so we always say that. We give kisses afterwards. So, yes, but you know what? We tell her, you have to listen to Mommy's words. You have to listen to Daddy's words.

> First of all out of frustration most times I just have to remove myself. So I won't be too harsh some times on her. You know I'm like cynical. So depending on the situation I just kinda have to send her off to her room while I sit and think. And then I try to discuss what happened and what I feel shouldn't been done and what she did.

Gina and Grace both described using separation strategies to address inappropriate behaviors and supplementing those with talking to children about their infractions.

Appropriation of privileges. Also common among mothers in this study was the strategy of privilege appropriation. Several parent participants responded that they would take away children's toys, games, televisions, and other objects, deny leisure activities, and other enjoyment for a period of time to punish undesirable behaviors and attitudes. This form of punishment was identified by parents across social class.

Mothers drew upon this form of punishment in a variety of situations to encourage self-regulation. Connie took away her son's privileges when he had tantrums in public places. She commented:

> Oh, he throws tantrums every once in awhile, which he hasn't in a long time. Like, maybe last summer. And I think that was because we moved and he was kind of acting out. But he was like throwing big fits at the park or whatever so that we'd have to leave early and then when he comes back in, he can't go on the computer for a day or something like that.

Connie knew that her son enjoyed using the computer independently. Therefore, she restricted him from engaging in this activity as a form of punishment for behaviors she viewed as inappropriate. In Heather's family, watching television was a privilege reserved for the weekend. She punished her son, Walter, for disobeying this rule. She offered:

> All right. Walter can't watch television during the week…His grandmother was here helping with the baby. So it was just a situation where he was tricking his Grandma into allowing him to watch television on a day he went to school. So what we did was took away his cars and his video game. So we take things away.

Heather took her son's video game for "tricking" his grandmother into allowing him to watch television. When Pam's son was separated in an effort to redirect behaviors and attitudes she also appropriated his privileges. She stated:

> I will send him to his room. He can't watch television. You know he can't do things that he enjoys. He loves watching television, watching Power Rangers and things like that. And I will restrict that.

Pam's statement suggests that when parents use separation children's privileges also are appropriated or taken away.

Working-class parents appropriated privileges. For instance, Alicia, a working-class mother, restricted her preschooler from watching her favorite television program when she did not follow directions given to her to pick up her belongings. Alicia stated, "Like if I have told her to go and pick up all the toys and stuff like that and she didn't pick up the toys. Then she don't get to watch Hannah Montana." Nicki, a working poor parent, reported that she "Don't let him go outside" when her son did not follow expectations for self-care. Ebony, a poor mother, used appropriation of privileges for more serious behaviors. She provided the following example:

> Yeah, once he was playing with the socket. He took off the socket cover and kept putting it back in back and forth. When I walked up on him, he didn't see me, so I stood there watching him, make sure he was doing what I thought he was [doing]. He did and I took away his Diego bike and he was upset. But, it worked. He didn't do it again.

Ebony used appropriation of privileges to deter dangerous behaviors. She typically denied her son the privilege of playing with his games and toys as a form of punishment.

Physical chastisement. In addition to the previous three forms mentioned above, parents cited physical means of punishment. Caregivers reported physically chastising their children to include: spanking, swatting on the bottom, tapping, popping hands, or "whupping." This form of punishment was generally used as a last resort to redirect inappropriate behaviors and attitudes. It emerged among parents' descriptions of punishment regardless of social class positions.

Some middle-class families said they spanked their children to redirect their behaviors. They also noted that spanking was reserved to deter dangerous behaviors and acts. For instance, Vanessa, a middle-class grandmother, stated:

> Well, it all depends on what she do. Now, I ain't gonna beat 'em….But yeah, I will spank they bottom…. Now like, say for instance, she'd be in there, going in the drawers and you know, picking out a knife or something, then she might end up getting a swat on the bottom because of the fact that's dangerous. Anything dangerous, gonna hurt 'em or get them hurt….Then I might spank her.

Though Vanessa did not use physical punishment indiscriminately, she viewed it as an appropriate form of punishment, especially considering it was a used by her mother when she was growing up. However, she reserved it for dangerous behaviors that needed to be addressed immediately such as playing with knives. Connie and Shana, both middle-class mothers, provided similar examples of when they physically chastised their sons. Connie said, "I have spanked him on his hands for like touching things that he's not supposed to, such as the stove and things like that." According to Shana:

> I do whip him. In terms of thing that if he don't do what he needs to do….When he didn't sit in his car seat. He unbuckled his self and got out the car seat while I was driving. So he got in trouble for that; I whipped him for that.

Data suggest that some dangerous situations prompted parents to use physical means to punish young children. Heather, a middle-class mother, employed spanking as a form of punishment more when her son was younger than she did as he grew older:

> We're spanking. And when he turned about four, we reserved that for only things that are life and death. Because he's old enough to reason now. But we did do, you know, you're gonna get a whack or you're gonna get a little spanking. And so that was very effective.

Like Heather, some mothers did not "totally agree" with using physical force to punish misbehavior and often "reserved" it for addressing issues that might have dire impact on life and limb.

Working-class and poor caregivers also noted the use of physical punishment. Like middle-class families, physical chastising was typically not their first course of action. It was often combined with separation. For example, Bonnie, a working-class mother, stated that "She normally will get a warning first, second would be a time-out, and third would be a spanking." Denise, a working-class parent, explained that she did not agree with "beating kids" and rarely employed physical punishment to redirect her preschooler. She asserted that spanking "helps" deter inappropriate behavior. Denise offered an example of using multiple forms of discipline:

> She took a really important book that, one that wasn't ours, I think it was the library's book and she started ripping pages. I don't know why she was doing it. She didn't even know why she was doing it. She was telling me this, I don't know. I don't know why I did it. This is not your book. We have to pay for this now. I don't care. Okay, nose on the door. And, then she stayed on it for about a minute and then she got off. And she decided that a minute on the door, well that was fine. So, she proceeded to go and do some more stuff with tearing up paper. She gets a swat. She goes in her room.

Denise provided a description of the progression from separation to physical means of punishment.

According to Francis, when her children display undesirable behaviors or attitudes "They sit in the chair cause I mean, spankings, I don't spank my kids you know. I spank them very seldomly. It has to be something drastic that they've done to get a spanking." She preferred other forms of punishment to physical chastisement.

Connections and Disconnections

Verbal reprimands and talking were commonly identified by several middle-class parents as strategies used to counter behaviors and attitudes that they viewed as inappropriate. This form of punishment was less often discussed by working-class and poor parents. On the other hand, parent participants across social class subgroups referenced separation as an effective way to deter inappropriate behavior and to encourage children to regulate their emotions. Though the

examples were diverse, appropriation of privileges was often identified by caregivers as a form of punishment across class. Almost all of the primary caregivers in this study reported using physical punishment to redirect children's behaviors and attitudes. However, it was not the only or most commonly relied upon method of punishment across social class subgroups. Physically chastising children did not emerge as a default form of discipline among families who participated in this study.

Rewards

Parents rewarded children to reinforce desirable behaviors and attitudes. Praise and treats were two forms of rewards that emerged from these data. Caregivers praised children's efforts and accomplishments and treated them to something special for initiating or completing tasks independently, displaying "good behavior," being helpful, and performing well in school and related activities. Rewards emerged across social class subgroups. Data suggest rewards promoted the social competency, self-regulation, and independence school readiness categories.

Praise. Verbal and nonverbal forms of praise were identified. Some examples of verbal praise were phrases such as "good job," "nice job," "you're a big girl/boy," and "you can do it." Examples of nonverbal praise were clapping, showing affection, and giving "high fives."

Middle-class parents' descriptions of praise acknowledged children's daily accomplishments and independence. For instance, Tina praised her son for completing routine activities:

> I try to give him positive reinforcement you know when he does something well. Richard you ate all your food, good job. I just try to give him positive reinforcement. [I say] you put your socks on you're a big boy or high fives or something, some type of positive reinforcement.

Tina, a middle-class mother, provided an example that suggests verbal and nonverbal praise were embedded in everyday situations around eating and dressing independently. In some examples,

children also received praise for displaying desired behavior that was outside of their routine activities. Consider a middle-class parent's example. Laurie said:

> Most of the time, it's verbal, just praise or how well she listened or what a nice job she did. I try, you know, hugs and kisses and thank yous and I appreciate yous. Like this weekend she was doing a lot of writing of her letters. I was excited. She was asking how to spell everybody's name and then she was writing the letters down and writing out everybody's name. I really, really, really was excited about that. You know we showed Daddy what a good job she did and how she was writing.

The example above illustrated the act of praising to reward several desirable behaviors. Laurie took note of her daughter's interest in writing and praised her efforts. Heather, a middle-class mother, discussed differences in how she and her husband rewarded their son, Walter. She said he brought Walter motorcycles, but she praised him. Heather offered the following example of a time she praised her son for being truthful:

> Walter told me the truth once. He said, Mommy, I did something. You know, I did this, you know. I put these things under my cabinet. You know he told me about it. So I just want to have a reaction, but I said you made good choices. This is wonderful. Thank you for telling me the truth. And I, you know, hugged him.

Heather rewarded her son's honesty with positive affirmations. Additionally, Shana, another middle-class primary caregiver, noted that when her son did something that she thought he should do, she would "Just tell him good job. Cause these are things, most of the things that he does is things that he's gonna need in life. So I just tell him good job this is what you need to do, really." Praise was generally applied as her son developed the life skills she viewed as important. Connie, a middle-income mother, said that although her husband might give things "when I aint looking," she avoided this type of reward and preferred to praise when her son does what is expected:

> Say thank you for doing that. You're a good boy. I mean, we don't really give things. I'm more of this is what you're supposed to do and it's good that you do it. That type of thing. Not, oh do it so you can get something type of [person] we always just tell him, oh great job! Great! You're nice. You're a nice guy.

Praise was positioned in opposition to material rewards by some parents. Shana and Connie

praised their children when they completed routine tasks as expected, instead of material

rewards.

Working-class mothers praised their children in the context of everyday life. Francis, a

working-class caregiver, offered the following example:

> Well, I guess at clean-up time every day, I reward him for that, you know, for picking up
> all the toys. He does a good job with that. So, you know, I reward him for that. Cause
> he can clean the room just exactly the way that I did it and he's free. And that's just
> amazing to me, you know…So he gets praise for things like that.

Francis instituted praise to reward her preschooler's efforts. Alicia also praised her preschooler

when she did something that she thought she should do. She said, "I praise her, you know,

sometime I do something with her, you know, letting her know she did a good job." Ebony also

relied heavily upon praise as a form of reward because they did not agree with giving children

tangible objects for expected behaviors and attitudes. She instated high-fives as a means of

rewarding her son:

> High-five. I try not to give him too many material rewards. Then they get to expecting
> them. They'll just, you know, behave for that five minutes to get that reward. You know
> what I mean? So, I try to [use] more [non-material] rewards, you know what I mean?
> Like a high-five or there you go, you know? Stuff like that. Make them feel good.

Ebony's goal was to "make her son feel good" about his efforts and achievements. She

described both nonverbal and verbal ways in which she praised him.

Treats. When children demonstrated behaviors and attitudes parents viewed as

noteworthy, they rewarded them with "treats." Treating children included bestowing tangible

items such as money, toys, snacks, and special family outings upon them. Treats were often

awarded less often than praise but were often mentioned in response to how do you reward your

child for doing what you think he or she should do, particularly among working-class and poor parents.

Some middle-class parents identified eating out at restaurants as a reward they gave their children for displaying attitudes and behaviors they viewed as appropriate. For instance, superior participation in organized activities was rewarded with a trip to McDonald's by Vanessa:

> When they do, we go to the karate real, I don't want to be cooking, we go to karate and they do a good job, listen, pay attention, and that's why I got 'em into it, to get those skills together….And, when they do it and he don't have to say, Julie turn around, I reward her. I say, well you know what? Ya'll did such a good job. Let's go to McDonald's. I hate McDonald's! I truly, truly, beyond a doubt hate McDonald's! But, they love it.

Vanessa treated her children when they demonstrated self-regulation during their martial arts class. Pam also considered McDonald's a treat, and she noted that she rewards her son's reading progress with occasional visits:

> What I try and do with him like there are certain things at school, certain awards they can earn, reading awards and things like that. If he's working along the way to get his award, I have milestones that I set for myself. I say, well you know what, there are ten books in that series, by the time he gets to book five, as an encouragement, we'll go out and we'll have McDonald's. McDonald's is not something that we have in our house. McDonald's was a treat to me. And I want it to be a treat to him.

In an effort to encourage literacy development, Pam implemented a reward system that ended with a trip to McDonald's.

Like praise, treats also are implemented to reward everyday activities among working-class caregivers. Bonnie gave treats as rewards when her daughter did what she thought she should do. She said:

> I would normally ask her if there's something special she wants. And, if she can tell me, then I'll go get that. It can be from candy to a new purse or wallet, pencils. They have a pencil fetish.

Bonnie allowed her preschooler to choose what she wanted as a treat, which varied from candy to pencils. Nicki bought her son small toys and his favorite snacks to treat him for engaging in self-care activities like toileting independently:

> Oh, I give him like fruit snacks and juices and stuff. I go and buy him a little dollar toy; a little jump up or a little water gun or something for them to play with when they do something good…. When he finally used the bathroom by himself and not pee on himself. And I gave him a pack of fruit snacks and I had bought him a little water gun from the store.

In an effort to encourage her son to develop independence she gave him material rewards. Also consider how Alicia treated her preschooler when she displayed desirable behaviors:

> Well, I had to leave them actually with my son. He babysitted and, like I said, they're hard-headed. And I told them if they was good, that I was gonna give them a dollar. And so when I got back, they were real good, so they got a dollar.

Alicia chose to allocate monetary rewards when her children behaved well outside of her presence. Similarly, Niecey offered treats as a form of rewarding desired behaviors and attitudes. She stated:

> When she do good and she want a Barbie doll or something, I'll get her a doll. I try to reward her by getting her something she really likes. When she was going to [preschool] they take turns being the head leader of the class. And when they say head leader that means they get to lead the way, like to the gym, for snack, help pass out snack, stuff like that. So when she did that, she got an award and my auntie took her to the store and let her get whatever she want.

Niecey generally gave her daughter toys as treats for good behavior. Her example suggests that she and extended kin treated children to special gifts and outings for performing well as the class leader in preschool.

Connections and Disconnections

Praising and treating children to something special were forms of rewards identified among parents, across social class, who participated in this study. Verbal accolades and affection were described as ways to reward children in their everyday lives. It was used by

parents to signal approval and pride as well as to encourage behaviors and attitudes they viewed as appropriate and children were going to "need in life". Mothers also provided examples of the ways in which they treated their children for doing what they thought they should do. However, some mothers monitored how often they gave material rewards or treats. Participants rewarded children in an effort to discipline them to attain appropriate behaviors and attitudes. Rewarding children has the potential to promote school readiness skills and competencies.

Teaching, Materials, and Language

Teaching entails the ways in which information and skills are transmitted to children. Materials refer to "cognitively and linguistically stimulating" activities available at home. Language considers children's exposure to words and print through varied interactions with their primary caregivers. In order to explore participants' perceptions of the learning process in the early years, they were asked to elaborate on how children learn skills, concepts, and abilities required before beginning kindergarten. Parents incorporated teaching, materials, and language into their parenting repertoires to promote concepts and skills they thought were important for children to learn. Teaching involved modeling appropriate behaviors and attitudes. This category of parenting had the potential to promote the nominal knowledge and language and literacy, and to a lesser extent, social competency and self-regulation school readiness categories.

Teaching

Participants' approaches to teaching children were practical. They engaged children in activities and modeled appropriate behaviors and attitudes to teach them what they thought were important for children to learn prior to kindergarten. This section also captured some of the activities families employed to teach young children at home.

Teaching was less commonly discussed among middle-income families than low-income ones. However, Pam, a middle-income mother, described using the rote method to teach her son, Luis, to read and spell. She stated:

> Now as far as teaching him things academically, I just do like a rote method, kind of. I don't know if I'm using the rote method, where I just continuously teach the same things. We have blocks that he got when he was like two years old and we build words. And, he'll ask me, how do you spell this? And, I say, well you know what? Sound it out. You know the sounds of the words and I taught him how you know how a long vowel sounds and if it's a silent e at the end, and things like that.

She described teaching Luis difficult concepts by repeatedly reviewing concepts with him. Conversely, Vanessa, a middle-class caregiver, discussed her efforts to make learning fun for her grandchildren. She explained:

> With Julie, I'll make sure she can say her ABCs. We can be in here cooking and I'll say tell me your ABCs or count for me. I'll say help me count these cookies, help me count this and help me count that. I'll say how many pots do I need to cook, this [or] that. Or we can be in there playing.

Vanessa's comment suggests the interactive, hands-on nature of teaching nominal concepts while cooking.

Working-class and poor parent participants most often noted hands-on instruction to teach children skills and concepts they viewed as important to learn prior to kindergarten. Ebony, a poor mother, also embedded teaching her preschooler within everyday life. She provided the following example:

> As we go through the day, if he's helping me do something I always try to test him like, what color is this, Andrew? How many numbers are in here? You know, stuff like that just test him randomly.

Ebony embedded instruction in their daily lives as a way to teach her son the "basics." Instructing children at home was considered an important parenting function. Alicia played interactive games to teach her preschooler nominal knowledge:

> We play games. We pick out colors and we pick out letters. We've even got numbers that we put up there. It'd probably look better up here, though. But we do the numbers, and the letters and colors and stuff like that, you know, on the 'frigerator. And actually I win them over with treats.

Alicia taught her preschooler colors, numbers, and letters of the alphabet within a group of her same or similar-aged family members. Francis integrated educational resources as well as home made activities to teach her children at home:

> But as far as my own children, I go over sight-words with them. I have a kindergartner and I have a five-year-old going into kindergarten when August starts. And so shapes, colors, the flashcards, hands-on [with] shaving cream, painting on the wax paper, hands-on [with] Cheerios, making letters, gluing it onto the papers. Flashcards with the numbers, just different activities and little 'ole pieces that I put together for them to enjoy learning instead of just showing them flashcards all the time and not making it fun.

Francis incorporated homemade activities using materials from everyday life to teach her preschooler, Sammy. She also attempted to make learning fun for him. Francis incorporated the teaching techniques she used as a child care provider into the activities she engaged in with Sammy.

Modeling was another teaching approach among mothers who participated in this study. They reported teaching children concepts by modeling them. This modeling generally focused upon promoting social competencies and expected behaviors. Laura, a middle-class mother, contended that children learn from watching others. She said, "I actually think they learn from watching adults do it. Or you spend time with them sitting down doing it together and maybe watching some educational videos."

More specific examples of modeling were provided by Vanessa, a middle-class caregiver and Denise, a working-class mother, respectively. They used modeling as a method of teaching their children respect:

> Even if I scold Julie or Jessie and I would say put that up and I would just say thank you. And as for respect, if they see me giving them respect, letting them take their time first or

saying excuse me if I accidentally hit them or something or going past them, watching TV or playing a game. I say excuse me. If I'm walking in front of the TV or something and they do me like that. And so that's how I think you teach it. Just by using it constantly, over and over amongst yourself.

Well, as far as the respect part you know, she has to learn responsibility. We give her chores, we show her the proper way to speak to an adult, as you witnessed earlier. We actually take the time out to show our children that not only can we teach you this, but we can do it ourselves. So, we're going to respect people. We're going to respect you but you have to do it to us in return.

Vanessa and Denise modeled appropriate behaviors and attitudes at home. They contended that children learned from observing adults in their environments.

Language

Exposure and access to books in the home environment were components of language provision. The previous chapter on family life included several examples of language activities to include reciting prayers and book reading. Middle-class parents offered additional examples of language in their parenting practices. For instance, Gina described several ways that she has engaged her child in activities that she believed prepared her daughter for kindergarten to include reading.

We've been reading to Marie since before she could walk and long before she could talk. As soon as she could sit up we would read books to her… And those books were mostly books that [made] lots of noises….And then another thing we did was we spent a lot of time in Kindermuzik….And we got her in that probably when she was six or eight months old.

Gina incorporated shared book reading interactions with her daughter. Also, involvement in Kindermuzik provided opportunities for her daughter to engage language. Shana stated, "We do reading time every night. We do have words that we go over with [him] every night. We do computer games. We do the Leapfrog. We do a lot of materials with him." In addition to books, Shana noted several materials she provided in their home to expose her son to language and literacy.

Materials

Not all mothers discussed interactive approaches to learning. Some parents introduced electronic toys and games to stimulate learning in the early years. Several examples of children engaged in activities with educational materials were provided in the previous chapter. Additional examples were provided by parents across social class.

Middle-income. Some middle-class parents identified computers as materials in the home that they used to teach their children. Connie said her son "teaches himself" using the computer as his primary tool:

> He's really into the computer. He's kind of teaching himself. So he does like his learning games and everything. He watches those educational [shows] and all those things like that.

Connie's son noted the computer as a material provided in the home that stimulated learning. Typically, Laurie's daughter played with games, to include learning ones, and puzzles on the computer:

> But for the most part, she really loves the Memory game and puzzles. And she likes to work on some of her homework books. She plays games on the computer. So she likes some of those. It was an older computer but it was just an older computer for her to play her games on. Some of those Windows 98-type you know kindergarten-type you know. So, she likes to play those.

Laurie described several materials provided in the home to promote early learning. The computer and corresponding kindergarten games were included.

Low-income. Working-class and poor parents provided books, games, and electronics within their homes for their children. For example, Niecey described how she incorporated educational resources to teach her daughter at home in the following:

> We brought her these educational books. It teach her how to trace over letters and numbers and its some colors in there. Then my auntie brought her like, it's a Bingo game, and it basically help with the colors, try to teach them how to read, stuff like that. So I just get her educational books and she go through them.

With help from her aunt, Niecey encouraged nominal knowledge and emergent writing through

individual exploration and interactive games. Wendy provided the following materials:

> Extra little assignments here that we can do on the weekends. Or just when there's no school, I buy those little books like for preschool or kindergarten where we just do little spelling out sound of words, or writing words or numbers, shapes, colors, things like that.

Wendy incorporated materials and educational activities in her daughter's home life. These

materials promoted nominal knowledge and language and literacy skills and competencies.

Electronic toys and games were also discussed as materials that promote learning through

self exploration. Bonnie provided an example of an electronic education resource that helped her

child learn to read:

> We actually use the Leap Frog Leap Pad and there's a Leap Frog Leap Pad Plus Writing. So she's able to trace the letters and then with the Leap Pad, she can follow along with each word and it tells her, you know, what the word is. And she repeats it and then she goes on like that. That's what we do.

Bonnie's statement suggests that electronic materials promoted fine motor skills and early

literacy. Francis was cautious about some video games, but she encouraged her preschooler to

play educational games. She stated her son likes to play:

> The V-Tech you know is the educational video game. We don't own Play Station, Nintendos or Wii's. I don't do that. Whatever it is, it's educational. If it's video games, it's education….I let him get on the computer. We have educational discs, you know, on the CD Rom that I let him get on there and do. Sammy, he thinks he knows what he's doing but he just pushes the buttons. But he's learning though. You know? That's learning.

Francis limited her son's video game play to education-related activities. Even though Sammy

does not know how to operate the computer, she suggested that he's learning through play.

Connections and Disconnections

Findings suggest that parents teach children at home through hands-on activities and role

modeling. Children participate in these activities both in concert with others and alone. Across

social class, mothers played games, read books, and provided learning materials in their homes to promote early learning.

Chapter Summary

Overall, parenting experiences and practices were similar across social class. Though parents faced daily challenges, participants enjoyed being parents. Some viewed it as their "job" to take care of their children and therefore managed the stress and hardship of having limited financial resources and single parenthood. Parenting practices were similar across social class backgrounds. Nurturance, discipline, teaching, language, and materials were embedded in poor, working-class, and middle-class caregivers' parenting practices. They displayed love and affection in their interactions with their children. They employed strategies to encourage desirable behaviors and redirect undesirable ones. They also exposed them to language and provided them with educational materials in their home environments.

Parents indirectly and directly nurtured their preschoolers. Parent participants described mutual exchanges of verbal, physical, and symbolic displays of affection between themselves and their children. Though not generally supported in the literature, these findings suggest that nurturance is a routine feature of African American parenting, across social class subgroups.

Attempts to redirect children's behaviors and attitudes were diverse. Several strategies were identified, including verbal reprimand, separation, privilege appropriation, and physical chastisement. Only slight social class variations were identified in the area of parents' use of verbal reprimand as a discipline strategy. Middle-income parents more often identified it as a method of punishment than low-income caregivers. Middle-class mothers' incorporation of verbal reprimand has the potential to confer social profits in school learning because of the emphasis educators at the kindergarten level place on language abilities. Middle-class and

working-class parents commonly noted praise as a way of rewarding desired behaviors and attitudes. However, working-class and poor families more often described bestowing treats as a form of reward in comparison to middle-class parents.

Families incorporated teaching, language, and materials in children's everyday lives in ways that could promote school readiness. Though low-income parents included interactive teaching through home-made games more often than middle-income caregivers, there was little variation across social class subgroups. In this chapter, middle-income mothers and in the previous chapter on family life, middle- and low-income parents described reading, talking, and praying with their children. These language activities were often embedded in children's daily routines. Several parents provided examples of learning materials available for their children within their homes. Middle-income families included computers in their discussions only slightly more often than low-income families did.

Following Chapter

The next chapter offers a discussion of the substantive findings. The ways that these findings can contribute to theory are presented. Also, applied implications for education policy and practice and social support are provided in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 13: DISCUSSION

This study explored adults' perceptions of school readiness and kindergarten preparation practices. Divergence and convergence across and within ecological structures provided insight into mechanisms through which school readiness advantages and disadvantages operate. It revealed that within the U.S. social structure some children are better positioned than others to meet changing expectations for what young children learn in schools. Cumulative advantages and disadvantages, particularly in terms of social class, were identified within and across multiple contexts that have the potential to perpetuate different levels of skill and competence in various developmental domains among children on the first day of school. In this final chapter, I summarize this study's substantive findings and lessons learned. I also discuss theoretical implications, applied recommendations, and future research directions that address the limitations of this study.

Substantive Findings

I organize the substantive findings around this study's major findings. I begin by summarizing conceptions of school readiness. Then I discuss how systems of stratification, education policy, institutional and community resources, kindergarten transition activities, kindergarten preparation practices, family life, and parenting influence notions of school readiness. Variations across and within subgroups of participants and school readiness advantages and disadvantages are highlighted within each section.

What is School Readiness?

School readiness expectations varied among systems. What school readiness meant and what school readiness entailed were intertwined, interrelated and multifaceted. School readiness categories were congruent with previous research. Participants' discussions included evidence of

nominal knowledge, general knowledge, language and early literacy, social competence, self-regulation of behavior, independence, and motor skills and good physical health as important for children to possess prior to their kindergarten transitions.

Across home and school contexts, participants typically agreed that general and nominal knowledge and social competence skills were essential for children to learn prior to their first day of kindergarten to ensure they did not start out "behind" their peers. Limited or lack of ability in these core categories did not necessarily indicate children were not ready to attend kindergarten, though participants did interpret limited abilities as a "red flag" that signaled areas for children to improve upon. Conversely, clear variations were identified across educator and parent subgroups for the language and literacy, regulation of behavior, and independence school readiness categories.

Educators

The majority of educators primarily defined "school readiness" as a marked entry into school learning denoted by demonstration of developmental competencies. However, expectations for children and ideas about how children learn varied among subgroups of educators. Variations were most evident between teachers and administrators employed at Middleton Pre-K Program and public schools and those working in community day care and learning centers. In terms of school readiness categories, community preschool educators focused more upon the need for children to possess general and nominal knowledge while district-employed educators highlighted the importance of language and literacy skills. This focus on literacy might be a byproduct of differences in educational training. District-employed educators typically had higher levels of education than community educators. The stress on literacy could be a byproduct of the courses completed in the process of pursuing bachelor and

master degrees. Pre-kindergarten educators typically reported more formal contact with

kindergarten teachers than community preschool educators, which can also account for

variations.

Parents

Social class differences among African American families were most notable among the

language and literacy school readiness category. For the majority of low-income families the

basics included nominal and general knowledge; being able to read was not typically included in

their discussions of school readiness. Middle-income families' descriptions of the basics focused

more centrally on language and literacy skills and competencies. In fact, middle-income mothers

perceived being able to read prior to entering kindergarten as important. All parents of children

attending a private preschool reported their children were indeed reading independently prior to

the start of kindergarten.

The transition into kindergarten emerged as a developmental milestone in early childhood

and a significant, marked event for families. It tended to be a mundane experience among

parents in this study.   Primary caregivers overwhelmingly described their preschoolers'

eagerness to learn and their excitement surrounding their children's first day of school as

indications of school readiness, across social class.

"School readiness" emerged as a commodity. "Profits" were associated with families'

alignment with schools' expectations. Middle-class children acquired "school readiness" within

cultural contexts that gave implicit messages regarding norms for behaviors and expectations that

more closely matched the school environment. Findings suggested district educators'

expectations for literacy and language-related skills and competencies were more aligned with

middle-class home ecologies. They had higher expectations for literacy than low-income

mothers. In some instances, middle-income parents' expectations exceeded those described by educators in the category of early literacy and language. By virtue of having these similar expectations, middle-class parents had the potential to confer school readiness advantages to their children as they transition into kindergarten. Though some poor and working-class parents discussed the importance of reading and talking to children, as a subgroup they were less likely to identify skills within the language and literacy category as important to learn prior to kindergarten in comparison with their middle-class counterparts. However, low-income families' focus on social competencies and independence could potentially yield advantages for children transitioning into kindergarten.

In some elementary school buildings the basics were the bare minimum, and language and literacy were considered important for children who were expected to be able to read before entering first grade. Some low-income African American families did not appear to be privy to this shift in kindergarten expectations. Lareau (2000) noted that social class status affords middle-class families access to information regarding such educational shifts because of relationships with others, time, and systemic knowledge that their social class positions afford. Low-income families' focus on providing their children with "the basics" translated into fewer school readiness advantages upon entering kindergarten. Not only did middle-class parents stress reading and language, a subgroup of them acted upon their expectations by enrolling their children in a "reputable" private preschool to ensure their children were reading at the start of kindergarten.

Co-Constructing School Readiness

The ecological model's concern with human development as situated in multiple, diverse, interrelated social contexts working in conjunction and/or opposition, offers a clear

strength for advancing comprehensive school readiness categories. School readiness has been discussed in the literature in terms of the roles of various ecological structures on children's transitions into kindergarten. This study of African American caregivers' and educators' perceptions further demonstrates the multidimensional nature of school readiness as a construct across home and school contexts.

These qualitative findings should be used to co-construct what it means to be ready for kindergarten. It is clear that school readiness evokes different meanings among different interest groups. School readiness is a socially constructed concept (Bloch et al., 1994; Graue, 1993) that has not been completely developed (Meisels, 1999). Though debated in the field, the review of literature suggests there is a general consensus among policy makers, professionals, and parents regarding the importance of promoting multiple developmental domains as children enter school (Meisels, 1999; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). A conceptualization of school readiness that summarizes meanings and conceptualizations constructed by scholars, educators, parents and others in the field includes, but is not limited to: preschool-aged children engaging in or displaying excitement, potential to engage in learning tasks related to cognition (general and nominal knowledge), interest in early literacy and language, social and emotional awareness (a sense of responsibility to self and others, self-esteem), and physical well being (health, nutrition, restful sleep) in the context of children's abilities, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and past learning experiences.

Schools' readiness for diverse children is limited. Findings suggest children with more experience in middle-class culture are at an advantage upon entering kindergarten while those from diverse backgrounds start out their first year in school behind. School readiness ideology must be re-examined to address this issue. Monolithic, incomprehensive, decontextualized

school readiness constructs contribute to children "[being] officially tracked and classified, which renders them members of the disposable and expendable class" (Darder, 2002, p. 14). Findings also suggest that school readiness exists upon a continuum and children are "always ready to learn" something though that something varies from one child to the next. Steps should be taken to diffuse the assumption that only children who are "ready to learn" should enter and/or exit schools and kindergarten classrooms (Graue, 1992) and that a universal construct of school readiness will fit all children under all circumstances from one historical point in time to another. A school readiness construct should be considered a moving target that must be adjusted over time.

Systems of Stratification

"School readiness gaps" are documented in social science literature. This study examined current social class, racial, and to a lesser extent, gender disparities in assessments of school readiness. At the most basic level, race, class, and gender have historically impacted children's school experiences and continue to influence kindergarten preparation in Middleton.

Social Class

Several participants discussed the influence of having and not having financial resources on children's school readiness and kindergarten transitions. Social class was considered key to meeting children's basic needs for food and clothing as well as their access to the "extra" resources and exposure to varied life experiences critical for school learning.

Educators

Overall, findings revealed that social class trumped race among White, district-employed teachers and administrators. In fact, in their discussions of the influence of race on children's school readiness and kindergarten transitions, several White educators deferred to social class as

having a more significant impact on children. From their view, having basic needs met and "exposure" to experiences that would promote success in kindergarten was related to class more than race. Providing "lap time" reading, visiting the zoo and museums, and traveling were all examples of cultural capital noted by educators that having financial resources afforded children and prepared them to learn in schools. In contrast, a small number of educators did not think that social class had a strong influence on children's transition into kindergarten or their readiness to learn. They described resourceful parenting as a viable means of buffering adverse consequences of limited finances.

Parents

Parents typically did not attribute limited financial resources to impacting *their* abilities to meet children's basic needs. Mothers noted that they would "find a way" to meet children's basic needs even if financial resources were limited. However, several parents discussed the general impact of having or not having financial resources on families' abilities to provide basic needs, varied experiences, "good" neighborhoods, and private educations for their children. A key caveat is low-income families might exert more efforts to access basic needs and seek out additional educational resources to prepare their children for kindergarten because these families' finances were limited.

School readiness was a commodity. Participants described the ways in which financial resources afforded families opportunities to acquire school readiness through participation in cultural activities that cost money (zoo, museums, and travel). Not all families can afford "school readiness." Social class was a prominent mechanism through which school readiness advantages and disadvantages were allocated.

Race

History offered a context for current school readiness debates. The experience of going to school was a privilege reserved for *some* children; not all. Middleton Community School District shared in the industrial growth of the 1900s. Racial disparities within the city's educational system have existed over time and have historical roots in the community. Early studies suggested African American families and children experienced educational inequality and unequal access to resources beginning with African Americans' migration into Middleton. Social movements and parent leadership have led the way to decreasing some of these disparities. One result of these efforts was the implementation of the consent decree. Though some progress has been made, racial disparities in school performance still existed in this district at the time of this study.

Participants offered broad responses to the influence of race on school readiness and kindergarten transitions. Three racial ideologies, colorblind, ever-present, and imminent threat, were identified from these broad statements, assertions, and comments regarding the impact of race on school readiness and transitions. Participants' racial ideologies varied by race and social class subgroups within this community school district.

Educators

Educators employed by the district and self-identified as White, typically noted limited to no impact of race on children's transition. Though a small minority of these educators alluded to race by mentioning the consent decree and racial balance, the local historical and current context of racial disparities in school performance under scrutiny were rendered invisible in their discussions. Race was considered an issue of the past and/or insignificant in children's early school experiences. Colorblind racial ideology was evident among these educators. Contrarily,

African American educators' counterstories, particularly of those who worked in community preschool programs, discussed the potential for race to impact children's kindergarten transition. They suggested teachers' perceptions of African American children's abilities, especially if they lacked prerequisite skills and/or competencies, were low. Among these educators "ever-present" notions of race threatened African American children's abilities to learn in schools.

Parents

Middle-class families tended to share African American educators' "ever present" racial ideology. Middle-income mothers noted that within "diverse" educational environments that tended to be overwhelmingly White, they thought being African American could adversely impact children's kindergarten experiences. Low-income parents typically did not anticipate much impact of race as their children transitioned into kindergarten and often asserted that their children were colorblind. This finding might be explained by the fact that low-income parents typically identified schools that were in their neighborhoods which were predominately African American. School populations were also more likely to be overwhelmingly African American and Latino. However, unlike White educators, low-income mothers' racial ideologies centered upon the "imminent threat" race eventually posed to African American students as they aged into later grades. Low-income primary caregivers might be more attuned to the impact of race on children in the later years in their neighborhoods in comparison to the early school years. Race intersected with social class. Middle-class parents' comments suggested that the likelihood that their children would encounter racism, prejudice, and/or stereotypes did not transcend their social class positions.

The impact of race on children's transition into kindergarten was also a point of departure between school and home contexts. Disconnections between racial ideologies within the home

and school contexts regarding the influence of race have the potential to contribute school readiness disadvantages to African American children transitioning into kindergarten. As McAdoo (1993) states:

> A common value that is shared by most families of color, for example, will be the need for the school system and the home to instill feelings of positive warmth and respect for the cultural and historical context of the young child (p. 298).

Colorblind ideology among White educators rendered issues of race invisible, historical and contemporary, in the school settings. This did not align with African American parents' ever-present and imminent threat racial ideologies that centered issues of race in their children's school experiences. This incongruence had the potential to adversely impact the nature of the ties between home and school. In their study of race and cultural capital, Lareau and Horvat (1999) noted that:

> Black parents are more likely to begin the [educational] process suspicious and critical of the risk of unfair treatment of their children. Although the terminology is somewhat awkward, we see being White as a cultural resource that parents unwittingly draw on in their school negotiations in this [school] context. Technically, in this field being White becomes a type of cultural capital (p. 42).

Race emerged as a cultural capital in this study that had the potential to confer school readiness advantages and disadvantages.

Gender

School and home are "gendered institutions." Therefore school readiness advantages and disadvantages were associated with being female and male. Children's socialization was gendered and adults' gender ideologies were considered influential in children's experiences in the early years.

Social science research played a significant role in shaping gender within the American school system, especially in terms of the ideology behind who could benefit from schooling in

the early years. Maturity was and remains a key factor in determining readiness. Regulating bodies was important for school readiness. Boys generally have been considered less able to meet school expectations for social competence and self-regulation than girls. Findings suggest that boys are still considered immature and less ready for school learning than girls. Educators described girls as better at learning in schools than boys, mainly because they were given more opportunities to attend than boys. Findings suggest that to be ready to learn in the institution of school, children must have knowledge of and be willing and able to conform to school expectations and rules for appropriate behavior. School readiness advantages were conferred to girls and boys who were socialized to self-regulate. However, boys were described as more active and physical in comparison to girls. Intersectionality of race and gender was evident as mothers discussed their concerns for their African American sons' transitions into public schools. Despite privileged social class positions, some middle-class mothers noted the ever-present and imminent threat that they could "lose African American boys" in the educational system because of their behaviors.

Educators

Though educators held fundamental differences and equal opportunities gender lenses that believed boys and girls both needed to learn the same things, they suggested girls and boys entered school with different competencies. Educators suggested families provide similar opportunities to boys and girls in order for all children to be successful in kindergarten.

Parents

A peripheral exploration of children's typical activities at home revealed small gender differences in resources available for doing gender that influence their school experiences. For example, girls' "baby" dolls offered more sustained opportunities for them to attend in

comparison to boys' superhero dolls and cars that engaged in imaginary play that involved more movement and sound effects. This was a small difference in light of the similarities in the activities boys and girls engaged in such as watching television, using the computer, riding bikes, and reading books. Boys' active, aggressive play was not aligned with school expectations for students' behaviors.

Parents often discussed gender in terms of the fundamental difference gender lens. They contended that boys and girls were "naturally" different. Within families, primary caregivers discussed the importance of girls and boys gaining control over their bodies in preparation for kindergarten. Parents' perceptions of what boys and girls needed to learn prior to beginning kindergarten were gendered. Mothers of girls viewed safeguarding their daughter's bodies in preparation for kindergarten as essential. Mothers of boys focused on regulating their sons' bodies and behavior in preparation for the transition. Race and gender intersected parents' perceptions and discussions as well. Middle-class parents of African American boys were highly sensitized to the possibility of their boys being labeled early because of "behaviors" coupled with racial stereotypes associated with being African American they conceived as prominent features of Middleton Community School District and society. Therefore they expressed more concern with their children's pending transitions into kindergarten. The intersectionality of social class, race, and gender had the potential to confer school readiness disadvantages for low and middle-income African American preschoolers.

Social class, race, and gender afford children, or not, cultural capital needed to meet school expectations and determine the ease with which children conform to school. Within the macrosystem, these settings had the potential to translate into school readiness advantages and disadvantages. Systems of stratification, and similarities and differences between home and

school expectations of entering kindergarten, could operate in concert to influence children's school readiness.

Education Policy

Historical changes in kindergarten occurred in Middleton School District. Documentary evidence and participants' observations suggest that kindergarten resembles first grade in the 1950s. Half-day kindergarten programs that once focused upon orienting children to school expectations changed into contexts in which "children need to come in thinking about learning" today. Changes that have taken place in kindergarten are not universally known. Findings suggested that low-income parents viewed school readiness expectations in terms of learning the "basics." In this case example "the basics" had changed. School district educators expected more pre-academic and social skills from incoming kindergarten children than what some parents conceived.

National education policy has made its way into the local community of Middleton. The National Learning Standards and the No Child Left Behind Act not only influenced how school was talked about but also expectations, assessments, and early childhood practice. The development and implementation of National Learning Standards has indirectly impacted curriculum and expectations for kindergarten, which means they look very different today than in the recent past. The development of state Early Learning Standards is one direct impact of these standards on early childhood education. The alignment of curricula and assessment are two indirect results of education policy. Education policy and subsequent changes are crucial factors in preparing children for kindergarten in this historical moment. Families knowledgeable of current early childhood education policy and goals have the potential to confer school readiness advantages.

Preschool and kindergarten have become more academic in response to the pushed down effect of the NCLB Act. Educators employed by the school district described being "under pressure" to ensure young children perform at predetermined levels in various developmental domains prior to and upon entering kindergarten as a result of the NCLB Act. Despite professional orientations and developmentally appropriate philosophies, district-level educators had to adjust their practices and expectations to meet the growing demand for achievement in reading and math "pushed down" from higher grades into preschool and kindergarten. This trend of pushed down early childhood education begs the question of how far are we willing to reach back into early childhood to ensure that young children perform at predetermined standards within social institutions?

Preschool was noted as important in easing children's transition into kindergarten and promoting their development in multiple domains, though information on national education policy was not readily available to some community preschool program staff, and these programs were disconnected from district expectations. Conversely, everyday experience and "knowing" children tended to guide community preschool teachers' and administrators' constructions of "school readiness" and desired child competencies.

Parents

National education policy has been slow in making its way to local families residing in Middleton, especially the NCLB Act. Findings suggest the NCLB Act had little influence on families' views of kindergarten preparation. Parents typically described the law as ineffectively implemented. These comments were often based on what parents had "heard." A subgroup of low-income parents reported not having heard anything about the NCLB Act. They were overwhelmingly disconnected from national education policy. These policies often stressed the

families' role in children's education, but parents knew little about them. There was more diversity in how much parents knew and what they thought about the national educational policy compared to school district educators. Families' limited to no direct knowledge of current education policy have the potential to confer school readiness disadvantages.

Institutional and Community Resources

Parents played a key role in facilitating the transition from home into school by attending to institutional logistics. The local education policy, in this case controlled choice school assignment, dictated which institutions families had to navigate. Families reported managing administrative requirements, choosing kindergarten programs, and arranging transportation to and from school in preparation for their children's pending transitions into kindergarten. Community resources existed to assist parents as they prepared their children for kindergarten.

Parents had to make choices about where to send their children to school. For middle-income parents, the choice was often between public and private schools. Uncertainty regarding what school their child would be assigned through controlled choice was anxiety-provoking for these families. Low-income parents experienced the controlled choice process differently. They often chose schools based on prior experiences with the school/staff and their proximity to home and family, therefore they were generally more at ease with the process. Families' schools of choice varied. Poor and low-income mothers typically selected Suncrest and Time Center as their first choice mainly because of their close proximity and familiarity with these schools. On the other hand, middle-income and affluent families selected Wayworth and Cedar North more often for their academic reputations. School choices had the potential to confer advantages and disadvantages. Middle-class mothers' school choices had the potential to confer more "academic profits" as children navigated the educational system. On the other hand, schools chosen by low-

income families had the potential to yield more "social profits" in terms of close relationships and positive social interactions between home and school.

Neighborhoods did not assume a salient role in this community as children transitioned into kindergarten. However, community resources were important in the kindergarten preparation process. The establishment of the Connection Center and the development and distribution of The Kindergarten Calendar by a local organization were two community resources identified as key supports for families and children as they transition into kindergarten. In addition to these more formal community school readiness resources, participants cited schools in the district and family, friends, and acquaintances who had experience or knowledge related to sending children to school in this district as school resources as well. Parents referred to these informal community school readiness resources more often as places they could access help in comparison to the formal ones more often cited by district-employed educators.

Families who have the savvy to navigate institutions and community school readiness resources are better positioned to prepare their children for school in ways that confer not only school readiness advantages but also long-term educational ones as well. Families who purposefully reside in desirable neighborhoods, submit controlled choice applications early, ensure children have required health exams and transportation, choose high-performing or relationship-rich schools, and tap into multiple community resources all promote more advantages for their kindergarten-bound children on the first day of school. On the other hand, less institutionally and resource-seeking savvy families are positioned within the social structure in ways that do not confer similar advantages. This is a source of disadvantage to their children upon entering kindergarten.

Expectations for Schools

Several kindergarten transition activities were identified by participants residing within this community. Three levels of activities were evident: preschool, elementary, and district. Findings suggest the types of activities offered and families and children's access to them in this community varied by program type and level. Preschool offered symbolic and tangible transition activities. They performed preschool graduations into kindergarten and offered parents, and at the pre-kindergarten program children, information regarding pending kindergarten transitions. Elementary schools' and teachers' roles centered more upon providing transition activities that assisted families and children as they entered public school in the pending months and days before and/or on the first day of kindergarten. District-level activities informed parents of the process of transitioning into kindergarten and offered some information on individual school buildings.

Despite community and district efforts to ease the transition from home into school, some families and children still entered kindergarten "blind." Late school assignment notifications condensed the amount of time parents and children had to become acclimated to their kindergarten classrooms and teacher's expectations upon entering school. Educators' discussions of kindergarten transition activities suggest families and children often participated in transition activities only a few days prior to the first day of school. Families' and children's participation, or not, in kindergarten transition activities have the potential to confer school readiness advantages and disadvantages.

Parents perceived schools' roles in preparing children for kindergarten as communicators. They expected teachers and people who worked at schools to clearly articulate their expectations for incoming kindergarteners and family involvement. Parents also expected educators, at the

preschool and elementary levels, to inform them of concerns they had regarding their children's progress so that they could work collaboratively with schools to address them.

Expectations for Families

As more was expected of schools and teachers in Middleton, findings suggest that more also was expected of homes and families to prepare children to meet the demands of school learning. Though educators assumed some responsibility in preparing children for kindergarten, ultimately, participants viewed preparing children for kindergarten as a family function. Parents played a key role in facilitating the transition from home into school by engaging in preparation strategies to include provision of preschool, direct instruction, active engagement, and social engagement.

Families were expected to instruct children on basic nominal and general knowledge, provide children with preschool experiences, reinforce preschool learning at home, and provide children with engaging literacy and language and social environments. The emphasis placed on each preparation practice varied. Preschool-level educators, particularly community-employed ones, and low-income families stressed the importance of parents partnering with program staff and reinforcing nominal and general knowledge at home using direct instruction. District-employed educators' descriptions of parents roles as actively engaging children in talk and book reading at home to promote language and early literacy skills was most closely aligned with middle-class families' perceptions as the best way for parents to prepare children for school.

Middle-income parents, as opposed to low-income parents, suggested kindergarten preparation practices that more closely resembled those advocated by educators in elementary school settings. This finding suggests children from middle-income homes are more likely to enter kindergarten with prior experiences with the cultural expectations for talking and reading

as a form of learning than their low-income counterparts. Cumulatively, middle-income children had the potential to gain advantages from their families' alignment with schools' expectations for school readiness and preparation practices. Conversely, misalignment in the same areas among low-income families with elementary school educators has the potential to confer disadvantages. Investing time and money into teaching children academic concepts and providing preschool and social outlets were privileges unequally distributed in Middleton. Still, preparing children for kindergarten was primarily perceived among these caregivers as a parental responsibility. In all, participants characterized school entry as "taught first at home, and then out in the world."

Family Life

Though the children who participated in center-based programs received most of their care from early childhood educators during the weekday, educators and primary caregivers considered families essential in the kindergarten preparation process. Families' daily routines and rhythms provided children opportunities to promote nominal knowledge, language and literacy, social competence, independence, regulation of behavior, and motor skills and physical health in the routine activities of everyday life. Adjusting family routines in light of pending kindergarten transitions also was a key component of the preparation process.

Adults structured children's morning, mealtime, and bedtime routines. Children engaged in much of their unstructured activities in their homes and neighborhoods with peers and family members watching television, engaged in educational activities, and playing with recreational toys and games. Young children did not typically engage in organized activities within the community. The exception was middle-class children who attended a private preschool. These children participated in multiple organized activities to include ballet, swimming, martial arts,

and sports. Children, across social class subgroups, were involved in structured religious activities within their neighborhoods and/or community.

During the weekend, social class differences were most evident because family activities varied. Entertainment, cultural outings, and traveling differed in terms of the families' frequency and ability to engage in them as a family. Though all families participated in some form of entertainment, middle-income families expressed the desire to or reported visiting the zoo, museums, and traveling more often and farther than low-income families.

The knowledge and experience a child has through the course of her or his life provides the foundational knowledge and varied experiences so often discussed by educators in this study. In effect, skills that middle-class children bring to bear when they enter kindergarten are "worth" more than those possessed by low-income children (Dyson, 2003) in schools. Teachers and administrators in this district discussed how children needed knowledge of book reading and question answering, "being in school" (knowledge of school norms, rules, and expectations), and exposure to culture (i.e., museums, zoos, traveling) in preparation for kindergarten. They noted that children who acquired such cultural capital before entering school would be ready for academic learning, while those who do not start school "behind." Therefore, the nature of family activities has the potential to confer school readiness advantages and disadvantages.

Parenting

The explanation that parenting practices among African Americans hindered development and school readiness was not supported by these findings. It was evident, across social class, that primary caregivers enjoyed the "challenging" "work" of parenthood. One caveat is low-income parents reported more stress associated with parenting, particularly when they were single, in comparison to middle-income mothers. It is important to note spanking that

occurred in concert with nurturance has been categorized by Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) as tough love. In their comprehensive review, tough love emerged more often among African American parents in comparison to their White peers. Also, African American children who experienced tough love demonstrated fewer negative consequences associated with spanking and in some cases scored higher on measures of intelligence and vocabulary.

Parents engaged in normative strategies to nurture, discipline, and teach their children at home and prepare them for kindergarten. Findings suggest parenting practices were in sync with expectations for school readiness. Parents provided and accepted affective verbal, physical, and symbolic overtures that could promote emotional readiness for transitioning into kindergarten with minimal separation anxiety. They also reported using multiple forms of rewards and punishment to discipline their preschoolers that could encourage self-regulation upon entering kindergarten. Mothers provided several examples of teaching, materials, and language activities they engaged in within the family context that could promote general and nominal knowledge and early literacy and language competencies.

Social class differences in parenting practices were most evident in teaching, material, and emphasis placed upon language preparation. Irrespective of social class positions, families read to children and provided educational materials. However, middle-income families' parenting practices emphasize language use. This was aligned with school expectations for early literacy and language slightly more often than low-income parents. This difference can precipitate school readiness advantages and disadvantages. Additionally, middle-income families were more likely to include computers and corresponding preschool computer programs in their descriptions of their children's educational materials. On the other hand, low-income families were less likely to discuss the benefits of computers, though some of them did have

computers at home. Low-income mothers were more likely to reference home-made and

electronic toys as educational materials available in their homes. Though participants did not

identify computer literacy as a school readiness category, children are likely to encounter them in

their kindergarten classrooms. Exposure to and experience using computers has the potential to

confer school readiness advantages upon entering kindergarten.

<div align="center">Theoretical Implications</div>

Qualitative research is useful for developing and contributing to existing theories because

the micro-level social processes and relationships (Jarrett, 1997, 2000) are highlighted. The

ecological model was employed in concert with critical examinations of social class and race

within systems of development to explore this important developmental transition "in context."

Substantive findings from this study can be used to further advance school readiness as a

construct and the concepts of cultural capital.

<div align="center">*Extending the Concept of Cultural Capital*</div>

Conceptually, this paper contributes nuanced notions of the roles of social class and race

in perpetuating "school readiness gaps" by drawing upon and extending cultural capital and

critical race tenets.   This study's findings challenge cultural capital scholars' focus on culture as

behaviors, tastes, and actions. By integrating Whiteness as property, a tenet of critical race

theory, the concept of cultural capital can be extended to more fully examine race as capital.

Duncan (2006) notes:

> The notion of property to include skin color has always played out in this country in ways
> that maintain an unequal distribution of economic, social, and political resources, which
> in turn, privileges White people over people of color (p. 193).

According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) "racism is not a series of isolated acts but is

endemic in American life, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically" (p. 49).

I offer skin color has capital. It can serve as a biological marker of privilege or disadvantage.

Race as a marker was invisible to White educators in this study who held colorblind ideologies but it was "ever-present" in the social realities of African American educators and parents. African American educators and parent participants' counterstories regarding race were not aligned with mainstream notions of race; instead ever-present and imminent threat racial ideologies were offered. They generally conceived race as existing outside of children's consciousness and within school environments and not under their immediate controls.

As it stands, cultural capital is rarely used to understand the impact of undesirable racial capital on children's educational experiences into account. Drawing upon CRT, Duncan's (2006) statement suggests the ways in which skin color has capital:

> The preservation of material property rights as well as the extension of the notion of property to include skin color has always played out in this country in ways that maintain an unequal distribution of economic, social, and political resources, which in turn privileges White people over people of color (p. 193).

Although Lareau and Horvat (1999) highlighted Whiteness as a "cultural resource" in their study, they did not take into account capital that *White skin* affords people in U.S. society aside from what is gained through acculturation of social practices/norms. Blackness has the potential to be counterproductive as capital in parents' interactions with teachers. This was marginally examined and positioned by Lareau and Horvat (1999). Additionally, Lareau (2000) noted that cultural capital had to be activated in families' interactions with institutions. It falls under "cultural resources that are difficult to control" that denotes, correctly or erroneously, social class status. However, race as property and capital need not, and cannot, be activated or deactivated to yield advantages and disadvantages in social situations. In this sense, African American children must manage racial capital as they transition from home into school. Therefore, transitioning into kindergarten was a unique developmental and parenting experience for African American

children and families. More stands to be noted about other cultural resources that become master statuses and markers such as race and language that *need not* be activated but can indirectly influence children's kindergarten transitions.

Race as a social construct has historically organized American society. The conceptualization of cultural capital can be further extended using CRT to account for race in terms of social realities it confers without being activated in addition to the impossibility of deactivating it at will. These findings can be used comparatively to understand the experiences of other minority groups who face disadvantage due to social class and racial/ethnic social positions. For example, Latino children, who hold similar social and economic positions in society as African American children, also are assessed as having fewer school readiness skills compared to the general population and their White peers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). This theoretical extension can be used to examine their experiences transitioning into kindergarten, specifically in terms of understanding the negative capital ethnic markers confer.

Applied Recommendations

The applied arena is where this study can make the most impact. Findings have implications for early childhood education practice and policy. Recommendations for early childhood education, education policy, and social policy are offered next.

Early Childhood Education Practice

Formal schooling is a socially constructed, imposed element of young childhood, not a naturally occurring event. Findings suggest that poor and African American children often make abrupt and sudden transitions from one way of learning at home to unfamiliar ways of knowing and being as they transition into formal schooling. This disconnect adds to the competencies African American children must acquire over the course of early development to be successful in

schools. Therefore, schools must actively implement pedagogy that effectively addresses cultural, linguistic, and experiential differences of learners to foster early learning among children of diverse backgrounds. Developmentalists know that children's trajectories vary. Consistently assessing developmental progress based on one standard is paradoxical at the least. A pitfall of this is that children with direct access to socially desirable knowledge retain privilege and high status positions in society, while other children generally settle at the bottom. Early childhood education practice should be flexible enough to support alternative developmental pathways.

Ideology refers to "a framework of thought that is used in society to give order and meaning to the social and political world in which we live" (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003, p. 13). Currently, child development and early childhood education in the United States tend to be dominated by Western, middle-class ideology (Kessler, 1991; New & Mallory, 1994). Engagement in the processes of dialectical thought, critique, and self-reflection can begin the process of rethinking and developing more inclusive practices by providing administrators and educators a metaphorical lens to observe schooling through the worlds of children from diverse backgrounds (Darder et al., 2003; Giroux, 2001). Valuing children's lived experiences and drawing upon family and community resources are tangible implications of this research for practice. Early childhood educators and providers can build children's excitement regarding transitioning into kindergarten by collaborating with parents to create or maintain symbolic ceremonies and rituals that mark the transition and build upon the strengths diverse families bring to bear.

In terms of assessment, findings support Meisel's (1999) suggestion that we first understand the dilemmas of readiness assessment and keep in mind that "testing is not a

monolith; high stakes testing does not promote early childhood learning; and readiness assessment calls for a comprehensive view of learning and development" (p. 59). Educators and parents who participated in this study noted multiple pathways to learning and development (New & Mallory, 1994). Assessment of learning and development must be flexible and tailored to developmental diversity. Though caution should be taken when employing alternative approaches since they have not been supported by research as of yet, Appl (2000) notes "the movement toward assessment that involves families and is compatible with children's natural activities makes sense" (p. 224)

Education Policy

The goals and objectives of the NCLB Act must be clearly articulated to all types of early childhood programs and professionals and parents across social class positions in order for education policy to be effectively implemented. To begin, there is a gap in knowledge of the pillars of the NCLB Act by program type with public school staffed and directed programs reporting more knowledge and impact of the NCLB Act on their early childhood practices. The NCLB Act has not been effectively filtered into community preschool programs. This is a key limitation of the law and a barrier to promoting continuity among preschool and public school contexts. The problem arises when children transition into kindergarten and expectations are not consistent. Community programs must be included more fully in the early childhood circuit of information regarding education policy. Additionally, data suggest that educators are currently engaging in pedagogy that is at odds with their early childhood and developmental ideologies. This is a point of contention that must be addressed as reauthorization of NCLB Act is debated and efforts to reform the American educational systems continue.

More effort also is needed to disseminate education policy information to parents, especially if they are expected to be their children's first teachers. Mothers play a major role in facilitating young children's development and their knowledge and experiences of child development gained from everyday life as children's primary caregivers in the early years must be incorporated in the design and implementation of the policy at various levels, such as advisory boards and evaluations (Wiley & Ebata, 2004). Education policy must be more attuned to local perceptions.

Educators and parents who participated in this study also offered policy recommendations. Early childhood educators recommended policy and decision makers possess first-hand experience and a basic understanding of child development and the day-to-day workings of early childhood programs. They noted that this knowledge and understanding could more effectively promote school readiness and early learning in their community. Consider the following comments from Catherine, a daycare administrator, who contended:

> It's one thing to say this and say that and say this. Spend some time around kids before you start making policy; because a lot of what we do comes from what we know about children.

Policy and practice informed by knowing children and talking to early childhood educators and care providers who were "in the trenches" suggested policy begin where children were developmentally and advance forward instead of being "pushed down" into early grades in developmentally inappropriate ways.

Studies reveal the important impact of investing in early childhood care and education. Children spent a substantial portion of their week in the care of early childhood educators and child care providers. Governments must invest more resources into these programs and child care arrangements in order to enhance and align early learning in these settings as well.

Participants also recommended preschool for all. Parents and educators noted the importance of providing preschool for all children to assist them in meeting school expectations. Consider the following example from Pauline, a building principal in Middleton School District:

> Well I think back to my preschool for all. I really think that's going to be key in helping ensure that all children succeed in school is if we make sure we offer them that preschool for all.

Universal preschool was advocated as one way to level the educational playing field. It also was suggested to ensure partnerships between ecological structures to prepare children for kindergarten. Incorporating early childhood care and education programs in public school (such as Universal Pre-Kindergarten) and community (e.g., churches, local agencies) settings will allow space and resources for more children to participate in early learning and socializing opportunities in formal settings. As children enter kindergarten, they are expected to be ready to learn and to be socially competent (Sidle Fuligni & Brady-Smith, 2003). Therefore, implementing early childhood education programs in public school and community settings should increase the likelihood that children will have access to diverse learning opportunities in the early years.

<div align="center">Social Policy</div>

Findings from this study highlight the need for more resources in addition to Head Start. Low-income neighborhoods lack a variety of activities for young children that can assist them in achieving normative developmental outcomes. Learning enrichment programs, cultural centers, local neighborhood events, libraries, and parks and playground that are *safe* for young children to play are critical for promoting positive cognitive, social, and moral developmental outcomes that are long-term. Children can achieve optimal development if families, community, and schools

work collaboratively to support their growth and development (Mangione & Speth, 1998; Morris, 2002).

Lastly, participants advocated for policy that supports parents and families. Education and social policy should be connected to children's everyday lives, families' strengths and daily routines, and community infrastructures. Grace, a mother of two, stated:

> They need to have more programs geared towards the parents to help them achieve in order to help their children to achieve. I know it's asking a lot but I mean help provide transportation. Have the PTA set up a little like daycare. Most of them have multiple kids so it's not always easy for them to do it. I mean the ones that think it's even worth trying. Transportation is a big thing and daycare.

Parenthood is challenging for middle-income mothers who had financial resources and social support, it was more challenging for low-income families. Providing families access to basic necessities such as jobs, specialized training, housing, health care, and the like can lessen the challenges of preparing children for kindergarten. An even greater challenge to decreasing school readiness disadvantage is socially integrating poor families into the fabrics of society at every level and addressing their basic health and nutritional needs.

School readiness advantages and disadvantages are cumulative. Disparities in opportunities and personal experiences are rooted in inequitable social and economic conditions that have been established over time. These experiences shape what children know prior to entering kindergarten. Systems of stratification by social class, race, and gender often serve to reaffirm and perpetuate not only the "school readiness gap" but also a social order (Darder, 2002; Graue, 1993) that limits children's developmental potential in schools.

<center>Limitations and Implications for Future Research</center>

Insights from this qualitative case study provided rich, detailed, first-hand accounts of educators' and mothers' perceptions of kindergarten and strategies and activities children engage

in within their everyday lives that can promote early learning and development. The broader set of findings derived from this study suggests the value of multi-method studies. Insights from this study further suggest that, while the findings from small scale studies are not generalizable, rich, detailed accounts can uncover hidden processes that offer broader explanations. The broader set of findings derived from this study suggests the value of case studies. Though it should not be generalized to all school districts, similarities are likely to be found in other cases across the county. Future research should build upon these findings by examining diverse samples of parents, educators, schools, and communities to further understand transitioning into kindergarten more generally.

This study only examined adults' perceptions of school readiness. Though informative, the relationship between perceptions and school readiness outcomes and kindergarten experiences was not examined. Time was a factor for this research project. Still, a qualitative, longitudinal follow-up is warranted to explore target children's developmental outcomes and experiences over time. Longitudinal qualitative studies will enable greater understanding of school experiences and developmental trajectories. Future research endeavors will include multiple stages of the transition process (e.g. prior to, upon, and at completion of kindergarten). Longitudinal data can further examine whether or not children's school experiences differed from family life and if so, how.

Women's perceptions and experiences were highlighted in this study because its sample included primary caregivers and early childhood educators. Women are overrepresented and men underrepresented as primary caregivers and early childhood educators because of gender stratification at the societal level. Though the focus on women was justified, incorporating men's views of school readiness as well as the role and views of extended kin in kindergarten

preparation will be addressed in future research. Future studies should examine the family context more fully by incorporating experiences and perceptions of multiple members.

Finally, this study offered directions for social scientists examining social class, race, and gender beyond variables being input into equations. The experiences of middle-class African American children and families have been neglected in the past. This case study shed light on the heterogeneity of perceptions and experiences of African American families. The nuances of race and social class were disentangled to reveal more details of how social class and race work to impact school readiness. Future research should examine African American family life on a larger scale to further unpack social class and race in meaningful ways. This study's examination of gender was limited. Time did not permit in-depth observations of children's activities at home and school that would have contributed a more comprehensive account of how adults and children do gender in their everyday lives and across developmental contexts. Future research should address this limitation by more fully exploring gendered institutions and their impacts on school readiness advantages and disadvantages.

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<div align="center">FIGURES AND TABLES</div>

Figure 3-1. Ecological Model's Concentric Structures

Microsystem

Mesosystem

Exosystem

Macrosystem
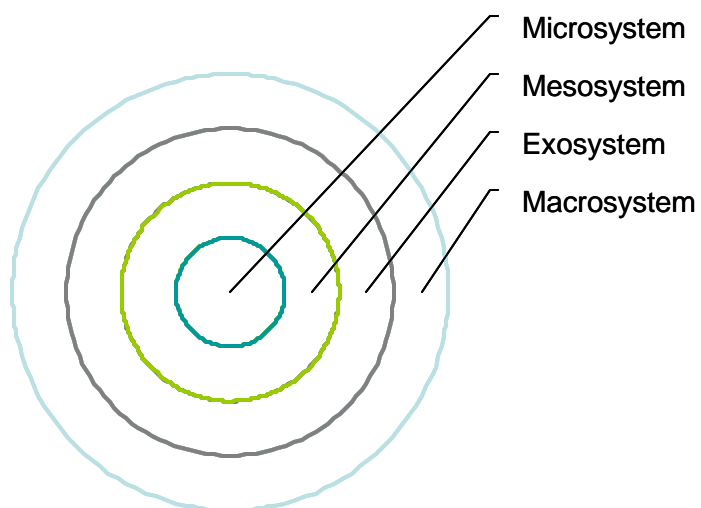
Figure 3-2. Concentric Structures Revisited
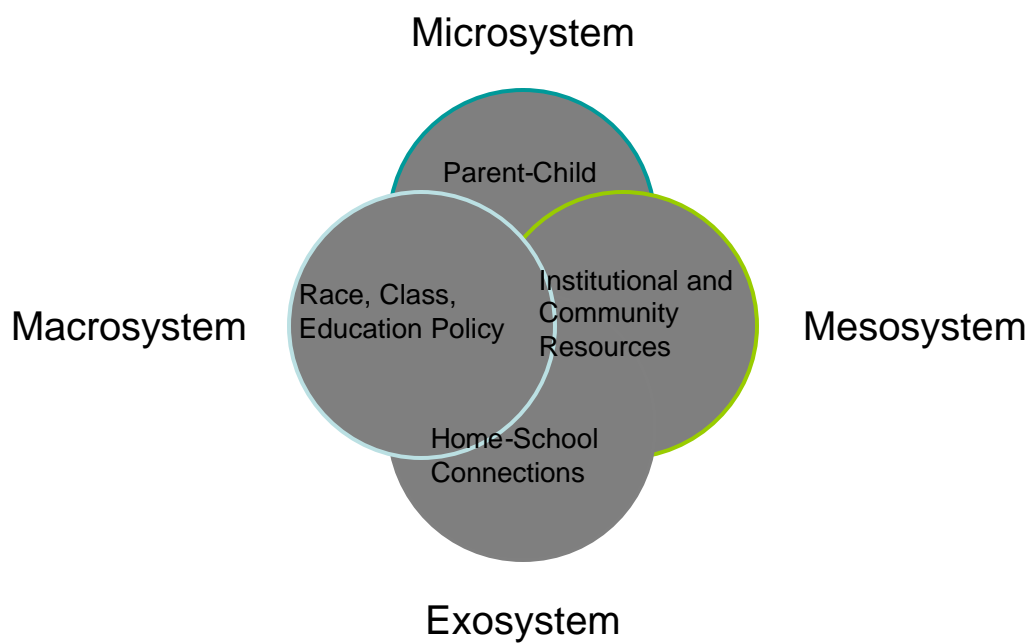
Table 3-1. Theoretical Framework: A Synopsis of Guiding Tenets and Concepts

Theory	Targeted Processes/Issues	Related Tenets	Corresponding Research Areas
Ecological Model	Developmental contexts	Social interaction Interrelated systems	Connections and disconnections between contexts and children's preparation for kindergarten
Critical Race Theory	Racial disparities	Counterstory telling	African American parents' perceptions of school readiness and kindergarten preparation
		Whiteness as property	Historical disparities in educational opportunities
		Colorblind	Racial ideologies
Cultural Capital	Social class disparities	Culture as resource	Social class currencies
		Transmission of culture	The impact of social class on conceptions of school readiness, preparation practices, family life, and parenting
Feminist Thought	Gender disparities	Gendered institutions	Differential concerns among mothers of girls and boys; gender ideologies
		Doing gender resources	Differences in the kinds of toys and activities noted among girls and boys
Intersectionality	Social class disparities Racial disparities Gender disparities	Intersecting oppressions	Differential concerns among mothers of girls and boys by social class

Table 4-1. Stratified Purposive Sampling: Parent Participants

Socioeconomic Status	Center Care or Home Care
Low-income	Center Care
Low-income	Home Care
Middle-income	Center Care
Middle-income	Center (Private)

Table 4-2. Stratified Purposive Sampling: Educator Participants

Grade Level	Position
Preschool	Teacher
	Administrator
Elementary	Teacher
	Administrator

Table 4-3: Educator Demographic Information

Name	Age	Race	Gender	Level of Education	Major in or Related to Education	Program Type	Program Name	Participant Type	Teacher Certification
Bridget	36	Black	Female	Bachelors	Yes	Daycare	Area Park Daycare Center	Preschool Teacher	No
Kate	25	Black	Female	Some college	Yes	Daycare	Area Park Daycare Center	Preschool Teacher	Yes
Catherine	50	Black	Female	Some college	Yes	Daycare	Area Park Daycare Center	Program Director	No_pending
Annette	34	White	Female	Some college	Yes	Daycare	Lovees' Day Care	Preschool Teacher	No
Isabelle	28	Indian	Female	Bachelors	No	Daycare	Lovees' Day Care	Preschool Teacher	No
Mary	43	Black	Female	Bachelors +	No- 23 hours	Daycare	Lovees' Day Care	Program Director	-
Rachel	-	Black	Female	Master's	Yes	Public School	Middleton District Building	District Administrator	Yes
Samantha	46	White	Female	C.A.S.	Yes	Pre-K	Middleton Pre-K Center	Program Principal	Yes
Donna	32	Latina	Female	Bachelors	Yes	Pre-K	Middleton Pre-K Center	Preschool Teacher	Yes
Halle	32	White	Female	Master's	Yes	Pre-K	Middleton Pre-K Center	Preschool Teacher	Yes
Sally	32	White	Female	Master's	Yes	Pre-K	Middleton Pre-K Center	Preschool Teacher	Yes_type O4
Josie	24	Black	Female	Bachelors	No	Learning Center	Sweetie Pie Learning Center	Preschool Teacher	No
Faith	50	Black	Female	Master's	Yes	Learning Center	Sweetie Pie Learning Center	Program Director	No
Jacqueline	22	White	Female	Bachelors	Yes	Public School	Time Center ES	Kindergarten Teacher	Yes
Lindsey	27	White	Female	Master's	Yes	Public School	Time Center ES	Kindergarten Teacher	Yes_type O3
James	39	Black	Male	Master's	Yes	Public School	Time Center ES	Building Principal	Yes
Pauline	55	White	Female	Master's	Yes	Public School	Warren Grove ES	Building Principal	Yes_5
Karla	23	White	Female	Bachelors	Yes	Public School	Warren Grove ES	Kindergarten Teacher	Yes
Janice	53	White	Female	Master's	Yes	Public School	Waysworth ES	Kindergarten Teacher	Yes_2
Nancy	50	White	Female	Master's	Yes	Public School	Waysworth ES	Kindergarten Teacher	Yes

Table 4-4: Parent and Target Child Demographic Information

Participant's Name	Age	Employment Status	Level of Education	Income	Marital Status	# of Children	Focal Child's Name	Focal Child's Sex	Name of Preschool Program
Denise	29	Self-employed	Some college	Less than $9,999	Married	2	Annie	Female	Home Care
Ebony	23	Employed	High school	Less than $9,999	Single	4	Jason	Male	Home Care
Nicki	23	Employed	Some high school	Less than $9,999	Single	2	Tony	Male	Home Care
Alicia	45	Employed	High school	Less than $9,999	Single	5	Gabby	Female	Middleton Pre-K
Uniece	30	Unemployed	Some high school	Less than $9,999	Single	4	Belinda	Female	Middleton Pre-K
Xenophia	36	Employed	Some college	$10,000-$15,999	Single	4	Mario	Male	Middleton Pre-K
Constance	28	Self-Employed	Associates	$20,000-$25,000	Married	2	Phillip	Male	Sunny Day Learning Center
Grace	28	Unemployed	Some college	$20,000-$29,000	Married	2	Hannah	Female	Home Care
Francis	26	Self-employed	Some college	$26,000-$28,999	Single	3	Sammy	Male	Home Care
Bonnie	27	Employed	Some college	$26,000-$28,999	Married	4	Katrina	Female	Middleton Pre-K
Wendy	30	Employed	Bachelors	$29,000-$36,000	Married	5	Kayla	Female	Middleton Pre-K
Joy	70	Employed	Some college	$29,000-$36,000	Divorced	7	Candice	Female	Sweetie Pie Learning Center
Laura	34	Employed	Bachelors	$40,000-$49,000	Married	2	Jasmine	Female	Sweetie Pie Learning Center
Vanessa	-	Employed	Some college	$40,000-$49,000	Single	2	Julie	Female	Sweetie Pie Learning Center
Shana	-	Employed	Trade school	$50,000-$59,000	Married	2	Maurice	Male	Sweetie Pie Learning Center
Heather	37	Employed	Master's	$65,000 +	Married	2	Walter	Male	First Stop Private Program
Ivy	49	Employed	Master's	$65,000 +	Married	1	Maurice	Female	First Stop Private Program
Lorraine	37	Unemployed	Bachelors	$65,000 +	Married	2	Luis	Male	First Stop Private Program
Melissa	36	Employed	M.D	$65,000 +	Single	2	Jade	Female	First Stop Private Program
Tina	30	Employed	Bachelors+	$65,000 +	Married	3	Richard	Male	Sweetie Pie Learning Center

Table 4-5. Relationship Between Research Questions, Theory, and Methods

Guiding Research Questions	Theoretical Perspectives	Methods
1. What characterizes school entry in the context of low- and middle-income African American homes? What does "school readiness" mean? How do race, class, and gender impact parents' views of "school readiness"?	Ecological Critical Race Theory Cultural Capital Feminist Theory	*-In-depth interviewing (parents)* *-Observation* *-Photo elicitation*
2. How does the target school district characterize "school readiness"? What does "school readiness" mean to early childhood educators and administrators? How do race, class, and gender impact educators' views of "school readiness"?	Ecological Critical Race Theory Cultural Capital Feminist Theory	*-In-depth interviewing (teachers, administrators)* *-Observation*
3. What continuities and discontinuities exist between the ecological contexts of home, school, neighborhood, and policy regarding perceptions of school entry?	Ecological	*-In-depth interviewing* *-Observation* *-Photo elicitation* *-Archival/secondary sources*
4. What role do community resources play in the transition to kindergarten? What community resources and activities do adults utilize to facilitate school entry among African American children?	Ecological	*-In-depth interviewing (parents)* *-Archival/secondary sources*
5. How do national educational policies, such as the National Learning Standards and the No Child Left Behind Act, influence parents' and educators' perceptions of school entry?	Ecological	*-In-depth interviewing (teachers and parents)* *-Archival/secondary sources*

Figure 4-1. Triangulation Strategy


Data Sources
Educators
Parents
Archival and Secondary
Documents

Theoretical Framework
Ecological
Cultural Capital
Critical Race Theory

Data Collection Strategies
Archival Research
In-depth interview
Observations
Photo Elicitation
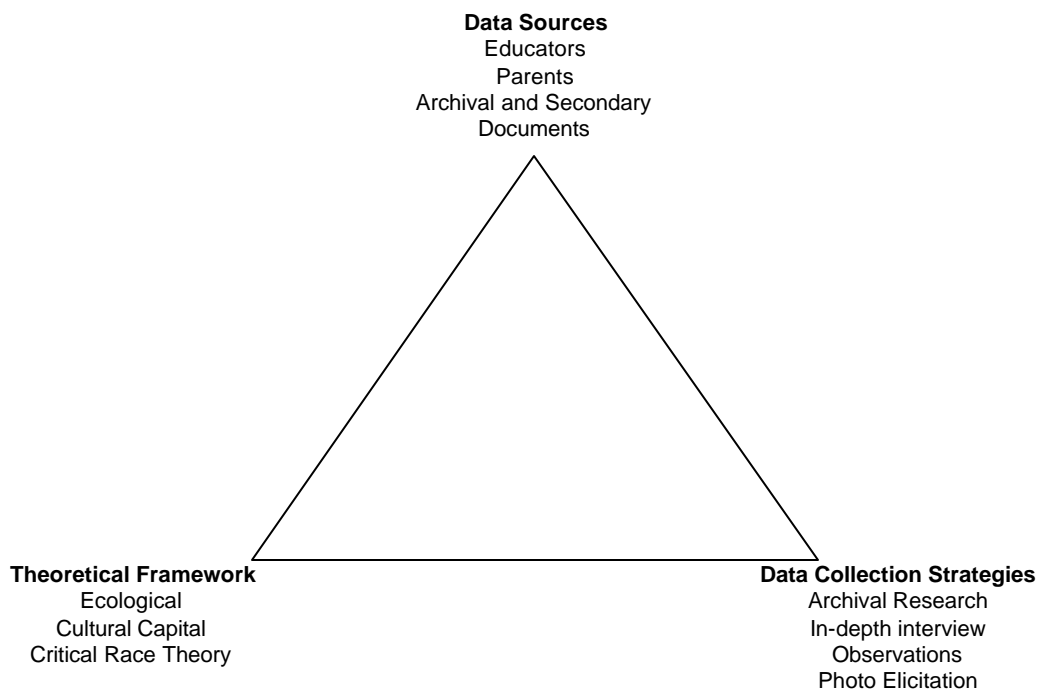
Table 5-1. Educators' Categories of School Readiness

Category	Description	Emergent Concepts	Grade Level Alignment		
			Community Preschool	Pre-K	Elementary
General	Knowledge of self , significant others, and personal safety	(1) recite name (2) recite names of family members (3) recite addresses	Yes	Yes	Limited[5]
Nominal	Knowledge of pre-academic concepts	(1) identify and recite the alphabet (2) identify numbers and count (3) identify colors (4) identify shapes and objects.	Yes	Yes	No
Early Literacy	Emerging reading and writing and comprehension of conventions of printed text	(1) identify letter sounds (2) write and spell (3) recognize sight words/read	No	Yes	Yes
Inferential Reasoning	Displaying higher order thinking competency beyond basic repetition	(1) answer questions about stories (2) use pictures to infer story plots	No	Yes	No
Social	Meeting the demands of social situations	(1) verbal communication with others (2) interact well with others (3) cope with different social situations	Yes	Yes	Yes
Self-Regulation	Emotional state of being and exhibiting control of a range of emotional responses in social situations	(1) excited to learn (2) capable of separating without anxiety (3) exhibit self-control (4) exhibit maturity (5) follow directions (6) listen and attend (7) feel loved	No	Yes	Yes
Independence	Ability to complete daily tasks without constant adult supervision and intervention	(1) address individual needs and wants (2) be self-sufficient in a group (3) navigate classroom environments and routines	Yes	Yes	Yes
Motor Skills and Physical Health	Exhibiting fine and gross motor skills as well as good health, adequate nutrition, and restful sleep	(1) hold/use writing utensil/scissors (2) fill in space using writing utensil (3) ride, climb, throw objects (4) fed and rested (5) general health	Yes	Yes	Yes

---

[5] *Limited refers to representation within a subgroup that emerged from negative case example(s)

Table 5-2. Parents' Categories of School Readiness

Category	Description	Emergent Skills/Concepts	Social Class Subgroup Alignment	
			Low-income	Middle-income
General	Knowledge of self , significant others, and personal safety	(1) recite name (2) recite names of family members (3) recite addresses	Yes	Yes
Nominal	Knowledge of pre-academic concepts	(1) identify and recite the alphabet (2) identify numbers and count (3) identify colors (4) identify shapes and objects.	Yes	Yes
Early Literacy	Emerging reading and writing and comprehension of conventions of printed text	(1) identify letter sounds (2) write and spell (3) recognize sight words/read	Limited[6]	Yes
Inferential Reasoning	Displaying higher order thinking competency beyond basic repetition	(1) answer questions about stories (2) use pictures to understand story plots	No	Limited
Social	Meeting the demands of social situations	(1) verbal communication with others (2) interact well with others (3) cope with different social situations	Yes	Yes
Self-Regulation	Emotional state of being and exhibiting control of a range of emotional responses in social situations	(1) excited to learn (2) capable of separating without anxiety (3) exhibit self-control (4) exhibit maturity (5) follow directions (6) listen and attend (7) feel loved	Yes	Yes
Independence	Ability to complete daily tasks without constant adult supervision and intervention	(1) address individual needs and wants (2) be self-sufficient in a group (3) navigate classroom environments and routines	Yes	Limited
Motor Skills and Physical Health	Exhibiting fine and gross motor skills as well as good health, adequate nutrition, and restful sleep	(1) hold/use writing utensil/scissors (2) fill in space using writing utensil (3) ride, climb, throw objects (4) fed and rested (5) general health	No	Limited

Figure 7- 1. "Pushed-Down" Effect of the No Child Left Behind Act
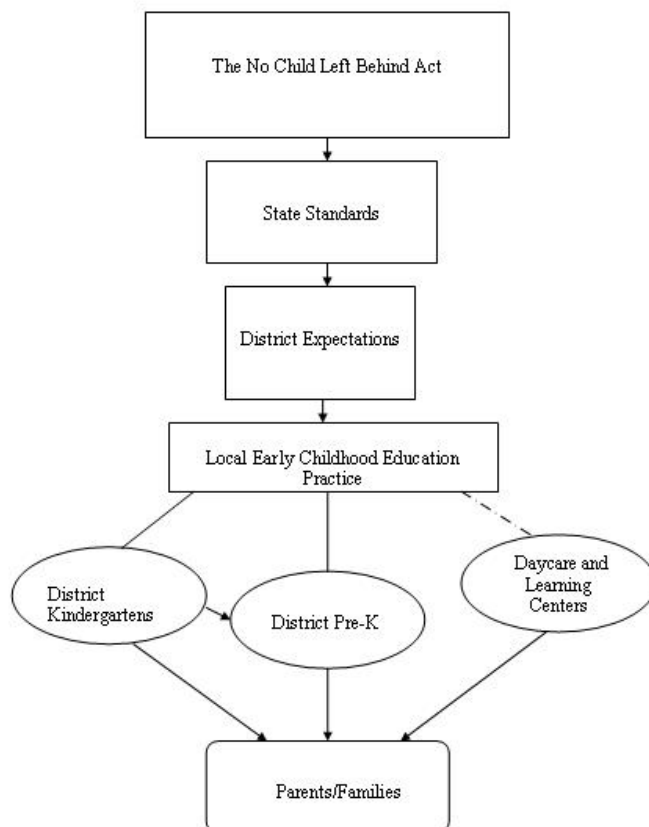
Figure 7-2: Perceptions of the NCLB and the Pillars

Perceptions of the Pillars of the NCLB Act

Macrosystem

Mesosystem

Microsystem

Pillars of NCLB
Local Freedom
Choice
Curriculum

Curricula alignment
Concept is good

Parent Perceptions

Educator Perceptions

Accountability
Accountability needed   Limited to no
Overly emphasize testing   knowledge of law
Poor implementation   Children passed
School Disparities   through system
Limits agency

Table 8-1. Demographics of Parents' Schools of Choice by Social Class

DEMOGRAPHICS OF SCHOOLS CHOSEN BY MIDDLE-INCOME FAMILIES						
Building	% of population African American	% of population low-income	% of students performing at or above state standards	Gender with higher performance in Reading	Gender with higher performance in Math	Building Focus
Waysworth	28%	30%	92%	Girls	Boys	Multiple Intelligences
Cedar North	26%	25%	90%	Boys	Boys	Arts/Multiple Intelligences
Warren Grove	27%	33%	85%	Boys	Girls	Technology
Brownswell	40%	83%	70%	Girls	Boys	Arts
Gloribrook	42%	60%	77%	Girls	Boys	Arts

DEMOGRAPHICS OF SCHOOLS CHOSEN BY LOW-INCOME FAMILIES						
Building	% of population African American	% of population low-income	% of students performing at or above state standards	Gender with higher performance in Reading	Gender with higher performance in Math	Building Focus
Suncrest	43%	70%	77%	Boys	Boys	Basic Skills
Time Center	46%	70%	78%	Equal	Boys (2%)	Exploration
Brownswell	40%	83%	70%	Girls	Boys	Arts
Warren Grove	27%	33%	85%	Boys	Girls	Technology
Red Brick Lane	42%	53%	87%	Girls	Boys	Math and Science
Cover	33%	36%	82%	Girls	Girls (1%)	Service Learning

Table 10-1. Educators' Descriptions of Kindergarten Preparation Practices

Preparation Practice	Description	School Readiness Categories	Program Type Subgroup Alignment		
Provision of Preschool	Making opportunities to participate in organized early childhood education	Social competence Self-regulation	Community Preschool Yes	Pre-K Yes	Elementary Yes
Direct Instruction	Intentionally teaching concepts and promoting skill development	General Knowledge Nominal Knowledge and Numeracy Motor Skills	Community Preschool Yes	Pre-K Yes	Elementary No
Active Engagement	Purposeful efforts to occupy children in activity or interaction	Language and early literacy	Community Preschool No	Pre-K Yes	Elementary Yes
Social Engagement	Purposeful efforts to provide children with opportunities to interact with others	Social competence Self-regulation	Community Preschool No	Pre-K Yes	Elementary Yes

Table 10-2. Parents' Descriptions of Kindergarten Preparation Practice

Preparation Practice	Description	School Readiness Categories	Social Class Subgroup Alignment	
Provision of Preschool	Making opportunities to participate in organized early childhood education	Social competence Self-regulation	Low-income Yes	Middle-income Yes
Direct Instruction	Intentionally teaching concepts and promoting skill development	General Knowledge Nominal Knowledge and Numeracy Motor Skills	Low-income Yes	Middle-income No
Active Engagement	Purposeful efforts to occupy children in activity or interaction.	Language and early literacy	Low-income Limited[7]	Middle-income Yes
Social Engagement	Purposeful efforts to provide children with opportunities to interact with others	Social competence Self-regulation	Low-income Limited	Middle-income Yes

Figure 11-1. Average Percentage of Hours Spent in Home Care and Provider Care, by Program, on a Typical Day
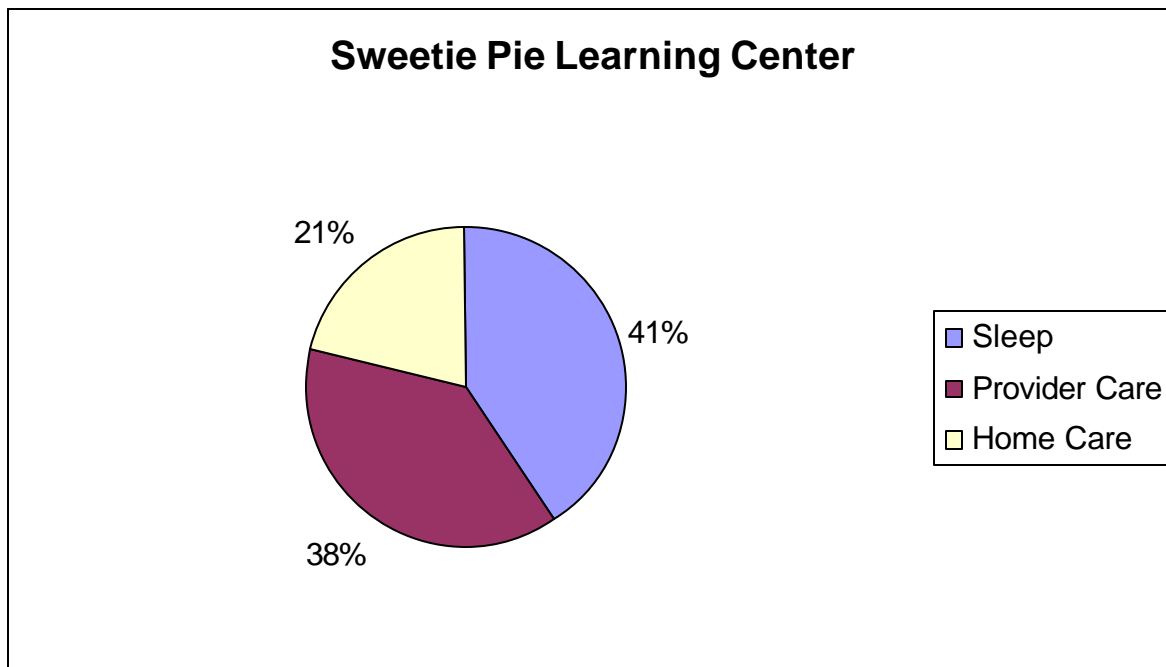
Figure 11-2. Average Percentage of Hours Children Spent in Home Care and Provider Care, by Program, on a Typical Day

First Stop Private Preschool Program

29%

41%

30%

- Sleep
- Provider Care
- Home Care
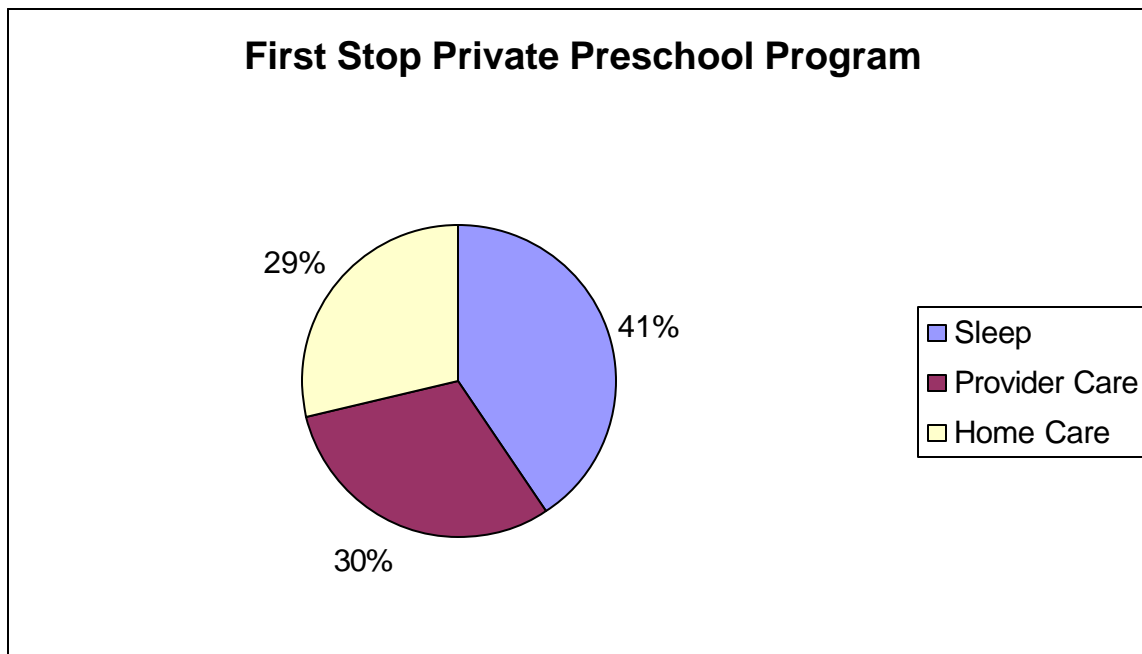
Figure 11-3. Average Percentage of Hours Children Spent in Home Care and Provider Care, by Program, on a Typical Day

APPENDIX: OBSERVATION AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL ENTRY OBSERVATION GUIDE

CONSTRUCT	OBSERVATION
Parent's Role in Getting Children Ready for School	

In-Home Learning	Are caregivers, siblings, or other family members engaged in learning activities with young children?
	    *Note the type and nature of interactions
	 Are children independently engaged in learning activities (games, songs, dance)
	    *Note type and nature of activity.
	    *Note the presence of writing and reading material in the setting (to include grocery lists, magazines, crayons, pens, electronics)
	 Is there evidence of toys, games, and media in the settings?
	    *Note homemade and store bought learning materials
	 In what ways do these materials contribute to children's ability to learn in schools?

Scheduling	Is there evidence of appointment dates and notices in the setting (i.e., work schedules, doctor's appointments, school visits, pick-up/drop off times and days)? *Note scheduling conflicts and difficulties that arise What mode of transportation do parents use to travel from one appointment to another (bus, car, walk)?
Community Engagement	Are there signs of community engagement related to school entry (i.e., flyer advertising a community event, conversations taking place about events and activities taking place in the community for children)?
School/Teacher's Role in Getting Children Ready for School	
School Connectedness	Are there documents from schools in the setting? Are there any discussions related to visiting schools and meeting with teachers? *Note participants' body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions during discussions

PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL ENTRY PROTOCOL

Introduction: Today I would like to talk with you about what it will be like for your child to start kindergarten. People have different ideas about what happens before and after children start school. I would like to hear what your experiences getting your child ready for school have been like. Just as a reminder, you do not have to do this interview if you do not wish to. Are you ready to begin? May I turn the tape recorder on?

Parent's Role in Getting Children Ready for School
1. What does school readiness mean to you?
2. What is the best way for parents to get their children ready for school?
3. What do you have to do to make sure your child is ready to start school?
      Probe: Who will pick-up/drop off your child from school?
      Probe: How will your everyday life/schedule change?
      Probe: What appointments do you have to make before your child starts kindergarten?
4. What do you think is important for young children to learn before entering school?
      Probe: How do you teach (child's name) these things?
5. Tell me about the school (child's name) is going to for kindergarten?
      Probe: What is the name of the school?
      Probe: Who will (child's name) teacher be?
      Probe: What do you think of school/teacher?
6. What do you tell your child about going to school?
7. When you have questions about sending (child's name) to school, who do you talk to?
      Probe: Will you please give me an example of a time you asked someone a question about your child starting kindergarten?
8. Where do you go in the neighborhood when you have questions about getting (child's name) ready for school?
      Probe: Will you give me an example of a time you went or will go somewhere in the neighborhood to get help with a question about kindergarten?

School/Teacher's Role in Getting Children Ready for School
1. What things do you expect teachers and people who work at schools to tell you about getting (child's name) ready to start school?
      Probe: Will you give me an example of a time you got help from teachers or people who work at schools with a question or concern about your child starting school?
2. How do you think teachers and school staff will get along with (child's name)?
3. How do you think you will get along with the teacher and school staff?
4. What activities will you take part in at the school?

Educational Expectations and Values
1. What do you think children learn in kindergarten?
      Probe: How do you expect your child to do in school (i.e., grades, behavior?)
      Probe: If your child has a problem in school, what will you do?
      Probe: If you child does well in school, what will you do?
2. What things does your child do that tells you that he/she is ready for school?

3. What things does your child do that tells you that she/he is not ready for school?
4. Why is it important for (child's name) to do well in kindergarten?
5. Knowing your child as you do, how far do you think your child will go in school?
   Probe: What does (child's name) need to do in order to get that far?
   Probe: What do you have to do as a parent to help your child get that far?
   Probe: What do schools and teachers have to do to help your child get that far?

Early Educational Experiences (Adults)
1. Growing up, what was school like for you?
   Probe: How would you describe your relationship with teachers? Other students?
   Probe: How would you describe yourself as a student?
   Probe: What did you like about school? What did you dislike?
2. How were you parents/family members involved in your education when you were in elementary school?
   Probe: What advice did your parents give you about school when you were younger?
3. When your child goes to school, how do you think their first day will be like your first day? How will it be different?

No Child Left Behind
1. Tell me how the "No Child Left Behind" Policy will affect you and your child when he/she starts school.
2. What do you think about the government's goal that all children start school ready to learn?
3. What do you think about the government's goal that every school will try to get parents involved and that parents will be children's first teachers?
3. What advice would you give to people who make these policies and decisions about education that you think will help your child succeed in school?

Closing: Thank you for taking the time to complete this interview with me

PARENTING OBSERVATIONAL GUIDE

CONSTRUCT	OBSERVATION
Parenting Practices	

Developmental Expectations	Are children expected to do things on their own in the setting?
	 Are children asked to help out in the setting?
	   *Note the kinds of things children are asked
	    to do

Positive and Negative Reinforcement	Are there times when caregivers reward children in the settings?
	   *Note how children are rewarded
	
	 Are there times when children are punished in the setting?
	     *Note how children are punished in the
	      setting

Role of the Family Members	Do other members of the family care for the child (dress, feed, bathe, play with, help with tasks, etc.) in the setting?
	   *Note the relationship of the people who help
	    with care giving to the child/caregiver

Monitoring Behaviors	Do parents allow children to play with other children in the setting? Do you observe times when children go to visit other children?
Intergenerational Parenting Practices	Do older relative or grandmothers give caregivers child rearing advice in the setting? *Note the nature of the advice given Do older relatives or grandparents care for children in the setting?

Parent-Child Relationship	Do caregivers show affection in the setting (do they hug, kiss, cuddle, tease, or laugh with children)?
	   *Note the context of affection
	 Do caregivers maintain distance from children in the setting?
	 Does the child appear to be attached to the parent and the parent attached to the child?
	    *Note the apparent level of comfort in the
	     interactions between caregivers and children

Neighborhood Resources	Map out the neighborhood setting
	    *Note landmarks, local businesses, shopping
	     options, proximity of social service agencies,

	parks, libraries, etc., descriptions of neighborhood activities and residents Evidence of community involvement or lack thereof in the setting (neighborhood watch signs, tenant organization fliers; visiting neighbors, child involvement in community programs and activities)

Income	Are there signs of unemployment/employment concerns?
	Does there appear to be a shortage of money to secure basic necessities within the setting?
	  *Note late and disconnection notices, availability of food, leisure activities, surplus items, clothing, shoes, transportation, etc.
	Are there signs of limited access to medical and health care?
	  *Note complaints of long lines and wait times to see doctors and dentists, etc.

Race	Note pictures, books, music, television shows, etc. in the setting that feature African Americans Do people in the setting talk about race? *Note the nature of these discussions Do children's toys and games feature African American characters and themes related to being African American

PARENTING PROTOCOL

Introduction: Today I would like to talk to you about your experiences as a mother/father. Parents have different ways of teaching their children the things they think are important for children to learn. I would like to hear about how you do things as a parent. Just as a reminder, you do not have to do this interview if you do not wish to. Are you ready to begin? May I turn the tape recorder on?

Parenting Practices

1. I would like to ask you about your child's activities in your home and in your neighborhood. What are some of the things that you think (child's name) should be able to do at his/her age?
2. What are some of the ways that (child's name) helps you out at home?
3. Besides yourself, who are the people who are helping raise (child's name)?
    Probe: Name/relationship to parent
    Probe: If no one helps, what do you think about raising your child without help from others?
4. What kinds of activities do you do as a family on a regular basis?
    Probe: What role does (child's name) play in these activities?
5. Who are some of the children that your child spends time or plays with? What are their names and will you tell me what their friendship is like?
    Probe: Background of playmates
    Probe: Where child lives
    Probe: Strategies to encourage or discourage friendships
6. What are some of the things that you are teaching your child that your parents taught you?
7. Please give me some examples of things that you think you have to do differently when you are raising boys? What about girls?
8. How do you reward (child's name) for doing the things that you think he/she should do?
    Probe: Will you give me an example of a time when you rewarded (child's name).
9. How do you punish (child's name) for doing things that you think she/he shouldn't do?
    Probe: Will you give me an example of a time you punished (child's name)?

Parent-Child Relationship

1. What things do you do to show (child's name) that you love her/him?
2. Please give me an example of a time you were very affectionate towards (child's name).
    Probe: How were you affectionate
    Probe: Why were you so affectionate with (child's name)?

Neighborhood Resources

1. Please tell me about the activities that your child is involved in in this neighborhood.
    Probe: Name of activity
    Probe: Location of activity (inside or outside of the neighborhood)
2. As a parent, what have your experiences with the people who work or supervise these activities/programs been like?
3. What activities do (child's name) take part in outside of this neighborhood?
    Probe: What other people are involved in these activities?
    Probe: How did you learn about these activities?

4. What kinds of activities would you like your child to take part in?
     Probe: Why?
     Probe: What are some challenges you face to having your child involved in these activities?

5. If you needed help, where would you go in your neighborhood to get it?
     Probe: Name of person or place
     Probe: Why would you go there for help?
     Probe: Please give me an example of a time you went there for help.

6. What things can be done to make this neighborhood better for your child and family?
     Probe: How often does child take part in activities?

Income

1. How does having or not having financial resources affect being a mother or father?
     Probe: How are your responsibilities similar to parents with more or less money?
     Probe: If your income changed in the opposite direction today, how would it affect the way you are raising your child?

Race

1. How does being African American affect the way that you are raising your child?
2. How do you think being African American will impact your child when he/she begins kindergarten?

Thank you for taking time to complete this interview with me

DAILY ROUTINES/TYPICAL DAY OBSERVATION GUIDE

CONSTRUCTS	OBSERVATIONS
Family Routines	Note any regularities in the setting Cleaning Watching television Reading Playing games Homework Working School Leisure activities Standing appointments/meetings Sleeping

Disruptions to Routines	Transitions—
	New job/loss of job,
	Kindergarten entrance,
	New child care provisions,
	 * Note how caregiver responds to events
	  (observe body language, gestures, tone of
	  voice, facial expressions)
	Births, deaths, illnesses, accidents
	  *Note how caregiver responds to events
	  (observe body language, gestures, tone of
	  voice, facial expressions)

Family Rituals	Note any activities that recur yearly or seasonally in the setting (Christmas, Kwanza, Easter, birthday celebrations, etc.)

DAILY ROUTINES/TYPICAL DAY PROTOCOL

Introduction: Today I would like for you to tell me about your child's routine or "typical day." I will ask you to describe what your child usually does from the time he/she wakes up in the morning until the time he or she goes to bed at night. Just as a reminder, you do not have to do this interview if you do not wish to. Are you ready to begin? May I turn the tape recorder on?

I would like for you to think of a typical day during the week and please take about five minutes to fill in this time chart.

1. Now using the chart you just filled in, please walk me through what a typical weekday is like for your child.
> Probe: Who decides what your child will do?
> Probe: Why does your child do that?
> Probe: Who does that with your child (family, siblings, friends, neighbors, etc.)?
> Probe: What do you do to wake child up in the morning/ put child to bed at night?
> Probe: What does your child watch on television?
> Probe: What kinds of games or toys does your child play with?
> Probe: Other activities/rituals
2. Please give me some examples of times when you do not follow this schedule?

Next, I would like for you to think of a typical day during the weekend and please take about five minutes to fill in this time chart.

1. Now using the chart you just filled in, please walk me through what a typical weekend is like for your child.
> Probe: Who decides what your child will do?
> Probe: Why does your child do that?
> Probe: Who does that with your child (family, siblings, friends, neighbors, etc?)
> Probe: What do you do to wake child up in the morning/ put child to bed at night?
> Probe: What does your child watch on television?
> Probe: What kinds of games or toys does your child play with?
> Probe: Other activities/rituals
2. Please give me some examples of times when you do not follow this schedule?

Finally, let's talk about some of the pictures that you took of (child's name) typical day.
> Probe: What is the child doing?
> Probe: Who are the people in the picture?
> Probe: Where was this picture taken?
> Probe: What does this picture show?

Closing: Thank you for taking time to complete this interview with me.