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Impacts of Parental Involvement on Early Literacy Skills

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Impacts of Parental Involvement on Early Literacy Skills

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Abstract

This action research was conducted to identify a correlation in high literacy skills with parental involvement and support. Baseline data was gathered from kindergarten student's winter FAST screener scores. Parental involvement began by sending homework for my students to work on with an adult in their home. A spreadsheet was kept tracking which students returned their parent signature sheet weekly and which students did not. All students were progress monitored on letter sounds weekly. The spring FAST screener data was then used to gather ending data. Growth was compared from the winter to spring data with the amount of parental involvement to determine if student's success in literacy can be increased with parental support.

Impact of Parental Involvement on Early Literacy Skills

Kindergarten is a crucial time to build foundational literacy skills. Kindergarten teachers work hard daily to ensure our students are learning these skills. Literacy skills needed by the end of kindergarten include phonics, sight words, vocabulary, letter sounds, letter names, grammar, and comprehension. These skills are taught in an explicit manner daily. Sometimes instruction from whole group and small group is not enough for students. Some students may need more support to help build strong literacy skills. The kindergarten team had wonderings, does parental involvement have a positive influence on kindergarten student's literacy skills?

Strong early literacy foundational skills are something that would truly benefit all students at the kindergarten level. Some students struggling with foundational skills might benefit from this extra practice at home more than others. Being a kindergarten teacher there is an obligation to ensure students have a great foundation for reading. A structured literacy program is used whole group with all students, and research-based curriculum for teaching other skills such as sight words, comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar. Students are taught six new sight words a week. About half of these students pick up and retain these words within that week while the other half continues to struggle with them. By conducting this research, the hope is that those struggling students will receive the extra support they need with reading our sight words and help them become more confident readers.

A note was sent home to parents informing them that homework would begin coming home after our winter FAST screener. The FAST screener was used as a baseline because screens important foundational literacy skills. "Alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, and fluency are strong predictors of future literacy performance" (Goffreda and DiPerna, 2010, p. 463). The FAST assessment measure letter sound fluency, CVC word segmenting, nonsense

word fluency, beginning sound recognition, and sight words. This screener assesses all three areas that students need for future literacy success. They were given examples of the types of work that their child may bring home and how to assist their child with that work. They began with letter sound and letter identification sheets and then progressed to beginning sounds, CVC word segmenting, non-sense words, and sight words. Many parents are unaware of what to work on with their child or don't have the material necessary to do so. The hope is that the research will show a positive correlation between parents being provided the materials needed to work with their child and student's success in literacy. By conducting this research, it will be determined if sending homework home has a positive impact on students learning.

Does parental involvement have an effect and influence on the literacy skills of kindergarten students? Current research shows that parental involvement can have multiple positive influences such as academic improvement in language arts, science, and math, social and emotional development, and motivation. These positive effects could be shown from all students no matter their socioeconomic status. Including parents and providing them with tools to be involved in their child's learning process has been proven to create a positive and strong home-school connection. Previous research will help support the idea of having students work on schoolwork at home. It would also guide the researcher to understand if at home work would be beneficial to building their foundational literacy skills. Foundational literacy skills in kindergarten consist of letter sound correspondence, beginning sound recognition, CVC word segmenting, nonsense word fluency, and sight word fluency. These skills are the focus of this study because they are kindergarten literacy standards and essential to beginning reading.

Review of the Literature

Outcomes of Parental Involvement

Parental school involvement is related to multiple positive outcomes. Berryhill (2016) states multiple positive outcomes of parental involvement. “Home-based involvement is related to increased child academic achievement and social-emotional development, better grades and higher standardized test results in language arts, math, and science” (Berryhill, 2016, p. 264). This research helps support further research because it helps in the decision to send work home with Kindergarten students. Although, many believe that children need time to be kids outside of school the work they will be completing at home are things that will not take any longer than five minutes a night and only need to be completed three nights per week. Parents will have to be involved in working with them on their literacy work at home because of their young age and the type of work that will be sent home. The goal is that this will not only have a positive impact on kindergarten student’s literacy skills but also positively impact their relationship with their parents. “Home learning activities can be enjoyed by both parents and their children and at the same time be beneficial” (Downing, and Grande, 2004, p. 125).

Parental involvement in student’s academics is shown to decline over time. The goal through this research is to build a strong home/school relationship foundation that will continue throughout the student’s academic years. Parents will feel a strong bond with their child’s educational process and will better understand what standards their child should be mastering by the end of their kindergarten school year. Parents will be given explicit instructions on how to assist their child at home with their homework. “Never assume parents know how to help with homework. The more specific you are, the greater chance of success for the child and parents” (Brandes, 2005, p. 54). By providing student’s parents with the tools needed to help build their

child's literacy skills at home the hope is to encourage them to continue this process every year. "Parental involvement in education is an influential tool for improving youth's academic outcomes" (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015, p. 1712).

Background of Community and School

The community involved in this research is a high poverty area. Many students in the school district are on free and reduced lunches due to their family's low income. Gordon and Cui (2014) takes into consideration families that live in poverty and how that effects those student's achievement even when the parents are involved. Through their research they found that "positive effects of parental involvement on adolescent schooling came from high-income communities and low-income communities" (Gordon & Cui, 2014, p. 622). This finding supports further research because students will be able to attain the positive literacy outcomes from home-parental involvement, no matter what type of home they come from. The goal is that it will also help build a bond between the parent, child, teacher, and school district. The child will know that their parents and teacher are both supporting their education and wanting to do whatever we can to help them learn, no matter their family income and home life.

Parental Involvement

Including parents in their child's education during kindergarten can have positive long-term effects. Creating a strong connection with parents in early school years such as preschool and kindergarten, can help set a positive tone for families for the rest of the child's school years and will hopefully encourage parents to stay involved in their child's education. "Students who struggle in the later grades can still have a chance if we can bridge the gap between home/community and school literacy" (Asselin, 2001, p. 61). Parents will be made aware of

what skills their child is needing to master during their kindergarten year. They will see the progress their child is making on those standards during parent/teacher conferences and when their standards-based report card is sent home each quarter. This form of communication will be beneficial for parents because they will have the work I have provided and sent home. They will be able to revisit any areas their child may be struggling with as needed. When teachers and parents work together to help students be successful positive outcomes follow. “Parental involvement is an important determinant of youth’s educational success and is linked to higher academic performance, and motivation across grade levels and racial-ethnic groups” (Bhargava, and Witherspoon, 2015, p. 1702). By bridging the gap between home and school we are creating a healthy environment built on communication and trust to help all students succeed.

Creating a Positive Home/School Connection

It is very important in today’s world to create a positive home-school connection before sending homework home for students and parents to work on together. This home-school connection has become so important that some state’s parent advisory councils are creating missions and visions to help foster this connection. “Maryland’s Parent Advisory Council has a vision of involvement which “parents, families, educators, and community members work together as real partners, hold themselves mutually accountable, and have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to succeed at improving the achievement of all students”” (Christie, 2005, p. 645). Creating a positive connection will give parents an optimistic outlook on their child’s work when it is sent home. “Parents perceive their involvement in their child’s homework as important, it is necessary to promote parent-teacher collaboration and parent-training workshops to improve the quality of parental homework involvement” (Cunha, Rosario, Macedo, Nunes, Fuentes, Pinto, Suarez, 2015, p. 159). Through collaboration with parents at parent teacher

conferences and through apps such as, *Class Dojo*, teachers can provide them with things they can work with their child at home on and explicitly model the correct way to do so. This will build a positive parent/teacher connection and show them that they are a part of a team in their child's educational process. This also encourages the parent and gives them the confidence to help build their child's literacy skills at home.

Using Communication as a Tool

“Communicating: emphasizing communication in both directions, from school to families and from families to school” (Dickers, 2013, p. 116). Utilizing an app such as, *Class Dojo*, as a means of communication creates a comfortable school to home communication line as well as a home to school communication line. The teacher is able to send out information as a mass message to all parents as well as private messages to individual parents. Parents can also respond in private messages which creates an opportunity for them to ask any questions they may have and let the teacher know if they need further clarification. There are other means of communication that allow family to school and school to family communication such as e-mail and phone calls. Giving parents multiple ways they can reach you as the teacher will help create a parent/teacher connection and in turn encourage the parents to support their child's learning at home. “Every communication exchange, regardless of format, should reflect a thoughtful, planned approach and should be viewed as an opportunity for teachers to promote parent partnerships and, ultimately, to support student learning” (Graham-Clay, 2005, p. 126-127).

Intrinsic Motivation

At the kindergarten level there is a high pressure to start a love for learning in all students. Creating a love for learning will motivate students to continually want to learn more.

Teaching students to have a growth mindset will help encourage this love for learning as well. It is important to instill a growth mindset in students to help ensure they want to work at home on their literacy skills to better themselves. Instilling intrinsic motivation in them will be a skill they will have and need for a lifetime. “The results of this study showed that in all three grade level subgroups of students, the amount of homework completed was positively related to academic achievement” (Nunez, Suarez, Rosario, Vallejo, Valle, & Epstein, 2015, p. 393). Teachers can teach their students that even at home they can be self-starters. Teachers can also instill the power of yet. Students may not have a standard mastered yet, but they will continue to work on that area at school and home until they feel confident in their abilities in that content area. Although at the kindergarten level they will need to have parental assistance they can get their homework out and ask a parent or guardian to work with them.

Early Literacy Skills

Foundational literacy skills such as letter sounds, beginning sounds, CVC word segmenting, nonsense word fluency, and sight words are very important indicators of future reading success. These areas should be mastered by the end of the kindergarten school year as they are all Iowa common core standards for kindergarten students. Ensuring all kindergarten students are confident in these skills will help set a positive tone for when these students are beginning to read. “Preschool and kindergarten students with poor knowledge of letter names and sounds are more likely to struggle with learning to read and be classified as having reading disabilities” (Piasta and Wagner, 2010, p. 8). To ensure these areas are being met all students work on these skills at school in small groups, whole group, and independently as well as at home with parental guidance. Progress on these skills is monitored weekly to help guide literacy instruction and see how each child is responding to current instruction. Changes can be made as

needed and additional supports, such as individual assistance, can be added to this regimen if needed. Teachers and parents work as a team to ensure early success for all students to prepare them for reading.

Past Research

There has been extensive research done on the impact of parental involvement in the school setting and at home. Much of this research has shown a positive correlation between student achievement and parental involvement. “Family literacy programs involving parents can result in positive effects on children’s language and literacy development” (Doyle and Zhang, 2011, p. 223). This research will hopefully confirm this when the focus is primarily the effect of parental involvement on student’s literacy skills. Informal and formal data is used to find this information. The formal data used will come from student’s winter and spring FAST composite scores. Informal data will be derived from weekly letter sound progress monitoring. This information will not only help the teacher visualize student progress but will also help guide the parents on the amount of time they are spending working with their child weekly. It will also help encourage them to ensure they are having school work time with their child at home weekly if they are not making the growth they should be. The research that has been previously read and reviewed encourages and supports the decision to involve the parents of students in their learning. Meetings with parents will be scheduled and the work they will be completing with their child will be modeled for them. They will be shown ways they can support their child’s learning in the home setting.

Methods

Participants

The participants of this study include 21 kindergarten students. It will be researching the literacy skill growth of twelve boys and nine girls. These students will range in age from five to six years old. First, data will be collected from the winter FAST screener to obtain a baseline for all students. This screener assesses student's letter sound fluency, beginning sounds knowledge, word segmenting, and nonsense word fluency. Once baseline data collected is collected the researcher will begin parental involvement by sending home explicit instructions on literacy skill work for them to work with their child at home on. The researcher will create a recording sheet for parents to sign each week they work with their child. This will be put into a spread sheet to keep an organized record of which students were receiving support and how often. Students will be observed daily on skills growth and will also be progressed monitored on letter sound fluency weekly. The progress monitoring data will be put into individual graphs showing their trend line compared to their goal line. This data will be watched closely to monitor student growth and will also be used to compare the growth of students who have been consistently receiving support at home with those that have not been receiving sufficient support from parents. Lastly, students will take the FAST screener again in May to compare their growth in all areas. They will once again be tested on letter sounds fluency, nonsense word fluency, and beginning sound recognition, and word segmenting. Once all data is collected the researcher will be using it to determine whether parental involvement does or does not have a positive impact on student's literacy growth and achievement. This will help the researcher determine if sending home literacy skill work is an effective practice for future use. It will also help decide what support or

interventions students that do not receive the support at home could receive at school to level the playing field.

The variables analyzed throughout this research include the Independent variable of parental involvement and the Dependent variable of student's literacy skills. Other variables that may impact the findings of the research include student's socioeconomic status as the area these students live in range from low income to middle class families. Some students may have learning difficulties that could affect the outcome of this study. These students may be receiving special instructional assistance for these learning difficulties or may not yet qualify for them. Family demographics could play a role in this study. To participate in this study parents must work with the child for five to ten minutes each night. Single parent homes, students living with grandparents or other living situations may not be able to accomplish this due to extenuating circumstances. All of these variables could affect the findings in this research.

Data Collection

While collecting data the researcher will take into consideration any possible variables. In this study the independent variable will be parental involvement. The researcher understands not all parents will be willing to assist their child with their literacy skills at home. Some parents may go above and beyond, practicing literacy skills nightly, while others may only practice once a week. This independent variable will affect the dependent variable, my student's literacy skills.

To measure parental involvement a spread sheet will be created with a column for each week. The researcher will keep track of each time a student returns their signed form showing work was completed at home with a parent or guardian. To measure student's literacy skills all students will receive the FAST screener to measure letter sound fluency, nonsense word fluency, phoneme segmentation, and beginning sounds before we begin sending home the at homework

Students will be progressed monitored on letter sounds throughout the study. A midterm assessment will be demonstrated to collect data and then the final data piece will come from the FAST screener given in May. Data from these three assessments will be used to measure student's literacy growth. The researcher will compare the data from the two variables to determine if the students who had a high occurrence of parental involvement at home had a larger increase in their literacy scores than those who did not have much parental involvement at home.

The data will be both Qualitative and Quantitative. The Qualitative will include measuring parental involvement through return forms. The Quantitative data will include weekly letter sound progress monitoring, and winter and spring FAST assessment composite scores to measure student's growth in grade level literacy skills. A spreadsheet will be used and a signature form will be sent home with work and returned to collect data on parental involvement. This will show the researcher which parents are working with their children at home on literacy skills and how often. The researcher will be able to compare the at home work with student growth to monitor each child's progress. Validity and reliability of this data collection process is unknown. To measure student's literacy skills, the researcher will administer the winter FAST assessment to get a baseline composite. The spring FAST assessment will be used as a posttest to show student growth. The FAST assessment screens student's letter sound fluency, nonsense word fluency, word segmenting, phoneme segmentation, and sight word knowledge. Validity and reliability of these tests are unknown. Students will also have weekly letter sound progress monitoring to monitor growth between testing periods.

Table 1

Amount of Parental Involvement and Student Scores

Student	Amount of Parental Involvement (18 weeks total)	Winter FAST screener composite score (Benchmark 52)	Spring FAST screener composite score (Benchmark 65)	Total Growth from Winter to Spring (Adequate growth=13)
A	7	60	71	11
B	17	52	73	21
C	5	28	38	10
D	14	64	79	15
E	17	63	84	21
F	15	63	82	19
G	16	57	78	21
H	12	55	67	12
I	10	60	73	13
J	15	50	67	17
K	9	53	64	11
L	3	60	65	5
M	5	54	62	8
N	9	49	59	10
O	15	45	64	19
P	13	51	66	15
Q	15	62	77	15
R	16	43	61	18
S	8	52	63	11
T	10	54	66	12
U	8	61	70	9

Findings

This study showed that eleven of the twenty-one students in this study had what is considered adequate growth based on their FAST composite scores from winter to spring. These students also had the highest amount of at home parental involvement recorded in this study. The six students that had composite growth of eighteen to twenty-one averaged recorded parental involvement sixteen out of the eighteen researched weeks. The five students that showed composite growth from thirteen to seventeen from winter to spring averaged recorded parental involvement sixteen out of the eighteen researched weeks. The five students that showed composite growth from thirteen to seventeen from winter to spring averaged a little over thirteen weeks of parental involvement out of eighteen weeks. The amount of parental involvement dropped drastically for those who did not show adequate growth.

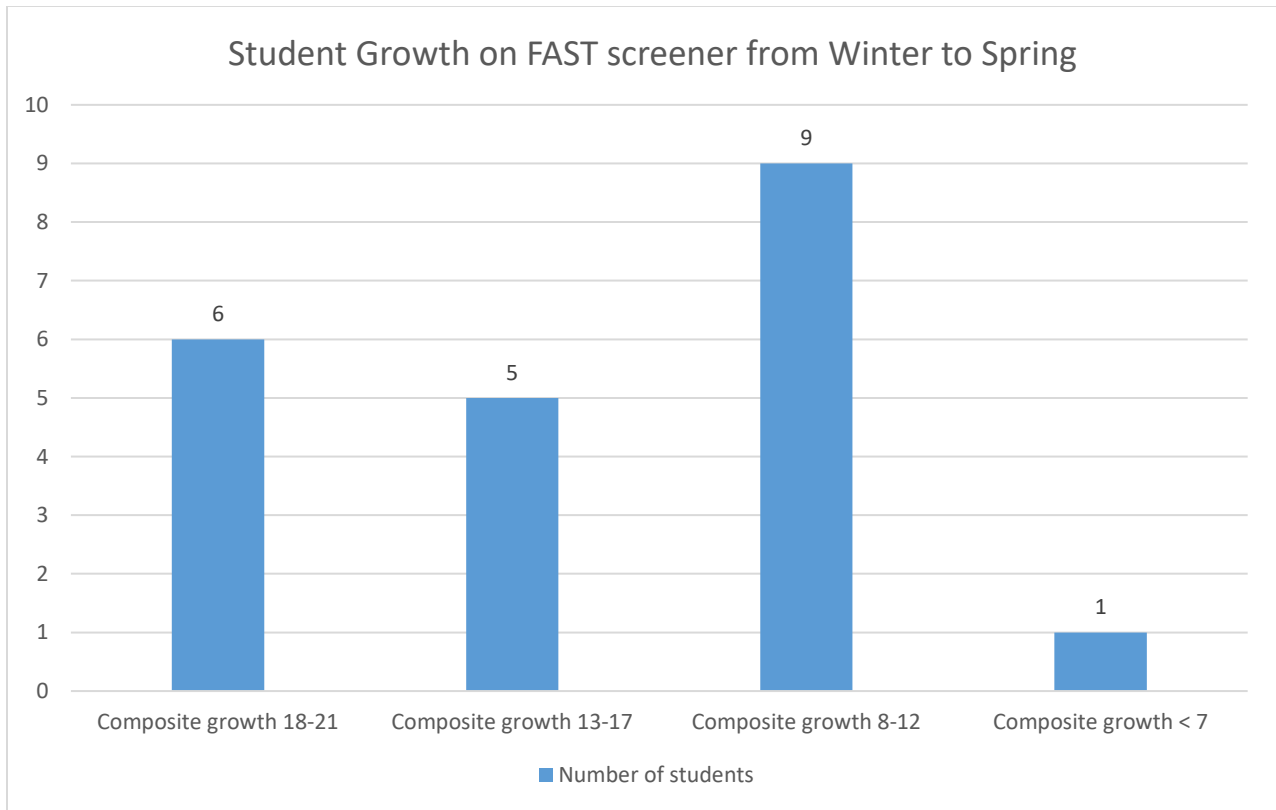


Figure 1

Student Growth from Winter to Spring

The nine students that showed growth between eight and twelve averaged eight weeks of at home parental involvement. The one student that showed growth less than seven only had three weeks of parental involvement out of a total of eighteen weeks. Overall, there is a positive correlation between parents helping their child build literacy skills at home and the child’s ability to show those skills learned on the FAST screener. The skills worked on and tested are essential skills for beginning readers. These skills included letter sounds, beginning sounds, CVC word segmenting, nonsense words, and sight words. These two graphs show the importance of at home parental involvement and the positive effects it can have on students foundational literacy skills.

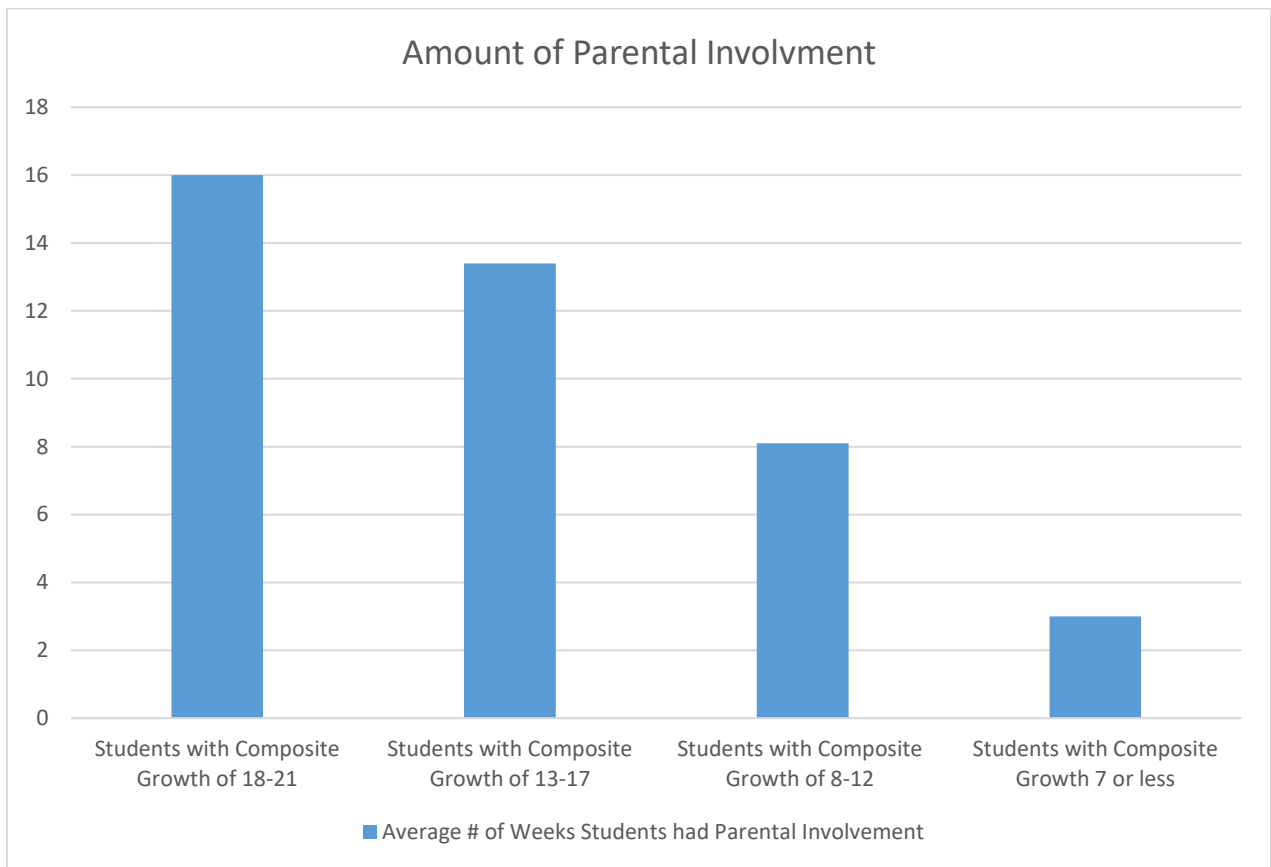


Figure 2

Amount of Parental Involvement

Data Analysis

The data analysis will be both qualitative and quantitative. For qualitative data analysis the researcher will be using coding surveys. The researcher will be using this to find a pattern in or correlation in parents at home involvement in their students learning and an increase in literacy skills. Key questioning will also be used to help analyze the data. The researcher will be asking and answering questions such as: How did parental involvement effect student achievement in literacy? And how much of a positive influence did the involvement have on the student's learning? The quantitative data analysis technique of connecting findings to personal experience will be used during this process. The quantitative data will be collected through comparing the FAST screener results and the post test results with the student's pretest and parental involvement spread sheet. Having supportive and involved parents will more than likely not only help students succeed in the classroom but also help build other important aspects such as self-esteem. To ensure students do not get burnt out on schoolwork at such a young age the researcher will use their understanding of balancing school and home life and keep this in mind when analyzing the data.

The research question asks, does parental involvement have an effect and influence on the literacy skills of kindergarten students? The independent variable in these questions is the parental involvement. The dependent variable is the impact on student's literacy skills. The research plan includes collecting data by creating a spread sheet to keep track of parental involvement through homework slips returned to school. The researcher will then compare this to the student's growth on the winter FAST screener, midterm assessment and the winter FAST screener. Students will also be progress monitored on letter sound fluency weekly to track their progress along the way. Progress can be checked quickly by reviewing individual student's

progress monitoring graphs on the FAST Bridge website. These graphs show each student individual target line, trend line and if they are making adequate growth.

Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

Based on the data collected during this study it can be concluded that the students with the highest amount of parental involvement also had the highest amount of growth on the FAST screener from winter to spring. Students were screened on foundational literacy skills such as letter sounds, CVC word segmenting, nonsense word fluency, beginning sounds and sight words. Each week a different skill was sent home with explicit instructions for parents or guardians to complete with their child. The researcher kept a spread sheet of which weeks the homework sheet was signed and returned to school over a total of 18 weeks. Students with parental involvement of at least thirteen of the eighteen weeks during this study had what is considered adequate growth from winter to spring on their FAST early reading screener, a composite score growth of thirteen or more. The students with very little parental involvement, eight or less weeks, did not see adequate growth from winter to spring. The single student that only worked at home with a parent 3 of the 18 weeks only grew by 5 points on the composite FAST score from winter to spring. This data shows that parental involvement at home does have a positive effect on kindergarten student's foundational literacy skills such as letter sounds, CVC word segmenting, nonsense words, onset sounds, and sight words.

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations that may affect the findings of this research, the effects of parental involvement on literacy. One of these limitations might be parents that will sign a paper saying they worked with their child even when they have not. The researcher will have no way

to know whether each parent is truly working with their child at home when sending home things to help build their child's literacy skills. Another limitation could be parents that are working with their child at home but not signing and returning the paper that shows they did. This is another limitation that the researcher will not know if the time spent on the study was enough to really have a true picture of the importance of parental involvement. Another limitation that could affect the findings are student demographics. Some of the students come to school daily with problems from home weighing on their mind. This could affect their ability to show what literacy skills they truly do know but maybe are not able to portray that day. Parental level of education may also be a limitation in this study. Although very explicit instructions will be sent home and modeling will be done at parent teacher conferences, some parents may just not understand exactly what is expected of their child or understand some of the important literacy skills taught, such as letter sounds, blending sounds, digraphs, and nonsense words. This lack of understanding may hinder their ability to help their child at home or may have them thinking they are helping but not correctly, which could confuse the child more than anything. Timing of the study may also cause limitations in the findings. Starting this type of study at the beginning of the year would warrant more gains than starting it in the middle of the school year. Students are learning so much at the beginning of the year that the additional at home support could really help give them the extra help they need to show proficiency quicker.

Further Study

To further this study, the researcher could continue this study starting at the beginning of the school year with a new group of students. This would give the researcher more FAST screener data points and would show if students would still have the same growth with parental involvement over a longer period of time. The research could also ask for parent volunteers

before the school year begins to get parents involved in their child's education in the school setting. Parent volunteers could come in and do read alouds, work with students in small groups or one on one, and monitor areas during small groups. The researcher could also create a group of vertical grade level teachers to share the findings and get others involved in the study. This would give the researcher data to show if there are positive effects of parental involvement on the literacy skills of students of all ages.

Conclusion

Does parental involvement have an effect and influence on the literacy skills of kindergarten students? The findings in this study show that parental involvement does have a positive effect and influence on the literacy skills of kindergarten students. Students were given written explicit instructions and weekly work to take home and work on with their parents. A signature sheet was to be brought back to school at the end of each week to show a parent had worked with the student. Students were progress monitored weekly on letter sound correspondence to track growth. The parental involvement was tracked on a spreadsheet and progress monitoring was graphed each week. The amount of parental involvement was then compared to the student growth data from their winter to spring FAST composite scores. The FAST screener assessed student's ability to show letter-sound correspondence, CVC word segmenting, beginning sound recognition, nonsense word fluency, and sight word recognition. All of these skills were sent home at least twice to practice with an adult over the duration of this study. Students with higher parental involvement at home showed more growth on their FAST screener than those who did not have a high amount of parental involvement. Giving parents an opportunity to be an influential part of their child's learning process helped students build their literacy skills and also created a positive connection between the teacher and parent(s) or

guardian(s). This research has supported the findings of other similar studies. Other studies have shown positive correlations between parental involvement and student success. Not only does parental involvement have a positive effect on literacy skills other research shows it has a positive effect on many other areas of our youth's lives. "Home-based involvement is related to increased child academic achievement and social-emotional development, better grades and higher standardized test results in language arts, math, and science" (Berryhill, 2016, p. 264).

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