

Even Start Family Literacy Program Evaluation: Measuring Parental Involvement in Education

Community Research Seminar, Spring 2009

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report is the final product of a semester-long collaborative study between a group of student researchers from Wesleyan University and the Middletown Adult Education Even Start Family Literacy Program (Even Start), an early child learning and adult education program in Middletown, Connecticut. Since Even Start is founded on a parent-child joint learning model, this study focuses primarily on the effects of the program on the parental involvement level of its former participants, with secondary foci on parent and child educational achievement after leaving Even Start.

Methodology

We utilized two principle means of collecting data—surveys and interviews—to gauge former participants' implementation of Even Start's teachings. Additionally, we gathered their opinions on both the program and general issues of parental involvement to better understand the role Even Start plays in its participants' lives.

Surveys:

- Our population included all parents who participated for at least four months in the Middletown Even Start Program since it began in 1996 and for whom we had valid addresses, for a total population size of 81.
- Surveys were conducted both by mail and over the phone.
- We received 11 mailed-in surveys and conducted 13 phone surveys for a total of 24 informants, a 29.6% response rate.

Comparison Group:

- We also distributed our survey to a comparison group so that we could make meaningful statements about the effects of Even Start on its participants.
- To be included in the comparison group, parents had to be enrolled in Middletown Adult Education but not the Even Start Program, and have children between the ages of one and 15.
- In total, we collected 21 comparison group surveys.

Interviews:

- We carried out four in-person interviews with former Even Start participants, as well as one interview with a current teacher with the Even Start program.
- Each interview ranged from 45 minutes to one hour, and all interviews were confidential.

Results

Even Start has broadly positive effects on measures of past participants' individual advocacy on behalf of their children.

- Among parents who read to their children, former Even Start parents (29.2%) are more likely to do so five or more hours a week than parents in the comparison group (9.5%).
- Parents who participated in Even Start were more likely to have shared a teacher's comments with their child after a Parent-Teacher conference (100.0%, compared to 73.3% of comparison group parents).

- Past participants of Even Start have higher aspirations for their children than comparison group parents do. All former Even Start parents expect their child to at least attend a 4-year college, while 25.0% of comparison group parents expect only high school graduation or attendance at a vocational school or junior college for their children. Moreover, the proportion of former Even Start participants (54.4%) who expect their children to attend graduate school is more than double that of comparison group respondents (25.0%) ($p=.02$).
- Even Start participants are more likely to enroll their child in Head Start or another preschool program (75.0% to 66.7%).

Even Start also seems to have a positive effect on some measures of individual child achievement.

- Children of Even Start parents are more likely to read on their own at home. While the proportion of children who do not read at all at home or who read less than two hours a week is similar in the two populations, children of former Even Start participants are more likely to read five or more hours a week (38.1% vs. 27.8% of comparison group children).
- Children of Even Start participants are slightly more likely to have received one or more positive recognitions such as “student of the month,” “citizen award,” or entrance into PROBE, Middletown’s gifted education program, than children of comparison group children (73.7% vs. 62.5%).

However, Even Start seems to have limited or negligible effects on parents’ participation in the larger school community

- Former Even Start participants are no more active than the comparison group in school fundraising and volunteering in schools. Furthermore, they are less likely (45.0%) to attend other school family events than comparison group parents (66.7%).
- Former Even Start parents are less likely than parents in the comparison group to attend Parent Teacher Organization meetings (15.0% vs. 42.1%) ($p=.06$).

Conclusion

We found that participation in Even Start produces different effects on different forms of parental involvement in education. Overall, parents who have gone through Even Start show more positive parental involvement in their children’s education in ways that directly benefit their child. They read more frequently with their children, have higher aspirations for the children’s future, are more likely to share teachers’ comments with their children, and are more likely to contact their children’s teachers with questions and concerns. Outside of school, Even Start parents are also more likely to enroll their children in pre-school programs or extra-curricular activities.

On the other hand, participation in Even Start does not seem to have a positive effect on parental involvement in the school community, which only benefits their children indirectly. Even Start past participants are not particularly active in school fundraising and volunteering in school. They are also less likely to attend Parent-Teacher Organization meetings and other school family events than parents in the comparison group.

These results, paired with backing evidence from our interviews, seem to suggest that Even Start does achieve its stated goals, at least within the realm of increasing parental involvement.

Project Overview

This report is the final product of a semester-long collaborative study between a group of student researchers from Wesleyan University and the Middletown Adult Education Even Start Family Literacy Program (Even Start), an early childhood learning and adult education program in Middletown, Connecticut. The study was formulated with the hope of providing an independent and scientifically rigorous evaluation of the Even Start program, investigating the effects of the program in the lives of its former students. Since Even Start is founded on a parent-child joint learning model, this study focuses primarily on the effects of the program on the parental involvement level of its past participants, with secondary foci on parent and child educational achievement after leaving Even Start.

The study consisted of two separate, but mutually supportive, modes of investigation. In the first phase, we surveyed former Even Start students, as well as a carefully selected comparison group. In the second phase, we conducted a series of in-depth personal interviews in order to get a broader picture of the effects of Even Start.

Note: In this report, "former Even Start participants" and "former Even Start students" refer to the adult participants, while the children are referred to as "children of former Even Start participants." Both groups attended classes at Even Start.

Overview of the Even Start Family Literacy Program

The Even Start Family Literacy Program was first started by the U.S. Department of Education in 1988 with the aim to "improve the academic achievement of young children and their parents, especially in the area of reading ... [and] break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and low literacy in the Nation" (U.S. Department of Education 2009). In 1996, Even Start was adopted by Middletown Adult Education, a local educational center. Under the auspices of the national Even Start program, it reaches and serves a population "most in need, hardest to serve" (Connecticut Appropriations Committee 2008:4), with both a lower income level and younger children than comparable programs such as Head Start. In order to be admitted to Middletown's Even Start program, students must need adult basic education, high school completion, or English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, meet income eligibility guidelines, and have at least one child between the ages of six weeks and three years (Even Start Family Literacy Program 2008).

The Even Start student population is one that is often underserved in traditional educational systems. Its students often face significant economic and structural obstacles on their way to pursuing their educational goals. Within Connecticut, 92% of Even Start students belong to families at or below the federal poverty line, and most have children that are too young to participate in other early childhood education programs. Moreover, a majority of the students are originally from outside the United States (Connecticut Appropriations Committee 2008); of the Middletown Even Start population, 42% attend Even Start for ESL instruction (Even Start Family Literacy Program 2008). Therefore, Even Start serves a group of families that often otherwise would not be able to attend a typically structured educational program.

Even Start subscribes to a family literacy model, which means that it integrates parents' and children's education into one program in order to enhance the possibilities of learning for both. The Even Start program consists of the following five main components, in which students must participate in order to stay enrolled:

- Adult Education
- Early Childhood Education
- Parenting Education
- Parent and Child Literacy Activities
- Home-Based Literacy Visits

The first component, Adult Education, includes adult education classes ranging from basic education and ESL work to high school completion courses, including General Education Development (GED) preparation, the External Diploma Program (EDP), and the Credit Diploma Program (CDP). To facilitate participation in these classes, Even Start provides childcare in the same building, allowing parents to check in on their children during the course of their school day. The second component, Early Childhood Education, provides age-specific classes to the infants and toddlers of the adult students. The third component, Parenting Education, consists of classes designed to teach parents to become full partners in their children's education. The fourth component, Parent and Child Literacy Activities, takes parents and children together on trips to local educational resources such as Middletown's Russell Library and facilitates in-class learning activities between adults and their toddlers. Finally, as part of the Home-Based Literacy component, each family is visited at home by an Even Start literacy teacher once a month in order to link lessons taught in the classroom to practical applications at home (Middletown Adult Education 2009).

Literature Review

Even Start's mission is fundamentally linked to the national issues of deep-rooted inequalities within the U.S. school system. The principal inequality is based on socioeconomic disparity and is referred to as the achievement gap, which The Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN) defines as “a nationwide phenomenon where lower-income... students as a group do worse academically and score lower on standardized tests than other students” (2007:6). The achievement gap also poses dangers in the form of detrimental long-term effects, including high drop-out rates, low levels of college enrollment, and fewer career opportunities. Demographic statistics on Even Start families position them as those most likely to suffer from the educational achievement gap. Furthermore, the state of Connecticut has the largest achievement gap in the nation, represented by the fact that on average, low-income students possess math and reading skills which are three grade levels behind their peers (ConnCAN 2006). Similarly, on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) in math in 2006, 79% of students from Connecticut’s wealthiest suburbs reached the level required for passing, whereas only 12% of students from poorer cities achieved the same grade level (ConnCAN 2007).

Various studies have shown a clear correlation between socioeconomic status (SES)—indicated by a parent's income bracket, education level, and occupation—and a child's academic achievement, with a higher SES correlating to higher achievement (Eagle 1989; Clark 1983). The interconnectedness of these issues is related to systemic problems in economic distribution, as well as to social capital, defined as “the value created by social skills and connections” (Henderson & Mapp 2002:204), which is more easily obtained by middle- and upper-class families. In her studies on social capital in the education system, Lareau (1987) found that working-class families struggle with a variety of factors such as difficulty finding transportation

and childcare, as well as problems with parent-teacher communication or school communities. Overall, programs which are able to help families identify skills necessary to navigate the education system can help combat various levels of social inequalities, resulting in a positive impact on student achievement (Henderson & Mapp 2002). As Thomas Kellaghan states in his book on home and school relationships, “The socioeconomic level or cultural background of a home need not determine how well a child does at school. Parents from a variety of cultural backgrounds and with different levels of education, income, or occupational status can and do provide stimulating home environments that support and encourage their children’s learning” (1993:145). Programs such as Even Start are designed to help ameliorate systemic disparities in student achievement by focusing on the overall potential benefits of parental involvement.

In order to evaluate the effects of Even Start on the participants’ involvement in their children’s education, we must ask: What is parental involvement? How is parental involvement beneficial to children’s education? There is no unified definition of “parental involvement” in the existing literature. In fact, it is more common for literature to define parental involvement as a combination of different dimensions. Ho and Wilms (2006), for example, divided parental involvement into four categories. Parental involvement at home comprises discussing school activities and monitoring children’s out-of-school activities, while involvement in school includes contact between parent and school personnel, and volunteering in school or attending parent-teacher conferences and open-house meetings.

Fan and Chen (2001), through a meta-analysis of parental involvement and students’ academic achievement, compiled a more detailed list of the elements of parental involvement other studies have considered. The broad categories of parental involvement include parent-child communication, home supervision, educational aspiration for children, and school contact and participation. Fan and Chen also find that parental expectation and aspiration for children’s

achievement in school shows the strongest relationship with academic achievement. In order to provide a comprehensive account on the levels of parental involvement of Even Start past participants, our study covers a wide range, if not all, of the facets of parental involvement mentioned above, including school-contact, aspirations, and extracurricular activities.

Does higher parental involvement benefit children's academic performance? Henderson and Mapp (2002) summarized 51 studies and show that family involvement has a positive and convincing relationship with improved academic achievement, regardless of economic, racial/ethnic or education backgrounds and age of students. They further claim that "programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement" (2002: 25). Some of the specific benefits they list include higher GPA and test scores, lower drop-out rates, and more rigorous academic course loads.

As Peisner-Feinberg et al. (1999) reveal, at-risk children whose parents have lower levels of education benefit more from early childhood education programs; for these children, there is a greater link between participation and later academic success than for children whose parents have higher levels of education. Studies conducted by the Child Care Action Campaign (2008) also illustrate the importance of early childhood education programs in offering at-risk children means of overcoming certain struggles. They assert, "States committed to improving school readiness and educational outcomes should invest in bettering the quality of early education." Even Start uses the Creative Curriculum for Infants & Toddlers (CCIT), which, research indicates, improves academic achievement for low-income children. Those students who partook in the CCIT program achieved "gains across all measures" compared with a control population.

Overall, programs with higher teaching standards and national accreditation are shown to have higher success rates than those without them. Middletown Even Start, a program accredited by The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), requires that all of

its infant-toddler teachers are certified in early childhood development. These teachers approach the teaching of parental involvement through a series of different models. In terms of family literacy, they utilize the Keenan Family Literacy Model, which emphasizes an intergenerational approach, teaching not only to parents or the children, but to both parties together. Studies performed by the National Center on Family Literacy have shown that the model fosters greater literacy, academic, and professional success for parents and children, and creates “more educationally supportive home environments.” Furthermore, Im, Osborn, Sánchez and Thorp (2007) show that the success of family literacy programs is dependent on the amount of parent and child interaction, which is central to the Keenan model.

In the past, Even Start evaluations have been done either on a nation-wide or state-wide basis (see, for example, the 2008 Connecticut Appropriations Committee report on Even Start in Connecticut). Our evaluation differs from these in that it is a case study of how the program has worked in one specific city, allowing us to include in our population every past participant for whom we had contact information and to use in-person interviews to add qualitative depth that has been missing from other reports on Even Start. We were also able to send Spanish-language surveys to those former participants who we knew were native speakers of Spanish, a measure which may not have been possible with a larger population.

Most reports on Even Start’s effectiveness focus specifically on services provided to and educational gains made by parents and children currently enrolled in the program (Weirauch 2006). Our report instead looks at the impact that the Middletown Even Start program has on its participants after they leave the program. One other study, carried out in Texas between 2004 and 2005, also investigated the effects of Even Start on its former participants (Seaman & Chen 2005). However, this study focused mainly on parental achievement after leaving Even Start, rather than on their involvement in their children’s education. In addition, for the few questions

that did focus on parental involvement, the researchers asked former Even Start participants to retroactively recall such things as how often they read to and helped their child with homework before Even Start—something that may be difficult to recall years later—as well as how often they currently do so. The current report instead gets at this pre-Even Start information by using a comparison group of parents who attend Middletown Adult Education classes but are not enrolled in Even Start, which enables us to make meaningful comparisons with non-Even Start parents.

In addition, we have tried to avoid problems with the way some of the questions were asked in the Texas study. For example, instead of asking parents how many hours per week they read to their child, which may lead to vague, overinflated answers, our study asked parents to specifically recall how many hours they read to their child “in the last week,” leading to more concrete, accurate answers. Finally, our report differs from earlier evaluations of Even Start, including the Texas study, in that it focuses specifically on parental involvement in children’s education, allowing us to study this important variable in more depth than if it were only one component among many being studied.

Methodology

We utilized two principle means of collecting data – surveys and interviews – to gauge former participants’ implementation of Even Start’s teachings. Additionally, we gathered their opinions on both the program and general issues of parental involvement to better understand the role Even Start plays in its participants’ lives.

Survey

Our population included all parents who participated for at least four months in the Middletown Even Start Program since it began in 1996. Although there are a total of 200 former Even Start participants, we were only able to construct a list of 81 updated addresses through Even Start records. We mailed out surveys, nine of which were in Spanish for the known Spanish-speaking parents, to all of these addresses.

We asked that parents mail back the survey anonymously, and send back a separate postcard with their contact information. Two weeks after sending out our surveys, Even Start Facilitator Cynthia Cappetta began calling parents to remind them of the survey and ask if they would be willing to complete it over the phone. We received 11 mailed-in surveys and conducted 13 phone surveys for a total of 24 informants, a 29.6% response rate. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to fill out or to conduct over the phone.

We also distributed our survey to a comparison group so that we could make meaningful statements about the effects of Even Start on its participants. This group consisted of parents currently taking classes at Middletown Adult Education who had never been enrolled in the Even Start program. Adult Education teachers distributed surveys to willing parents who had children within the ages of one and 15. These age limits reflect the lowest and highest possible ages of

children of former Even Start participants. Comparison group parents completed the survey during their class time. All completed surveys from this group were placed in an envelope, which was then sealed and given directly to the researchers. Before handing out surveys, teachers stressed that only members of the research group would ever see them.

Our comparison population is for the most part demographically comparable to that of Even Start participants, but it is not receiving the Even Start components of Early Childhood Education, Parent and Child Together Time, or Parenting Instruction. Differences in survey results between the Even Start and comparison groups can be fairly safely attributed to respondents' participation or non-participation in Even Start, although it is possible that variables not tested by our survey may have also contributed to these differences. The comparison group completed 21 surveys.

We constructed our survey by producing questions that are expressly directed at parents' support and involvement in their child's education. We asked that parents think of only one child when filling out the survey. This helped us obtain the most specific results possible, since parents with more than one child may be involved in each child's education in a different way.

In order to address parenting skills specifically targeted by Even Start, we collaborated with Cynthia Cappetta and read Even Start program literature. In addition, we interviewed the teacher of the "Sociology of Families" class, Even Start's parenting education class. We also developed questions based on outside studies to help us further determine what parenting behaviors are predictors of children's academic success. Our primary focus involved questions on the parents' participation at their child's school and their encouragement of literacy-based practices at home. In relation to secondary research aims, we devised questions on the child's academic achievement and on parental achievement and continuing education.

The survey consisted of 29 closed-ended questions which required parents either to check off boxes belonging to relevant answers or to provide short answers, and four open-ended questions. Two of the questions in this latter category were specific to Even Start parents and were removed from the survey distributed to the comparison group. These open-ended questions were designed to allow respondents to share their thoughts and understandings of Even Start and parental involvement in their own words. See Appendix A for a copy of our survey in English and Appendix B for our Spanish-language survey.

Interviews

In addition to our quantitative survey, we conducted a series of qualitative interviews. We solicited participation in these interviews both through our mail-in survey and in our follow-up calls. Of those who expressed interest (nine in total), we were able to contact and schedule interviews with four parents. Because our population was self-selecting, our sampling may be biased, as those who had the time and inclination for interviews may not be representative of our total population.

Our interview script was developed as a guide that provided chronological prompts for the interviewees based around their life before, during, and after Even Start. In order to allow the interviewees to tell their stories in their own words, we used the script as a guide rather than as a strict checklist of questions. For a copy of our interview script, see Appendix E.

We designed our interviews in order to identify what aspects of Even Start the participants found most salient, and in what ways those aspects affected their parenting styles and their lives. Further, because of the limited ability of surveys to capture the full range of impacts a program can have, we wanted to use the interviews to get at a more holistic understanding of how participants used Even Start within the context of their individual

experience as a parent. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and all interviews were confidential.

Limitations

Our study was constrained by some limitations that may have affected the accuracy of our results. The first such limitation is our low overall number of surveys, which makes it difficult to obtain statistically significant data. However, this is due to the fact that our total population was small; our response rate of 29.6% was actually relatively high. Also, it is possible that those who responded do not reflect our general population's demographic profile accurately, since respondents had to self-select by voluntarily returning the survey. We may have therefore inadvertently selected for those who had more of a positive experience at Even Start, as those people would be more likely to respond to surveys associated with the program.

Since our first contact was by mail, we may have systematically excluded a transient population that does not have access to a fixed address. Further, since we were only able to supply materials in Spanish and English, we may have excluded native speakers of other languages; in total, Even Start has provided services to native speakers of 25 different languages. We tried to mitigate this bias by making follow-up phone calls, so that those who were unable to complete the survey in English could have a friend or family member translate with us on the phone. However, this still excluded those who did not have working phones because of a low income level or other reasons.

We anticipated a possible discrepancy between the surveys we received by mail and those we conducted over the phone, because people we spoke with directly may have been less open about personal issues from fear of being judged. However, when we compared our data

from surveys returned by mail and those completed over the phone, we did not find any significant differences between these two groups.

Comparison between Even Start and Comparison Groups

In total, we received 21 surveys from our comparison group population and 24 surveys from former Even Start participants, 13 of which were conducted by telephone. Demographic statistics show that the experimental and comparison groups are comparable in most characteristics, such as age and the proportion of ESL speakers. The comparison group does have a much higher proportion of respondents identifying as Hispanic (42.9%, as opposed to 18.2% of the experimental group). Comparing responses from Hispanics and non-Hispanics did not yield any clear bias; however, we cannot be certain that the differences in race between the two groups did not bias our results in any way.

Our survey asked former Even Start participants to provide the age of only one child with whom they had participated in Even Start. The ages of these children range from one to 15, with a median age of eight. Children's ages are comparable between Even Start past participants and the comparison group.

The two groups differ somewhat by employment status; in each group, the ratio of respondents who are unemployed is similar, but among the employed, former Even Start participants are more likely to be employed full time (41.7% vs. 25.0% of comparison group respondents), while the comparison group is more likely to be employed part time (35.0% vs. 16.7% of the Even Start group). This was to be expected, as adults going to adult education part time, as is the case with our comparison group participants, are more likely to be working part time to accommodate their hours. The relatively high rate of former Even Start parents employed full time may also reflect the fact that one of Even Start's goals is to help its adult participants achieve occupational success. Although parents working full time may have less time to be involved in their children's education, the same is true of parents working part time

and going to adult education part time. Thus, we do not believe that employment status introduced significant bias into our results.

Another demographic difference between the two groups is sex. While there are no men in the experimental group, 38.1% of the comparison group is male. In order to test for possible bias introduced by this fact, we tried removing every male from the comparison group to see if this would affect our results. We found that this measure produced no significant differences in any of our results, so we can conclude that the sex differences between the Even Start and comparison groups did not introduce bias into our study.

Results and Discussion

Our analysis is organized into three general sections: parents' individual advocacy on behalf of their children, parents' involvement in the larger school community, and measures of children's achievement. Informed by trends found in our results, we have divided the first section into three subsections: measures of parental involvement in the child's academic progress, child's enrollment in extra-curricular activities, and aspirations for one's child. Within the second section fall measures such as involvement in school activities, volunteering in school, and attendance at PTO meetings. We have based our third section on measures of children's achievement such as parents' reporting of standardized test scores and positive recognition at school.

Unless otherwise noted, our results are not statistically significant.¹ Due to the small sample size, achieving statistical significance is extremely difficult. Consequently, our results are analyzed as strongly suggestive trends.

Involvement in child's academic progress

Parents who have gone through Even Start are found to be more involved in their children's academic progress. In this section we will discuss the effects that Even Start has on past participants' involvement in their children's academic progress. We define involvement in the academic progress of one's child as reading at home together, checking homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, and contacting teachers with questions or concerns. While we will discuss each of these measures of involvement separately, we found that Even Start had an

¹ Data that are statistically significant are proved through statistical means to be unlikely to have occurred by chance. In this study, we define data as statistically significant when the *p*-value is smaller than 0.10. This means that the probability of our results occurring simply by chance is less than 10%, a risk we consider acceptable considering the small scale of our study

almost uniformly positive effect on each one (with the marked exception of frequency of checking homework), strongly pointing to the efficacy of the program in this area of parental involvement.

Time spent reading with one’s child is one of the most important measures for evaluating Even Start, since the program’s curriculum and goals place heavy emphasis on this activity. Overall, we found that Even Start parents read to their children more often than their peers in the comparison group. Among parents who read to their children, former Even Start parents are more likely to do so five or more hours a week (29.2% vs. 9.5% of comparison group parents), while respondents in the comparison group are more likely to read with their child between one to five hours a week.

Table 1. Hours Read with Child in the Last Week

	0 Hours	1-2 Hours	3-4 Hours	5 or More Hours
Even Start Group	20.8%	29.2%	20.8%	29.2%
Comparison Group	19.0%	38.1%	33.3%	9.5%

In order to carry this analysis of reading frequencies further, we hypothesized that child grade level may be an important factor in affecting the frequency parents read with their child, because parents may be more likely to read to younger rather than older children. With that in mind, the data were split into two groups: children in preschool through fifth grade, and children in the sixth through tenth grades. We found that most parents who read with their children at all have children in the preschool to fifth grade cohort, while parents of older children seldom read with their children. Because of that, we then analyzed the preschool to fifth grade group separately, and found that former Even Start participants are more likely to read with their children more than three hours a week than are comparison group parents (see Table 2).

Table 2. Hours Read with Child in the Last Week: Preschool-Fifth Grade

	0 Hours	1-2 Hours	3-4 Hours	5 or More Hours
Even Start Group	0.0%	28.6%	28.6%	49.2%
Comparison Group	0.0%	33.3%	58.3%	8.2%

We also found data suggesting that not only do former Even Start parents read to their children more, the children themselves seem more invested in reading. Children of Even Start parents read more on their own time than children in the comparison group. While the proportion of children who do not read at all at home or who read less than two hours a week is similar in the two populations, children of former Even Start participants are more likely to read five or more hours a week (38.1% vs. 27.8% of comparison group children). See Table 3.

Table 3. Hours Child Read on His or Her Own in the Last Week

	0 Hours	1-2 Hours	3-4 Hours	5 or More Hours
Even Start Group	0.0%	38.1%	23.8%	38.1%
Comparison Group	5.6%	38.9%	27.8%	27.8%

On the other hand, we did not find differences in the frequency that parents check their child's homework. In the two groups there is a similar proportion of parents who check their child's homework two or fewer times a week. However, respondents in the Even Start group are actually less likely than comparison group parents to check their child's homework more than five times a week.

In general we found that the above trends, especially Even Start's positive effect on the frequency of parents' reading with their children, were supported through the qualitative data that we collected. In responses to open-ended questions on the survey as well as throughout the

longer interviews, respondents repeatedly emphasized that they learned the importance of teaching literacy through reading to the children at Even Start, and that the program also gave them opportunities to nurture this habit. When asked if Even Start had affected their involvement in their child's education, many respondents explicitly identified their awareness of the importance of reading as a benefit from Even Start, with such statements as, "Most of what I learned about reading to [my son]...came from Even Start," and Even Start "made me more involved, taught me to help my child."

The interviews also allowed us to get a closer look at former participants' perceptions of the ways in which Even Start affected their involvement in their children's education. One interviewee stated that Even Start teachers "continuously drill inside of us how we need to work with our children, continue reading" with them.

I started from a very early age reading, there's always papers and books and crayons and all these things that I just bombard them with, from earlier. I remember, as a matter of fact, I still have those clipboards... My little daughter, when she was in the infant class, her teacher... gave it to her.... She always liked to scribble on it.

This child, a four-year-old preschooler, is already reading very well, and her mother attributes her success to Even Start: "She's doing kindergarten work, and it's all the reinforcing from Even Start." Even interviewees who were less enthusiastic about the parenting class often emphasized the things they learned from it as they discussed its problems. One interviewee stated,

I didn't really enjoy it, but when I think back, it was really helpful...at the time I hated being there, who wants to be in class? I just wanted to leave and go home. But they taught a lot of stuff that was important for your child, so I was learning. A lot of parents do pay attention though. The teachers really try to get you involved; it's all things that make you more involved in your child, with your child's development. It clicks with parents eventually.

These trends coincide with what Even Start teachers emphasize as important teaching points, both in the general Even Start philosophy and more specifically in the "Sociology of

Families” class that they provide within their program. The “Sociology of Families” teacher explained her use of children’s literature in her classes:

We’re using children’s books... to try to show [parents] how they can use children’s literature to help children understand their feelings.... And at the same time we’re encouraging them, by doing this, to read to their child and teaching them the importance of reading, which is important for their child to be ready for school.

It may have been Even Start’s significant emphasis on both adult reading and early childhood literacy that led to the greater amount of time spent reading with children among former Even Start parents.

We also found that participation in Even Start was associated with a high level of individual advocacy on behalf of children, not only at home but at school as well. While attendance rates at Parent-Teacher Conferences are similar between the two groups at a relatively high 70.0%, the likelihood of a parent sharing what they learned during the conference with their child varied substantially between the two groups. Even Start parents indicate unanimously (100.0%) that they share teachers’ comments with their children, while only 73.7% of comparison group respondents do so. In addition, a higher percentage of parents in the Even Start group (76.2% vs. 61.1% of comparison group parents) reported that they are “very likely” to contact their child’s teacher with questions, concerns, or information.

These data correspond with the teacher’s assertion that Even Start helps parents learn how to navigate the school system and advocate for their children. Even Start teachers encourage this by introducing school websites and teacher contact information, holding formal parent-teacher conferences within the program, teaching presentation and negotiation skills, and helping parents to practice how they would respond in certain situations, such as when they need to talk to a child’s teacher at school.

These activities seem to have an impact on Even Start participants, as all of our interviewees mentioned the importance of advocating for their child within the school system. One of these mothers spoke to us about the difficulties involved with having a child with a disability enrolled in the public school system: “It’s pretty tough, and if you don't have money to get a lawyer, a special education lawyer, you have to fight that battle yourself.” This interviewee emphasized her determination to advocate for her child, mentioning that she has visited her daughter’s classroom to see how she is being taught, and has repeatedly talked to teachers and school officials about their failures to address her child’s special learning needs.

This willingness to advocate in the face of opposition from the school seemed especially important, as many parents we interviewed expressed their frustration with either teachers or the school administration. One interviewee stated,

I tell them [the teachers] always, at the beginning that she’s difficult, but instead of going her way, they go their way, and they just go like [gestures as if her two hands are passing each other] ... [but] All the time the teacher and I are always talking, not just conference, we are always communicating with each other.

This mother believes that her children’s teachers do not always understand them, and she tries to advocate for her children's needs. Over and over, either within school or in their personal lives, interviewees stated that one strong impact that Even Start had for them was in their increased ability to speak up for themselves and their children. One stated, “I grow up [at Even Start]...I mean, I was old for the program, but it makes me strong...if you need something or you're angry you can say it, if you don't like it you can say it. Because otherwise you say nothing and people will keep doing it...Before I was quiet, and it's a good thing that my voice is more up now.”

Involvement in child's activities outside school

Results are somewhat mixed in regard to Even Start's effect on parental involvement in children's activities outside of school. Former Even Start participants are less likely than parents in the comparison group to have not used the library at all in the past month (27.3% to 38.1%). However, among all parents who do take their children to libraries, comparison group parents go to libraries slightly more frequently. 14.3% of respondents in the comparison group took their child to the library five or more times in the last month, versus 9.1% of respondents in the experimental group (see Table 4).

Table 4. Visits to Library in the Last Month

	0 Visits	1-4 Visits	5 or More Visits
Even Start Group	27.3%	63.6%	9.1%
Comparison Group	38.1%	47.6%	14.3%

Children of former Even Start participants are significantly more likely to be involved in extracurricular activities and other programs outside of the conventional school setting. 60.0% of Even Start parents have enrolled their children in at least one extracurricular activity, while only 40.0% of comparison group parents have done the same. Furthermore, Even Start participants were more likely to enroll their child in Head Start or another preschool program after they left the Even Start Family Literacy program (75.0% to 66.7%).

Aspirations

Statistically significant data ($p=.02$) show that Even Start parents have higher aspirations for their children than do comparison group parents. All Even Start parents expect their child to at least attend a 4-year college, while 25.0% of comparison group parents expect their children

only to graduate from high school or to attend vocational school or junior college. Moreover, the proportion of former Even Start participants (54.4%) who expect their children to attend graduate school is more than double that of comparison group respondents (25.0%). See Table 5.

Table 5. Aspirations for Child’s Educational Future

	High School Completion, Vocational School, or Junior College	4-Year College	Graduate School
Even Start Group	0.0%	45.5%	54.4%
Comparison Group	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%

This trend is important because research has found that parent aspiration is the measure of parental involvement with the highest correlation with student achievement (Fan & Chen 2001). Responses to our survey corroborate that Even Start parents have high aspirations and expectations for their children. When asked, “What hopes do you have for your child’s future education and career?” former Even Start participants stated consistently high expectations, including, but not limited to, “Finish school faster than I did, go to college, become something like a doctor or lawyer, be good in life and succeed;” “Going on to college/university;” “He will attend graduate program;” and “I am hoping she graduates high school and moves onto college. I would like her to have less struggles in this life than I did.”

One interviewee stated, “Always my wish for my kids—actually more than wish, I try to make them be that—for example, my older daughter—good education first... and then, be a brain surgeon. And for my middle daughter, she talks so much, she should be a lawyer. And for my little one, teeny-tiny, she should be a teacher.” Another echoed this sentiment, stating, “I have high aspirations for [my children]. I want them to be doctors... and the reason why is

because I want them to be able to take care of themselves and their families... just want them to have a good life.”

Involvement in school community

Even Start does not seem to have a great effect on parental activities that contribute to a school community, as opposed to focusing on direct advocacy for one’s own child. For example, only 15.0% of Even Start parents attend Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings, compared to 42.1% of comparison group parents. Statistical tests confirm that this pattern did not occur by chance ($p=0.6$). As the proportion of parents who are employed full time is higher among Even Start parents than in the comparison group, it is possible that Even Start parents are less likely to have the time to attend PTO meetings. However, explanations for this trend are only speculative.

Even Start participants are also no more active than the comparison group in school fundraising and volunteering in schools; the proportion of parents participating in these activities is comparable between the two groups. Even more strikingly, they are actually less likely (45.0%) to attend school events, such as Family Learning Nights or Information Nights, than comparison group parents (66.7%). See Table 6.

Table 6. Involvement in School Community

	Attend PTO Meetings	Help with School Fundraisers	Volunteer in School*	Attend School Events**
Even Start Group	15.0%	35.0%	42.1%	45.0%
Comparison Group	42.1%	33.3%	38.9%	66.7%

* Volunteering in school is defined as participating in this school year in one or more of the following activities: helping out in the classroom, chaperoning field trips, and helping out with extracurricular activities or clubs.

** Attendance at School Events is defined as attendance in this school year at one or more of the following events: Family Learning Nights, Information Nights, Family Events, or other school events.

Overall, Even Start participation seems to have a neutral or negative correlation with participation in school communities. On the other hand, Even Start parents are more involved in their children's individual academic progress. This seems of greater importance since studies have found that parents' participation in school social activities and volunteering in school have the least effect on student achievement among all factors of parental involvement.

Comparing student achievements

Our study compares two measures of children's achievement at school: parent reports of the four-subject Connecticut Mastery Tests (CMTs), the state-wide standardized test; and parent-reported positive recognitions the child received at school. While we hope that an increased level of parental involvement found in Even Start parents would lead to better student achievement, measures of children's achievement are only indirect indicators of the effects of Even Start.

We did not find strong trends in comparing parent reporting of CMT scores. The passing rates are similar between the Even Start children and comparison group in the Reading and Writing CMTs. The passing rate of Even Start children is slightly higher than that of the comparison group in the Math CMT, and is also somewhat higher in the Science CMT. However, since the Science CMT is only taken in the fifth and eighth grades, the pool of respondents is small and the results not very meaningful.

Even Start children do show greater school achievement through parents' reporting of the positive recognitions their child received from school. Children of Even Start participants (73.7%) are slightly more likely to have received one or more positive recognitions such as "student of the month," "citizen award," or entrance into PROBE, Middletown's gifted education program, than children of comparison group children (62.5%).

Conclusion

This study aimed to gauge the effect of Even Start participation on its past participants' involvement in their children's education. We found that participation in Even Start produces different effects on different forms of parental involvement in education. Overall, parents who have gone through Even Start show more positive parental involvement in their children's education in ways that directly benefit their child. They read more frequently with their children, have higher aspirations for the children's future, are more likely to share the teacher's comments with their children, and are more likely to contact their children's teachers with questions and concerns. Outside of school, Even Start parents are also more likely to enroll their children in pre-school programs or extra-curricular activities.

On the other hand, participation in Even Start does not seem to have a positive effect on parental involvement in the school community, which only benefits their children indirectly. Even Start past participants are not particularly active in school fundraising and volunteering in school. They are also less likely to attend Parent-Teacher Organization meetings and other school family events than parents in the comparison group.

Since it is not the main goal of this study, we do not have sufficient data to establish the connection between Even Start participation and children's and parents' education achievement. Nonetheless, this study has shown positive effect of Even Start on measurements of parental involvement in children's education, which has been shown in other studies to have positive effects on children's achievements.

There are limitations to this study posed by the methodology. Since the study targets a population that is small and transient, the total numbers of surveys (24) and interviews (4) conducted are small, making it almost impossible to produce statistically significant results. On

one hand, given that all Even Start programs differ in its execution, it is this study's strength to be able to focus on evaluating the effects of one particular Even Start program. On the other hand, we recommend that future studies be done on a larger scale, covering a bigger population, so that the effects of Even Start on parental involvement can be measured more comprehensively.

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Appendix A: Survey (English)

Community Research Survey

If you have more than one child, please answer the questions in regard to ONE child with whom you FIRST participated in Even Start.

Please fill out this survey to the best of your ability. If you do not wish to answer a question, you may skip it.

1.) How many children do you have? _____

2.) What are their ages? _____

3.) What is the age and grade of the child about whom you are answering this survey?
What school do they attend?

Age: _____ Grade: _____ School: _____

4.) What is your employment status? (Check all that apply)

Unemployed Part-time job Full-time job Student Full-time Parent

5.) Have you attended or are you currently attending any of the following (in the United States)? (Check all that apply)

Vocational school GED/High school equivalency program
 2-year college Graduate school
 4-year college Other: _____
 None of the above

6.) In the last week, how many hours (approximately) have you read with your child?
(Please check only one)

0 Hours 1 Hour or less 2 Hours 3 Hours
 4 Hours 5 Hours More than 5 Hours

7.) In the last week, how many hours (approximately) has your child read on his or her own at home? (Please check only one)

My child is too young to read on his or her own
 0 Hours 1 Hour or less 2 Hours 3 Hours
 4 Hours 5 Hours More than 5 Hours

8.) Does your child see you reading at home any of the following? (Check all that apply)

Religious Materials Newspapers Books
 Magazines Advertisements Other: _____
 No, my child does not see me reading at home



Please turn page:
Printed on **both sides**

9.) In the last month, how many times have you taken your child to a library (not at the Middletown Adult Education and Training Center)? (Please check only one)

- Never 1-2 times 3-4 times 5-6 times More than 6 times

10.) If you do use a library, what services do you or your child use? (Check all that apply)

- Borrow books Attend library programs (readings, storytelling, lectures)
 Borrow movies or CDs Use career services
 Use the computer Other: _____

11.) What expectations do you have for your child's educational future? (Check all that apply)

- Middle School completion Vocational School
 High School completion 4-year College
 Junior College Graduate Program (MA, MD, Ph.D, etc.)

12.) How often, in the past week, have you looked over your child's homework with him or her?

- My child does not yet have homework
 0 times 1 time 2 times 3 times
 4 times 5 times More than 5 times

13.) Did you attend your child's last parent-teacher conference? (Please check only one)

- Yes No My child does not yet go to school

14.) If yes, did you share the teacher's comments with your child? (Please check only one)

- Yes No My child does not yet go to school

15.) How likely are you to contact your child's teacher with a question or concern, or with information you think the teacher should know?

- My child does not yet go to school
 Not likely A little likely Fairly likely Very likely

16.) In this school year, have you attended any of the following school events? (Check all that apply)

- My child does not yet go to school Family events
 Family Learning Nights Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO)
 Information nights Other (please list): _____

- None of the above

17.) In this school year, have you participated in any of these activities at your child's school? (Check all that apply)

- My child does not yet go to school Chaperoned school field trips
 Helped out in the classroom Helped out with extracurricular activities or clubs
 Helped with school fundraisers Other (please list): _____

- None of the above

18.) Since the beginning of this school year, how many days has your child been absent from school?

- My child does not yet go to school
 0-2 3-5 6-8 9-11
 12-14 15-17 18 or more

19.) Has your child received any positive recognition at school (e.g. student of the month, achievement awards, citizenship award, PROBE etc.)?

- Yes (please list): _____
 No I don't know My child is too young

20.) In the past 12 months, has your child participated in any of the activities below?
(Check all that apply)

- Boy Scouts or Girls Scouts Oddfellows Playhouse activities
 YMCA activities Green Street Art Center activities
 Church-sponsored activities Mentoring or Big Brother/Big Sister programs
 Sports teams/sports classes outside of the above organizations
 Art or music lessons outside of the above organizations
 After school programs (please list): _____
 Other (please list): _____

 My child is not involved in any of these activities

21.) If your child has taken the CMT (Connecticut Mastery Test), what performance level did your child achieve in each subject in last year's test?

Reading:

- My child didn't take this CMT I don't know
 Advanced Goal Proficient Basic Below Basic

Writing:

- My child didn't take this CMT I don't know
 Advanced Goal Proficient Basic Below Basic

Mathematics:

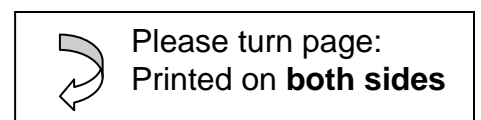
- My child didn't take this CMT I don't know
 Advanced Goal Proficient Basic Below Basic

Science (5th grade and 8th grade only):

- My child didn't take this CMT I don't know
 Advanced Goal Proficient Basic Below Basic

22.) Has your child ever been enrolled in any of the following? (Check all that apply)

- Head Start Even Start Other preschool program



23.) Did you receive a diploma from Middletown Adult Education?

Yes No I am currently taking classes at Middletown Adult Education

24.) For how many months did you participate in Even Start? _____ Never participated

25.) What is your age?

15-19 20-24 25-29 30-34 35-39 40-44 45-50 50 and over

26.) What is your sex? Male Female

27.) What is your race?

White Hispanic Native-American
 African-American Asian or Pacific Islander Other: _____

28.) Is English your first language?

Yes No

29.) If not, what is your first language? _____

30.) Did Even Start affect your involvement in your child's education? If so, how?

If you have never participated in Even Start, please skip this question.

31.) In what ways do you feel Even Start could improve in order to better help its participants? If you have never participated in Even Start, please skip this question.

32.) Do you face any obstacles in helping your child with school? If so, what are they?

33.) What hopes do you have for your child's future education and career?

Please use this space for any feedback on the survey or additional comments.

Thank you very much for your time. We really appreciate your help.

Appendix B: Survey (Spanish)

Encuesta de investigación comunitaria

*Si tiene más de un hijo, por favor conteste las preguntas con respecto a **sólo un hijo** con quien participó en Even Start por primera vez.*

Si usted no desea responder a alguna pregunta, la puede saltar.

1.) **¿Cuántos hijos tiene?** _____

2.) **¿Qué edad tienen?** _____

3.) **Con respecto al hijo sobre lo que Ud. va a responder, ¿qué edad y grado en la escuela tiene? ¿A cuál escuela asiste?**

Edad: _____ Grado escolar: _____ Nombre de la escuela: _____

4.) **¿Cómo es su situación laboral?** (Marque todas las opciones que se apliquen)

- Desempleado Trabajo a tiempo parcial Trabajo a tiempo completo
 Estudiante Padre a tiempo completo

5.) **¿A cuáles de las opciones indicadas abajo asisten o ha asistido? (en los Estados Unidos)?**
(Marque todas las que se apliquen)

- Escuela de enseñanza técnica GED
 Universidad de dos años Escuela de estudios de postgrado
 Universidad de cuatro años Otro _____
 Ninguna de las anteriores

6.) **Durante la semana pasada, ¿cuántas horas (aproximadamente) ha leído con su hijo?**
(Por favor, marque sólo una opción)

- 0 Horas 1 Hora o menos 2 Horas 3 Horas
 4 Horas 5 Horas Más que 5 Horas

7.) **Durante la semana pasada, ¿cuántas horas ha leído su hijo por su propia cuenta en casa?** (Por favor, marque sólo una opción)

- Mi hijo es demasiado joven para leer por su propia cuenta
 0 Horas 1 Hora o menos 2 Horas 3 Horas
 4 Horas 5 Horas Más que 5 Horas

8.) **¿Es que en algún momento su hijo ve a usted leyendo algún material entre los que están indicados abajo?** (Marque todas las que se apliquen)

- Materiales religiosas Revistas Libros
 Periódicos Anuncios Otro: _____
 No, mi hijo nunca me ve leyendo

9.) Durante el mes pasado, ¿cuántas veces ha llevado a su hijo a alguna biblioteca (no nos referimos a la del Middletown Adult Education y Training Center)? (Por favor, marque sólo una opción)

- Nunca 1-2 veces 3-4 veces 5-6 veces Más que 6 veces

10.) Si usa la biblioteca, ¿qué servicios usa usted o su hijo? (Marque todas las que se apliquen)

- Préstamo de libros Programas de la biblioteca
 Préstamo de películas o CDs Apoyo profesional
 Las computadoras Otro: _____

11.) ¿Qué expectativas tiene para el futuro educacional de su hijo? (Marque todas las que se apliquen)

- Graduación de primaria Escuela de enseñanza técnica
 Graduación de colegio Universidad de cuatro años
 Universidad de dos años Escuela de estudios de postgrado (MA, MD, Ph.D, etc.)

12.) Durante la semana pasada, ¿cuántas veces ha revisado la tarea de su hijo/a con él o ella?

- Mi hijo todavía no tiene tarea
 0 veces 1 vez 2 veces 3 veces
 4 veces 5 veces Más que 5 veces

13.) ¿Asistió usted a la última conferencia entre padres y maestros?

- Sí No Mi hijo todavía no asiste a la escuela

14.) Si asistió, ¿compartió las observaciones del maestro con su hijo?

- Sí No Mi hijo todavía no asiste a la escuela

15.) ¿Cuán probable es que usted se ponga en contacto con el profesor de su hijo con una pregunta o preocupación, o con información que piensa que el profesor debe saber?

- Mi hijo todavía no asiste a la escuela
 Poco probable Existe cierta posibilidad Probable Muy probable

16.) Durante este año escolar, ¿ha asistido usted a alguno de los siguientes eventos escolares? (Marque todas las que se apliquen)

- Mi hijo todavía no asiste a la escuela Eventos para la familia
 Reuniones de aprendizaje en familia Organización de padres y maestros (PTO)
 Reuniones de información Otro (por favor especifique): _____
 Ninguna de las anteriores

17.) Durante este año escolar, ¿ha participado en alguna de las siguientes actividades en la escuela de su hijo? (Marque todas las que se apliquen)

- Mi hijo todavía no asiste a la escuela He acompañado a los estudiantes en eventos escolares
 He ayudado en clase He ayudado a un club o una actividad extraescolar
 He ayudado con la colecta de fondos Otro (especifique por favor): _____
 Ninguna de las anteriores

18.) Desde el principio de este año escolar, ¿cuántos días ha faltado su hijo a clase?

- Mi hijo todavía no asiste a la escuela
 0-2 3-5 6-8 9-11
 12-14 15-17 18 o más

19.) ¿Ha recibido su hijo algún reconocimiento en la escuela (p. ej. estudiante del mes, premio por merito, premios por educación cívica, etc.)?

- Sí (especifique por favor): _____
 No No sé Mi hijo es demasiado joven

20.) Durante el año pasado, ¿ha participado su hijo en alguna de las siguientes actividades?

(Marque todas las que se apliquen)

- Boy Scouts o Girls Scouts Oddfellows Playhouse
 Actividades del YMCA Green Street Art Center
 Actividades con la iglesia Programas de mentores o Big Brother/Big Sister
 Equipos o clases deportivos aparte de las organizaciones antedichas
 Clases de música o arte aparte de las organizaciones antedichas
 Programas extraescolares (especifique por favor): _____
 Otro (especifique por favor): _____
 No, mi hijo no ha participado en ninguna de estas actividades

21.) ¿Si su hijo ha hecho el CMT (Connecticut Mastery Test), el examen estandarizado del estado, cuál nivel de rendimiento consiguió el año pasado?

Lectura:

- Mi hijo no hizo el CMT No sé
 Advanced Goal Proficient Basic Below Basic

Escritura:

- Mi hijo no hizo el CMT No sé
 Advanced Goal Proficient Basic Below Basic

Matemáticas:

- Mi hijo no hizo el CMT No sé
 Advanced Goal Proficient Basic Below Basic

Ciencias (sólo para los grados 5 y 8):

- Mi hijo no hizo el CMT No sé
 Advanced Goal Proficient Basic Below Basic

22.) ¿Ha participado su hijo en alguno de los siguientes programas? (Marque todas las que se apliquen)

- Head Start Even Start Otro tipo de preescolar, guardería infantil, o prekindergarten

23.) ¿Ha recibido usted un diploma de Middletown Adult Education?

- Sí No Tengo clases en Middletown Adult Education

24.) ¿Por cuántos meses participó usted en Even Start? _____ Nunca participó

25.) ¿Cuántos años tiene Ud.?

15-19 20-24 25-29 30-34 35-39 40-44 45-50 50 o más

26.) ¿Cuál es su Masculino Femenino **sexo?**

27.) ¿De qué raza es Ud.?

Blanco Hispano India Norteamericano
 Afroamericano Asiático o Isleño del Pacífico Otro: _____

28.) ¿Es inglés su lengua materna?

Yes No

29.) Si no, ¿Qué es su lengua materna? _____

30.) ¿Cómo ha influido Even Start en su participación en la educación de su hijo?

Si nunca ha participado en Even Start, salte esta pregunta.

31.) ¿Tiene alguna sugerencia para Even Start?

Si nunca ha participado en Even Start, salte esta pregunta.

32.) ¿Se enfrenta Ud. a algún obstáculo cuando ayuda a su hijo con sus estudios? En caso afirmativo, descríbalos.

33.) ¿Qué esperanzas tiene Ud. para el futuro de la educación y la carrera de su hijo?

Si tiene algún duda, comentario o sugerencia, por favor añádale a continuación Utilice este espacio para añadir cualquier otro comentario o sugerencia.

Muchas gracias por su colaboración. Apreciamos su ayuda

Appendix C: Cover Letter (English)



Middletown Adult Education
Even Start Family Literacy Program
398 Main Street
Middletown, CT 06457
860 343-6050

Dear Former Even Start Student,

I'm writing you to ask for your help with a research project being done by a class of student researchers at Wesleyan University for the Middletown Adult Education Even Start Family Literacy Program.

We would appreciate it if you could fill out the short survey that is enclosed. It should take no longer than 8 minutes. You can ask someone for help if you have difficulties filling out the survey.

Please mail the survey back to the students in the stamped and addressed return envelope that is included. You do not need to put your name on the survey. The survey is anonymous and the information that the students collect from it will not be linked to you in any way.

After you finished the survey, please write your name on the postcard that is also enclosed, so that we do not call you to ask you to send it in.

If you would be interested in participating in a more thorough, face-to-face interview with one of the Wesleyan students, please check "yes" on the postcard. This interview will be confidential, and can be held at a place that you choose. Write down a way you can be contacted (your address or phone number) and put the postcard in the mail.

If you have any questions about this project, you can call me at 860-343-6050 or Professor Rob Rosenthal at Wesleyan at 860-685-2943.

Thank you for your time, and for helping us with this important project.

Sincerely,

Cindy Cappetta

Appendix D: Cover Letter (Spanish)



Middletown Adult Education
Even Start Family Literacy Program
398 Main Street
Middletown, CT 06457
860 343-6050

Estimado ex-alumno de Even Start,

Le escribo para pedirle su ayuda con un proyecto de investigación realizada por una clase de estudiantes investigadores de la Universidad de Wesleyan para el Middletown Adult Education Even Start Family Literacy Program.

Le agradeceríamos si pudiera Ud. rellenar la encuesta corta adjunta a esta carta (or: incluida con esta carta). El proceso no debe tardar más de 8 minutos.

Cuando termine, envíenos la encuesta en el sobre con franqueo prepagado que también incluimos. No tiene que poner su nombre en la encuesta. La encuesta es anónima y la información recogida en ella no será relacionada a usted de ninguna manera.

Además de rellenar la encuesta, ponga su nombre en la postal también incluida. Marque la casilla para confirmar que usted ha completado la encuesta [para que no le llamemos después.]

Si le interesaría participar en una entrevista más extensiva y en persona, por favor, marque la casilla correspondiente en la postal. Esta entrevista sería completamente confidencial, y se puede hacer en el lugar elegido por usted (como en el Russell Library o Middletown Adult Education). Indíquenos cómo podemos ponernos en contacto con usted (su dirección o número de teléfono, por ejemplo) y envíenos la postal por correo.

Si tiene preguntas sobre este proyecto, no dude en llamarme a mí (860-343-6050) o al Profesor Rob Rosenthal de Wesleyan (860-685-2943).

Le agradecemos su tiempo y su ayuda con este proyecto importante

Atentamente,

Cindy Cappetta

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Before Even Start

How did you first hear about Even Start?

-Who told you about it? What did you think?

Why did you join Even Start?

-What about the program seemed useful? How did you think it could be helpful for you and your family?

During Even Start

Could you tell me about the first time you ever went to Even Start?

-How did you feel? How did your child feel?

-What do you remember about people you met or things you did?

What kinds of things did you do and learn at Even Start?

-Describe a typical day for me.

-Do you remember any specific classes or people that influenced you? What made them important for you?

-Tell me about your classmates. Did you feel they were a supportive community? How?

Did you ever feel frustrated while you were at Even Start?

-Did you ever have trouble getting there?

-If there was another time you felt frustrated or confused, what caused it?

-Who were you with? Did you talk to anyone about it?

Tell me about the last class you had at Even Start.

-How were you feeling?

-What was your reason for leaving?

-Did you graduate from Even Start? If so, how did you feel at your graduation?

After Even Start

Can you tell me about a time you've thought about Even Start since leaving it?

-Is there a specific experience at Even Start that stands out in your mind? Why/how is that important to you?

-Do you talk about Even Start and the things you learned there with family members?

Tell me about a time you recently spent at your child's school (besides picking them up or dropping them off)?

-Why were you there and what did you do?

-How comfortable do you feel being at your child's school in general?

-Do you feel comfortable talking to your child's teacher?

-Do you think he or she understands your child's needs, strengths, and weaknesses?

Do you talk to your child about school?

-What is something you have talked about with them recently?

-What is something they enjoy about school (a favorite class, etc.)?

-Is there anything that they have trouble with?

-Have there been times when you felt that it was difficult to help your child in school related matters?

-Do you talk with your child about his/her performance at school? When he/she does well (good grades, etc.), how do you feel?

-Did your child ever bring home a grade that you were disappointed with? If so, how did you react and what did you talk to them about?

Outside of school, how do you help structure your child's time?

-Do you have rules about when they have to do work and when they can play? When they can watch tv/internet/hang out with friends?

-Do you help them plan or enroll in activities they like to do?

-Do you read with your child, and does he/she read on his/her own?

-How does he/she feel about reading?

Future/General

What aspirations and expectations do you have for your child?

-In 10 to 20 years, where do you see your child? What do you think your child will be doing?

-Do you talk with them about your hopes for them and about their own dreams/goals? (Where do you think they see themselves?)

-Do you talk with them about any struggles they may face or worries you have?

What has changed since you participated in Even Start?

-Has it changed what you think parents should do?

-Do you relate to your children differently?

Appendix F: Interview Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Study of the Middletown Adult Education Even Start Family Literacy Program

Researchers: Shayna Bauchner, Katie Hanna, Isaac Maddow-Zimet, Holing Yip

Faculty Advisor: Professor Rob Rosenthal

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Shayna Bauchner, Katie Hanna, Isaac Maddow-Zimet, and Holing Yip for a class project under the supervision of Professor Rob Rosenthal in the Department of Sociology at Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT.

You have been approached because you are a former participant of the Middletown Adult Education Even Start Family Literacy Program, and because you indicated to the student researchers that you would be willing to participate in an interview about the program.

Purpose:

The goal of this project is to help Even Start understand the experiences of its participants during and after their time in the program.

Confidentiality:

Unless you check below to request otherwise, neither your name nor any identifying details about you will be referenced in the transcript or audiotape, or in any material generated as a result of this research. The tape of your interview will be closed to public use, and your name will not appear in the transcript or referenced in any material obtained from the interview.

Procedures:

The interview will take approximately one hour. During the interview you will be asked questions about your past experience in the Even Start program. You will also be asked questions about your experiences with being involved in the education of the child with whom you participated in Even Start.

The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. The results of your interview will be used in a report produced by the student researchers in conjunction with a course taught by Professor Rob Rosenthal in the Department of Sociology at Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT.

Risks/Benefits:

The risks associated with participation in this interview are minimal.

There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but your willingness to share your knowledge will contribute to Even Start's understanding of its participants' experiences

with and feelings about the program. In addition, you may request to be given a personal copy of the finished report. The report will also be available at Wesleyan University's Center for Community Partnerships, in Russell Library in Middletown, CT, and online at http://frontpage.wesleyan.edu/slc/comm_res/community_research_reports.htm

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. Even if you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the interview without penalty, or request confidentiality, at any point during the interview. You may also choose not to answer specific questions or discuss certain subjects during the interview or to ask that portions of our discussion or your responses not be recorded on tape.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research project or interview, feel free to contact Shayna Bauchner at sbauchner@wesleyan.edu or 617-694-6360, Katie Hanna at khanna@wesleyan.edu or 518-396-9657, Isaac Maddow-Zimet at imaddowzimet@wesleyan.edu or 347-598-2733, or Holing Yip at hyip@wesleyan.edu or 860-754-6787..

You may also contact Professor Rob Rosenthal at rrosenthal@wesleyan.edu, 860-685-2943, or at:

Department of Sociology, Wesleyan University
238 Church Street
Middletown, CT 06459-0012

Statement of Consent:

I agree to participate in this interview, and to the use of this interview as described above. My preference regarding the use of my name is as follows:

___ I wish to remain anonymous in any transcript or reference to the information contained in this interview.

__ I agree to be identified by name in any transcript or reference to the information contained in this interview.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date