

The Effectiveness of a Community Involvement Information Session Involving Translated  
Materials and Interpreters On Hispanic Student Attendance

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables	i
Abstract	ii
I. Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem	4
Statement of Research Hypothesis	4
Operational Definitions	4
II. Review of the Literature	6
Parental Involvement	6
Impact on Parental Involvement	8
Challenges and Theories	10
Strategies	14
Conclusion	18
III. Methods	20
Design	20
Participants	21
Instrument	22
Procedure	22
IV. Results	25
Table I.	25
Comparisons to Prior Research	26
Implications of Results	26
Threats to Validity	27

Implications of Future Research	29
Conclusion/Summary	30
Appendix A –English Version of Parent Invitation	32
Appendix B-Spanish Version of Parent Invitation	33
References	34

## List of Tables

1. Means, standard deviations, and <u>t</u> -test results comparing mean number of hours attended prior to, and after, the community meeting	25
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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to determine if elementary student school attendance would increase if Hispanic families were informed about school policies, requirements, and expectations pertaining to attendance by the use of translated materials and interpreters through a community based information session. This study involved use of pretest and post test design to measure student attendance rates in six week increments before and after a community information session where translated materials and interpreters were present. Subjects ( $n = 8$ ) served as their own controls. The students attended significantly more hours of school in the six weeks after the intervention (Mean = 169.81, SD = 5.42) than in the six weeks prior to the intervention (Mean = 151.25, SD = 13.42) [ $t(7) = -5.25, p < .001$ ]. Research in this area should continue as there is very little information regarding the impact of translated materials and the use of interpreters within a community based meeting on increasing student attendance.

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Schools in the United States have experienced changes in their demographic profile over time. However, there has been little research on how this change impacts the Hispanic students of the U.S. schools. As demonstrated by the 2000 Census, the Hispanic population within the United States has grown exponentially (Clayton, 2011).

It is critical that educators and researchers find ways to increase the educational success of the growing Hispanic school population. One avenue of improving student success is improving school attendance. Spencer (2009) found in her study, *School Attendance Patterns, Unmet Educational Needs and Truancy*, that student attendance is imperative during elementary school years. In Kindergarten through grade 1, students begin developing reading, writing, and social skills, all of which are necessary components of student achievement. In grades 2–3, basic skills are reinforced and built upon. During grades 4–5, academic skills become more complex. It is imperative that children attend school, not only due to state mandates, but to receive the necessary skills needed to succeed in the public school system. Students not attending school regularly are not receiving the same vital instruction as their peers. Missing this vital instruction prohibits them from increasing their academic knowledge.

Spencer discovered that truancy patterns can be dated back to a student's elementary school years. This absenteeism tends to lead to higher drop-out rates among bilingual students (Spencer, 2009).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2010), children living in poverty are 25% more likely to miss three or more days of school per month (Bloom, Cohen, & Freedom, 2011). Ready found in *Socioeconomic Disadvantage, School Attendance, and Early*

Cognitive Development, that students who benefit most from attending school are the same students who suffer chronic absences. Therefore, schools targeting attendance rates must target those students from lower socioeconomic statuses (Ready, 2010).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation emphasizes the importance of attendance as an indicator of adequate yearly progress related to elementary accountability (Spencer, 2009). Schools are required to maintain specific attendance rates among the various demographic groups within their school. The NCLB statute defines parental involvement as the participation of parents in meaningful communication involving students' academic learning. In addition, according to the statute, whenever practical, written translations of printed information should be provided to parents with limited English Proficiency in a language they can understand. Therefore, in order to better meet the ideals of the NCLB, communications about attendance expectancies should be presented to parents in a language in which they are fluent.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, (2009) 21 percent of children spoke a language other than English at home, 5 percent spoke English with difficulty, and 73 percent of those who spoke English with difficulty spoke Spanish (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). Thus, there are likely a large number of American student households in which the parents are not fluent in English and would have difficulty understanding English based school communication.

A disproportionate number of these children also have the risk factor of poverty. This would suggest that Hispanic students, particularly those of non-English speaking parents, are at particular risk for attendance problems. The Pew Hispanic Center Report, written by Fry and Gonzales determined in 2008 that more than a quarter of Hispanic students (28%) live in poverty, compared with 16% of non-Hispanic students. This suggests that Hispanic students

enrolled in public schools are more likely to reside in households at or below the poverty level. Hispanic students are one-and-a-half times as likely to live in poverty, and foreign-born Hispanic students are twice as likely.

The 2010 U.S. Census Bureau report 26.6 percent of Hispanics work within service occupations. In 2010, the average Hispanic family median income was \$40,165. In 2010, the U.S. Census bureau reported that 24.8 percent of Hispanics were living at the poverty level (Hispanic/Latino Profile, 2010).

There has been little research on Hispanic student attendance rates. One possible solution to increasing Hispanic student attendance is to lower the barriers for community participation.

Abrams and Taylor found community participation, especially from parents, is positively correlated with attendance rates (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). It is important that student attendance expectations be communicated to parents. Unfortunately, this communication is often compromised by social class and cultural differences. Cultural capital is the knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has, which give them a higher status in society.

Sociologist Lareau's (1989) ethnographic research in public elementary schools found that non-English speaking families, often considered to be below-income parents, do not possess the Cultural Capital necessary to communicate their opinions in the public school arena (as cited in Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). Linguistic capital is defined as the mastery of and relation to language. Linguistic capital can be understood as a form of cultural capital in that it represents a means of communication and self-presentation acquired from one's surrounding culture. For this reason community based information sessions held in family's native languages are important for maintaining effective communication within the school community with the hopes of improving the non-English speaking families' cultural capital.



### **Statement of the Problem**

A community based information session where attendance policies are explained to Hispanic parents by Spanish speaking interpreters and through translated materials could increase student attendance rates at the elementary level among Hispanic students whose parents do not use English as their primary language.

### **Statement of the Research Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis is that there will be no statistically significant difference in the number of hours of school attended by Hispanic students whose parents participated in a community information session with information provided in Spanish in the six weeks preceding the information session and the six weeks following the information session.

### **Operational Definitions**

**Hispanic students** are defined by the study as students attending an elementary school whose parents identified them as being of Hispanic ethnicity on their student identification cards.

**Student attendance** is defined as the total number of hours a student attends school per day. A school week is defined as five days per week, 6.5 hours per day. A student's attendance score will be based off of the total number of hours of school attended over each six (week period).

**Community based information session** is defined as a meeting, held in an apartment complex in a centralized location in which many of the students reside. Information was presented in Spanish orally and in text. The meeting communicated information about attendance expectations, community resources, and reading strategies in a make-it take it fashion, which could be implemented inexpensively within the home.

**Attendance expectations** are defined as the amount of time children are expected to be in school per year. This includes the allotted number of absences both excused and unexcused.

**Community resources** are defined as resources in the community available to assist families with educational and language based issues including discounted services and materials from an internet provider and free English and Spanish classes at a local college.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This review of the literature explores various aspects of parental involvement as it relates to diverse families. Society assumes that parents who are not attending school meetings do not understand the importance of education or do not have high expectations for their children's learning (Li, 2003). Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'afoi, Talenti, and O'Regan (2009) found parents who are unable to visit schools are less likely to gain the social, informational, and material rewards gained by parents who participate in the "parental involvement" roles valued and delineated by schools. In addition, parents who are not able to be present at the school may be viewed as indifferent or uncaring, a position that may have negative ramifications for their children.

Section one will address the importance of parental involvement in education. Section two will address the ideal condition and impact of parental involvement by analyzing Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement. Section three highlights the challenges parents face as they try to become involved with their children's school. The reality of parental involvement is that individuals of low socioeconomic status and those with inadequate access to public resources in the community are at a disadvantage (Li, 2003). Specifically, this section will highlight the Cultural Mismatch Theory, the Minority Assimilation and Acculturation Theory, and the Cultural Capital Theory. The final section shows school and community centered strategies available, which benefit both the schools and the parents.

#### **Parental Involvement**

Scribner and Scribner (2001) stated "parent involvement encompasses a multitude of complex phenomena. Differences in the family structure, culture, ethnic background, social

class, age and gender represent only a few of the factors affecting interpretations of or generalizations about the nature of parent involvement ” (as cited in Ferguson and Southwest Educational, 2005, p.1). Fradd (1992) referred to Stedman (1987) who states the perception that schools are solely responsible for educational outcomes is not the case in the society we live in. Education is a process that includes all stakeholders: teachers, parents, and students together in a collaborative effort. Students are more likely to succeed, develop social skills, cooperate and engage with peers, and demonstrate self-control when parents are able to model and teach their children about these interactions. This teaching begins in the home. Parents must be able to talk to their children about the importance of school and assist them with practicing learned skills (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010).

Often parents do not fully understand how to support their students and maintain a positive relationship with schools. Effective collaboration models should include the cultural and linguistic diversity (Fradd, 1992). Schools report they struggle to increase attendance at parent nights. They feel they lack effective strategies to successfully promote parental involvement (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Parent training sessions have proven to be effective within the schoolhouse; however, it can be difficult to attract parents to take part in a manner that produces change (Nix, Bierman, & McMahon, 2009). Clear communication must be developed between school and home in order to effectively communicate expectations. Bower found that Latino families tend to respect the role of the school and teacher, making it less likely they will contact the school regarding potential problems, especially when English is not their first language.

## **Impact on Parental Involvement**

Parent involvement, overall, is a positive indicator of school success. Parent involvement starts when a child steps through the doors their first year of school. Parents who are active participants in their children's kindergarten experience are supportive and caring, as well as involved in school activities and have direct and regular contact with the school. Parents need to maintain direct and regular contact with the school in order to understand whether their children are excelling or if deficiencies are presenting themselves (Ray & Smith, 2010).

Bower refers to The Epstein Model of Parental Involvement which outlines six concrete types of family involvement behaviors: positive home conditions, communication, involvement at school, home learning activities, shared decision making within the school, and community partnerships. As defined by Epstein, positive home conditions refer to a child's basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. It also includes providing the school supplies and a place in the home for the child to complete schoolwork (Ingram, Wolf, & Lieberman, 2007).

The second important aspect according to Epstein's framework is communication between home and school. This communication can be seen in many forms, specifically informing parents of student progress or lack thereof, upcoming school programs, and school related activities. Schools expect that parents act upon the information schools give them regarding their child's progress (Ingram et al., 2007).

The third aspect of Epstein's Parental Involvement Method is maintaining involvement at school through school-to-home communication. This can be seen through the form of conferences, volunteering, open houses, report cards, even newsletters. The job of the school is to find appropriate ways of helping all parents to acknowledge and understand their role in the home-school partnership (Ray & Smith, 2010).

The fourth aspect to Epstein's model discusses learning at home. Family members can direct and support their children at home with homework assignments and other school-related activities. Other researchers have found that parents' educational expectations and aspirations for their children are associated with academic achievement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Parents with different backgrounds may display different types of involvement. Depending on how parents regard experiences, behaviors, attitudes, or perceptions about parental involvement will determine the amount of contact that takes place within the home (Fletcher, et al. 2009).

Lastly, Epstein highlighted collaboration within the community. This focuses on parent involvement with services and resources within the community which can lend to their students' achievement. It also includes parents' efforts to communicate with other parents and other resources to gain perspective about the school, their children, or their family (Ingram et al. 2007). It is important for families and schools to communicate present circumstances in order to provide the school with a clear picture of the family's resources, their household dynamics, and the ways family members participate within the community (Fradd, 1992).

Parental involvement has been positively linked to improved academic achievement, increased school attendance, positive student and family perceptions of school climate, and a willingness to embark on academic work. In addition, it appears that the quantity of parent and student interaction, aspirations for higher education, and parent satisfaction with teachers have been positively linked as well (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Resources for parents speaking languages other than English are available and can be accessed through communication with the school system. Bilingual and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers are knowledgeable about the development of students' English skills and how particular students compare with others of the same age from the same

language background. They know how to integrate language development into classroom-based instruction while maintaining a focus on the content of the lesson. These teachers usually are in close contact with parents, siblings, and the ethnic communities. When parents are able to use their first language in meetings, the parents are more relaxed and they are better able to advocate for their children if they can use their first language (Fletcher, et al., 2009).

Facilitating a translator to be present at school-related functions could assist parents both receptively and expressively communicating with the school (Fletcher, et al., 2009). They may be able to serve as a cultural bridge to help teachers and administrators address cultural and academic requirements of students (Fradd, 1992). Involving family members in the teaching process can benefit students, families, and the school community in general. Interaction between families and schools can enhance the understanding of school practices and school culture in addition to promoting learning activities in the home. Instructional programs using the home language as well as English provide the greatest opportunities for family participation. This type of direct communication between the home and school in the language that is most comfortable for the family members is the key to foster collaboration.

### **Challenges and Theories**

Fletcher reported that if schools do not invite family members to the school, and the school staff do not meet with families within the community they will not foster a home school partnership to support children's learning (Fletcher, et al., 2009). One reason that parents may avoid involvement in their child's school experience is that they are under considerable stress (Ray & Smith, 2010). This pivotal point is considered to be a stressor in the transitional experience to the child and to the family.

Parents' negative attitudes about school are attributed to societal barriers such as, lack of employment, lack of time with working multiple jobs, and lack of monetary necessities. Parents with low levels of education, for example, may be less involved at school because they feel less confident about communicating with school staff due to poor knowledge of the school system, a lack of familiarity with educational jargon, or their reliance on negative perceptions from their own educational experiences (Fletcher, et al., 2009). On the flip side, parents who question or challenge teachers' authority or who do not emulate the prevailing middle-class norms of the school are generally made to feel unwelcome (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002).

Non-English speaking parents may experience difficulty communicating praise or dissatisfaction with their child's educational performance. Carreon, Drake, and Barton indicated that parental attendance may be high at parent-school activities, but the genuine interactions between the parents and the school may be minimal (Carreon, Drake, & Barton. 2005). They went on to explain that because of non-English speakers limited familiarity with the English language, parents experience difficulty expressing their views and concerns regarding the schooling of their children. Colina and Sykes stated that language is an instrument of identity and power. Immigrant parents lose some of the power they had in their home countries because they lack awareness of the nuances of language called for in particular school situations. Immigrant parents often must rely on their children as translators with schools, shifting natural power structure within both the family and the school (Colina & Sykes, 2004).

For some parents the lack of bilingual personnel within a school represents a source of concern and symbolizes a lack of respect for parents who have to wait until a translator is available to speak on their behalf in school situations (Carreon, et al., 2005). Parents talk about difficulties in communication with school personnel and how they feel they do not have respect



when they attended school events where translators are not available. In an attempt to reduce these barriers, schools should provide translators as a means of communication between the school and the families. The barriers listed above impact families and schools across the United States and prevent parents from gaining knowledge about how to help with schoolwork or support learning at home (Ingram, et al., 2007). Although it may not be intentional, the school system acts as a barrier itself. The lack of teacher training in parent involvement; and teachers' negative attitudes and mistaken assumptions about parents also work against the goal of including families within the school realm. In order for the parents and the schools to understand the barriers that are preventing families from being more involved in schools, several theories have been used to examine the different aspects surrounding parental involvement.

The language barriers these minority families face are only one of the many obstacles they face when trying to involve themselves in school-related functions. Minority families' first language and the language of instruction in schools differ (Fletcher, et al., 2009). Without the facilitation of a translator, communication between families and schools becomes complicated when dealing with diverse populations with schools.

The cultural mismatch theory takes a look at cultural values compared to the school systems beliefs. By using this theory the values and beliefs between the minority and the school can be better analyzed. When there is a mismatch or a difference in the language, the literacy beliefs, and the interactional patterns of schools and minority families. Individuals involved must understand that school literacy discussions are an important mark for school success (Li, 2003). Students from non-mainstream cultural backgrounds have to learn a different set of conventions of literacy practices and often experience difficulties with schooling.

Another obstacle families face is the location where they reside, the jobs where they work, and their niche within society. Employing the Assimilation and Acculturation theory has allowed researchers to analyze families living in low socioeconomic statuses with low paying labor-intensive occupations. In addition, minority families are sometimes separated from their ethnic community. Families in these situations are typically not in close contact with their culture, which has been reported to have a negative impact on their children's' ability to be successful in school (Li, 2003). Non-English speakers may be unaware of school expectations with regard to academics, attendance, and federal laws, which schools are required to uphold. These non-English speakers are inevitably reliant upon others to relay information. Fletcher et al. referred to findings from a study conducted by Harkness, Hughes, Muller, and Super's (2005) which highlighted that non-English speaking parents in the United States reported that many of their children were cared for by older siblings or relatives. Family routines were restricted by work schedules and parents' limited educational backgrounds which made providing effective support with schooling unattainable (Fletcher, et al., 2009).

The Cultural Capital Theory analyzes how schools replicate uneven power relationships which end up working against minority groups. This power struggle translates into social segregation, thus ensuring that the status quo of minority groups is maintained (Li, 2003). Although, many minority groups are fluent speakers of the English language it is important not to forget that a large sub-group is unable to communicate using English. Colina and Sykes (2004) refer to the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 that requires that all students receive equal educational opportunities, regardless of their race, color, sex or national origin. Despite this detailed legislation, reaction on behalf of the schools is delayed due to poor communication with the involved minority families. The need for a family's first language to be

acknowledged and used in the school setting is a critical issue in building effective home school relationships (Fletcher, et al., 2009).

While translation is looked at as a key to communicating with minority families it can also be an issue. Bower and Griffin (2011) determined through their work that although most schools translate written communication, translation should not end with written language if schools truly desire parents' involvement and collaboration. It is not enough to have documents translated and sent home to be read (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Colina and Sykes (2004) take a look at translating in the historical perspective. She refers to early translations focusing on word-for-word translation of the text. Often the message can be skewed or not effectively communicated to non-English speakers. A more effective method of translation works to develop translation on a more personal level implemented within the social context and will be discussed as a parental involvement strategy later in the review.

### **Strategies**

Communication between schools and families is a two way street. Ideally, when parents attend school and community based meetings, the resources and home centered activities that parents can do with their children are available to the parents in their native language and translators are available to answer questions or provide guidance for families. A number of books and programs are available for encouraging parent involvement in bilingual literacy development (Fradd, 1992).

Suggestions for involving parents in school programs include the following: cultural events and activities, written and oral communication in the language of the home; designated school personnel from whom families can obtain information about school events. Trained interpreters and translators serve as the communication link working with families and school

personnel to communicate student performance and school culture between families and schools. They are able to create handbooks and written forms available in the languages of the families represented in the school (Fradd, 1992).

The first strategy to benefit non-English speaking parents and their children is the implementation of skilled interpreters to be used within the home school community. This is both a school based and community centered approach (Colina & Sykes, 2004). Colina and Sykes believe that functionalist theories of translation are the more descriptive and explanatory in nature than other historical methods which relied on word-for-word translation. Translated materials and those interpreted must take into consideration the purpose and the circumstances; it must be used in the social context correctly. Resources must be made available for local agencies to receive the benefits of skilled interpreters and translators. In an attempt to employ translators appropriately, schools can hold community and school meetings where translators are present. It is the school's responsibility to educate parents about the effective strategies to be employed at home to better help their children.

Translators have proven to be effective in facilitating and participating in school related functions. A liaison, able to speak the parents' first language, could visit parents in their home and encourage a greater understanding of how teachers and parents can work together to support children's learning (Fletcher, et al., 2009). School and classroom volunteer programs have the potential to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents (Ingram, et al., 2007). Parent involvement is positively correlated with academic success for most students. The more parents are involved in a child's education, both at home and at school, the more academically successful the child will be (Ingram, et al., 2007).

The second strategy in a school centered approach to attain parental involvement is to look specifically at parental motivation. Allowing non-English speaking parents to see that there are individuals employed within their students' school or district who share their same ethnic background, values, cultures, and beliefs can be a motivator of parent participation. Feeling as if they have a connection with the school can promote self advocacy helping parents believe that their beliefs and actions will produce a desired outcome where as those who feel their actions are useless do not participate (Shah, 2009).

The third strategy in a school centered approach titled Project Reach out and Read (ROAR). Project ROAR has been reported to have had positive impacts on all English and non-English speaking parents involved. Project ROAR is a program created to help parents become aware of in-home activities to promote literacy and school success. Such a program would be beneficial to non-English speakers because their educational backgrounds may be limited. A program such as project ROAR could educate non-English speaking parents on ways to work with their children within their homes. This program not only motivates parents of lower socioeconomic classes to actively and regularly participate but also motivates parents to participate with monetary incentives. The parents participating in project ROAR are trained in a workshop setting to learn to develop positive attitudes towards literacy, which increases their interaction with their children, and the amount of time both parents and children engage in literacy activities outside formal schooling (Gilliam, Gerla, & Wright, 2004).

The fourth strategy is a community centered approach to increasing parental involvement called the Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement (OCCMSI). The OCCMSI model could be beneficial for non-English speaking families because it breaks the language barriers between schools, teachers, and families. Many communities have free classes

for non-English speaking parents at local colleges that allow non-English speakers to connect with other people in the community. OCCMSI enables family and community resources for learning, healthy development, and success in school. OCCMSI enables educators and others working at schools, to develop school-family-community partnerships focused on breaking the barriers students face during learning. OCCMSI enables educators to gain some influence on the time students' spend out of school and address nonacademic barriers to learning and includes school-family-community partnerships. OCCMSI provides after-school programs, mentoring, peer counseling, social recreation, arts, sports, values education, service learning, community service, volunteerism, leadership development, extracurricular activities, conflict resolution, life skills programs, youth employment, career counseling/job skills training, and academic improvement. Family engagement and support involves schools supporting families through assistance, continuing education, and parent-to-parent support in the school community. They include school and community based resources such as mental health services, financial and housing assistance, child welfare supports, and dental and medical services. These support strategies assist in improving academic achievement, social competence, and school climate, and in reducing substance use, mental health barriers, and aggressive behaviors. Non-English speakers may be unaware of all that their community can offer them because they are unable to effectively communicate their needs (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, Iachini, Bean, Flaspohler, & Zullig, 2010).

OCCMSI was designed to help schools and communities to unveil programs, services, strategies, and initiatives currently operating in their neighborhoods and identify important needs, conditions, resources, and gaps through its planning, implementation, and evaluation process. School-family-community partnerships developed through OCCMSI help educators

gain influence over more students' academic learning time and allowed schools to address the nonacademic barriers that students often bring with them to school (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, Iachini, Bean, Flaspohler, & Zullig, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

Schools must begin providing non-English speaking families the necessary resources to be active participants in their children's education. Schools need to provide opportunities and time for teachers and parents to work together, understand each other, and communicate effectively toward the greater achievement of each student while taking into account language barriers. Parents indicate that they want to be informed on homework policies and how to help their children with their schoolwork. Teachers indicate that they want parents to be involved in educating children outside of the school. A sure fire way to appease both parents and teachers is by implementing interpreters in order to educate non-English speaking families on school expectations, requirements, and community resources. Providing interpreters at school functions is an important aspect of planning school events because without their presence the lines of communication between schools and families cannot be effectively established. Interpreters at school functions will provide guidance and support for family members to supervise and assist their children at home with homework assignments and other school related learning opportunities. Interpreters bridge the language barrier and allow teachers to assist parents in locating the community resources necessary to help them accomplish their parenting, employment, educational, and personal goals (Ingram, et al., 2007).

Educators must not turn a blind eye to the pleas for help from the parents within our communities. There are many strategies and avenues schools can take to improve parental

involvement. This literature review highlights only a few of the many ways educators can establish positive rapport with non-English speaking families within the school community.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

This study was undertaken to determine if informing Hispanic parents about attendance expectations in their native language (Spanish) within the context of a community based meeting would increase their student's attendance at school. Research results will be used to identify whether there is a need for more community information sessions related to attendance targeted towards specific demographics.

#### **Design**

The study uses a pre-experimental design and is a variant of a pre-test/post-test design. Students were not randomly selected to participate in the study and they served as their own controls. The independent variable was whether or not the family had participated yet in the community information session. The dependent variable was the number of hours of school attended in the designated six week period. The values of the dependent variable were compared for the six weeks before (pre-intervention) and after (post-intervention) the community based information session. The criteria used for determining which weeks to include in the study were based on whether the school was closed for students more than one day of school in any given week. Weeks in which school was closed for students for more than one day were excluded from the study. The total length of span of weeks used for the study totaled 15 weeks. Condition number one (pre-intervention) took place over a course of nine calendar weeks. Although there was data from six total weeks of school prior to the community based information session, the six weeks were not consecutive because the weeks of Thanksgiving and the winter holiday were excluded. There were a total of six weeks for condition two (post-intervention) used in the study. These six weeks occurred consecutively.

## **Participants**

The elementary school used in the study had a total of 563 total students enrolled. Of the 563 students within the school, 35 were Hispanic. Hispanic students make up 6% of the entire elementary school population, which breaks down to 57% male and 43% female Hispanic students. The target population for this research study included 35 Hispanic students in kindergarten through fifth grade from an elementary school in a suburban county in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Thirty-five invitations were sent home to thirty-five Hispanic students. There was a 31% response rate to the thirty-five invitations. Every child was given an individual invitation even if he or she had a sibling in the school. A total of eight invitations were returned. Each invitation allowed the Hispanic students to indicate the number of family members expected to attend. It was anticipated that twenty-four individuals would attend the community meeting. The invitations did not specify whether the family members attending would be male or female. The group of children who reported that a family member would attend consisted of one male kindergarten student, two first grade students, one male and one female, one female second grade student, two third grade students, one male and one female, and two fifth grade students, one male and one female. There were three sets of siblings. Of the eight students, four receive English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services on a weekly basis at the elementary school.

There were five Hispanic families represented at the community based information session. Of the eight Hispanic students in attendance, each student brought at least one family member with them to the community based information session. There were a total of six Hispanic adults present at the community based information session. Of the six adults that

attended the community information session with their children, four were women and two were male. Of the six adults, none of them spoke English as their primary language.

Six students who were not of Hispanic descent attended the community session with their parents. The six students attended either because they had been invited by the researcher or they had heard about the event. The students from these families were not included in the study.

### **Instrument**

The study used a sign in sheet to determine the parents and children present at the community information session. The researcher made sure that everyone who attended the meeting signed in as they entered the meeting. Student school attendance data was collected on the eight students that had at least one family member attending the community meeting. Attendance data was collected on the eight participating students six weeks before and six weeks after the study. Attendance data was gathered from the computer program parents use to sign children in and out of school. The computer program automatically records the time students are picked up or dropped off.

### **Procedure**

Prior to holding the community based information session there were several steps that had to be taken. The invitations to the community based information session were written in English by the researcher, and then translated into Spanish through the Office of World Languages of Baltimore County. The invitation provided families with the location and time of the meeting. The invitation informed families that there would be free pizza and drinks provided. Families were encouraged to bring younger siblings. Parents were informed that their children would participate in a story time with a volunteer during the parent information portion

of the meeting. The invitation addressed the topics that would be covered at the meeting. See Appendices A and B.

The invitations were sent home with students three weeks prior to the community based information session. Two weeks prior to the community based information session a translated reminder was sent home with the students. One week prior to the community based information session a Connect-Ed phone call reminder was placed in Spanish.

The community meeting was held in an empty apartment in an apartment complex where a high population of Hispanic students lived. Although not all of the Hispanic students attending the community meeting lived in that complex, the meeting location was strategic in nature. The community information session was held in a central location to ensure those families without transportation would be able to attend. Transportation was not offered to families participating in the study.

When families arrived, the adults and children were asked to sign a registration sheet that was printed in Spanish. After participants had arrived and registered, the PowerPoint presentation slides were viewed in Spanish. The researcher discussed the PowerPoint in English orally and comments were interpreted in Spanish by an interpreter supplied by the Office of World Languages of Baltimore County Public Schools. Topics addressed through the use of a Power Point presentation included the importance of reading with children each night, in English or Spanish, and a brief description of the purpose of make-it-take-it activities. In addition, a short verbal overview explaining internet connection opportunity through a local internet provider and details about free English and Spanish classes were discussed. Attendees at the meeting were informed that pamphlets explaining the internet discount and the free classes were available for them to take home with them after the meeting.

Next, a People Personnel Worker (PPW) for the school system gave a presentation addressing the Maryland legal requirements for school attendance that also included issues of particular concern (i.e. students missing full days of school for doctors' appointments and children not attending school on their birthdays). In addition, the PPW explained the repercussion that could occur when students fail to meet the state mandated attendance expectations. The PPW's presentation was communicated in English and then interpreted into Spanish.

After the presentations were concluded, families had the opportunity to participate in make-it-take-it stations run by school personnel volunteers. Each school personnel volunteer was provided a demonstration as to how to run his or her station by this researcher prior to the actual meeting. The make-it-take-it stations provided instructions in Spanish and in English as to how to make items to support reading through inexpensive household items. There were two interpreters available to clarify information that might have been lost in translation while the parents and students moved about the apartment through the eight make-it-take-it stations. At the end of the meeting, parents were asked to complete a survey, written in Spanish, to gain feedback about the community based information session.

After the community based information session, the researcher accessed the student attendance records. The school attendance records documented the days and the times for student attendance. The researcher calculated the total number of hours attended by each of the students in the six week period preceding and following the community information sessions. The number of hours attended prior to the information session to the number of hours attended after of session was compared by non-independent sample t-tests.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The students attended significantly more hours of school in the six weeks after the intervention (Mean = 169.81, SD = 5.42) than in the six weeks prior to the intervention (Mean = 151.25, SD = 13.42) based on the attendance data gathered before and after the community based information session [ $t(7) = -5.25, p < .001$ ]. See Table 1. During the six week periods there were a total of 175.5 hours that could have been attended.

The null hypothesis that there will be no statistically significant difference in the number of hours of school attended by Hispanic students whose parents participated in a community information session with information provided in Spanish in the six weeks preceding the information session and the six weeks following the information session was rejected.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and  $t$ -test results comparing mean number of hours attended prior to, and after, the community meeting

Condition	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	$t$	Df	Sig. (2- tailed)
before	8	151.25	13.42	-5.25	7	.001*
after	8	169.81	5.42			

\*Statistically significant at  $p \leq .001$

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The results of the study rejected the null hypothesis stating there would be no statistically significant difference in the number of hours of school attended by Hispanic students whose parents participated in a community information session with information provided in Spanish in the six weeks preceding the information session and the six weeks following the information session.

#### **Comparison to Prior Research**

The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Gilliam et al. (2004) in that they demonstrated the effectiveness of a program that involved translators for non-English speaking Hispanic families within a family friendly environment. Gilliam and colleagues implemented Project ROAR in a predominately Hispanic elementary school to help parents learn ways to promote literacy for their children. According to the parent survey, 40% of participants in Project ROAR spoke and preferred to read in Spanish at home. During ten, once a month sessions, the school district provided two interpreters for the families who did not speak English. They provided a large space for the meetings, refreshments, and child care. At the conclusion of the study, parents reported they read more with their children and would attend more activities like Project ROAR if they were offered.

#### **Implications of Results**

From a practical perspective, the data suggests that a community based information session involving translated materials and interpreters was a successful course of action for an elementary school to take in an attempt to improve Hispanic students' attendance rates. Schools with a high number of Spanish speaking students should provide materials in Spanish with

interpreter services. Schools should send staff members out into the community to hold community meetings and educate the community about resources available to them.

It would be worthwhile to increase recruitment efforts to get more parents to participate or perhaps offer the community information sessions multiple times per year in different locations. It would be useful to have had a larger space to hold the community based information session. The space chosen for this study was not ideal due to the small space in which it was held. Therefore, future community based information sessions in a larger area allowing for more room.

From a theoretical perspective, an implication of the results is that Li (2003), was correct in his assertion that more community outreach is needed for students who constitute a minority. His research led him to discover that schools need to establish partnerships with parents, in order to assist with student academic achievement. Li suggests communicating to parents through newsletters and newspapers in their native language as an effective way to communicate school and community issues with families. In addition, he refers to educators as the cultural brokers for whose job it is to encourage parental involvement at home and at school.

### **Threats to Validity**

There were numerous threats to the validity of this study. One threat to this study was that the researcher did not randomly assign subjects to the condition. Rather, students served as their own controls. This limits one's ability to generalize the results. The biggest threat to the validity related to lack of randomization. The parents who opted to attend a community based meeting may very well differ from families that did not choose to attend the meeting on variables important to school attendance. For example, parents who attended the community based meeting are presumably interested in their children's education and feel that they can influence



their children's education. These types of parents may be more likely to encourage their children to have better school attendance once they became aware of the emphasis on attendance.

The students and families invited to participate in the community information session were all identified based on their information cards, on which parents indicated they were of Hispanic descent. This information is then put on a computer program which the school can use to run ethnicity reports. One limitation to relying on these cards is that if the parent checked the wrong box on the card, a student could be labeled as Hispanic when in actuality they are not. It was the researcher's impression that all of the students whose families attended the session were correctly identified as Hispanic. However, it is possible that a parental error in filling out the information card could have contributed to a relatively low participation rate.

Another threat to validity was the small sample size. Although thirty-five invitations were sent to thirty-five families, only eight students (representing five families) participated, causing this study to have low statistical power. Although the results were statistically significant despite the low sample size, the results would be more generalized if they were based on a larger sample size.

Another threat to validity was that the school attendance data was not based on two, consecutive six week periods. The weeks when the children missed school for the Thanksgiving and Winter Holiday breaks interfered with consecutive data collection. The attendance data from before the community information session was collected over a total of 9 weeks. While the attendance data collected after the community information session was gathered over six consecutive weeks. This can be considered as a limitation to validity because the data was collected over different time frames.

There are also concerns about the impact of the specific time frame for the study on

attendance patterns. The data collected before the information session was done around the holiday season when families might be more prone to have their children miss school due to vacations and family obligations. The community information session was held at the peak of flu season. This limitation could have prevented more families from attending the meeting. Since the study took place during the flu season, many student absences may have been attributable to the flu and not under the control of parents.

The validity of this study could also have been threatened due to the fact that some parents are unable to provide telephone service in their homes. Without a phone, parents would have been unable to hear the Connect-Ed reminder message sent by the school reminding parents to attend the meeting. If these families had a telephone they may have otherwise attended. This differential selection of participants may have had an impact because families without telephone service might have different financial situations and different attitudes and behaviors regarding attendance than families with telephone service.

An additional threat to the validity of this study is the computer generated attendance logs. These logs could have been compromised due to human error. Parents are required to type student's names into the computer program during arrival and dismissal times when children are picked up and/or dropped off at school. Parents who did not fill out the computer log when they dropped off or picked up their children could have skewed the data derived from this study.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Future studies could examine if family participation rates increase at community based information sessions and/or school related functions when transportation is provided. Some school systems have bus services that must be requested in advance and used to transport families to different locations ensuring their attendance at school functions. The bus service does

cost money so schools choosing to use this service would need to arrange for funding. It could prove to be beneficial for schools to determine successful ways to secure the home-school connection.

Another resource to assist schools in Baltimore County with informing parents about expectations and events is the use of the Parent Mobile. The Parent Mobile can be requested for specific dates and could be present at school functions. This mobile information station can be set up at a desired location and be used as a resource for schools. Researchers could design a study looking at the effectiveness of using a Parent Mobile if it is stocked with materials in Spanish and travels to community locations with a large Hispanic population.

Ideally, this study would be performed over a much larger time span in order to account for irregularities within the attendance data. In addition, there should be a randomly assigned comparison group. A future study could look at one year prior to the community based information session and one year after the community based information session to determine if the attendance rates are maintained over extended periods of time.

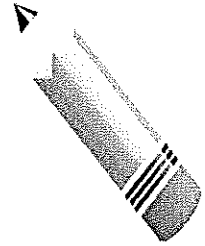
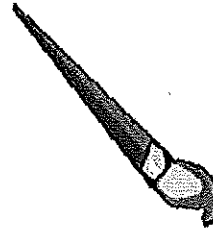
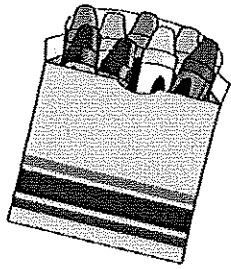
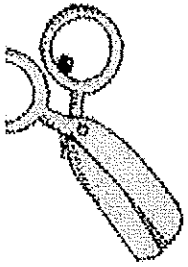
Another research idea would be to compare the attendance rates of different ethnic groups over an extended period of time. This could allow schools to identify those ethnicities whose attendance rates are low. Community based meetings with translators could be held for those groups and a study could compare the effectiveness of the intervention for other ethnic groups.

### **Conclusion/Summary**

The results of this study rejected the null hypothesis stated that there will be no statistically significant difference in the number of hours of school attended by Hispanic students whose parents participated in a community information session with information provided in Spanish in the six weeks preceding the information session and the six weeks following the

information session was rejected. The mean attendance rate of the students whose parents participated in the community based meeting was significantly higher in the six week data collection period following the intervention than in the six week data collection period before the intervention. The researcher felt that the use of the translated materials was beneficial for the students and their families. Holding the community based information session in a community location allowed the families to feel included with school activities without worrying about transportation to the school. Students and their families had the opportunity to gain insight and knowledge about attendance expectations and requirements through the use of translated materials and an interpreter. Hopefully through word of mouth, Hispanic families who did not attend the meeting will be informed of attendance requirements. The researcher recommends that teachers and administrators employ the use of translated materials and interpreters at all school functions in order to allow all families to feel a part of the school community and to become informed about school policies and instructional strategies in their native languages.

## Appendix A



# Making Reading Materials in Your Home

Thursday January 10, 2013

Session 2 6:00-7:00PM

Come join us at Dulaney Valley Apartments on **January 10, 2013** from 6:00-7:00 PM for a Make-it Take-it style workshop. Our evening will include a **FREE PIZZA DINNER** as you listen to a discussion of the importance of parental involvement in a child's literacy development. Information will be presented on discounts through Comcast and **FREE** classes offered at Goucher College (computer classes and grammar activities). This information session will be followed by some fun stations where you can make and take reading materials to assist your child at home. In addition, there will be a First in Math computer demonstration. Children are welcome. There will be a story time to occupy them during the meeting.

Please plan to join us on this fun and educational evening.

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Let us know if you are coming by completing and returning the RSVP slip to your child's teacher by **December 19, 2013**.

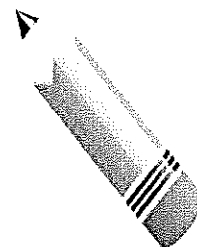
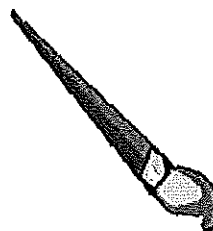
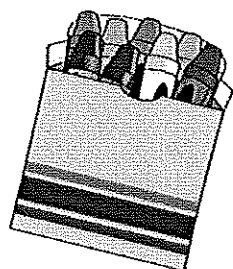
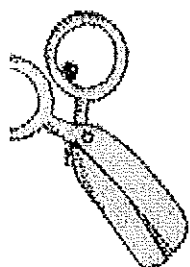
Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Name \_\_\_\_\_

Number of people coming \_\_\_\_\_

*Hope to see you there*

## Appendix B



### Reunion para la comunidad hispana de Hampton Elementary Como hacer materials de lectura en su hogar Jueves, 10 de enero 2013 5:00-6:00

Vengan a Dulaney Valley Apartments el 10 de enero 2013 desde las 5:00-6:00 PM para un taller de lectura. Pueden crear materials con nosotros y llevarselos a casa. Nuestra noche incluira una cena de pizza GRATIS mientras escuchan una discusion acerca de la importancia de la participacion de los padres en el desarrollo de alfabetizacion. Vamos a tener informacion presentada acerca de descuentos ofrecidos a traves de Comcast y clases GRATIS ofrecidas en Goucher College (clases de computadora y actividades de gramatica). Esta session de informacion se va a seguir por algunas estaciones divertidas para ayudar a su hijo/a en casa. Adicionalmente, Habra una demostracion en la computadora de First in Math. Los ninos estan bienvenidos. Vamos a tener una hora de cuentos para ellos durante la reunion.

Por favor vengan y disfruten de esta noche con nosotros.

Dejenos saber si pueden venir. Solo necesita completar y devolver este papel al maestro de su hijo/a para el **19 de diciembre 2012**.

Nombre de Estudiante \_\_\_\_\_ Grado \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre de Padre(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Numero de personas que van a asistir \_\_\_\_\_

**¡Esperamos verlos allí!**

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