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Creating Positive Experiences: Increasing Parent Participation In A Low Income Elementary School

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Creating Positive Experiences: Increasing Parent Participation In A Low Income
Elementary School

by

Krista Stinson Cayer

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

Previous research has examined the effectiveness of placing parents on a variety of incentive programs which would increase their likeliness to participate in school related activities. That research suggested that establishing school as a reinforcing environment for parents was vital. Due to these findings, this study examined the effects of a token economy on parent involvement at a low-income elementary school. Teachers were trained in the data collection method, and parental behavior was observed on a daily, weekly and bi-weekly schedule. Measures of social validity were obtained through teacher and parent questionnaires.

The data from the research study suggested that the implementation of the token economy did increase the amount of parent participation, but only on a “micro” level. Parent involvement on a larger scale such as participation in after school activities such as PTA’s and other large scale school related activities were not affected.

Chapter One

Introduction

Parent involvement in schools has been defined as “any of a variety of activities that allow parents to participate in the educational process at home or in school, such as information exchange, decision sharing, volunteer services for schools, home tutoring/teaching, and child advocacy” (Chavkin & Williams, 1985, p.5). Because student achievement is a foundational goal of education and schooling, several studies have explored the relationships between parent involvement and student academic gains, whereas others have explored the factors influencing parent participation in children’s education. Stevenson and Baker (1987) administered a questionnaire to a sample of 179 parents, children, and teachers (grades kindergarten through 12th) to discern what variables had the greatest effect on parent involvement. The researchers asked the teachers to rate the children’s academic achievement and the extent to which children’s parents were involved at school. The data taken from the questionnaire revealed three major findings. First, more educated mothers tended to be more involved in school activities. Second, parents of younger children were more likely to involve themselves in school activities, as compared to parents of older children. Lastly, the data suggested that parents who were more involved in school activities were more likely to have children who were performing well in school.

Similarly, Griffith (1997) surveyed parents, principals and students (grades kindergarten through 5th) to determine the associations between quality of parent-teacher/student-teacher relationships and parent involvement. To measure these variables, items were borrowed from national and regional surveys of school environment and satisfaction, including the U.S. Department of Education's National Education Longitudinal Study's Student Questionnaire, the San Diego County Office of Education's Effective Schools Student Survey, and University of Washington's Effective Schools Project Student (ERIC ED239337; ERIC ED297459; U.S. Department of Education, 1988). Results indicated that both parental satisfaction and student achievement were related to parent-teacher interactions in the classroom. Specifically, parents who interacted more with their child's teacher had children with better attendance, behavior, and academic achievement. Their data also suggested schools that empowered parents (e.g., keeping parents informed of their child's educational progress and school activities) had students who gave higher ratings of academic instruction and student-teacher relationships.

Hewison and Tizard (1980) launched the Haringey Reading Project in London, England to determine the effectiveness of a program between teachers and parents set up to increase the amount of parent help given to 6-8-year-old children learning to read, and to evaluate the impact of that help as measured by London Reading Test. Six schools were involved in the research, which was designed to increase the amount of reading help given to the children by specifically asking the parents to listen to their children read. Two of the participating schools utilized a parent involvement project (parents were asked to listen to their children read on a

daily basis), two schools used an intervention that consisted of giving supplementary reading instruction from a qualified teacher, and two schools served as control groups. Follow-up research conducted three years after the study (Hewison, 1988) suggested that children whose parents intervened by listening to them read on a daily basis were reading better than children who had been involved in either the supplementary reading group or the control group. These results suggest a relationship between parent involvement and children's reading achievement, though the causes of increased achievement remain unclear.

In a related study, Zellman and Waterman (1998) investigated the relationship between parental involvement and students' IQ and standardized reading test scores. A sample of 193 2nd and 5th graders and their mothers participated in the study. The researchers defined parent involvement on two dimensions: school site involvement and homework involvement. The researchers asked the mothers and children to rate the frequency in which the parents involved themselves in school activities and with homework. Principals were interviewed and teachers completed questionnaires about school climate and individual students, including such variables as grades, intelligence and achievement test scores. Researchers found that an increased level of reported parent involvement with homework was associated with students who had higher IQ's, as measured by Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (KBIT). The data also suggested that children who had parents who engaged in classroom participation activities showed improved academic achievement as measured by standardized reading tests. Though these results suggest a relationship between parent involvement and I.Q and/or achievement,

causal relationships cannot be determined. Moreover, data are inherently suspect due to the self-report method of data collection.

Whereas some studies have sought to determine relationships between parent participation and student achievement, others have sought to examine parent involvement from a more ecological approach. Haynes, Comer and Hamilton-Lee (1989) examined the effects of a school improvement program in an economically depressed urban area. The participants included 306 randomly selected students in grades third through fifth from 14 elementary schools (7 control, 7 experimental), 98 teachers, and 276 parents. The goal of the program was to involve parents at all levels of school life. The researchers created three levels of parent involvement for the experimental group. The first level was involving the parents in evening events (i.e., carnivals, spring musicals) and voluntary monthly in-service training directed at improving their ability to relate positively with the school. The second level was the Parent Stipend Program, in which parents could work at the school a maximum of 15 hours each week to assist with such activities as library duties, playground supervision, office support, classroom support, and fundraising. The third level was the School Advisory Committee (SAC), which was comprised of parents, teachers, and other staff and met monthly to establish goals and objectives for the school. Parent participation was voluntary for all levels of involvement. The study incorporated 7 schools into the program on the first year, and then all schools on the second year. The 7 schools in the second phase served as the control group for the first year of the study. The dependent measures were questionnaires that assessed 1) teachers' perceptions of school climate (i.e., were the teachers pleased

with parent/teacher relationships?) 2) Children's perceptions of the climate of their classrooms (i.e., did the children enjoy going to school, and did they feel safe in their classroom?) 3) Parents' perceptions of their children's schools (i.e., did the parents feel there was a positive relationship between themselves and their child's teacher?). Teachers and parents were questioned using a survey developed by the Yale University Child Study Center to measure their perceptions of school climate and The Classroom Environment Scale was used to measure children's perceptions of their classroom climate.

Pretest data on the dependent measures were collected at the beginning of the school year and posttest data were collected at the end of the school year. The data revealed an overall positive change in the assessment of classroom climate from teachers, students, and parents in the experimental group, with no changes (or negative changes) observed in the control group. The researchers concluded that parental involvement is enhanced when parents are involved in the planning, organizing and decision making functions of a school.

In an effort to understand demographic variables that might be related to parent involvement, several researchers have focused on the relationship between socioeconomic status and parent participation in education. Griffith (1998) surveyed 122 public elementary school parents, students and principals to examine the association between socioeconomic standing and parent participation at school. The data resulting from the survey suggested that lower socioeconomic standing, as measured by having a child enrolled in a free or reduced lunch program, was associated with lower parent involvement in school activities, as measured by

parents' responses to questionnaire items dealing with participation in their children's education. Lower parent involvement was also observed among schools having greater percentages of Hispanic, African-American and Asian-American students.

Another examination of the relationship between socioeconomic status and parent involvement is found in Herman and Yeh (1983). Using data collected during an evaluation of California's Early Childhood Education Program, the researchers discovered that lower socioeconomic status was related to lower levels of parent participation and school awareness. This finding suggests that families living in economically depressed areas are less likely to engage in school-related parent participation activities. The data also suggest that these parents consider themselves less informed about their child's academic performance.

According to Epstein (1989), the principal research scientist and director of the Effective Middle Schools Program at the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools at the Johns Hopkins University, parents of lower socioeconomic status generally desire to participate in their children's education; however, they are frequently unable to do so because of employment and other obligations. The parent involvement activities schools offer are often at times when working parents or single parents are unable to attend. Also, school activities are frequently offered on the basis of needs identified by school personnel. Rarely are parents in socially depressed areas surveyed to find what they find important and on what specific areas of education they would like their child's school to focus. Epstein suggests that more attention should be placed on the type of involvement parents want, as

well as when they want it. To this end, he conducted a survey asking what specific techniques were best for involving parents in their children's educational program. Three thousand seven hundred 1st, 3rd and 5th grade teachers and their principals, 1200 parents, and 2100 students in 600 schools were included in the survey, which revealed five types of parent participation strategies that help increase the probability of parent participation. Table 1 (adapted from Epstein, 1989) presents the five types of parent involvement.

Consistent with Epstein's recommendations, Comer and Haynes (1991) also designed a program to address the problem of increasing parent involvement in low socioeconomic schools. A nine element School Development Program was housed in two schools, both located in low-income neighborhoods, with over 80% of the students on free or reduced lunch programs. The goal of the program was to increase parent involvement by forming groups that worked together instead of maintaining the traditional isolated roles of parents and teachers. The researchers hypothesized that involving parents at all levels of school life, as well as promoting parent/staff collaboration to establish academic and social goals, would increase the number of parents who chose to participate in their children's academic life.

There were three overriding mechanisms of the program. First, the School Planning and Management Team (comprised of peer elected parents and teacher/staff volunteers) was representative of all the adult stakeholders in the school. This unit oversaw critical management operations such as development and implementation of a comprehensive school plan that focused on both the school

Table 1

Examples of Practices to promote and outcomes from the five types of parent involvement.

Types	Practices	Examples	Outcomes
Parenting	Assist other families in establishing lifestyles that create and facilitate learning.	Teachers provide information to parents that will help them assist their child in homework. The information the parents receive is specific to their child's grade level.	The home becomes a place of learning. School awareness increases and attendance improves.
Communicating	Teachers create better ways to communicate to their families who speak multiple languages.	Teachers provide information in the families native language. Daily and weekly notes are sent Home stating the child's progress.	Parents increase their awareness of their child's progress. They are able to monitor their child's education.
Volunteering	Staff at school recruits Parent's find school parent volunteers.	PTA/PTO campaign set up to survey parental interests, ideas and availability.	Parents begin to find school reinforcing. An increase in parent/teacher interaction is noticed at school
Learning at home	Teachers provide ideas that increase parent/child interactions. Parents find	Parents are made aware of Weekly subjects being taught Homework is sent home to be signed and returned the next day.	Parents recognize that home is a place to learn. They feel more connected to the education process.
Representing other parents	Parents vote other parents to sit on voting committees.	Parents have a voice as to what policies will affect their child.	Parents feel more connected to the school.

climate and the academic program. Second, the Mental Health Team (staffed by volunteer teachers, volunteer mental health professionals and volunteer parents) addressed behavioral needs of students, including such issues as child development and relationships with classroom teachers and administrators. Third, the Parent Program (comprised solely of parent volunteers) focused primarily on soliciting parental support for student programs and follow through efforts necessary for the extensive parent involvement component of the school. The three levels of parent participation were 1) Level 1, which included parents elected by their peers to represent them on the School Planning and Management Team. These parents worked to develop activities in support of the comprehensive school plan; 2) Level 2, in which volunteer parents participated in day to day classroom and school activities; and 3) Level 3, in which parents attended general activities such as field day and holiday performances. The guidelines which drove the School Development Program were a 1)“no-fault problem solving approach; 2) consensus decision making based on child development principles and; 3) collaborative management” (p.273).

The data, as measured by anecdotal reports of parent attendance at school functions and hours spent volunteering at the school, suggested that the School Development Program increased parent involvement because the program allowed parents to participate in contextually fit roles. The organizational outline of the program allowed for parents to choose what role they felt best fit their lifestyle and what decisions they would like to have more control in making, while not feeling burdened by the traditional, inflexible school environments.

Based on the existing literature, it appears there are several key factors that are important in successful attempts to increase the participation of parents in their children's education. These include surveying parents to find out what they value as important in their child/children's education and using that feedback to create contextually fit roles for parents, increasing the interaction between parents, teachers, and administrative staff, and creating and maintaining communication between school and home. Recent literature has suggested stipend programs, volunteer programs and parent-teacher collaboration programs as viable means for increasing parent participation (e.g., Comer & Haynes, 1991; Haynes, Comer & Hamilton-Lee, 1989). Comer and Haynes also discuss the need for schools to be positive environments for parents, and to provide them with opportunities to hear good news about their children and the school. Put another way, schools must become conditioned reinforcers for parents. Unfortunately, many parents have had negative experiences with school, either through their own histories or the histories of their children. These histories may in turn produce avoidance behavior or behavioral deficits with regard to parent participation opportunities. Therefore, strategies targeted at attenuating deficits in parent participation must also focus on creating environments that are reinforcing for parents. One strategy that has proven particularly useful in producing positive behavior change and establishing reinforcing environments is the token economy.

Token economies have a rich history in the field of behavior analysis. The effectiveness of token economies has been demonstrated in a variety of populations and settings. According to Kazdin's (1972) seminal article, there are a variety of

benefits of using this type of system to produce positive behavior changes. Token economies link the target response to the back-up reinforcer, thus providing reinforcement for responses that might not otherwise be reinforced. They also allow reinforcement of the target response to occur at any time, rather than requiring a delay between the behavior and the delivery of the reinforcer. A token economy also provides for a more consistent and efficient method for delivery of reinforcement.

Perhaps one of the most prevalent settings for token economies has been the school classroom (e.g., Dalton, Rubino, & Hislop, 1973; Deitz & Repp, 1974; Kazdin & Bootzin, 1972; McLaughlin & Malaby, 1972;). However, the effectiveness of token economies in increasing behavior has not been limited to studies involving school children. Zohar and Fussfeld (1981) used a token economy system to increase the use of ear protectors in 180 factory workers. The factory workers were employed in the looming department where the noise level averaged 106dBA. Two factories were involved in the study. Factory 1 had the token economy implemented and Factory 2 was used as a control. Baseline data was collected at both sites for three months. During the intervention, the workers at Factory 1 had multiple opportunities during their shifts to earn tokens, and then exchange them for consumer products. At Factory 2, the workers knew the researchers were taking data as to whether or not they wore protective ear wear, however they were not placed on the token economy system. The results revealed that the use of protective wear increased from 35% at baseline to 90% during the token economy. The percentage of loom

employees continually wearing protective ear wear remained around 90% nine months after the token economy had been removed.

Fox, Hopkins, and Anger (1987) investigated the use of a token economy in which miners were given tokens for not having accidents or injuries for specified periods of time. The workers in two different mines served as participants in the study. During baseline, the yearly average number of days lost from work due to on the job injuries in the first mine was approximately eight times the national average. At the second mine, it was approximately three times the national average. At the time of intervention, workers at both mines were divided into hazard groups according to the number of lost time injuries reported during baseline. Workers were given a specified number of trading stamps at the end of each month if they had not suffered a lost time injury or compensation injury that required a physician's care during the month. In addition to the individual stamps, at the end of each month all workers managed by a common supervisor were given an additional specified number of trading stamps if all workers under that supervisor had avoided lost time or medically treated compensation injuries during the month. Results revealed substantial decreases in the number of days lost to injury in the mines. The terminal level of injuries was approximately 11% of the average baseline at Mine 1 and approximately 2% of the baseline level at Mine 2.

Given the previous success of token economies as a mechanism for producing positive behavior change and the importance of establishing school as a reinforcing environment for parents, the present study will seek to examine the effects of a token economy system on specific parent involvement behaviors at a

low-income school. Parents will be given multiple opportunities to participate in their child/children's education, potentially creating a life long change in the way they choose to involve themselves in their children's academic career.

Chapter Two

Methods

Participants and Setting

Participants were parents of children enrolled in a Tampa, Florida public elementary school. The study included eight classrooms, kindergarten through third grade. The researcher informed all participants of the nature of the study through a letter written in plain language that was sent home with all children in the school. An informed consent form was attached for the parents to sign if they wished to participate in the study (see Appendix A.) There was a seventy-two percent return rate of informed consent forms. All procedures were approved by the University of South Florida's Institutional Review Board and the Hillsborough County School System prior to the start of the study.

Dependent Variables and Data Collection

Data were collected on parent involvement by measuring the following behaviors: 1) signing and returning teacher-selected weekly notes from school by the next school day; 2) signing and returning teacher-selected daily notes from school by the next school day; 3) reading and signing a bi-weekly newsletter sent by the principal. All dependent measures were evaluated on a class-by-class basis (i.e., grade levels were not grouped together) using a multiple baseline design. Prior

to data collection, the researcher ensured that all children had been provided with folders which were used specifically for bringing items to and from school.

Signing and returning selected weekly notes from school by the next school day was defined as a parent obtaining the item(s) from the child's folder, signing the item(s), placing the item(s) back into the child's folder and returning (or having the child return) the folder to their child/children's teacher by the next school day. These included a homework help sheet (in Ms. Hank, Ms. Callie, Ms. Jay, Ms. Dee, and Ms. Knot's classes) and a weekly "WOW!" paper, which was a completed paper that had a sticker and the word "WOW!" printed at the top (see Appendix B). Teachers collecting weekly "WOW" data included Ms. Park, Ms. Lake, and Ms. Callie. Each item included for data collection had a clear notation that it was to be signed and returned to school. The teachers recorded the date the signed note was returned by each child on a recording sheet (see Appendix C). The recording sheets were kept in a separate folder in each teacher's room and were collected weekly by the researcher. Data were presented as a weekly percentage (i.e., number of items returned to school signed by the next school day divided by total number of items sent home for the week).

Signing and returning daily notes from school by the next school day was defined in the same manner as weekly notes, but data were recorded daily. Daily notes consisted of some type of daily planner in each classroom, which included such information as behavior notes, daily schedules, homework schedules, and classroom activities. Daily notes also consisted of a Nightly Reading Assignment Sheet which Ms. Park used in her class (see Appendix D). The teachers recorded

whether the daily note was signed and returned by each child on a recording sheet (see Appendix E). The recording sheets were kept in a separate folder in each teacher's room and were collected weekly by the researcher. Data for each classroom were presented as a daily percentage (i.e., number of items returned to school signed by the next school day divided by total number of items sent home for the day).

Reading and signing a bi-weekly newsletter sent by the principal was defined as parents obtaining the newsletter from their child's folder, signing the attached sign-off sheet of the newsletter, placing the letter back into their child/children's folder, and returning the folder to school within a three school day period. Data on this variable was collected by having teachers obtain the signed sign-off sheet from the child's folder and recording whether or not the parents' returned the sheet within the three-day period (see Appendix F). Data were collected on three occasions for each classroom and was presented as a percentage (i.e., number of newsletters returned divided by number of newsletters sent home). Although the newsletter was scheduled to go home every other week, actual publication of the letter varied between two weeks and four weeks.

Interobserver Agreement

The researcher collected the items returned by students in each class twice weekly across the course of the study to assess interobserver agreement between the teachers' records and the data collected by the researcher. The researcher conducted an independent count of the number of items returned within each dependent variable category (daily notes, weekly notes, newsletters), then

compared each teacher's record of items sent home and returned to that of the number recorded by the researcher. The researcher did not view the teacher's data prior to conducting an independent count of the items, but did use the teacher data sheet to calculate interobserver agreement after conducting the independent count. The number of agreements divided by the total number of agreements and disagreements multiplied by 100 were used as the interobserver agreement equation. The researcher checked interobserver reliability on Wednesday and Friday of each week for each dependent variable available during that week. One hundred percent of all dependent variables were scored for interobserver reliability. The mean IOA score was 87% (range, 83% to 100%).

Procedures

The token economy specified a point value to each dependent variable and parents earned points for engaging in behaviors specific to each dependent measure. Each week the participants had the opportunity to earn 100 points. The point values changed depending on what items the participants had the opportunity to sign that week (e.g. sometimes a daily note was worth 25 points, sometimes it was worth 50 points, depending on the number of other response opportunities for the week). Due to variability in parents' opportunities to return items across different weeks, it was not possible to inform parents ahead of time as to how many points could be earned for each signed item. However, parents did know that they had the opportunity to earn 100 points each week, regardless of the number of items their child's teacher sent home.

Participants initially were made aware of the opportunity to earn points through a note that went home with their child. The note explained the token economy system, including what behaviors would earn points, how many points could be earned for each behavior, and how points would be exchanged. A list of sample reinforcers was also included. Throughout the intervention, parents were informed of the number of points earned each week through a note that was sent home with their child each Friday (see Appendix G). Prior to sending the Friday notes, the researcher obtained all the data collected that week from their child/children's teacher and calculated the number of points earned to arrive at an accurate point value to record on the note. The note included a list of available reinforcers for the week, and allowed the parents to choose whether they would like to save their earned points or cash in their points for a reward of their choosing.

Back-up reinforcers included such items as gift certificates for local restaurants and stores, coupons for goods and service, and various tangible items. For example, donations were received from Publix, WalMart, The Tampa Bay Devil Rays, The Florida Aquarium, Gladstone's Chicken, Chick-Fil-A and Westshore Pizza. Points were also used to purchase raffle tickets for large, one-time reinforcers. All back up reinforcers were provided through community donations to increase the likelihood of program maintenance after the conclusion of data collection for the study.

Social Validity

Questionnaires were administered to the parents upon completion of the final phase of the study to assess perceptions of the token economy reinforcement

system. Parent intervention questions (see Appendix H) assessed whether or not they believed the token economy helped them increase their level of parent participation. Teacher questionnaires (see Appendix I) were also administered to assess the teacher's perception of the token economy and the effect it had on parent participation.

Chapter Three

Results

Figure 1 shows the percentage of daily notes returned across baseline and treatment conditions in four different classes. Two graphs in Figure 1 display data from Ms. Park's class, due to the fact that she sent home two different types of daily notes. The first graph shows data collected in Ms. Lake's first grade classroom. During the baseline phase, Ms. Lake's class's daily note return was relatively stable and averaged 40% (range, 28%-64%). During the token economy, the mean return percentage changed to 67% (range, 43%-79%). Data remained relatively stable, and the majority of data points fell outside of the baseline range.

The second and third graphs in Figure 1 show the results from Ms. Park's second grade classroom. The second graph shows results for return of the daily behavior note, whereas the third graph represents the percentage of parents who returned notes from a nightly reading program that was specific to her classroom. During baseline, Ms. Park's class's return of daily notes was somewhat variable and averaged 39% (range, 18%-62%). After the implementation of the token economy, data were more variable, but the average percentage of notes returned changed to 57% (range, 24%-82%). During baseline for nightly reading, parent participation appeared to be on a downtrend and averaged 50% (range, 25%-71%). During the token economy, data were variable, but mean nightly reading engagement changed

to 65% (range, 29%-76%). Toward the end of data collection, reading note return appeared again to be downtrending.

The fourth graph shows data for daily note return for Ms. Dee's third grade classroom. During the baseline phase, an average of 42% of home notes was returned and there was a great deal of variability in the data (range, 13%-75%). During the intervention phase, variability decreased, but the average return rate also decreased to 23% (range, .07%-29%).

The fifth graph in Figure 1 shows data collected in Ms. Knot's third grade classroom. During the baseline phase, Ms. Knot's class had a daily note return rate averaging 16% (range, 0%-32%). During baseline, there was somewhat less variability in the data, but overall return rates remained relatively unchanged (mean, 14%; range, 11%-19%).

Figure 2 shows the percentage of weekly notes returned across baseline and treatment conditions in 7 different classes. Two graphs in Figure 2 display data from Ms. Callie's class, due to the fact that she sent home two different types of weekly notes. The first graph in Figure 2 shows data collected in Ms. Hank's kindergarten classroom. During the baseline phase, Ms. Hank's class's weekly note return was relatively stable and averaged 42% (range, 32%-45%.) During the token economy, the mean return percentage changed to 46% (range, 36%-59%).

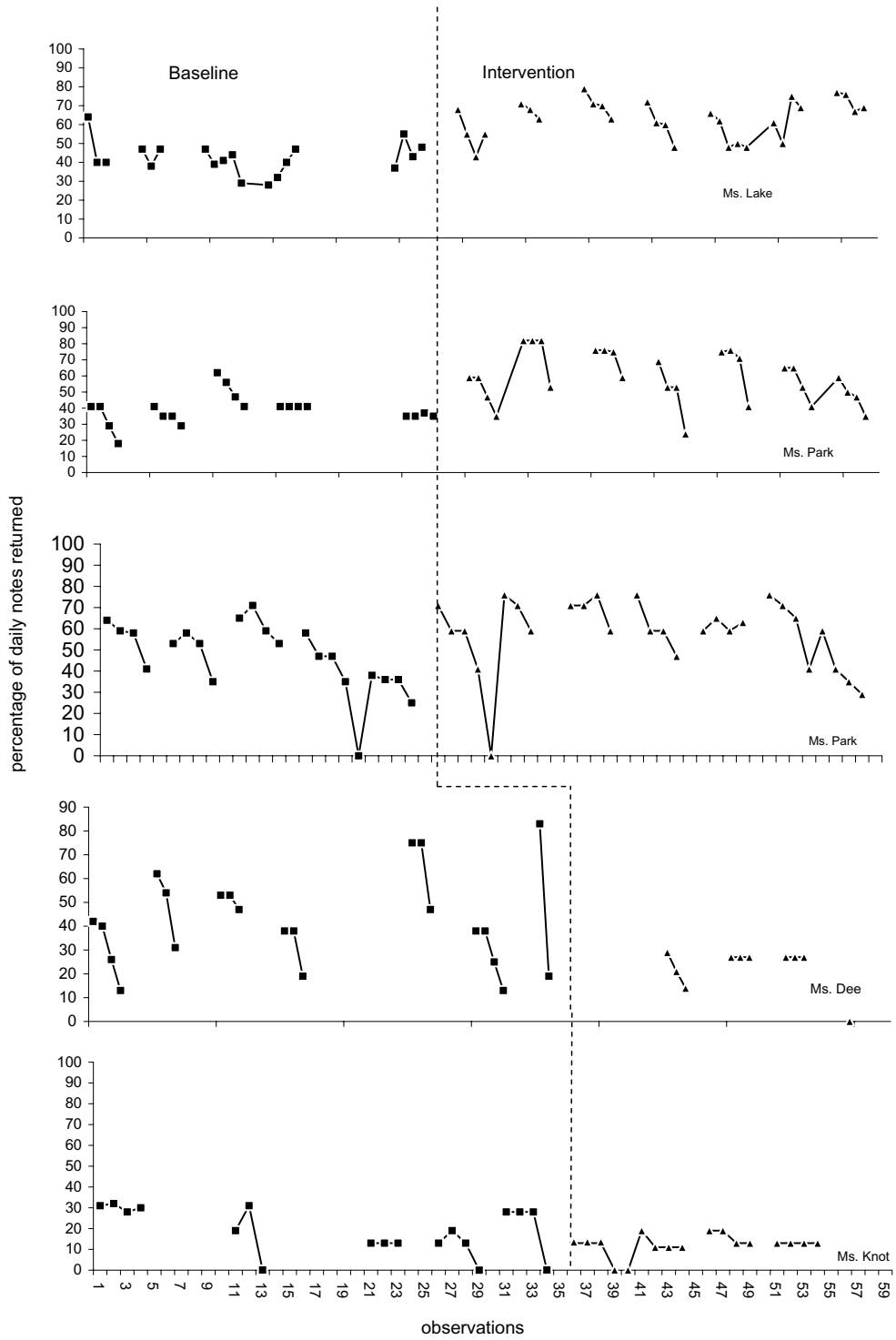


Figure 1: Percentage of daily notes returned across baseline and treatment.

The second graph in Figure 2 shows results for return of Ms. Park's first grade class's weekly behavior notes. During baseline, return of weekly notes averaged 13% (range .06%-24%). After the implementation of the token economy, data became very stable and the average percentage of notes returned increased to 24% (range, 24%-35%).

The third graph in Figure 2 shows data collected in Ms. Lake's first grade classroom. During the baseline phase, an average of 12% (range, .09%-25%) of weekly home notes was returned and data appeared to be trending downward. During the intervention phase, the average rate of return increased to 17% (range 11%-29%) although all data points fell within the baseline range.

The fourth and fifth graphs in Figure 2 show the results from Ms. Callie's second grade classroom. The fourth graph represents the percentage of parents who returned weekly homework help notes, whereas the fifth graph shows results for the return of weekly "WOW" papers. During baseline for homework help notes, parent participation appeared to be somewhat variable and averaged 29% (range 0%-37%). During the token economy, data continued to be variable but mean homework help engagement increased to 47% (range, 24%-53%). Towards the end of data collection, homework help return appeared again to be downtrending. During baseline, Ms. Callie's class's return of weekly "WOW!" papers averaged .09% (range .05%-11%) After the implementation of the token economy, data continued to be stable, and the average percentage of weekly "WOW!" papers increased to 15% (range, 11%-29%).

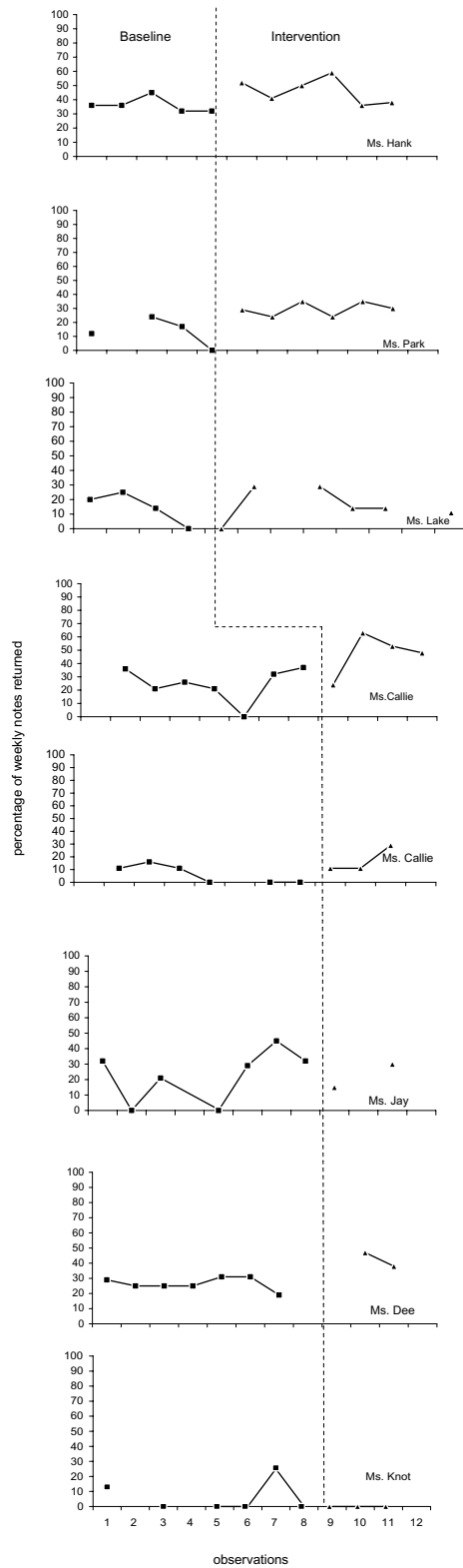


Figure 2: Percentage of weekly notes returned across baseline and treatment.

The sixth graph shows data for weekly note return for Ms. Jay's second grade classroom. During the baseline phase, variability was high with an average of 25% (range, 0%-45%). During the intervention phase, only two data points were collected, and both fell within the baseline range.

The seventh graph shows the percentage of weekly notes returned for Ms. Dee's class. During the baseline phase, an average of 21% (range 19%-31%) of weekly home notes were returned and the data were very stable. During baseline there were only two opportunities available to collect data, but the average rate of weekly home notes returned increased to 28%.

The eighth graph shows results for return of weekly home notes in Ms. Knot's class. The data is very stable at 0%, with the exception of one data point at 25%. After the implementation of the token economy the data remained unchanged and at 0% for the remainder of the study.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of bi-weekly school newsletters returned across baseline and treatment condition in seven different classes. Due to the limited opportunities for data collection on this variable, treatment effects are difficult to discern. The first graph shows data collected in Ms. Hank's kindergarten class. During the baseline phase the rate of return was 14%. During the token economy, the return rate was initially low but then increased to 41%.

The second graph shows results for return of the bi-weekly school newsletter in Ms. Lake's first grade classroom. During baseline the participants returned the bi-weekly newsletter at a rate of 39%. After the implementation of the token economy, return rates initially dropped but then increased to 76%.

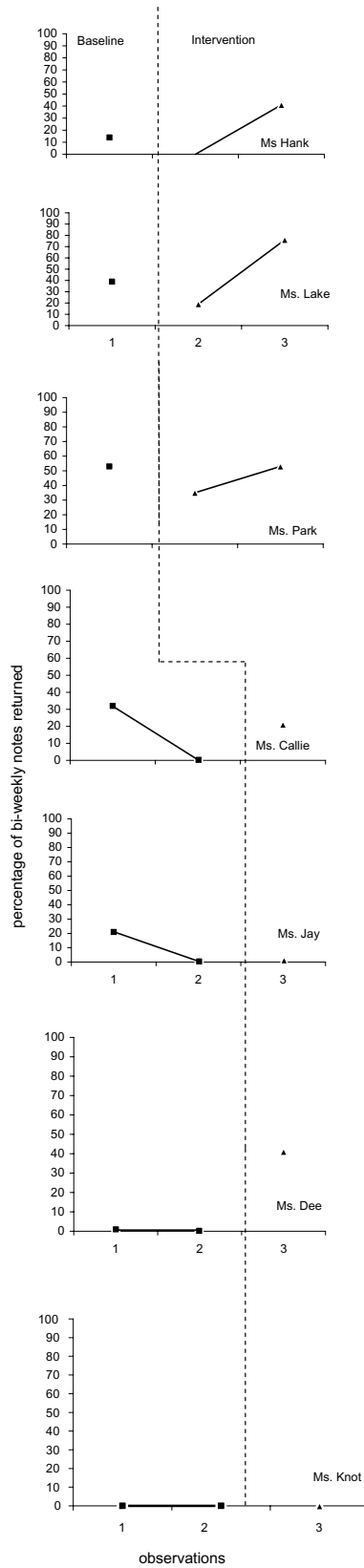


Figure 3: Percentage of bi-weekly newsletters returned across baseline and treatment.

The third graph shows data collected in Ms. Park's first grade classroom. During baseline the parents returned the bi-weekly newsletters at a rate of 53%. During the token economy the return rate decreased, with data points falling at 35% and 53%.

The fourth graph reports results from Ms. Callie's second grade classroom. During baseline Ms. Callie's class's had return rates of 0% and 32%. During the token economy, the return rate fell in the middle of those points at 21%.

The fifth graph shows Ms. Jay's second grade classroom. During baseline Ms. Jay's class's averaged an 11% rate of return (range 0%-21%). After the implementation of the token economy Ms. Jay's class's rate of return lowers to 0%.

The sixth graph reports data from Ms. Dee's third grade classes. Ms. Dee's average rate of returns was .06% during baseline. During the token economy, the rate of return increased to 41%.

The seventh graph shows Ms. Knot's third grade class return of bi-weekly school newsletters. During baseline and during the token economy the rate of return was 0%.

Table 2 shows results from teachers responding to the social validity questionnaire. Results from the teachers were split down the middle. Fifty percent of the teachers either strongly agreed or agreed that the program was a success, whereas the other half responded with neither agree nor disagree. Three of the six teachers who responded agreed the program benefited them, two neither agreed nor disagreed and one strongly disagreed that the program was a benefit to them as a teacher. Three of the six teachers who responded felt the data collection was

simple, one neither agreed nor disagreed, one disagreed and one strongly disagreed. Furthermore, five of the six teachers believe the program should run next year, whereas one responded neither agree nor disagree.

Table 3 shows results from parents responding to the social validity questionnaire. Seventy-seven percent of the parents who participated in the study returned the social validity questionnaire. Fifty seven percent of the parents either agreed or strongly agreed the program was a good idea. Thirty percent of the participants reported they were more aware of what there child was bringing home, and they were happy with the reinforcers. Moreover, 45% of the participants strongly agreed they would participate in this study next year.

Table 2

Number of Teachers responding to Items on Social Validity Questionnaire

Item	I strongly agree	I agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Program was a success	1	2	3		
2. It benefited me as a teacher	1	3	2		1
3. Improved parents knowledge	2	3	2		
4. Increased returned items	2	2	1	1	
5. Reinforcers were appropriate	2	3	2		1
6. Data collection was simple	2	1	1	1	1
7. Program should run next year	1	4	1		

Table 3

Number of Parents Responding to Items on Social Validity Questionnaire

Item	I strongly agree	I agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I think the program was a good idea	22	10	1	0	0
2. It helped me to check my child's folder	10	9	6	4	4
3. I had more chances to talk with the school	8	11	7	7	0
4. I was more aware of how my child was doing	9	11	4	8	1
5. I liked the thank-you gifts	10	20	3	0	0
6. I would participate next year	14	11	7	1	0

Chapter 4

Discussion

The goal of this study was to increase parent participation in a low income elementary school by allowing parents to become involved in a token economy system. Donations from local community businesses, organizations, and individuals were obtained to provide reinforcement for parents who chose to participate in the study. Whenever possible, back-up reinforcers were selected to increase opportunities for interactions between parents and children (e.g., baseball game tickets, aquarium passes, meal coupons). However, some donations were not as likely to prompt increased parent/child interactions (e.g., gift certificates from department stores). The data from the study suggested that the program was a success in some classrooms, although changes within classrooms with regard to different dependent variables were sometimes variable.

In general, parents in the kindergarten and first grade classrooms responded to the program at a higher rate than the parents in the second and third grade classrooms. One reason for the difference between classrooms was that teachers in the kindergarten and first grade classrooms were more cooperative in adhering to the protocol of the study than were the teachers in the second and third grade classrooms. The researcher asked the participating teachers to distribute the daily and weekly information to the students, collect the data and record the information

onto classroom specific data sheets, and remind the students of the reinforcers their parents could earn. Training had been provided by the researcher so there was no confusion as to how the procedures were to be implemented and how data were to be recorded. However, in both third grade classrooms it was not uncommon to have two weeks pass without teachers giving parents the opportunity to sign and return daily and weekly notes. When the teachers finally did distribute the daily and weekly materials, it seemed the parents were less interested in participating. After multiple conferences with the 3rd grade teachers, their behavior did not change and the parent participation data continued to fall within baseline measures.

Although changes in parent responding were evident in some of the classrooms (especially kindergarten and first grade), the changes were frequently variable and not of a great magnitude. Analyses of the data also revealed that most of the increases in parent responses were attributable to the increased return rate of parents of children with relatively good behavior. Parents of children that regularly received negative comments from the teacher did not appear as inclined to begin returning school notes during the token economy. Interestingly, however, there did not appear to be vast differences in the overall percentages of parents who participated minimally and typically received negative notes about their children, and the low-participation parents who generally received positive notes. For example, of the parent who chose not to participate in Ms. Lake's class, about 10% of those parents received negative comments on a daily basis, whereas 15% of the low-participation parents received positive feedback. This finding suggest that while parents with positive notes did appear to be more inclined to return those notes, note

content did not guarantee a good return rate from parents. Unfortunately, offering additional incentives for participation also did not appear to guarantee increases in parent involvement.

Originally, this study was designed to include data on the percentage of parents who participated in school meetings. Prior to the beginning of the study, the principal noted that whereas having parents attend one-to-one conferences with the teachers was not problematic, there did seem to be difficulties with getting parents to attend PTA meetings, other types of parent/school meetings, and student events (plays, musicals, etc.). During the study there was one Spring Time Musical, which was held in the evening. Thirty-one percent of the parents attended and received extra “points” for attending the meeting. Unfortunately, the monthly parent/school meetings that were supposed to be scheduled never were, so there were no other opportunities for parents to attend these meetings or for data to be collected. PTA meetings were scheduled more consistently (once per month) and were reliably attend by the same six parents and the principal. Despite opportunities to earn points for PTA attendance, no additional parents ever attended. This might have been attributable to the scheduling of the meeting (7:00 am), which could have presented problems for some parents in terms of logistically figuring out how to get their children off to school, get themselves ready for work, and still attend a PTA meeting

Clearly, there are many areas in this program that can be altered which will increase the likelihood of a higher percentage of parent participation across all dependent variables and all classrooms. One shortcoming of this study was that no

attempt was made to involve teachers or parents in the design or implementation of the token system. Seeking greater input on the development of the program from teachers and parents, especially with regard to the types of information from school that they would find useful to send/receive, might improve the acceptability of the procedures and ultimately result in a greater “investment” in the success of the program. Another change in future programs might be to have interested parents help obtain back-up reinforcers. If parents initiated the recruitment of reinforcers, they may feel more involved in the construction and maintenance of the program.

Another improvement in this program concerns the issue of timing. During the second implementation of the intervention (i.e., in the second and third grade classrooms), there were only four weeks of school remaining. It appeared that the motivation for teachers to maintain the program was not as high as those who were exposed to the intervention earlier in the school year. Although the researcher intermittently delivered edible items (candy, donuts, etc.), thank you notes, and verbal praise to participating teachers, it was evident that the teachers began losing interest in the study before as the end of the school year approached. One hypothesis for this occurrence might be the changing roles the second and third grade teachers played during the end of the school year. The formality of the teaching had lessened and the majority of the time spent in school, especially the last two weeks, was spent on activities that fell outside the academic arena (art projects, excessive free time for students). The teachers were inundated with paperwork and it seemed clear that the teachers were less interested in receiving feedback from parents in comparison to the teachers who received the intervention

earlier in the school year. In the future, the school should probably attempt to begin this type of program at the beginning of the year when parent participation is likely to be at its highest. One idea is to present the program as a “standard operating procedure” within the school. Therefore the program would not have the stigma of being a “new” program and might gain the insurance of being an annual parent participation program.

One other issue that became problematic during the study was that the parents who were already active did not see the relevance in reinforcing non-active parents for behaviors they “ought” to be engaging in. This was evidenced by notes the researcher received by parents who were already actively involved with the school. Although only two of these notes were sent to the researcher, they most definitely communicated disapproval of the procedures used in the study. One strategy for avoiding this problem in the future would be to provide a brief training to explain to active parents the reasoning behind using “contrived” reinforcement to increase parent involvement. This could possibly create a better understanding for those who found the idea of rewarding non-active parents unacceptable, and create a more helpful atmosphere between the active and the non-active parents.

Another solution might be to allow the active parents help form classroom parent teams, which would include traditionally non-active parents. These teams might create more opportunities for parents to engage in school related activities on a larger scale. Establishing better school based relationships among all active parents and non-active parents could increase the network of available resources. Non-active parents, who previously had problems getting to the school for programs

due to transportation or day care, potentially would have more options available to them through the network of active parents. Also, making some reinforcers team-based, instead of based on the individual, may be more appropriate and also lessen the amount of animosity found between the active and the non-active parents.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Informed Consent

Informed Consent for an Adult

University of South Florida

Information for people who are being asked to take part in a research study

IRB Study # 101013

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. For example, we want to learn more about parent involvement. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study.

Title of research study: Increasing Parent Participation Through the Use of a Token Economy

Person in charge of study: Krista Stinson Cayer

Where the study will be done: The USF Charter School

Should you take part in this study?

This form tells you about this research study. You can decide if you want to take part in it. You do not have to take part. Reading this form can help you decide. If you have any questions, ask the person in charge of the study or study staff as you go along.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to find out if rewarding parents for participating in school related activities will cause an increase in parent participation.

Why are you being asked to take part?

We are asking you to take part in this study because you are a parent of a child or children at the USF Charter School.

How long will it take to participate in this study?

Participating in this study will take a maximum of three hours per week for the remainder of the school year.

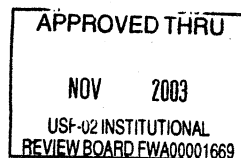
What will happen during this study?

During the study we will ask you to help your child with their homework, read notes that are sent home by the teacher, read a newsletter sent home by the principal and attend monthly parent meetings. We will take attendance at the parent meetings and record if you are there or if you chose not to attend. If you decide to participate in the program, you will earn points for each of these parent participation activities.

Here is what you will need to do during this study

During the study we will ask you to sign certain pieces of paper that come home with your child (teacher notes, newsletters, homework packets), we will also ask you to attend one monthly parent meeting. Your signature on these pieces of paper means that you did that specific activity. For example, if you help your child with their homework, then we would ask you to sign the homework sheet and send it back with your child the very next school day. If you do not send the items back the very next school day, you will not receive points for that activity.

IRB Number: 101013



Page 1 of 3

Appendix A: (Continued)

Will you be paid for taking part in this study?

We will not pay you for the time you volunteer in this study. However, if you decide to participate you will then have a chance to trade points earned in for prizes.

What will it cost you to take part in this study?

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

What are the potential benefits if you take part in this study?

That is why we are doing this research study. This study should help us learn whether the reward system will help increase parent participation

The potential benefits to you are:

- You will be able to earn weekly prizes for goods and services in the community.
- You might be more aware of what is happening at your child's school.
- Participating in this project might help your child do better at school.

What are the risks if you take part in this study?

There are no anticipated risks of participating in this study.

What will we do to keep your study records from being seen by others?

Your privacy and research records will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. Authorized research personnel, employees of the Department of Health and Human Services and the USF Institutional Review Board may inspect the records from this research project.

We may publish what we find out from this study. If we do, we will not use your name or anything else that would let people know who you are.

What happens if you decide not to take part in this study?

If you decide not to take part in this study you will not be in trouble or lose any rights you normally have. In addition, your decision to participate or not to participate will in no way affect your child's status as a student nor his/her grades.

What if you join the study and then later decide you want to stop?

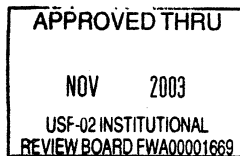
If you decide you want to stop taking part in the study, tell the study staff as soon as you can.

You can get the answers to your questions.

If you have any questions about this study, call Krista Stinson Cayer at 727-644-5762.

If you have questions about your rights as a person who is taking part in a study, call USF Research Compliance at (813) 974-5638.

IRB Number: 101013



Page 2 of 3

Appendix A: (Continued)

Signatures for Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

It's up to you. You can decide if you want to take part in this study.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that this is research. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

Date

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

Date

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully communicated to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.

The person who is giving consent to take part in this study

- Understands the language that is used.
- Reads well enough to understand this form. Or is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her.
- Does not have any problems that could make it hard to understand what it means to take part in this study.
- Is not taking drugs that make it hard to understand what is being explained.

To the best of my knowledge, when this person signs this form, he or she understands:

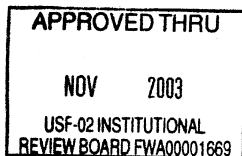
- What the study is about.
- What needs to be done.
- What the potential benefits might be.
- What the known risks might be.
- That taking part in the study is voluntary.

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

IRB Number: 101013



Page 3 of 3

Appendix B: Parent Homework Help Sheet

Week of ____ - ____

Homework Help Sheet

Dear Parents,

Please put your child's name, the date, time started, time finished and the subject you helped your child study this week. Don't forget to fill out completely and sign at the end!

Thanks!

Child's Name: _____

	Date	Start Time	End Time	Subject
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				

Parent Signature: _____

Appendix C: Teacher Weekly Note Recording Sheet

<u>Teacher:</u> Hank	<u>Week of</u> -	M	F
Grade: K			
Students:			
	Homework help sheets		
	Homework help sheets		
	Homework help sheets		
	Homework help sheets		
	Homework help sheets		
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	Homework help sheets		

Place a √ in the Monday column if a homework help sheet was given to the student to take home.
Place a √ in the Friday column if the homework sheet was returned properly filled out an initialed by the parent/guardian.

Thanks!

Appendix D: Parent Nightly Reading Assignment Sheet

Nightly Rigby Reading Parent Sign Off Sheet

Dear Parents,

Please tell us when and what you read about with your child tonight.

Student's name _____

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
What did you read about?	What did you read about?	What did you read about?	What did you read about?
Parent's signature	Parent's signature	Parent's signature	Parent's signature

Appendix E: Teacher Daily Note Recording Sheet

Daily Behavior Charts

Goal: Return Behavior Charts by the very next day.

Teacher: Park	Week of ___ - ___	+/-/n	M	T	W	R	F
Grade: 1							
Students:							
	Behavior Charts						
	Behavior Charts						
	Behavior Charts						
	Behavior Charts						
	Behavior Charts						
	Behavior Charts						
	Behavior Charts						
	Behavior Charts						
	Behavior Charts						
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	Behavior Charts						
	Behavior Charts						
	Behavior Charts						
	Behavior Charts						
	Behavior Charts						

In the column under +/-/n, please indicate what type of behavioral information was sent home. If the information was positive please place a + sign, if it was negative use a – sign, if it was neutral use the letter n.

Under the Monday column, please use an √ if a behavior chart was sent home. In the following columns T, W, R, F, please place an √ if the behavior charts were returned *with a signature*.

Appendix F: Teacher Bi-Weekly Newsletter Recording Sheet

Bi-Weekly Newsletter

Goal: Signed and returned within three school days.

Teacher: Hank	Week of __ - __	Date sent	Date returned with signature
Grade: K			
Students:			
	Bi-Weekly Newsletter		
	Bi-Weekly Newsletter		
	Bi-Weekly Newsletter		
	Bi-Weekly Newsletter		
	Bi-Weekly Newsletter		
	Bi-Weekly Newsletter		
	Bi-Weekly Newsletter		
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	Bi-Weekly Newsletter		

Mrs. Kelly would like to keep data on the school’s bi-weekly newsletter. Please document the date the newsletter was sent home and the date the newsletter was returned *SIGNED* by the parent/guardian.

Appendix G: Parent Reward Letter

Dear Parent of _____,

This week you had the opportunity to earn “thank you points” for helping to improve communication between parents and the school.

Weekly points In Mrs. Park’s class are earned by:

1. Signing and returning your student’s daily planner.
You signed and returned ____/4 daily planners at 15 points each: ____ points

2. Completely filling out and signing the Nightly Reading Sheet.
You completely filled out ____/1 Nightly Reading Sheet at 20 points each: ____ points

3. Signing and returning weekly “WOW!” papers.
You signed and returned ____/1 Weekly WOW paper at 20 points each: ____ points

TOTAL THANK YOU POINTS ____/100

Below is a list of the thank you gifts available this week. If you have points left over, they will be saved and added to next week’s total (you can also save all your points, if you’d like – just check the box below). If you don’t have enough points to earn a gift this week, your points will automatically be saved and added to next week’s total.

Item	Cost	Quantity	Points Used
WestShore Pizza buy -one -get -one \$3.00 off	20 points each		
Gladstone’s Chicken buy-one-dinner-get-one-free coupons	20 points each		
Raffle ticket for a \$25 Publix Gift Certificate (drawing on 5/22/03)	30 points each		
Free pass for skating at Skate Factory on Nebraska Avenue	50 points each		
Raffle ticket for 2 tickets to a Tampa Bay Devil Rays Baseball game (5/22/03)	100 points		
Raffle ticket for a Hewlett Packard donated computer (5/22/03)	150 points each		
→		Total points used	

Please save all my points and add them to next week’s total.

REMEMBER: In order to get your thank you gifts or save your points, this form must be returned to school on **MONDAY**.

Thanks for all you do to help make our school great!

Appendix H: Parent Social Validity Questionnaire

Parent Feedback Questionnaire

Thank you for being a part of our parent participation program! This was the program that allowed you to earn points for returning school note and/or attending school meetings. We'd like to get your feedback so that we can make improvements for next year. Please circle your answer to the following questions, and then return the form in your child's folder.

1. I think allowing parents to earn thank you points for returning items to school was a good idea.

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. The parent participation program helped me remember to check my child's folder for items that had been sent home.

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. I felt like I had more opportunities to communicate with the school as a result of the parent participation program.

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. I felt like I had a better idea of how my child was doing in school as a result of the parent participation program.

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I liked the thank you gifts I earned.

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. If this program was offered next year, I'd be interested in doing it again.

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Appendix I: Teacher Social Validity Questionnaire

Name (OPTIONAL): _____

Below is a list of questions to assess your opinions about the parent participation program. Please circle the number that best represents your response. When you're done, you may give the form to Frieda or put it in my mailbox. Thanks very much for your help!

Rating 1 means 'I strongly agree with this statement.'

Rating 2 means: "I agree with this statement."

Rating 3 means: "I neither agree or disagree with this statement."

Rating 4 means: "I disagree with this statement."

Rating 5 means: "I strongly disagree with this statement."

1. I feel like the program was a success. 1 2 3 4 5
2. I think the program benefited me as a teacher. 1 2 3 4 5
4. I think the program helped improve parents' knowledge about how their children were doing in school. 1 2 3 4 5
5. I think the items used as thank you gifts for parents were appropriate. 1 2 3 4 5
6. I felt like the data collection was simple. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I think our school should continue this program next year. 1 2 3 4 5