

PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS AND THE COUNSELOR ROLE IN KINDERGARTEN
TRANSITION PRACTICES

by

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B.A., Hastings College, 2002
M.S., Kansas State University, 2007

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Department of Special Education, Counseling and Student Affairs
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Abstract

Successful transition practices are essential in moving students forward into new facets of learning and life. Noteworthy is the transition into kindergarten, as students experience a new environment, with new academic, social, and behavioral expectations. Research has reviewed teacher and student perceptions on this topic, but has traditionally overlooked the parent stakeholder. Specifically assessing kindergarten transition from parents' vantage point provides a varied and necessary perspective that is often underutilized in effective school transitioning programs. Therefore, this study surveyed parents of children transitioning into kindergarten to identify their experiences and involvement in transition programming. Specifically to: (a) assess the concerns of parent stakeholders upon transitioning their children into formal schools (b) assess the perceptions of parent stakeholders in regards to their children's transition into kindergarten, (c) assess the areas in which parent participants would like more information about the transition process, and (d) explore environmental variables and demographics that may impact student transitional success.

The study utilized a retrospective pretest survey design to examine the experiences and perceptions of parents whose children were enrolled in full-day kindergarten in two school districts of comparable size in Northeast Kansas. A sample size of 91 participants was generated, as a parent or guardian of every student enrolled in kindergarten for the 2010-2011 school year in the surveyed schools was selected and solicited as participants for this retrospective pretest study. The final study population included 68 participants ($n = 68$) amongst the two respective schools, for an overall response rate of 74.7%.

Survey mean results indicated that no particular item in academic, behavioral, or social domains were considered a great concern for parents transitioning their child into kindergarten. However, items that received the highest rating for concern prior to kindergarten were in the areas of academic success in comparison to peers, and adjusting to new routines and surroundings. Parents also rated adjusting to new routines and surroundings as the area with the least amount of transitional success. Seventy-three percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed to feeling engaged in the transitional process. Also, a significant difference in parents'

perceived need for both social and behavioral support emerged between first and second born children as they transition into formal schooling indicating parents of firstborn would like more information and support. Finally, results also showed that significance emerged between parents' desire for counselor services and their concern as to the child's level of behavioral success upon entering kindergarten.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the betterment of transitional practices for incoming kindergartners and their families. Further, I dedicate this dissertation to the many hard working elementary school counselors who are providing quality work every day in ensuring support and services for our youngest and most fragile of students.

Above all, I dedicate this work to my children, Luke and Lauren. They have granted me the most important role and best possible gift of being “mom”. I hope that through this trying experience I have modeled for each of them the importance of having a dream and pursuing it. My hope is that one day they will recognize that with the love and encouragement of those around them that they, too, are capable of much more than they ever thought possible.

Preface

During my master's program in school counseling, continual emphasis was placed on two main ideas: successful transitioning practices (to middle school, high school, and beyond) and preventive comprehensive programming. In reviewing these two main concepts as well as holding my own experiences and perspectives from an elementary teacher's role, I felt that a large piece of this conversation was missing. While time and attention is placed on transitions and comprehensive models that are preventive in nature, I felt that the largest and most influential transitional periods of introducing students and families into formal schooling was being overlooked. Further, the opportunities to establish strong relationships amongst stakeholders, to learn about expectations of students, teachers, parents, and communities; to provide a cohesive, nurturing learning environment for students to allow for greater academic and socio-emotional success in schools.

Therefore, my focus for this research originates from the conversations I had with parents who have felt disenfranchised by the school, who felt "left in the dark" about expectations of them and their child. This research also derives from the challenges classroom teachers experience in working with troubled students, and the isolation that teachers, schools, and parents feel in working to provide what is best for students.

Most importantly, this research stems from the importance of providing each student a strong transition and start into formal schooling, where teachers, parents, and communities are in communication with one another and elementary school counselors are forging and fostering successful beginnings for students, families, and teachers alike. As McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, and Wildenger (2007) stated, "the time is ripe to develop strong, collaborative family-school partnerships, both in early education and during the primary grades, to support kindergarten transition and the school years to come" (p. 87).

CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

Background

The literature is replete with discussion on the importance of smooth transitions (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). “Transitions are key times where children face new and challenging tasks as they move from familiar to unknown and more complex surroundings” (Augst & Akos, 2009, p. 3). Research suggests that smooth transitions allow for greater success and opportunity in a new environment (LoCasale-Crouch, et al., 2008; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), and can strengthen academic, behavioral, and emotional dispositions (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Sink & Spencer, 2007). Therefore, successful transition practices are essential in moving students forward into new facets of learning and life.

Several significant transitions occur during formal schooling experience, including: transition to kindergarten, middle school, high school, and beyond the K-12 realm. Noteworthy is the transition into kindergarten, as kindergarten constitutes children’s first experience with formal schooling. Pianta (2001) asserted that successful entry into elementary school requires more than ensuring that children have the requisite competencies to carry them into a kindergarten setting (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Pianta, 2001), but rather the relationships and linkages between systems, more specifically, the connections between schools and families (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Thus, the transition into kindergarten also symbolizes the beginning of a new relationship between families and schools (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005).

Current literature highlights the importance of the kindergarten transition (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001) and effective transition practices and programs (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). However, the role and viewpoint of parents participating in this process is often overlooked (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke, & Higgins, 2001). Of the limited literature on parent perceptions of family involvement (Baker, 1997; McIntyre et al., 2007), the research purports that the typical transition for children entering kindergarten consists of contact that is made after the child has transitioned into the school, and the efforts are deemed “too little, too late, and too impersonal” (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008, p. 126; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Consequently, purposeful

coordination between pre-kindergarten and the elementary setting has recently drawn attention as an underutilized avenue (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Consideration as to how kindergarten transition influences children's, and consequently, parents' perceptions and attitudes about school is paramount, for the initial school transition "lays the groundwork" (Brannon, 2005) for future school experiences and learning.

Therefore, this dissertation is a descriptive study of parent perceptions as they transition their student into kindergarten. This study examines parents' concerns prior to, view of children's success upon transition, and parent recommendations for success of future kindergarten students as they transition into more formalized education. The findings from this study seek to provide elementary school counselors feedback into the wants and needs of parents of incoming kindergarten students as well as provide insight of a stakeholder's perspective to further enhance programs and services provided. Chapter one presents the overview of the issues, specifies the problem, describes the research's significance, discusses foreseeable limitations of the study, and closes with definitions of some key terms.

Statement of the Problem

Students experience significant transitions of various types throughout their educational journey, and school counselors have often been instrumental in helping them successfully make those transitions (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007). However, often overlooked in both school counseling research and practice as a critical time in children's elementary school experience is the transition into kindergarten (Augst & Akos, 2009), as this transition provides a first look at the school environment and can set the trajectory for later school success (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). This transitional experience presents an opportunity to establish nurturing, meaningful relations amongst family, students, and schools that can be continued throughout the children's schooling experiences. As home-school relations are emphasized in research (Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Piotrkowski, & Parker, 1999; Baker & Soden, 1998; Epstein, 1985) and legislation (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994; No Child Left Behind, 2001), current practices fall short at assessing parent perceptions of practice, as few studies provide insight as to the transitional experiences from the perspective of the family (Baker, 1997; McIntyre et al., 2007; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke & Higgins, 2001). Thus, a valuable stakeholder is

overlooked in the research and implementation of successful transition. Meeting the variety of needs of kindergartners upon entry into formal schooling should be of substantial consideration. To meet this goal, the focus of this study has been to gather perceptions of needs and wants of parent stakeholders so that counseling and transition practices that support incoming kindergartners can be enhanced.

Purpose of the Study

Increasingly, it is clear that in order to serve all students effectively, school counselors must think proactively and systemically about what actions to take during key times (Dimmit & Carey, 2007), such as kindergarten transition. Much of school counseling literature focuses on a strengths-based approach; these strengths-based relationships capitalize on the strengths found in schools, families, and communities to build caring and positive relationships, foster academic success, and empower parents and children (Bryan & Henry, 2008). “Good counseling and education recognize and build strengths rather than focus on problem reduction and correction,” (Bryan & Henry, 2008, p. 149). Thus, the purpose of this descriptive quantitative study is to review kindergarten parent stakeholders’ perceptions regarding the kindergarten transition.

This study surveyed parents of children transitioning to kindergarten to identify their experiences and involvement in transition programming. Specifically to: (a) assess the concerns of parent stakeholders upon transitioning their children into formal schools (b) assess the perceptions of parent stakeholders in regards to their children’s transition into kindergarten, (c) assess the areas in which parent participants would like more information about the transition process and (d) explore environmental variables and demographics that may impact student transitional success.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed by this study include:

1. Prior to kindergarten, to what extent do parents of kindergartners rate their level of concern in regards to their children’s academic, behavioral, and social development as it pertains to kindergarten transition?
2. After three months of schooling, what are kindergarten parents’ perceptions of their child’s success in meeting kindergarten academic, social and behavioral expectations?

3. How do parents of kindergartners rate the engagement they felt with the school in the transitional experience for their child?
4. Are there significant differences in the level of concern for the child based on a desire for counselor services?
5. Is there a significant difference between parents of a first, second, third, and fourth born child in their perceived need for transition services?
6. Does parent perception of engagement in the kindergarten transition correlate with perceived student level of success?

Significance of Study

As a result of the changing demographics of American society and the premium now placed on educational opportunities, “school failure is now more costly than ever” (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994, p. 107). “Only 13% of schools nationwide reported having formal policy related to kindergarten transition,” (LaParo, Pianta & Cox, 2000, p. 16). While most agree that transition practices are important, or that parent involvement is a requisite for children’s school success (Epstein, 1985; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005), there is little agreement as to what constitutes effective parent involvement (Baker, 1997). Therefore, without a unified paradigm for best practice, not surprisingly there are limited opportunities for parents to share their unique and valuable perspectives as to what would make for stronger home-school partnerships (Baker, 1997). Reviewing kindergarten transition through parents’ vantage point provides a varied and necessary perspective that is often underutilized in home-school relations and effective school transitioning programs

Results from this study provide meaningful information regarding current practices, perceptions, and concerns of kindergarten parents. Examination of data provides school counselors valuable insight into parent feelings and perspectives about ways and means of transition. Parents’ perceived needs and a current sense of what is or is not working provide school counselors beneficial feedback to create and implement enhanced programming to better meet an overlooked demographic. Further, the findings could provide counselor educators in the immediate area a sense of current needs of pre-service counselors who will be involved in transitioning students and families into kindergarten.

Limitations of Study

Limitations to this study include (a) availability of elementary public school counselors and corresponding programs to facilitate such a study and therefore (b) the ability to generalize the findings into larger areas and scenarios is compromised. Currently, local elementary school counseling programs are inconsistent. While some school districts employ a full-time counselor at the elementary level, others only offer a part-time position, or a “shared” or “traveling” counselor who travels between various buildings. Still, others do not employ an elementary school counselor all together, while some school districts elect to employ a social worker at the elementary level in lieu of a school counselor. Thus, the inconsistency among local school districts compromises the role, function, and understanding of the elementary school counselor role. In turn, the absence of full-time elementary school counselors limits the availability of comprehensive Pre-K through 12 counseling programs and diminishes a broad rich look at current practices in the Midwest area being assessed.

Another limitation of the study is based on the assumption that the family member participating in the survey is the family member who is best prepared to respond to the questionnaire. This assumption cannot be proven. Finally, since much of the survey is based upon the participants’ own perceptions, it important to note that some level of bias may be found within the results.

Definitions of Terms

Comprehensive School Counseling Program: “A comprehensive school counseling program strives to help all students pre-K through 12th grade achieve success in school through preventive education contained in guidance curricula, counseling, student planning, and consultation and systems support” (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007, p. 227).

Kindergarten Transition: Kindergarten transition refers to the “process used to provide continuity between a preschool or home and kindergarten program. Transitions involve sharing of student information, classroom activities, and curricular objectives” (Nelson, 2004, p. 187).

Parent: "the term parent will include parents and guardians of students, whether they are biological parents, extended family, foster parents, or other types of guardians" (Davis, 2005, p. 196).

Strengths-Based Focus: "a strengths-based focus; that is, they must recognize and utilize the strengths and assets that lie in children, their families, and communities" (Bryan & Henry, 2008, p. 149).

Transition: "Transitions are key times where children face new and challenging tasks as they move from familiar to unknown and more complex surroundings" (Augst & Akos, 2009, p. 3).

CHAPTER 2 - Literature Review

The transition into kindergarten and early schooling is considered a crucial period that sets the trajectory for students' future school adjustment (Augst & Akos, 2009; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). "Transitions are key times where children face new and challenging tasks as they move from familiar to unknown and more complex surroundings" (Augst & Akos, 2009, p. 3). Research suggests that smooth transitions allow for greater success and opportunity in the new environment (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), and can strengthen academic, behavioral, and emotional dispositions (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Sink & Spencer, 2007). The importance of transitions in elementary, middle, and high school is well documented in the education and school counseling literature (Augst & Akos, 2009; Dimmitt & Carey, 2007; Sink, Edwards, & Weir, 2007) as smooth transitions play a significant role in school success for students. Therefore, successful transition practices are essential in moving students forward into new facets of learning and life. Many components determine the effectiveness of this transition, and while instrumental pieces of this transition have been extensively researched, others have not received the same scholarly consideration. To provide a framework for this chapter, the relevant literature that surrounds transitions; the academic, social, and behavioral constructs of kindergarten transition; parent involvement; and school counseling were examined. In the remainder of this chapter, the literature related to parents' perspective of kindergarten transition is organized into the following sections: (a) Early Childhood Transitions; (b) Engagement; (c) Child Birth Order; (d) Academic, Social, and Behavioral Constructs; and (e) the Role of the Elementary School Counselor.

Early Childhood Transitions

Several important transitions occur during formal schooling experience, including: transition to kindergarten, middle school, high school, and the transition beyond the K-12 realm. Noteworthy of the transitional periods is the entry into kindergarten. Well-documented is the belief that kindergarten marks the start of formal education for students in public school and consequently a significant transitional period (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007; McIntyre et al., 2007; Nelson, 2004; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005). Furthermore, literature shows that kindergarten is one of the most significant transitions faced by elementary school-aged children (Augst &

Akos, 2009; Pianta & Cox, 1999). It is where young children begin to create views of themselves and their abilities as learners, friends, and members of society (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, Pianta, 2003; Pianta & Cox, 1999). Therefore, it is not surprising that research indicates that early school experiences forecast later school success (Rimm-Kaufman, & Pianta, 2000), that kindergarten influences attitudes about school (Brannon, 2005), or that students who experience an ineffective transition into kindergarten may see heightened risk in social adjustment or school failure (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008) as a smooth kindergarten transition “lays the groundwork” (Brannon, 2005) for future school experiences. Many components aid in providing continuity and seamless transitions for kindergarten students and their parents. However, the role engagement and parent involvement play are essential in developing successful student transitions.

Engagement

“Engagement refers to the emotional quality of interactions with the program, or how family members feel about or consider the services they receive, such as the strength of the relationship between family and program staff or the amount of conflict families have with the information presented,” (Korfmacher et al., 2008, p. 173). Engaging parents in their children’s schooling can play an integral role in fostering student success. In fact, “family involvement in school contributes to both children’s achievement and aspirations, and this influence acts above and beyond those of family socioeconomic status (SES) and student ability” (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, Cox, & Bradley, 2003, p. 180). While promoting family involvement in education may improve children’s school outcomes, both in early education and beyond, “it is not enough for schools to invite families to be involved, but rather, they need to help families realize their role and efficacy in influencing their child’s education” (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005, p. 312).

Parent involvement in their child’s education has become a national priority with No Child Left Behind legislation, The Goals 2000: Educate America Act, and reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Baker, 1997). It is now widely accepted by educators and policy makers that as parents are involved and engaged in their children’s education, children are more likely to succeed in school (Baker & Soden, 1998; Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Piotrkowski, & Parker, 1999; National Center for School Engagement, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman et

al., 2003). While found within much of current policy, true home-school relations that are successful at empowering parents in the education process are scarce at best and thus limit a “smooth transition from the „home child“ to the „school child“” (Baker et al., 1999, p. 369). In fact, parents have had surprisingly limited opportunities to share their unique and valuable viewpoint as to their view of the role of parent involvement or what they need to make school-home partnerships work (Baker, 1997). Policies, practices, and programs have been based on schools and policy makers’ ideas of parents’ desires and what would allow parents to be effective partners in their child’s education.

In an attempt to learn more about parents’ point of view, Baker (1997) conducted a qualitative study designed to gather parent experiences and perceptions about their involvement with school systems. One hundred and eleven parent participants were solicited and obtained through random selection procedures. Fifty-two percent of the participants were employed either full- or part-time, while the remainder of the group were considered unemployed (as they were either volunteering outside the home, taking courses, looking for work, or not working outside the home). Roughly two-thirds of the participants were married or in a coupled relationship, whereas the remaining third of parents were single-parent homes. Seventy-eight percent of participants reported job wages for their income, while the primary source of income for the remaining 22% came from government assistance.

From Baker’s (1997) qualitative study, parents shared their beliefs on being involved in their child’s education. One major reason that parents felt strongly about their involvement was they indicated that they provided “insider knowledge” and their “expertise” could be useful for teachers, not just when there was a conflict but on an ongoing basis. Moreover, they felt that if they did not advocate for their child, no one else would. Other parents were actively involved in the school environment as they saw the value of their involvement as an ongoing collaboration between the school and themselves on behalf of their child. Further, parents viewed their engagement as an important contribution to show their children that they valued education and viewed themselves as an equal partner in teaching the child outside of the classroom (Baker, 1997; Baker et al., 1999; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, Cox, & Bradley, 2003).

While parents felt their involvement is helpful to both student and school, they also discussed current barriers to parent engagement. Parents voiced that they would like to be more

involved, but felt that despite claims to the contrary schools did not want them to be. A final barrier collectively expressed by parents was the uncertainty as to *how* to be involved. The parent participants wished to know what the expectations were for their child so they could monitor their child's progress and provide continuity between school and home. Further, they wanted schools to generally be more "welcoming" and "family friendly" (Baker, 1997, p. 148); much like parents hoped for their children, parents also wished to be valued and respected by the schools.

Thus, Baker's (1997) recommendations for further practice from this study include: (a) being clear about how and why parents can be involved, (b) building on parent involvement at school programs, and (c) creating more opportunities for input from parents. This research concludes that strong interest and parent engagement in school programs are possible. Gaining parents' perspective could provide an additional layer of insight as to ways in which schools could be improved.

While Baker's (1997) study focused on parent perceptions and how their vantage point could provide another, much needed look and voice in understanding parent engagement, Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2005) conducted a longitudinal study of family-school communication in preschool and kindergarten. This study was designed to review key elements of family involvement and communication within the context of school and family relationships. Communication was conceptualized (and operationalized) as a "process involving a wide and diverse set of components, the goal of which is to share information and create supportive relationship structures" (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005, p. 288). Communication sets the stage for mutual decision-making and shared goals, avoiding misunderstandings, and helping parents understand how to reinforce learning and school instruction in the home.

This study used a daily diary method to track changes in frequency and characteristics of family-school communication between preschool and kindergarten, and was designed to serve as an intervention to enhance these relationships. The idea behind this study grew from the idea that parents and teachers will be well informed about each other's activities and, therefore be able to enhance and support each others' efforts (Baker et al., 1999; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005). Due to family attrition from changing residences, this study reviewed seventy-five child participants over a span of two years, which followed the students and families for a year of

preschool followed by a year of kindergarten. Of the 75 participants, 65 qualified for free and reduced lunch. Data were collected and analyzed from three sources: (a) family-school communication logs recorded by preschool and kindergarten teachers and family workers of their communications with families, (b) interviews of the families conducted twice each year by a family worker, and (c) a teacher questionnaire of problem behaviors.

Noteworthy in the findings was between half and three quarters of family-school communication involved the children's mothers. Further, family-school communication usually occurs between the teacher and the child's mother, and is initiated by the school rather than the family (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005). Results also showed that a decrease in family-school communications occurred from preschool to kindergarten. This decrease in communication holds implications for children identified as "at-risk" for school failure. It manifests an environment that limits communication, which leads to a hindrance of parent involvement and advocacy. Further, this shift away from family-school communication may adversely affect future development of family-school collaboration, especially for those children who may benefit the most from supportive relational structures.

In conclusion, Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2005) believe it is plausible that current elementary school priorities and policies, rather than family attributes, constrain communication efforts in kindergarten. While the findings show that two-thirds of kindergarten contacts were school driven, this statistic paves the way for schools to define the involvement of families. Therefore, it is not enough for schools to invite families to be involved. Instead, schools need to help families recognize their role and importance in influencing their child's education as the transition marks a new opportunity for schools and families to collaborate and communicate. Likewise, schools need to help parents feel engaged and empowered as a key member of their child's educational future during this pivotal time.

A strong theme of the previous two studies is the importance of family engagement in schools, and more importantly, in their children's schooling. While these studies focus on parent involvement, another study conducted by McIntyre et al. (2007) examined parents' viewpoint as to their children's initiation into formal schooling. McIntyre et al., (2007) felt that promotion of family involvement in education would improve school outcomes for all students. Further, for socially disadvantaged students the promotion of family-school partnerships might be vital,

given the host of additional risk factors they might experience. This survey, conducted in the Northeast in an urban school district, had 132 participant responses that were reviewed. Of those participants, nearly 90 percent of the caregiver respondents were mothers. Sixty-two percent of the respondents identified themselves as White/Caucasian. Nearly three-quarters of those participating were employed either part- or full-time; however, 40% of the families reported they qualified for government assistance. Participants in this study were surveyed through the Family Experiences and Involvement in Transition (FEIT) instrument (McIntyre et al., 2007). The goals of this study were to (a) describe transition-related activities from the perspective of family stakeholders, (b) describe family concerns and issues pertaining to their children's transition to kindergarten, and (c) explore environmental variables that may be related to family involvement in transition planning and services (p. 84).

Results of this survey indicate that 60% of parents wanted more communication from their son or daughter's future kindergarten teacher. Forty percent of parents also wanted to attend a transition information meeting to learn more expectations. More than 80% of parents wanted more information about academic expectations, well over two-thirds of respondents wanted more information about what the caregiver can do to aid in the transition, while nearly two-thirds of parents wanted further knowledge of the child's skills, and behavioral expectations, and nearly half wanted more information on emotional support and encouragement from school.

Concerns that were rendered from the McIntyre et al. (2007) study showed that nearly half of the parents expressed concerns about their children getting used to a new school and following directions. Other common concerns included academic skills and behavior problems. This study brought forth findings that parents would like more information about their child's transition, including academic and behavioral expectations. The majority of participants also indicated they wished to know what they could do to help prepare their children for kindergarten. The implications of this study suggest that parents are seeking more information and looking for ways in which to help their children in academic, behavior, and social venues. In addition, the results show that the lack of preparation and support in transitioning may further exacerbate the risk of school related problems. Families with socioeconomic (SES) risk factors may find it difficult to devote time, may feel less of a partner in the child's education, or may encounter other barriers. This makes the role of the professional essential in reaching out to make links

with families, particularly those who may be experiencing the transition into school for the first time.

Child Birth Order

Another contributing factor worth receiving scholarly attention is the role that a student's birth order plays in kindergarten transition. Children's birth order has been discussed as a factor that may influence parents' perspectives (Fergusson, Horwood, & Boden, 2006) as to one's kindergarten experience. Perhaps the "newness" of the transition and the situation could cause parents of firstborn children to presume both higher concerns and higher expectations. A longitudinal study by Fergusson, et al. (2006) examined the correlations between birth order and student educational and academic achievement. Even after controlling for participants' beliefs about birth order, a series of four studies consistently reported that first- and earlier-born children are the highest achievers. "Family resources" and "family niche" serve as two philosophies for explanation of this outcome. Family resources is explained as every family has a given set of resources, and as family sizes increase, those same resources are still being pulled from and continue to dwindle for the education and development of the children. Family niche refers to children carving out a place in the family. As emphasis is placed on educational and academic expectations for the first of children, or as older siblings favor scholastic and educational activities, other siblings seek to establish their own identities and differentiate themselves. Many contributing factors play into parent perception of child success in transitioning into kindergarten. While engagement and children's birth order are important to the success of the transition, so is the student's ability to find academic, behavior, and social ease in the transition.

Academic, Social, and Behavioral Domains

"Kindergarten (places) an emphasis on formal instruction-instruction that has the specific intent of raising the child's skill level. Such intent is not typical in preschool settings....(as) kindergarten is a different environment than preschool or home" (Rimm-Kaufman, & Pianta, 2000, p. 493). Academic elements of formal schooling have long been at the forefront of kindergarten transition. This focus has been further heightened by legislative academic demands, which have in turn established evolving curricular benchmarks. With the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandate of 2001, the stakes have been raised for academic student success.

With the advent of schools and school districts making adequate yearly progress (AYP) to maintain federal funding, schools are further driven to reach the prescribed academic expectations set forth and consequently emphasizing entry-level academic focus and front-end interventions for younger students.

Most recently, the National Core Curriculum standards have been implemented and have been adopted by 46 of the 50 states (National Core Standards, 2012) to increase academic rigor. Academic continuity and rigor among the states is a key principle in this newly established curriculum. The rationale behind this is twofold: first, students are participating in pre-kindergarten and daycare programs now more than ever before where ideas of socialization and previously taught kindergarten curriculum is more the emphasis, and second, the academic bar has been raised to successfully meet state and federal benchmarks for academics. Therefore, there has been a shift academically in the curriculum that students are taught, as schools work to meet academic standards in kindergarten. Visits with two kindergarten teachers each employed in school districts for over 25 years each reported that their students are now coming to their kindergarten classrooms with greater academic knowledge than in previous years (I. Baumchen, personal communication, January 15, 2010; C. Carr, personal communication, July 19, 2010). This, combined with longer school days (all-day versus half-day), has impacted their curriculum (C. Carr, personal communication, July 19, 2010). With increased academic rigor that supports a need for seamless transitions amongst new environments and relationships, the fostering of viable transitions for the youngest of students seems eminent. However, one must not minimize the role that social relationships play at this level.

As might be anticipated given the presumption that the purpose of schooling is to foster academic achievement, data indicates that intelligence prior to school entry predicts success in schools (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994). In addition, social connections and capabilities for elementary students have a large focus at this time; creating connections with peers, teachers, and other school authority figures prove vital to successful practices. In contrast to just a generation ago when the primary purpose of kindergarten was to ensure that children were socialized into spending time in groups with other children, the large majority of children who enter kindergarten today have had extensive non-parental care experience (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994). One might assume that improved social and behavior skills may arise from

children's exposure to others. However, while this non-parental care has broadened social opportunities for children prior to kindergarten, it has also diversified student's level of social skills. In fact, "children's social networks change from interacting primarily with adults to interacting more with other children and many experience difficulty in these novel interactions with peers" (Augst & Akos, 2008, p. 5). Moreover, strong social "connections between children and their peers help students feel more comfortable in their new environment," (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000, p. 17). Thus, children's ability to interact with their peers is a major source of concern for kindergarten teachers as children begin school (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; McIntyre et al., 2007). Further, McIntyre et al. (2007) identified a child's ability to communicate his/her needs as an additional social concern when beginning formal schooling.

While academic and social competencies are important to kindergarten success, students' behavior is also a component of concern in successful transitions. Kindergarten teachers expressed that the number one behavioral concern of incoming kindergartners was a failure to follow directions (Augst & Akos, 2008; Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001; McIntyre et al., 2007). Additionally, behavior problems, such as tantrums and how to effectively handle conflict and get along with others (McIntyre et al., 2007), round out the top behavioral concerns reported by teachers, while adjusting to new routines/surroundings and adjusting to a new school are also behavioral competencies discussed.

As school counselors have and continue to work with students in the areas of academic, personal-social, and behavior, it seems appropriate that the concerns found within the research in these three areas serve as the basis for this study. Therefore, the aforementioned variables formed the basis for the academic, social, and behavioral constructs created for this study. While key elements for kindergarten transitional success have been identified in this chapter, including, transition, engagement, children's birth order, and academic, social and behavioral concerns, a comprehensive program or those qualified to administer such a program have yet to be.

Role of the Elementary School Counselor

Augst and Akos (2008) stated, "it's not just the child making the transition into kindergarten but families and schools are as well" (p. 13). Looking at the role of parents and the influence they have or could potentially have in their child's successful transition is a critical

component to student success in school. While home-school relations are crucial to transition into kindergarten, research indicates that elementary school professionals are less trained in family involvement (Baker et al., 1999; Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005). Yet strong social-emotional, behavioral, and academic elements must be fostered to provide students a well-rounded transitional experience into kindergarten, and "most schools do not provide a comprehensive transition plan that allows teachers and parents to exchange important information about child development and school expectations" (Nelson, 2004, p. 187). School counselors have the skills and expertise necessary to lead this charge. Counselors have specialized expertise in the areas of academic, personal-social relations and behavior and have skills to respond to students' current needs (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). As previously discussed, these skills directly complement the areas that both parents and teachers feel are central in kindergarten transition. While the counselor's obligation to the student is first and foremost, arguably there is undeniable responsibility to both the school and parents of the child (Davis, 2005). Not only can school counselors provide direct service to kindergarteners, consult with teachers and advocate for optimal school policies, they can also provide direct service to parents and utilize the opportunity to communicate useful information about their role (Augst & Akos, 2008). Elementary school counselors have the developmental and intervention expertise to play a large role in promoting an optimal transition into kindergarten, and this concurrently provides an opportunity for school counselors to induct students and families into a comprehensive school counseling program (Augst & Akos, 2009). Therefore, as outlined by Gysbers and Henderson (2001) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2005), providing a comprehensive program that meets all of these needs seems pivotal to student success. A comprehensive school-counseling program strives to help all students pre-K through 12th grade achieve success in school through preventive education contained in counseling, consultation, guidance curricula, student planning and systems support (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007). ASCA states the importance of this piece. In aligning this element to the role and function of the elementary school counselor, a need exists for guidance and counseling programs to respond planfully to the current information-seeking needs of students, parents, and teachers (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001, p. 250-251). Moreover, the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program should include a viable transition model that works to lessen the

stress of the event through prevention-oriented interventions (Sink, Edwards, & Weir, 2007) for students and parents.

Another element of a comprehensive school-counseling program is a strengths-based approach. Augst and Akos (2008) believe school counselors are able to assess strengths of individuals and families, and can utilize the identified assets in transition practices. Increasingly, it is clear that in order to serve all students effectively, school counselors must think proactively and systemically about what actions to take during these key times (Dimmit & Carey, 2007). Much of school counseling theory focuses on a strengths-based approach; these strengths-based relationships capitalize on the strengths found in schools, families, and communities to build caring and positive relationships, foster academic success, and empower parents and children (Bryan & Henry, 2008). Good counseling and education recognize and build strengths rather than focus on problem reduction and correction (Bryan & Henry, 2008, p.149).

An emerging strengths-based theoretical perspective is Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Appreciative Inquiry is the cooperative search for the best in people and the world around them (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). This theoretical approach challenges traditional thinking; the appreciative inquiry approach reframes situations-not as problems to be solved, but rather as ideas to be uncovered. Focusing on and drawing from the strengths of “what’s working” and engaging all stakeholders in a cooperative learning and co-creation system are the emphasis of this approach. By developing a strengths-based approach to kindergarten transition, voice is given to parent stakeholders to be known and heard within the kindergarten transition relationship as valued individuals who offer another perspective. While a traditional framework reviews solving problems, Appreciate Inquiry gathers the perspective of all participants and treats all responses as a valuable whole. Through focusing on the positives, and hearing from all, a rich sense of empowerment and ownership emerges. The intent behind implementing this approach is to recognize and utilize the strengths and assets that can be drawn from kindergarten children and their families to build stronger, meaningful kindergarten transitions that benefit all.

Summary

Smooth transitions play a significant role in school success for students. Beginning kindergarten represents a new experience and challenge for children (Brannon, 2005), as it marks

the start of formal schooling, which also includes a new environment, curriculum, and expectations for behavior and socialization. Increased academic rigor and heightened academic expectations, changing demographics in children's educational and social experiences prior to kindergarten, and behavior concerns of incoming kindergartners are main concerns highlighted in this chapter. Thus, the kindergarten transition needs substantial consideration not only for the impact it has or potentially has on students, but also on families.

While much scholarly focus on kindergarten transition has been placed on teachers' perspective, it is important for research to also review and value parents' viewpoints to provide a well-rounded, thorough look at the transition to kindergarten. Parents play a pivotal role, and parent engagement and involvement in students' school experiences enrich the school transition and set the trajectory for student success. Engaging parents in the transitional experience is important, particularly to meet the needs of parents and children who are experiencing kindergarten for the first time. As Augst and Akos (2008) suggested, "when families are empowered, involved and knowledgeable about the transition into elementary school, more successful transitions occur," (p. 14). Elementary school counselors have a unique opportunity in providing a bridge between home and school and linking teachers and parents. Moreover, assisting and developing close relationships with students and parents early on the school experience (Sink et al., 2007) can play a vital role in supporting students, families and teachers in this transition and well beyond.

Finally, a distinctive component of school counselors is their expertise in overall student development and their ability to draw from stakeholder strengths. School counselors are in a position to provide a "strengths-based approach" (Bryan & Henry, 2008) that is a "unique, complementary and necessary contribution" for students, families, and educators (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Elementary school counselors have the developmental and intervention expertise to play a large role in promoting an optimal transition into kindergarten and this concurrently provides an opportunity for school counselors to induct students and families to a comprehensive school counseling program (Augst & Akos, 2009).

CHAPTER 3 - Method

This chapter presents the procedures and methods that were used within the study. It includes information regarding the (a) rationale for the study; (b) research questions; (c) survey; (d) protection of human subjects; (e) pilot study; (f) data collection procedures; (g) research hypotheses; and (h) data analysis.

Rationale for the Study

The purpose of this descriptive quantitative study is to review the perceptions of parent stakeholders in regards to their children's transitional experiences into kindergarten. Specific goals include: (a) assessing the concerns of parent stakeholders upon transitioning their child into formal schools; (b) assessing the perceptions of parent stakeholders in regards to their child's transition into kindergarten, and (c) assessing the areas in which parent participants would like more information about the transition process, and (d) exploring environmental variables and demographics that may impact student transitional success.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed by this study include:

1. Prior to kindergarten, to what extent do parents of kindergartners rate their level of concern in regards to their child's academic, behavioral, and social development as it pertains to kindergarten transition?
2. After three months of schooling, what are kindergarten parents' perceptions of their child's success in meeting kindergarten academic, social and behavioral expectations?
3. How do parents of kindergartners rate the engagement they felt with the school in the transitional experience for their child?
4. Are there significant differences in the level of concern for the child based on a desire for counselor services?
5. Is there a significant difference between parents of a first, second, third, and fourth born child in their perceived need for transition services?

6. Does parent perception of engagement in the kindergarten transition correlate with perceived student level of success?

Participants

The study examined the experiences and perceptions of parents whose children were enrolled in full-day kindergarten in two school districts of comparable size in Northeast Kansas. A parent or guardian of every student enrolled in kindergarten for the 2010-2011 school year in the surveyed schools was selected and solicited as participants for this retrospective pretest study; this generated a sample size of 91 participants. Parent participants were solicited by pre-notice cover letter (Appendix A) a week prior to the administration of the survey. The cover letter solicited participation and clearly stated that participation was strictly voluntary, incentives would not be received for participating, and information collected would be kept confidential and treated as aggregate data. Likewise, the cover letter (Appendix B) attached to the actual survey reiterated this information. It was hypothesized that these two school programs would be more likely to render information in regards to the role of the school counselor in kindergarten transition as both districts employ full-time elementary school counselors. The final study included 68 participants ($n = 68$) amongst the two respective schools, for an overall response rate of 74.7%.

Survey and Design

A retrospective pre-post design was implemented in this study to assess changes in knowledge and perceptions of parent participants. Utilizing a one-group pretest-posttest design provides a baseline for comparison as the researcher assumes that the participant is using the same internal standard to judge attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors as it applies to items found on the pretest-posttest (Moore & Tananis, 2009). Additionally, an evaluative assumption within this design is that the difference between pretest and posttest scores reflects the level of change because of the program it is assessing (Moore & Tananis, 2009). A “response shift,” which is a phenomenon of a change in a participant’s frame of reference, can be a threat to validity when self reporting. However, implementing a retrospective pre-post design simultaneously allows participants to use the same understanding of the construct (Moore & Tananis, 2009) to complete the pre- and posttest and can help to offset the response shift found within self-reporting. As

Moore and Tananis (2009) stated, “the retrospective pre-post test design seems a promising alternative to the typical pre-post test design in settings where perception of knowledge (both pre and post) serves to evaluate program effectiveness,” (p. 200). The survey also utilized a survey research design, as “surveys rely on the participants’ self-reports regarding their knowledge” (Watson, 2011, p. 59), perceptions, and experiences. Further, surveys are “advantageous for collecting data from a large group of people and providing a description of the population based on a sample of respondents” (Watson, 2011, p. 59).

A 41-item survey was developed for use in the study (Appendix C). Survey item content was based on kindergarten transition, parental involvement, and school counselor literature along with Dillman’s (2007) survey suggestions for increased participant response. Survey items were organized into three main sections: parent stakeholders’ perceptions of kindergarten transition, parent perceptions of the role of the elementary school counselor, and demographic data. The survey provided parents the opportunity to rate each item based on a traditional five-point rating scale, on the following variables: academic success, behavior problems, following directions, getting along with other children, getting along with the teacher, adjusting to new routines/surroundings, adjusting to a new school, and ability to communicate needs. These items were also sorted into academic, behavioral, and social domains to review parents’ response to the key areas of kindergarten transition. The academic, social, and behavioral variables are derived from the Kansas kindergarten curriculum, as well as from the national kindergarten transition and school counselor literature.

Parents were asked to rate their perceived level of concern of their kindergartner prior to the kindergarten transition (1 = no concern to 5 = great concern), and rate their perceptions of their student’s level of success upon transitioning into formal schooling (1 = unsuccessful to 5 = very successful) on the aforementioned variables. Parent perceptions for obtaining further information (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) for a more successful kindergarten transition were also assessed.

In the fourth section, items on parent engagement and the role of elementary school counselor were provided. Based on a five-point Likert rating scale, survey participants were asked to rate their feelings of engagement in transitioning their child to kindergarten. They were also asked to rate the level of their understanding as to the role and responsibility of the

elementary school counselor. An open-ended question asked what participants perceived the elementary school counselor could address to better meet the needs of future parents whose children will be transitioning into kindergarten.

Lastly, in sections E and F of the survey, demographic data were obtained for descriptive purposes. The demographic data can be further divided into two sub-categories: information about the kindergarten child and information about the survey participant. The child-based demographics include: age, primary language, previous educational program involvement, birth order, and number of children who have attended this school. Survey participant demographics measured in this survey include: relationship to child, number of household dependents, and number of people rearing the child within the home.

Select questions on the proposed study were used from the McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, and Wildenger (2007) instrument Family Experiences and Involvement in Transition. Permission to use the instrument was obtained from the first author, Dr. Laura Lee McIntyre, via email (Appendix D).

Protection of Human Subjects

Prior to conducting the study, approval from Kansas State University's Institutional Review Board as well as from each individual school district's superintendent and building administrator was received. In addition, the researcher adhered to the ethical standards established by the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2005) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2010).

Further, anonymity of participants was maintained, as surveys did not contain names or identifiable material to trace back to any one participant. No incentives were given and participation was strictly voluntary and explicitly stated in a cover letter (Appendix E) that accompanied each survey. Moreover, a section of the cover letter explicitly stated that the information obtained through the study was aggregate data and would not impact the student, parent, or school. Distinction was also made that this study is independent and separate from the school. However, once completed, the overall results and findings from the study were made available as feedback to any participants interested to know the outcomes of the study.

Instrument Review and Pilot Study

As part of the development of the survey, the researcher distributed the survey to 10 participants for review. Two current kindergarten teachers reviewed the instrument for content validity to determine if the academic, behavioral, and social outcomes discussed in the instrument seemed developmentally appropriate and aligned with current curriculum. Content validity “is based on logical analyses and experts’ evaluations of the content of the measure, including items, tasks, formats, wording, and processes” (Goodwin & Leech, 2003, p. 183). Further, one in-home childcare provider, private pay preschool teacher, Head Start preschool teacher, and preschool paraprofessional also reviewed the survey for developmentally appropriate child goals and incoming kindergarten expectations. Four parents of children enrolled in kindergarten during the 2010-2011 academic school year also participated in the pilot survey. All participants of the instrument review and pilot study live and work outside of the school districts of the study and were solicited and participated as volunteers. All 10 participants were solicited to review and provide feedback as to the clarity, cohesiveness, and format of the instrument as well as to determine a reasonable time frame for completion of the survey. Upon review, recommendations were welcomed and received, and appropriate revisions made. Clarity of item wording and length of the instrument were altered per pilot participant recommendations.

Procedures

The survey was distributed in a three-week window in November and December of 2010. This time of the academic school year was strategically chosen for retrieving data as typically students have completed three months of school at that time. By completing a quarter or even one-third of the academic year, students, teachers, counselors, and consequently parents, should be achieving a sense of the children’s transitional experience. Equally important to the study was that the data be obtained while the experience, thoughts, and perceptions were fresh within the minds of stakeholders. Furthermore, another consideration in receiving a high response rate was each of the schools in this study consistently has a 95 percent or higher participation rate from at least one or more of each of the kindergarten student’s parents at parent-teacher conferences. To ensure an even greater response rate, the researcher in collaboration with each of the respective elementary school counselors sent a pre-notice letter home (Appendix D) a week

prior to the school event to alert parents to the survey in hopes of soliciting increased awareness and participation in the upcoming survey (Dillman, 2007). Further, by presenting a survey either in person or via email increases the opportunity for a higher return rate. Likewise, the presence of the researcher and counselor to answer any questions that arose provided greater reliability and validity amongst participants.

School A: During the indicated time, School A held parent-teacher conferences. Parents were already within the school building to speak with the kindergarten teacher and support staff about student academic, behavioral, and social abilities and concerns. As previously mentioned, a cover letter was provided to explain and address any participant concerns. The respective elementary school counselor and the researcher distributed the surveys at a booth in the kindergarten wing of the school building, and parents participated in the survey while waiting to meet with the classroom teacher.

School B: Initially School B was to hold a kindergarten night and like School A. The researcher and counselor were to distribute the surveys at a booth in the school building. Each of the schools in this study consistently boasts a 95 percent or higher participation rate from at least one or more of each of the kindergarten student's parents at parent-teacher conferences and class events. However, the kindergarten night was moved to January and fell outside of the proposed window of time. Therefore, with permission from the building principal, classroom teachers, school counselor, and major professor, the cover letter and survey was sent to all kindergarten parents via email. Recognizing that the original times were compromised, parents were given a week to participate via email response.

Research Hypotheses

Following were the research hypotheses of this study:

1. Due to incoming kindergarten students' varied educational and childcare experiences, it was hypothesized that parents would express concern with their child's academic and behavioral abilities in this new environment.
2. It was hypothesized that parents of firstborn children would perceive a greater need for transitional services.

3. It was hypothesized that parent perception of engagement in their child's kindergarten transitional experience would positively correlate with their perception of child's transitional success.
4. It was also hypothesized that parents with greater levels of concern would indicate a desire for counselor services.

Data Analysis

Data from the returned surveys were examined for completeness and then coded and compiled into a spreadsheet program and summarized through descriptive statistics. A statistical computer program, SPSS 20.0, was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics, means, and standard deviations were calculated and used to review distribution, dispersion, and central tendency of items.

Research question one was descriptive in nature and assessed perceived parent participant concerns as they relate to academic, behavioral, and social concerns within the kindergarten transition. The second research question was also descriptive and illustrated the current perceived concerns of the parent participants as they relate to academic, behavioral, and social concerns within the kindergarten transition. Also descriptive in nature was question three, as it asked participants to rate their feeling of engagement in the transitional experience in transitioning their child into kindergarten.

One-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine research questions four and five. Question four employed the behavioral, social, and academic subcategories as the categorical variables, whereas question five used birth order for the categorical variables. The alpha level for each of the ANOVAs was set at .05, respectfully. Question six utilized a correlation design to assess the relationship between parent perception of engagement and parents' perceived level of student transitional success. A positive one-tailed look at the data was implemented, as the fine discrimination of using a one-tailed look would perhaps provide more insight.

CHAPTER 4 - Results

This study examined the concerns and perceptions of parent stakeholders upon transitioning their child into kindergarten in the areas of academic, social, and behavioral competencies. The study focused on (a) parent perceptions prior to transition, (b) parent perceptions as to the success of the child's transition after three months of schooling, (c) additional information that parents would have liked prior to transitioning their child into kindergarten, and (d) environmental variables that might impact student transitional success. This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the data collected to answer the research questions.

Description of Participants

Two local elementary schools, which employ full-time Pre-K thru 6th grade elementary counselors, participated in this survey. Between the two schools, a sample of 91 kindergarten students and families were contacted to participate in the survey. Sixty-eight surveys ($n = 68$) were returned for a response rate of 74.7%. All of the 68 returned surveys were coded. Only one survey was deemed unusable due to the parent participant experiencing special needs and not fully comprehending all of the questions or answers, thus providing an unreliable survey. The parent participant expressed difficulty with the instrument to the researcher, and only answered some of the items. When the researcher reviewed the survey, it was clear that of the items answered, the parent participant did not comprehend the questions. Thus, the survey was deemed unreliable. Of the usable 67 surveys, 12 data points found throughout the remainder of the collective surveys had an unmarked item; therefore, some sample items indicate an N of 67 while other items have an N of 66.

Participants were surveyed on two demographic sub-categories: (a) information about the kindergarten child and (b) information about the survey participant. Kindergartners in this study ranged in age from five years, three months to nine years, two months with a mean age of approximately five years, nine months ($M = 5.86$) and standard deviation of 0.6 ($SD = .6$). Further, the children represented had a mode age of five years, seven months and a median age of five years, nine months at the time the survey was administered. Table 1 displays the

additional demographics of the children, which include: primary language, child individual education plan services, previous educational program involvement, and birth order of the child.

Table 1
Characteristics of Children of Participants (n = 67)

Demographic Characteristics	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Primary Language in Child's Home		
English	65	97.1
Other	2	2.9
Child Individual Education Plan Services		
Receives Services	14	20.9
Does Not Receive Services	53	79.1
Early Education Prior to Kindergarten		
Participated in Early Education	55	82.1
Did not participate in Early Education	12	17.9
Birth Order		
First Born	23	34.3
Second Born	29	43.3
Third Born	10	14.9
Fourth or more Born	5	7.5

As indicated in Table 1, the vast majority of children in this study spoke English as their primary language (97%), and participated in an early education program prior to kindergarten (82.1 %). Participants surveyed also indicated that 20.9 % of the children discussed in the survey received Special Education services through an Individual Education Plan (IEP). First and

second born children made up 77.6 % of the surveyed group, with 34.3% of families indicating this was their first born child entering kindergarten, while 43.3% reporting on their second born child's experience.

Table 2 shows the demographics of the adult survey participants. Survey participant demographics collected in this survey include: the survey participant's relationship to child, number of household dependents, number of child that is attending kindergarten at this school, and number of people rearing the child within the home.

Table 2
Survey Participant Characteristics (n = 67)

Demographic Characteristics	Number (<i>n</i>)	Percentage (%)
Relationship to Child		
Biological parent	66	98.5
Adoptive parent	1	1.5
Number of Household Dependents		
One child	4	6.0
Two children	37	55.2
Three children	20	29.9
4 or more children	6	9.0
Number of Child That is Attending Kindergarten at This School		
First child	32	47.8
Second child	27	40.3
Third child	6	9.0
Fourth or more	2	3.0
Number of People Rearing the Child Within the Home		
1 adult	5	7.5
2 adults	59	88.1
3 adults	3	4.5

Table 2 illustrates that the majority of survey participants were the biological parent or parents for the kindergartner (98.5%), raising multiple children (94%) within a two adult led home (88.1%). Thirty-two participants, or 47.8%, indicated that this was the first child to attend

kindergarten at this school, while 27 participants (40.3%) indicated this was a second child’s experience at this school.

Research Question 1

Prior to kindergarten, to what extent do parents of kindergartners rate their level of concern in regards to their child’s academic, behavioral, and social development as it pertains to kindergarten transition?

Parent participants were asked to rate their perceived level of concern (1 = No Concern to 5 = Great Concern) for the items found within the academic, behavioral, and social constructs. The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Parent perceived academic, behavioral, and social concerns of students prior to kindergarten (n = 67)

Concerns Prior To Transition	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Academic success compared to peers	2.5	1.4
Behavior problems	2.0	1.2
Following directions	2.2	1.2
Getting along with other children	2.0	1.2
Getting along with teacher	1.6	1.2
Adjustment to new routine/surroundings	2.5	1.3
Adjustment to new school	2.3	1.4
Ability to communicate needs	2.1	1.4

Note. Ratings were made on a 5-point scale (1 = No Concern to 5 = Great Concern).

As shown, all mean scores illustrate that all survey items were considered either a concern or less than a moderate concern for parent participants. Items where parents indicated the highest perceived concerns prior to transitioning into kindergarten were academic success compared to peers (2.5 out of 5) and adjustment to new routine and surroundings (2.5); the

lowest mean score representing the least amount of concern was getting along with the teacher (1.6).

Research Question 2

After three months of schooling, what are kindergarten parents’ perceptions of their child’s success in meeting kindergarten academic, social, and behavioral expectations?

Parents were asked to rate their perceptions of their children’s level of success (1 = Unsuccessful to 5 = Very Successful) in transitioning into kindergarten for the items found within the academic, behavioral, and social constructs over the first three months of the kindergarten year. The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Parent perceived academic, behavioral, and social success of students currently in kindergarten

Level of Success Upon Transition	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Academic success compared to peers	66	4.4	0.8
Behavior problems	67	4.3	0.8
Following directions	67	4.4	0.7
Getting along with other children	67	4.5	0.7
Getting along with teacher	67	4.7	0.7
Adjustment to new routine/surroundings	67	4.2	0.9
Adjustment to new school	67	4.5	0.8
Ability to communicate needs	67	4.4	0.9

Note. Ratings are based on a 5-point scale (1 = unsuccessful to 5 = very successful).

As indicated, all mean scores fall within the successful to very successful range signaling parents’ feelings and perceptions about the kindergarten transition. The individual items where the parents specified the highest perceived success was getting along with the teacher (4.7 out of 5) and the lowest level of perceived student success among parent participants was adjusting to new routine/surroundings (4.2).

Research Question 3

How do parents of kindergartners rate the engagement they felt with the school in the transitional experience for their child?

On a 5-point scale, parents were asked to respond to their perceived level of engagement (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) in transitioning their child into kindergarten. The mean score (4.1 out of 5) demonstrated that parents felt engaged in the process. Forty-nine respondents (73.1%) either agreed or strongly agreed to feeling engaged in the transitional experience of their child.

Table 5
Parent Engagement in Transitional Experience

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I felt engaged in the process of transitioning my child to kindergarten	67	4.1	1.1

Note. Ratings are based on a 5-point scale (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree).

Research Question 4

Are there significant differences in the level of concern for the child based on a desire for counselor services and their level of concern of child need?

Items were grouped into academic, behavioral, and social domains. The academic domain consisted of the item regarding academic success. The behavior domain was comprised of the behavior problems, following directions, adjustment to new routine, and adjustment to a new school. The social domain included, getting along with peers, getting along with the teacher, and the ability to communicate needs. Once the items were placed into their domains, descriptive statistics were determined for the composite variables for each construct. Table 6 illustrates that the student social abilities construct was rated of greatest concern (4.6 out of 5) prior to transition, and received the lowest score (1.9 out of 5) on the perceived level of success upon transitioning.

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics for Domains

Domains	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Concerns Prior To Transition			
Academic	66	4.3	0.8
Behavior	67	4.3	0.6
Social	67	4.6	0.7
<i>Note.</i> Ratings were made on a 5-point scale (1 = No Concern to 5 = Great Concern).			
Level of Success Upon Transition			
Academic	67	2.4	1.4
Behavior	67	2.3	1.0
Social	67	1.9	1.1
<i>Note.</i> Ratings are based on a 5-point scale (1 = unsuccessful to 5 = very successful).			
Would Have Liked More Information Prior To Transition			
Academic	66	2.8	1.2
Behavior	66	2.7	1.1
Social	66	2.7	1.1
<i>Note.</i> Ratings were made on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).			

After the academic, behavioral, and social constructs were developed and described, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine parent desire for counseling services and their level of concern for their child in transitioning into kindergarten. Parent responses were coded: parents wanting counselor services were coded as yes = 2, parents not seeking or wanting counselor services were coded as no = 1, and parents who did not know if they would like more counseling services, or did not have enough understanding of the counselor role to know if they would like counseling services were coded as I Don't Know (IDK) = 0.

Table 7
Desire for Counseling Services

Desire for Counseling Services	<u>No Services</u>		<u>Yes Services</u>		<u>I Don't Know</u>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Concerns Prior to Transition						
Academic	21	4.3 (0.9)	22	4.5 (0.7)	23	4.2 (0.9)
Behavior	21	4.5 (0.6)	22	4.3 (0.7)	24	4.3 (0.4)
Social	21	4.6 (0.5)	22	4.4 (1.0)	24	4.6 (0.4)

Note. Ratings were made on a 5-point scale (1 = No Concern to 5 = Great Concern).

Level of Success Upon Transition

Academic	21	2.1 (1.3)	22	2.2 (1.3)	24	3.0 (1.5)
Behavior	21	1.8 (0.9)	22	2.4 (1.0)	24	2.5 (1.0)
Social	21	1.6 (0.7)	22	2.0 (1.3)	24	2.1 (1.1)

Note. Ratings are based on a 5-point scale (1 = unsuccessful to 5 = very successful).

Would of Liked More Information Upon Transition

Academic	20	2.7 (1.2)	22	2.9 (1.4)	24	2.9 (0.9)
Behavior	20	2.3 (0.9)	22	2.9 (1.3)	24	2.9 (0.8)
Social	20	2.3 (1.0)	22	2.8 (1.3)	24	2.9 (0.9)

Note. Ratings were made on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

There was not a significant difference between parents with a desire for counselor services and their level of concern, except for their response to their child's current level of behavioral success upon entering kindergarten, $F(2, 64) = 2.958, p < .05$.

Research Question 5

Will there be a significant difference between parents of first, second, third, and fourth children and their perceived need for transition services?

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the differences of parent perceptions on the need for transition services in first, second, third, or fourth born children. Third and fourth born responses were collapsed into one category, as they did not hold a strong enough n to be run separately. The ANOVA indicated that there was not a significant difference in parent perceived need for academic support, $F(2, 63) = 2.701, p > .05$. However, there was significance in both the behavioral, $F(2, 63) = 3.752, p < .05$, and social constructs, $F(2, 63) = 4.182, p < .05$, respectively. Analyses using Bonferroni post hoc comparisons for significance revealed that there was a significant difference between first and second born children in parents' perceived need of support in both the behavioral ($p < .05$) and social ($p < .05$) constructs.

Research Question 6

Does parent perception of engagement in the kindergarten transition correlate with perceived student level of success?

Table 8 illustrates the correlations between engagement and parents' perceived level of student success.

Table 8
Engagement Correlations (n = 67)

Factor	<i>r</i>	Significance
1. Academic Success	0.04	0.38
2. Behavior Problems	0.11	0.18
3. Following Directions	-0.01	0.46
4. Getting along with peers	0.19	0.06
5. Getting along with teacher	0.19	0.06
6. Adjustment to new routine	0.17	0.09
7. Adjustment to new school	0.21	0.04
8. Ability to communicate needs	0.18	0.08

Through a correlation analysis, a positive correlation emerged between parent engagement and adjustment to a new school, $r = .214$, $p < .05$, one tailed, $n = 67$. Parent perceptions of engagement was $r^2 = .214 \times .214$. There was no statistical significance between parent engagement and student perceived level of success $p < .05$ with any of the other items.

Summary of Results

Survey means indicated that all parent concerns prior to transitioning their child into kindergarten fell in or below the moderate concern range, and no particular item was considered a great concern. However, items on the instrument that received the highest scores for concern were in the areas of academic success in comparison to peers and adjusting to new routines and surroundings. Parent perceptions as to students' transitional success in the areas of academics, social, and behavioral abilities indicated that all mean results fell within the successful to very successful range. However, of the items and areas surveyed, parent participants rated adjusting to new routines and surroundings as the area with the least amount of success.

Perceived parent engagement during the transition indicated that nearly three-fourths of participants (73.1 %) agreed or strongly agreed to feeling engaged in the transitional process. A correlation analysis discovered that a positive correlation emerged between parent engagement

and adjustment to a new school. Parent perceptions on the need for transition services in first, second, third or fourth born children demonstrated that there was a significant difference in parents' perceived need for both social and behavioral support between first and second born children as they transition into formal schooling. Results also showed that significance emerged between parents' desire for counselor services and their concern as to the children's level of behavioral success upon entering kindergarten.

CHAPTER 5 - Discussion

As an aid to the reader, the final chapter of the dissertation presents the methodology, discussion and summary of results, the research problem, limitations of the study, and recommendations for practice and further study. This study was designed to focus on the perceptions of parent stakeholders as they transition their children into kindergarten. Specific goals included (a) assessing the concerns of parent stakeholders upon transitioning their child into formal schools, (b) assessing the perceptions of parent stakeholders in regards to their child's transition into kindergarten, (c) assessing the areas in which parent participants would like more information about the transition process, and (d) exploring environmental variables and demographics that may impact student transitional success.

A sample size of 91 possible participants, all of whom were parents of students enrolled in kindergarten for the 2010-2011 school year in Pre-K through 6 elementary schools in Northeast Kansas were solicited as participants for this descriptive study. It was hypothesized that these two school programs would be more likely to render information in regards to the role of the school counselor in kindergarten transition as both districts employ full-time elementary school counselors. The final study sample included 68 participants ($n = 68$) amongst the two respective schools, for an overall response rate of 74.7%.

The research questions addressed by this study were:

1. Prior to kindergarten, to what extent do parents of kindergartners rate their level of concern in regards to their child's academic, behavioral, and social development as it pertains to kindergarten transition?
2. After three months of schooling, what are kindergarten parents' perceptions of their child's success in meeting kindergarten academic, social and behavioral expectations?
3. How do parents of kindergartners rate the engagement they felt with the school in the transitional experience for their child?
4. Are there significant differences in the level of concern for the child based on a desire for counselor services?

5. Is there a significant difference between parents of a first, second, third, and fourth born children in their perceived need for transition services?
6. Does parent perception of engagement in the kindergarten transition correlate with perceived student level of success?

Discussion

A descriptive finding when the researcher administered the survey at School A was that couples tended to complete the survey together. Except for one of the parent couples, if the survey was passed to the father, he would give the survey to the mother to complete. Upon receiving the survey a few mothers worked independently; however, the vast majority of participants solicited answers and perspective from the father or worked collectively to answer the survey. While specific data were not collected on this finding, the results differed from McIntyre et al.'s (2007) research, where 90% of the caregiver respondents were solely mothers. Additionally, in the current study parent participant demographics indicated that nearly nine-tenths of children come from a two adult home, whereas the 2010 national average for children ages 0-5 living in two parent homes was only 73% (America's Children, 2011). Thus, the level of parent involvement and mother-father dynamics within this study provided additional insight into the parent relationships and presented a different sampling than other researchers have experienced.

Descriptive statistics also showed that nearly all of the survey participants spoke English as the primary language within the home. Survey participants indicated that four-fifths of children surveyed participated in an early education program prior to kindergarten, which shows that the majority of children are participating in early education programs prior to kindergarten, and parents are providing early childhood education experiences for their children prior to formal schooling. Thus, the heightened exposure to early childhood education experiences only furthers the importance of academic, behavioral, and social competencies for incoming kindergartners.

Additionally, the surveyed sample indicated that a fifth of the students were receiving services through an Individual Education Plan (IEP). This number was very high in comparison to the state average of Kansas' overall population of identified students, which is only 13.58% (Kansas Department of Education, 2011). Speculation as to the heightened number of students

receiving special services through an IEP are: (a) the perceived level of support for students on an IEP, and (b) a number of students potentially being identified as “developmentally delayed”. Typically students do not come into formal schooling with an IEP unless the needs are severe and are identified very early on. With the perceived need for heightened student support, it is not uncommon for parents to opt into the surveyed school districts. The smaller school and class sizes, as well as the strong reputation of the surveyed elementary schools for their special education support, might explain the higher special education demographic. Secondly, the heightened number of students with an IEP could be due to a developmental delay identification, and students often “outgrow and lose” this identification when they turn 10 years old (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2012). In conclusion, when the demographic study results were reviewed, the sample generated in this study was not representative of the population and may not generalize to larger populations within the Midwest.

Transition

In this study, it was hypothesized that parent stakeholders would express concern with their child’s academic and behavioral abilities due to the varied educational and childcare experiences students encountered prior to kindergarten, as well as the new environment and expectations set forth in formal schooling. Mean ratings indicated parent participants’ highest levels of concern upon transitioning their children into kindergarten were in the areas of academic success in comparison to peers, and adjustment to new routine and surroundings. Moreover, over a third of parent participants surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that they would have liked more information on academic expectations prior to school, and nearly a third either agreed or strongly agreed that they would have like more information on behavior expectations for kindergarten. This supports McIntyre et al.’s (2007) findings that “parents do not fully understand school expectations...as respondents indicated they wanted more information about academic expectations in kindergarten” (p. 83). Additionally, elevated levels of students on individual education plans gives additional credence to the concerns parent participants presented.

Upon transitioning, kindergarten parents' perceptions of their child's success in meeting kindergarten academic, social, and behavioral expectations were also assessed; all mean scores fell within the successful to very successful range signaling parents' feelings and perceptions about the kindergarten transition were favorable. From these results it could also be surmised that parents felt that the surveyed schools are doing a respectable job of transitioning students into the school environment. Since the findings suggest that overall, parents seemed satisfied with the transitional experience, and the kindergarten children's success, these results corroborate teachers', counselors', and school districts' work. This finding is substantial, as this is not always found within the literature (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003) or the media.

Interesting to note, however, is the item that parent participants rated the lowest was students' adjustment to new routines or surroundings. This item received a high amount of concern prior to the transition, and also received the lowest level of perceived success after the three-month transitional period. The heightened concern both initially as well as after the transition emerged as an opportunity for further consideration.

Engagement

One of the promising findings from this study was the level of engagement that the parent participants experienced in transitioning their child into school. An overwhelming three-fourths of parents indicated they either agreed or strongly agreed in their feeling of engagement; this indicates that the schools represented are providing opportunities to either engage or make parents feel engaged in the process. Furthermore, this finding is noteworthy as nearly a third of the student population in the surveyed schools receives free and reduced meals (Kansas Department of Education, 2011). Therefore, these school districts are creating an environment of engagement for all parents and students, regardless of socioeconomic status. The strong level of parent engagement represented in this survey could pave the way to meaningful relationships between home and school, for as Augst and Akos (2008) stated, "engaging parents during the kindergarten transition can set the course for successful parent involvement throughout a child's entire school career" (p. 13).

Concerning, however, is 40% of survey respondents felt they did not have a clear understanding of the position description, roles, or responsibilities of the school counselor. This number increased to 57% of respondents when “neither agree nor disagree” were included in the results. It can be surmised that while the respective surveyed school communities (teachers, counselor, administrator, and support staff) are supporting parents and students through the kindergarten transition, the school counselors in the surveyed schools are not clearly making their role in the process known. This finding aligns with Augst and Akos’ (2008) previous research and reiterates that school counselors need to educate families on the variety of changes that kindergarten children are facing while also clearly articulating the role and services the counselor provides within the school. While not surprising that counselors are being modest in sharing about their efforts to support and foster the kindergarten transition, it is noteworthy that parents are unaware of the role and function of the elementary school counselor. Compounding this issue is the local inconsistency as to the role, function, and understanding of the elementary school counselor along with most parents of children currently in elementary school did not have an elementary school counselor as a child (Davis, 2005).

It was hypothesized that parent perception of engagement in their child’s kindergarten transitional experience would positively correlate with their perception of child’s transitional success. Results showed there was no statistical significance between parent engagement and student perceived level of success with any of the items, except for adjustment to a new school. While parent engagement and student perceived level of success was statistically significant in adjusting to a new school, this finding only accounted for 4% of the variance. In reviewing the results, it appears that many other factors play into this outcome. Moreover, as one reviews the data, it is important to consider if the parent participants were answering the question regarding adjustment to a new school from the mindset purely of being a parent of kindergartner, or if they were interpreting the question as adjustment to a new school if their other children attended another kindergarten. The data does not and cannot discriminate in this area.

Counselor Services

Beginning kindergarten represents a new experience and challenge for children. Along with this new experience come many hopes and fears. This is to be expected from children.

However, “parents often also experience their own set of fears, concerns, hopes, and dreams regarding their child’s entry into formal education” (Brannon, 2005, p. 58). Thus, it was hypothesized that parents of students of firstborn children will perceive a greater need for transitional services. Parent perceptions demonstrated that there was a significant desire for both social and behavioral support of firstborn children as they transition into formal schooling. The desire for more information on behavioral expectations for incoming kindergartners supports McIntyre et al.’s (2007) findings. It also affirms Baker’s (1997) findings that “parents wanted their children to be protected and nurtured as much as they wanted them taught and educated” (p. 147).

An open-ended question was created to have survey participants write in what areas they felt might be good for the school counselor to address to better meet the needs of future parents whose children will be transitioning into kindergarten. Of the write-in responses, nearly two-thirds requested for the school counselor to address conflict management and/or develop positive social skills within kindergarten students. Such a high number of requests for support in this area signals a need for further consideration. This finding further supports McIntyre et al.’s (2007) research on parents wanting more information on behavioral expectations. Further, as family structure and dynamics shift and single parent, blended, and multi-generational families begin to impact family demographics, the need to address conflict management and/or develop positive social skills within kindergarten students might become even more important. For students will need to navigate various types of situations and relationships both inside and outside of schools.

Lastly, it was also hypothesized that parents with greater levels of concern would indicate a desire for counselor services. The only statistically significant response that affirms this hypothesis was in regard to the child’s current level of behavioral success upon entering kindergarten. This finding further supports parents’ desire for more behavioral expectations and support for incoming kindergartners. Otherwise, the survey results indicated there was not a significant difference between parents with a desire for counselor services and their level of concern.

Recommendations for Counselor Practice

Based on the results of this study, the following are recommended for practicing professionals:

1. A recommendation for elementary school counselors is to explicitly share their role in supporting students and parents. This point becomes even more salient as the role of the elementary school counselor varies, or is “blurred” in many local districts. The need for counselors to advocate for themselves and the role they play in facilitating support for students and parents alike is substantial. Particularly in a time of an educational funding shortfall and yearly discussion of budget cuts, it is imperative for counselors to showcase what and how they support students, parents, and staff.
2. Through this research a target audience of parents of firstborn children has been identified, and the recommendation for elementary school counselors is to hone in on the opportunity to foster and build meaningful connections with parents of children sending their firstborn child to kindergarten. Ideas to foster and support this relationship include but are not restricted to: having an (additional) informational meeting strictly geared towards parents of firstborn children entering formal schooling, providing more materials and information to these families, reaching out to them earlier and more often, and being more visible and accessible as an advocate for both the parent and the child.
3. Parent participants indicated great desire for conflict management and/or the opportunity to develop positive social skills within kindergarten students. Therefore, the recommendation for practicing school counselors is to elicit a proactive strengths-based approach, and address positive social interactions at the forefront of the kindergarten experience through classroom guidance. Developing and utilizing curriculum that targets and teaches kindergarten students the appropriate way(s) to handle conflict while also helping them to positively developing their own social skills could set the framework for healthier peer relations, stronger conflict management skills, and decreased bullying.
4. As the data indicated, an item that received a high amount of concern prior to the transition, and also received the lowest level of perceived success after the three-month

transitional period was adjusting to a new environment. The heightened concern with adjusting to a new environment is an opportunity for elementary school counselors to enhance delivery of their support services and directly target this component of the transition. Additionally, this serves as an opportunity for school counselors to also help parents “learn about the transition and cope with the change” (Augst & Akos, 2008, p. 13).

Recommendations for further study

1. A follow-up study should be conducted with a redesigned survey that has improved salient domains. While this study generated information and discussion regarding the academic, behavior, and social domains provided, developing multiple items that support the salient domains is essential to further understanding the perceived needs and demands of parent participants. For example, developing multiple items to assess parent perceptions of academic concerns prior to and transitional success upon transition would strengthen the academic construct and provide clarity of results for further interpretation.
2. A qualitative research opportunity to further explore parent engagement through the use of an asset-based problem solving process is also needed. Using elements of appreciative inquiry to better understand transition and engagement, parents, counselors, and teachers could create their “best story” for what successful parent engagement and student transitions could or should look like.
3. A study should be conducted to compare the educational experiences of incoming kindergartners and parents’ perceived levels of concern in relation to those experiences. For example, examining parents whose children attend childcare centers as to if they are more or less concerned with social, behavioral, academic abilities upon transitioning into kindergarten. This study would provide an important comparison to the perceptions of parents as well as add to the variety of needs and wants regarding counselor effectiveness in kindergarten transition.
4. An additional study is warranted to determine the perceptions of parents relative to the perceived needs of first born males and first born females entering kindergarten and transitioning into formal schooling. The data collected from such a study could provide

school counselors with greater understanding of the populations they are serving, which could allow for appropriate adjustments to services provided.

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Appendix A - Pre-notice Cover Letter

DATE

USD

ADDRESS

CITY, STATE ZIP

Dear Parents of (Riley County / Rock Creek) Kindergartners:

Approximately one week from today, an opportunity to participate in a questionnaire regarding your child's transition into kindergarten will be provided at (Kindergarten event). This survey is designed to look at the current state of kindergarten transition and ways in which it can be improved to better meet family needs.

This survey is a doctoral dissertation study that is being conducted at Kansas State University and is independent of your school district. Multiple schools will be reviewed and all information received will be looked at as a whole; no information will be identifiable to any person or specific school. Therefore, your responses will not impact your school, school staff, or child. Results from this study will be used to develop recommendations for improving home-school relations as well as helping kindergarten students' better transition into formal schooling.

Every parent or guardian of a kindergarten child enrolled in your school is being asked to participate in this voluntary survey. We would greatly appreciate your participation, as your input is critical to the success of this study. We look forward to seeing you (Date) at the (Kindergarten event) where we will have a booth set up (where?). Thank you in advance for your time and help.

Sincerely,

Jessica Lane

Doctoral Candidate

Dr. Judy Hughey

Major Professor and Dissertation Advisor

(785) 532-5527

Appendix B - Informed Consent Cover Letter to Survey

DATE

USD

ADDRESS

CITY, STATE ZIP

Dear Parents of (Riley County / Rock Creek) Kindergartners:

You are among the parents of current kindergarten students who are being asked to participate in a doctoral dissertation study conducted at Kansas State University regarding parents' current beliefs and views of their child's transition into kindergarten.

Research shows that positive connections between parents and schools provide for a stronger support system for students and greater academic success. By understanding parent concerns, better services to meet family needs can be offered. Therefore, results from this survey will be used to provide feedback on how to enhance the transition for students and parents into formal education.

Every parent or guardian of a kindergarten child enrolled in your school is being asked to participate in this survey. Multiple schools are being reviewed, and all information received will be looked at as a whole. Therefore, your responses will not be identifiable to any one person, nor will they impact your school, school staff, or child. This survey is strictly voluntary. However, you can help this research by taking approximately 5-10 minutes to share your thoughts and experiences.

The attached survey is designed to gather parent feedback on issues related to kindergarten transition. Both your elementary school counselor and myself will be available to answer any questions you may have while completing the survey. When finished, please place your completed questionnaire in the provided box to ensure confidentiality.

If you have any further questions or comments about this study, I would be happy to address them. My email address is jjj3636@ksu.edu or you can write to the address provided above. You are also welcome to contact my advisor, Dr. Judy Hughey, 532-5527, jhughey@ksu.edu.

Thank you very much for helping with this important study.

Sincerely,

Jessica Lane

Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C - Kindergarten Transition Survey

Kindergarten Transition Practices

This survey is designed to study the areas of transition for kindergarten students, perceived parental concerns regarding the transition, and how the school counselor might better facilitate the transition. If you have previously had children in kindergarten, please refer only to the **current** child enrolled in kindergarten's experience within **this** school district.

A. Please share to what extent each of the areas listed below was a concern for you **prior to** your child transitioning into kindergarten. Circle the number that **best** represents your response.

	No Concern		Moderate Concern		Great Concern
1. Academic success (e.g., knowing the alphabet) compared to his/her peers.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Behavior problems (e.g., tantrums)	1	2	3	4	5
3. Following directions	1	2	3	4	5
4. Getting along with other children	1	2	3	4	5
5. Getting along with the teacher	1	2	3	4	5
6. Adjustment to new routine/surroundings	1	2	3	4	5
7. Adjustment to a new school	1	2	3	4	5
8. Ability to communicate needs	1	2	3	4	5
9. Other: _____	1	2	3	4	5

B. Please share your perceptions of your child's **current** level of success in the areas below. Circle the number that **best** describes your perceptions using the scale below.

	Unsuccessful		Moderately Successful		Very Successful
1. Academic success (e.g., knowing the alphabet) compared to his/her peers.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Behavior problems (e.g., tantrums)	1	2	3	4	5
3. Following directions	1	2	3	4	5
4. Getting along with other children	1	2	3	4	5
5. Getting along with the teacher	1	2	3	4	5
6. Adjustment to new routine/surroundings	1	2	3	4	5
7. Adjustment to a new school	1	2	3	4	5
8. Ability to communicate needs	1	2	3	4	5
9. Other: _____	1	2	3	4	5

C. Please share the level to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about transitioning your child into kindergarten. Circle the number that **best** describes your perceptions using the scale below.

Prior to my child beginning kindergarten, it would have been helpful to receive more orientation information and services about:

	Strongly Disagree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Strongly Agree
1. the kindergarten program.	1	2	3	4	5
2. my child's strengths & weaknesses	1	2	3	4	5
3. my child's new school.	1	2	3	4	5
4. kindergarten academic expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
5. kindergarten behavior expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
6. kindergarten social expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
7. handling and resolving conflict.	1	2	3	4	5
8. strategies to better prepare my child for kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
9. how to emotionally support my child.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Other: _____	1	2	3	4	5

D. Please share the level to which you agree or disagree with the statements listed below about your engagement in transitioning your child into kindergarten. Circle the number that **best** describes your perceptions using the scale below.

	Strongly Disagree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Strongly Agree
1. I felt engaged in the process of transitioning my child to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I have a clear understanding of the School Counselor's position description, roles, and responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5

3. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: I believe it would be helpful during the time immediately prior to my child's preparation for kindergarten and the first semester of my child's kindergarten year to have the services available of an elementary school counselor.

_____ No
 _____ Yes

_____ I don't know enough about the role of a school counselor to answer that question.

4. What might be areas the school counselor could address to better meet the needs of future parents whose children are transitioning into kindergarten? (Examples might include: developing positive social skills, teaching conflict management, exploring career awareness, or developing personal safety skills)

E. Information about **the child**:

1. What month and year was this child born? Please write the full month in the space provided.

_____ (example: October) _____ year

2. Is English the primary language spoken in your child's home? Please circle your response.

No Yes

3. Does your child currently receive special education as part of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)? Please circle your response.

No Yes

4. Did your child attend an early education program prior to kindergarten? Please circle the best response.

No Yes Don't Know

5. What number of child is in the household? Please check the appropriate response.

____ 1st born
____ 2nd born
____ 3rd born
____ 4th + born

6. What number of child is this that is attending kindergarten at this school? Please check the appropriate response.

____ 1st
____ 2nd
____ 3rd
____ 4th or more

F. Listed below are questions that are designed to gain a clearer understanding of the participant answering the survey:

1. What is your relationship to your child? Please check the appropriate response.

____ Biological Parent
____ Step Parent
____ Adoptive Parent
____ Other relative
____ Legal guardian
____ Other (specify) _____

2. What is the total number of children (younger than 18 years) living in your home? Please check your response.

____ 1 child
____ 2 children
____ 3 children
____ 4 or more children

3. What is the total number of adults (including you) living in the home involved in raising the child? Please check your response.

____ 1 adult
____ 2 adults
____ 3 adults
____ 4 or more adults

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND HELP IN COMPLETING THIS SURVEY. YOUR ASSISTANCE IN PROVIDING THIS INFORMATION IS GREATLY APPRECIATED!

Appendix D - Permission to Use FEIT Survey

From : Laura Lee McIntyre <llmcinty@uoregon.edu>
Subject : Re: Family Experiences and Involvement in Transition
To : Jessica Lane <jjj3636@k-state.edu>
Reply To : Laura Lee McIntyre <llmcinty@uoregon.edu>

Tue, Feb 16, 2010 01:15 PM

Hi Jessica,

Here is a copy of the Family Experiences and Involvement in Transition survey. I would be happy for you to use any/all portions of this instrument.

Here's the citation:

McIntyre, L. L., Eckert, T. L., Fiese, B. H., DiGennaro, F. D., & Wildenger, L. K. (2007). The transition to kindergarten: Family experiences and involvement. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35, 83-88.

My very best,

Laura Lee McIntyre

--

Laura Lee McIntyre, PhD

Associate Professor & Director, School Psychology Program

Department of Special Education and Clinical Sciences

5208 University of Oregon

Eugene, OR 97403-5208

541.346.7452 (phone)

541.346.0683 (fax)

On Mon, 15 Feb 2010 10:38:30 -0800 (PST), Jessica Lane <jjj3636@k-state.edu> wrote:

> Hello,

>

> My name is Jessica Lane and I am a Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral candidate at Kansas State University. I'm interested in the role the school counselor plays / can play in transitioning kindergarten students into formal education. Along with this, I am also interested in a Home-School- Community approach and would like to look at both parents and teachers in this study. Currently I am hoping to employ a survey and therefore I am very interested in your Family Experiences and Involvement in Transition (FEIT) instrument and feel it could be very beneficial to my work. Might I be able to obtain a copy of your instrument? Might I be able to use select questions from your survey?

>

> I appreciate any help that you might offer. Thank you for your time.

>

> Sincerely,

>

> Jessica Lane

> Doctoral Candidate - Counselor Education and Supervision

> 1100 Mid-Campus Drive

> 338 Bluemont Hall

> Manhattan, KS 66506

FEIT.pdf