Identifying and Navigating the Barriers of Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Parental involvement in early childhood education significantly impacts children's academic, socio-emotional, and behavioral outcomes. Extensive research indicates that parental involvement plays a more influential role in a child's academic success compared to socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or educational background. However, a noticeable gap exists between the desired and actual levels of parental involvement, often attributed to identifiable barriers. This study aims to delineate these obstacles and proposes cost-effective, actionable steps to overcome them. We introduce specific strategies that enhance the home-school partnership and recommend that schools actively teach and promote these activities. These practices highlight the dual importance of parental support for school-based learning and school support for home-based activities.

Parent Involvement in Education

The concept of Parental Involvement (PI) has been defined in various ways. For example, Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) describe PI as multidimensional and involving a parent's commitment, time, values, and dedication to resources. PI has also been defined as "parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" (Jeynes, 2005, p. 245). Most would agree that PI encompasses ongoing communication with teacher(s), visits or volunteer work in the school, parental encouragement, and help with homework. These actions lay the foundation for further discussion of how such engagements enhance children's educational experiences and outcomes.

Epstein developed a framework of six major types of parent involvement following many years of research (Epstein, 2011). The six types of involvement defined include 1) Parenting – help all families establish home environments to support children as students and to help schools know their families; 2) Communicating – design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress, 3) Volunteering – recruit and organize parent help and support for the school and students, 4) Learning at Home – provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning, 5) Decision-making – include parents in school decisions; develop parent leaders, representatives, and advocates; include all parents' voices, and 6) Collaborating with the Community – identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development; conduct activities for students to assist the community.

Wilder (2014) synthesized the findings of nine meta-analyses that investigated the impact of different definitions. The results of this research suggested a favorable correlation between PI and academic achievement, regardless of the definition or measurement of PI. However, the findings indicated that this association was strongest when PI was characterized as parental expectations for their children's academic progress and weakest when defined as assistance with homework. Across grade levels and ethnic groups, the association between PI and academic achievement was found to be consistent.

PI in early childhood education takes on different forms in both home and school settings, each playing a vital role in a child's overall development (Barger et al., 2019). At home, PI involves actively engaging parents in their child's educational journey beyond the classroom. This includes creating a nurturing home environment that supports the child's learning and growth. Parents can designate a space for educational activities, help manage time effectively, engage in educational conversations, encourage shared reading, and introduce the child to culturally enriching experiences.

On the other hand, PI at school entails parents actively participating in the education program itself. Barger and colleagues (2019) suggested this involves activities such participating in school events, attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering in the classroom, participating in governance activities such as membership in the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) or school board, and engaging in discussions with the teacher.

Both forms of PI are often seen as valuable in early childhood education, potentially working together to create a comprehensive and supportive learning environment. While PI at home is thought to possibly enhance the child's foundational skills and attitudes toward learning, PI at school is believed to strengthen the educational community, enriching classroom activities, and fosters a sense of collaboration among parents, educators, and young learners.

PI in Early Childhood Education

In this paper we aim to demonstrate the efficacy of PI in preschool through early elementary years, encouraging schools to advocate for home-based PI to support student success. PI in preschool and pre-kindergarten helps establish a foundation for parent-school partnerships. It is important for parents to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to collaborate with teachers and other school personnel during these years. This is critical in the early years of a child's life for encouraging early academic and social abilities that predict later school performance (Ma et al., 2016; Powell et al., 2010). Studies have shown that early school success is associated with pre-kindergarten social competencies such as attention skills (Duncan et al., 2007) and behavioral regulation (Bronson, 2000). Long-term benefits for children's school readiness, academic achievement, and general well-being can be attributed to PI and family support services (Reynolds et al., 2022).

The interactions between parents and their children, along with the bonds formed with teachers and caretakers during the preschool years (ages 3-5) are critical for fostering a child's social-emotional, cognitive, and physical preparedness for school (Powell et al., 2010; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2001). During these years, children develop early cognitive, social-emotional, and regulatory abilities and competencies, which serve as precursors to longstanding adaptation and functioning (Levine & Philips, 2022; Sheridan et al., 2010). PI with preschoolers is associated with several adaptive qualities, including preliteracy development (Arnold et al., 2008).

Reynolds et al. (2022) stated that PI is critical in perpetuating a cycle of achievement and motivation throughout elementary school. The research of Hayakawa et al. (2013) utilized path analyses from Chicago Longitudinal Study (2005) participants to evaluate relationships between early parent school participation, student motivation and achievement, and later parent engagement. The study found that early parent school involvement was associated with improved kindergarten performance, which increased student motivation to do well in school and increased PI in later elementary school. This study emphasizes the need to start PI at a young age so that the cycle of motivation and achievement can begin early in a student's academic career, as reported by Reynolds et al. (2022).

PI research is well-established in early childhood education. Much of the preschool PI research has focused on low-income, ethnic minority families enrolling in Head Start. According to Bierman et al. (2017), low-income families frequently encounter numerous challenges in providing their children with high-quality preschool programs. Children are better prepared for school, have fewer behavioral problems, and have better social skills if we assist parents in helping their children develop throughout the preschool years. The act of parents helping their children can be conceptualized as home-based PI for our purposes. Effective PI initiatives can help close the achievement gap for children from low-income families. For example, mothers' and fathers' participation in Head Start is associated with improved levels of emotion regulation in children from low-income families (Downer & Mendez, 2005). Furthermore, a study of Head Start parents found that home-based parenting methods, including reading and learning activities, predicted considerable development in attention and language skills during preschool and reduced behavior problems (Fantuzzo et al., 2004).

In Head Start, parents are encouraged to participate in various ways at home and school. For example, involvement at home might mean accepting school visitors, reading to children, and teaching them numbers and letters. Home-based PI also includes various non-academic

activities that provide alternative opportunities for learning, such as playing games, singing with them, and taking them on field trips to the store, playground, or park.

Henrich and Blackmond-Jones (2006) described PI at school as a goal for Head Start program goal, supported by several activities to engage parents. For example, Head Start provides parent education seminars, social activities, and volunteer opportunities in the classroom. Parents can also participate in program creation, policy review, and governance through the local Head Start council. In general, research has demonstrated that PI for early childhood education in the home and at school improves program effectiveness and enhances all facets of school readiness.

In related research on family engagement in early childhood education, Halgunseth et al. (2009) extend PI research to include the importance of the entire family in the home-school relationship and refer to this as *family engagement*. According to Halgunseth et al. (2009), the home-school relationship in early childhood education refers to the formal and informal relationships between families and their young children's educational settings. Participation in preschool-based activities and regular communication between parents and teachers are associated with better results for young children. Parent-teacher conferences, participating in more extended class visits, and assisting with class activities are all examples of parent participation techniques. Participation in such activities is associated with children's development in language, self-help, social, motor, adaptive, and fundamental school abilities (Marcon, 1999). Marcon found in their study that PI in program activities was linked to greater preschool success and better adaptive and socially competent behaviors. Parents who volunteered at the school had a greater impact on their children's performance than those who simply attended parent-teacher conferences.

In a study conducted by McWayne et al. (2004), they found that consistent and direct communication between parents and schools positively impacted how kindergartners from low-income, ethnic minority backgrounds perceived their engagement with peers, adults, and learning. Strong home-school relationships boost children's outcomes during their early childhood years and over time. For example, regular communication with a teacher, volunteering in the classroom, and participating in school activities were linked to children's advancement from kindergarten to first grade (Mantzicopoulos, 2003). Increased participation of parents in preschool events helps parents by increasing their knowledge of the school programs and experiences. Furthermore, PI at school may serve as a model for the child, emphasizing the importance of education.

A greater number of studies focus on school-based PI compared to home-based PI. According to McDowell et al. (2018), home-based PI is crucial to students' success and achievement, particularly in the early years. Researchers may focus on home-based PI less frequently than school-based because it is more challenging to quantify and examine home-based PI. According to research, parents are more likely to be involved at home than at school while their children are in pre-kindergarten. Preschool children's educational results and early literacy abilities may benefit from involvement at home, such as reading books to children and parent-child interactions (McDowell et al., 2018; Powell et al., 2012).

PI Benefits on Achievement and Social-Emotional Outcomes

Many studies have been conducted detailing the benefits of PI on academic achievement and social-emotional outcomes. PI supports children's learning, but parents' attention toward

their children's well-being also contributes to long-term effects (Reynolds et al., 2022). For our purposes, we review the findings of one seminal study by Barger et al. in 2019. Barger et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative review of 448 studies that found a positive association between academic achievement, engagement, and motivation, as well as parents' naturally occurring involvement in their children's education. Their meta-analysis concluded that parental participation enhances academic performance, reduces delinquency risk, and improves social and emotional integration. These results were significant and remarkable as the research findings were consistent across age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Barger and colleagues (2019) compared the associations for PI for school-based involvement and home-based involvement to six dimensions of child adjustment, including achievement, engagement, motivation, social, emotional, and delinquency. The results suggest that school-based PI had a small, significant association with positive adjustment across children and all dimensions. However, home-based PI was significantly associated with positive adjustment across children and all dimensions. Home-based PI also presented more substantial effects than school-based effects. Because of this, we recommend that early childhood educators focus their efforts on increasing home-based PI, and we offer specific examples of home-based PI activities that schools can teach, encourage, and support.

For our purposes of navigating the barriers of PI, it is important to note that this meta-analysis concluded that both home-based and school-based PI are positively related to academic achievement and social-emotional outcomes. Barger et al.'s (2019) meta-analysis of the effectiveness of PI, paired with the research we described above on the positive impact PI has in early childhood, is a compelling reason why preschools should work to increase PI. Because our goal is to suggest ways to increase PI, the fact that home-based PI had a greater impact than school-based PI suggests that, to increase overall PI, early childhood educators should focus on encouraging PI at home as well. The home-school partnership can motivate parents to assist their children with classroom-related activities in the home setting. According to Powell et al. (2012), it may be helpful for school efforts to promote PI at home to stress parental instructional strategies that match with specific child outcomes on a meaningful level. For instance, a school seeking parent support for boosting students' mathematical skills may have better results if parents are provided with specific mathematics-related practices rather than general PI suggestions.

Overcoming Barriers to PI

Research reviewed within this study suggests that PI may benefit students across all grades, including those in early childhood settings. The findings indicate that PI generally enhances both academic and social outcomes for students, highlighting its positive impact on children's development. Furthermore, Barger et al. (2019) suggests the benefits of parental involvement can be observed across varying levels of engagement, emphasizing its importance in supporting children's educational and social well-being. Castro et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis on PI with kindergarten through secondary students. The results generally support positive outcomes for all students, and found the level and type of involvement matter, with certain types of involvement being more strongly associated with positive academic achievement. The effectiveness of PI, therefore, can vary based on the nature of the involvement, suggesting that not all forms of PI are equally impactful, but all contribute positively in varying degrees. However, according to Hornby and Lafaele (2011), there is a gap between the rhetoric and reality of PI. Hornby and Lafaele proposed that the gap between rhetoric and reality in PI

exists because of factors that act as barriers to developing effective PI. These include parent and family, parent-teacher, child, and societal factors. It is important to understand these barriers so educators can help parents navigate them to increase PI. This section discusses each of the factors and actions schools can take to overcome each barrier. Additionally, we labeled the actions early childhood educators can take to overcome the barriers by categories of support: Communicate, Partner, Support, and Encourage.

For the purpose of this paper, we defined communicate, partner, support, and encourage. *Communicate* refers to the process of effectively sharing and exchanging information between schools and parents. This fosters transparency, understanding, and mutual respect, creating a conducive environment for the child's development. *Partner* implies the establishment of a collaborative relationship between parents and schools, working together toward the shared goal of enhancing the child's academic and socio-emotional outcomes. This partnership encourages mutual responsibility and a sense of shared ownership in the child's education. *Support* denotes the provision of guidance, resources, and aid to parents, enabling them to contribute positively to their child's educational journey. This may include providing educational materials, conducting workshops, or offering emotional support to parents. *Encourage* signifies motivating and inspiring parents to participate actively in their child's education. This could involve recognizing their efforts, providing opportunities for involvement, and creating an inclusive environment that values their input and involvement. We define PI as the active participation, engagement, and collaboration of parents or guardians in their children's learning and educational experiences. As in previously defined descriptions of PI, this involvement can take various forms, including supporting academic activities at home, communicating with teachers and school staff, attending school events, and promoting a positive learning environment.

Individual Parent and Family Factors

The first level of barriers that Hornby and Lafaele (2011) addressed were individual parent and family factors (See Table 1). To increase PI, schools must address these factors. First, schools can directly influence parents' beliefs about PI and perceptions of invitations for PI. They can do this by communicating and demonstrating that education is a partnership between parents and schools and by directly inviting parents to participate in specific activities that support PI. Early childhood educators can mitigate the impact of two factors (current life contexts and class, ethnicity, and gender) by providing support to PI that recognizes the home and work reality of many families that may discourage PI. Schools can also encourage and support parents from all backgrounds to be involved. According to Bierman et al. (2017), preschool children's school readiness can be enhanced by extensive and targeted efforts, as indicated by rigorous intervention studies with socioeconomically disadvantaged parents. The strongest evidence that parent participation programs can improve child outcomes comes from evidence-based interventions that have been examined in randomized controlled trials. Many of these programs include home visits or parent-group interventions to enhance parenting skills related to social-emotional and academic readiness in young children. Others have concentrated on establishing preschool teacher-parent relationships to improve child learning.

Table 1

Individual Parent and Family Factors

Individual parent and family factors	Traditional school context (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011)	School Action	Category of PI support
Parents' beliefs about PI	If a parent believes it is their job "only to get their children to school," they are less likely to be involved in home-based or school-based PI.	Communicate that education is a partnership between home and school.	Communicate
Perceptions of invitations for PI	Parents' perceptions of the teacher's or school's openness to PI encourage or discourage PI.	Directly invite parents for specific PI activities.	Partner
Current life contexts	Parent education level, work, and career situations encourage or discourage PI.	Support PI activities that recognize the reality of some family contexts.	Support
Class, ethnicity, and gender	SES, ethnicity, and gender serve to encourage or discourage PI. There are disparities based on each. Some groups have less time; others have less trust. Women are more likely to engage in PI.	Encourage and support PI with all parents.	Encourage

Parent-Teacher Factors

Parents' and teachers' views of PI can differ in three ways, according to Hornby and Lafaele (2011), and these can be barriers to PI in education: differing goals and agendas for education, differing attitudes about school and education, and the different language used to talk about education. To address these factors, early childhood educators must maintain open communication about their goals for education, recognize and respect parents' goals, and make sure their parents and schools understand the language used to discuss PI. These can be addressed in regular communication sent to parents, parent-teacher meetings, and other school events.

In our local preschool setting, we surveyed parents and teachers to determine what school-based PI they felt most contributed to academic and social-emotional adjustment. The survey comprised of 180 participants, which included 125 parents and 55 teachers across four rural public schools for pre-kindergarten through second grade. The good news is that based on

our survey of parents and teachers at two schools in our community, there is general agreement that school-based PI is important. The goal for our local survey was not to generalize to a larger population but rather demonstrate to schools' specific areas where they can engage parents to increase school-based PI. We learned from our local setting that parents believe school-based PI is important to their child's success.

The next step that should guide all school PI efforts is open communication that respects differences and aims to use a common vocabulary about PI efforts. To overcome barriers related to parent-teacher factors, PI should strengthen these partnerships during preschool. Evidence-based programs are available to promote this relationship. Bierman et al. (2017) describe several programs, one of which provides multi-session workshops (8-12 sessions) for parents and children taught by preschool teachers. Teachers demonstrate learning activities and give parents materials to use with their children at home. These programs documented improvements in children's academic skills in the targeted areas. The Getting Ready Program aids teachers in making routine home visits and hosting collaborative parent-teacher conferences; it improved children's language use and pre-reading skills. Table 2 lists and describes the parent-teacher factors and provides school actions in response.

Table 2

Parent-Teacher Factors

Parent-teacher factors	Traditional school context (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011)	School Action	Category of PI support
Differing goals and agendas	Differing beliefs about general goals of education or about the purpose and goals of PI can lead to conflict and decreased PI.	Communicate school goals. Ask about parent goals.	Communicate
Differing attitudes	Parents and school professionals may have different opinions about the nature of school and education. If education equals schooling, then teachers have the most influence and power. If it is bigger than schooling, then the power shifts to teachers.	Respect differing opinions and attitudes about schools and schooling Focus on partnership between home and school.	Partner
Differing language used	Words mean different things to different people. "Partnership" means one thing to schools and another	Develop a shared or common vocabulary in the school community about PI	Communicate

thing to parents. This
differing understanding
leads to conflict and less
PI.

Child Factors

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) identified four child factors that can serve as barriers to PI (see Table 3): age, learning difficulties and disabilities, gifts and talents, and behavioral problems. As children get older, school-based PI tends to decrease. Of the remaining three factors, learning difficulties and disabilities, gifts and talents, and behavioral problems, two (gifts and talents and behavioral problems) tend to decrease the amount of PI, and one (learning difficulties and disabilities) tends to increase PI. Both gifts and talents and learning difficulties can have the opposite effect depending on the nature of cooperation between parents and the schools. The remaining three factors offer the most opportunity for parent-teacher or parent-school engagement and, therefore, increase PI if there is agreement on the issues addressed. Early childhood educators can take specific actions to encourage positive and sustained PI in response to these barriers (see Table 3).

Table 3

Child Factors

Child factors	Traditional school context (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011)	School Actions	Category of PI Support
Age	PI decreases as student age increases. The nature of PI also changes.	Directly invite parents for specific PI activities.	Encourage
Learning difficulties and disabilities	Parents with struggling students are more likely to be involved in PI, but if there is a disagreement over the issues, this can discourage PI.	Focus on partnership between home and school to address student difficulties or disabilities.	Partner
Gifts and talents	If a child is not academically challenged and becomes frustrated, this can discourage PI due to a conflict between parents and the school. Sometimes, parents of gifted and	Focus on partnership between home and school to support an academically challenging student.	Partner

	talented students are more motivated to engage in PI.		
Behavioral problems	Parents of students with behavioral problems are often less likely to be involved in school.	Focus on partnership between home and school to address student behavior problems.	Partner

Societal Factors

The societal factors that Hornby and Lafaele (2011) describe are not easily addressed by schools and parents, but some of the actions listed above can be used to help ease their impacts as barriers to PI. Schools and parents need to widen their view of what PI can be (as discussed in the section on what we can learn about PI from home schools) and focus on the partnership between parents and schools. Societal factors may include a narrow definition of PI along with a family-specific issue such as parents working hours, transportation, both parents working, and divorces leading to single parenting issues. Schools can support parents by offering various communication methods. Parents and teachers alike recognized the value of proactive parent involvement that does not require parents to be present at school or assist teachers in the classroom throughout the year. For example, schools can provide parents with opportunities to help from home and connect with teachers via school websites or email (Olmstead, 2013). See Table 4 for more details.

Table 4

Societal Factors

Societal factors	Traditional school context (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011)	School actions	Category of support
Historical and demographic	Narrow definitions of PI (school based and school supporting) and rigid bureaucratic nature of schools discourages PI.	Broaden our view of PI Focus on partnership between home and school.	Partner
Political	Little government push to encourage PI- no laws requiring it.	Encourage PI through education and direct invitations to specific PI actions.	Encourage
Economic	Little money dedicated to encouraging PI because there are no	Encourage PI through education and direct	Encourage

short-term rewards related to performance of accountability.	invitations to specific PI actions.

Support Behaviors for Overcoming Barriers

It is in the best interest of schools to increase PI as most of the research about PI associates it with academic success. If early childhood educators want to increase PI, they must recognize these barriers and work to satisfactorily address them with concerned families. In this section, we described the barriers to PI that Hornby and Lafaele (2011) identified. We also identified actions that schools can take to address these barriers. These school actions fall into four categories of support behaviors: Communicate, Partner, Support, and Encourage. First, as schools work to increase PI, they must communicate with parents that PI is important by inviting parents to be involved in specific ways. Next, they must focus on being a partner with parents in education. This includes parents supporting school-based activities and the school supporting home-based learning activities. Third, schools must support parent PI. This includes providing resources and information on the operations of PI. Finally, schools must encourage PI. School administrators can encourage PI by setting up professional development programs for teachers and staff that focus on helping them explore and overcome their preconceived notions about children and families, as well as any challenges that may stand in the way of greater PI (Yulianti et al., 2020). According to Jeynes (2005), schools that invest more in teacher professional development have more policies fostering parent involvement in school and home activities. More high-quality teachers in these schools equate to more school programs to engage parents in helping their children with homework and learning at home. Effective teachers can and do impact how schools prioritize and invest in parent involvement for both minority and White children.

Home-School Parents as Models for PI in Traditional School

If we accept the evidence that PI contributes to student academic success, we should encourage PI. One of the barriers to PI is parents' beliefs about PI (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Parents need to know they can make a difference and help their children achieve. If they think their effort matters, they will be more involved. But parents need examples. Home-schooling families can serve as one example of what PI looks like in action. In another study (Anthony & Wildmon, 2021), we conducted an analysis of homeschooling "how-to" books to identify specific techniques that traditional school parents could use as PI activities. To increase PI, early childhood educators must help parents understand what specific PI they can do at home that benefits students generally and supports school-based learning specifically. One of the benefits of using homeschool parents' activities as examples of traditional school PI is that homeschool parents usually do not possess expertise in education. Some use this to criticize homeschooling as an educational practice, but the fact that families that homeschool are not experts places these practices within the realm of possibility for most parents. Additionally, most families experience "homeschooling" their children during COVID-19 means that they have most likely actively engaged in some of these home-school practices that can be considered traditional school PI.

The homeschooling population is growing and becoming increasingly diverse. In 2021, Steven Duvall, a Home School Defense Legal Defense Association (HSDLA) researcher,

reported that the number of families in America who report homeschooling their children grew from less than 2 percent in 1999 to 3.3 percent in 2016. In the same period, White families homeschooled at higher rates than Black and Hispanic families. For example, in 2016, 3.3 percent of families reported homeschooling their children. 3.8 percent of white families reported homeschooling in 2016 whereas 1.9 percent of Black and 3.5 percent of Hispanic families reported homeschooling in the same year. Homeschool participation remained at about that level until the pandemic in 2020, resulting in record numbers of families reporting homeschooling their children. According to the Census Bureau, in 2021, the total number of families reporting homeschooling increased to greater than 18% for White, Black, and Hispanic families (Duvall, 2021).

Post-pandemic, the number of homeschool families decreased but not to pre-pandemic levels. In 2022, the percentage of families reporting homeschooling was 9.9 % for White families, 10.3% for Black families, and 8.9% for Hispanic families (Duvall, 2022). Recent statistics on homeschooling indicate that the gap between minority and White families who are homeschooled has closed. In 2023, 5.4% of families in America reported homeschooling their children. The same report indicated that 6.1% of White and 6.3% of Black families homeschool their children (Smith & Campbell, 2023).

Data on the increases in homeschooling and the increased diversity of those who homeschool is relevant to our argument that homeschool activities can be used as models of PI by parents in traditional schools. It demonstrates that many families have already conducted similar activities during the pandemic and continue to post-pandemic. Further, families who homeschool and may have conducted these activities are diverse, similar to families with children in traditional schools.

According to Brian Ray (2022) at the National Home Education Research Institute, 41% of homeschoolers are people of color. In short, the recommendations we make can be done by most parents at home as parents are currently doing them from all demographic groups.

Home-School Practices that can be Traditional School PI

According to Barger et al. (2019), home-based PI has a more pronounced impact than school-based PI. We propose that schools should consider home-based PI as a starting point to enhance PI within their institutions. To achieve this, schools must comprehend the specific PI activities outlined below and address the obstacles by employing the four categories of support discussed: Communication, Partnership, Support, and Encouragement. Early childhood educators can effectively communicate the existence and value of these activities, collaborate with parents to select activities that align with the curriculum and support in-school learning, provide educational resources and training to support parents' home-based PI efforts, and encourage parents' engagement in home-based PI through newsletters and parent-teacher conferences. Nine specific homeschool practices could serve as PI for traditional early childhood education (Anthony & Wildman, 2021; See Table 5). Most of these practices are low-cost and within reach of most parents and can be used by parents with children in early childhood education as home-based PI. Early childhood educators and parents who look to home-school parents for PI practices will find that these actions expand PI beyond supporting school activities to supporting greater student responsibility for learning. The last three homeschool practices listed in Table 5 are less concrete than the first six, but they focus on the parent taking an active role in supporting student learning at home. This may require a shift in school professionals' and parents' thinking

about learning. In this model, the goal is a greater partnership between parents and schools to support student learning at home with the goal of improving overall academic achievement and social adjustment in a school setting. Next, we discuss how each of the practices can be used by parents of preschool children as PI. Schools should work to increase these home-based PI activities by communicating their existence and value, defining them as a key component of the home-school partnership, supporting families with resources, and encouraging parents.

Table 5

Home-School Practices that can be PI

Home-school practice
1. Parent modeling learning
2. Parent finding and providing resources based on student interest or need
3. Parent providing a home learning environment
4. Parent trusting the child to learn
5. Parent supporting the child's interests
6. Parent making the world a classroom
7. Parent developing learner independence/ responsibility
8. Parent cooperating with the child to learn
9. Parent expanding their view of education

Parent Modeling Learning

Parents should include their children in everyday activities and see those activities as an opportunity for learning. Young children learn from the adults in their lives from the moment they are born. Children as young as 14 months old are known to mimic what they watch on television (Meltzoff, 1988). Shrier (2014) suggests considering the home as the child's first classroom. Young children are learning from the "teachers" or people in the home right from the start.   Parents can demonstrate to their children that asking for help is one approach to dealing with a frustrating situation. They can provide opportunities to solve problems that arise in the home regularly. It could be learning how to get a ball off a shelf, tie a shoe, or build a blockhouse. Parents can model writing, following rules, and saying "thank you" and "please." Parents can read in front of their children (not just to their children). When children see that parents are reading, this demonstrates that it is important, and children will want to mimic the action (even before they know how to read).

Parent Finding and Providing Resources Based on Student Interests or Needs

Dunst et al. (2001) showed that learning opportunities for preschoolers that are interesting and engaging and that give children spaces to explore, practice, and improve their skills were the most developmentally stimulating. The study implies that if children's everyday experiences are interest-based and engaging, they are likely to aid in their growth and learning.

Every parent knows what their children like and are interested in. Parents can take their children to the library to look for books about dinosaurs, fairies, dragons, or any other topic that interests them. Parents can also use TV time to allow their children to view shows about subjects they are interested in. The subject does not have to be intellectual for young children; it simply

needs to be something that interests them. Parents can then look for books, toys, and media relating to the topic and ask their children questions about it, allowing them to share what they already know and talk about what they want to learn.

Parent Providing a Home Learning Environment

Creating a high-quality home learning environment during early childhood has been shown to mitigate the effect of disadvantage and socioeconomic status on cognitive abilities and socio-emotional issues (Hartas, 2011; Niklas & Schneider, 2013). Children play, and much of what they play is based on what they perceive adults do. Just like we can provide play kitchens or workshops, we can also support play activities that support learning. This includes educational toys that allow them to explore their world (magnifying glasses, microscopes, binoculars), make things (building blocks, construction paper, glue, scissors), and learn about their environments (maps of their playground, nature walks, encouraging questions). Parents can also help their children leverage the Internet and other media for learning purposes. We often find amusing videos of children entertaining themselves (and their parents) with smartphones. But we can transform our media consumption from entertainment to education. This aligns with the idea that children are naturally curious and ask questions about their surroundings. Parents can provide valuable resources, like the Internet, to encourage exploration and learning about the world. Children also need a place dedicated to learning. This place can be used for their informal home-based learning, and as the child ages, it can become their headquarters for school-based learning activities, including homework.

Parent Trusting the Child to Learn

Research indicates that intellectual curiosity serves as a fundamental driving force for childhood learning, critical thinking, and reasoning. Through curiosity, children find motivation to expand their knowledge and personal growth. Encouraging and sustaining this motivation throughout their lives is crucial (Price-Mitchell, 2016). Formal learning experiences at home are not always necessary. Instead, we can empower children with the freedom to explore and learn. By creating an environment that fosters curiosity, we become role models for learning. As parents, we can inspire our children to ask questions when they feel confused or encounter something new in the community. Although less tangible, this approach acknowledges that children possess a natural desire to comprehend their world and can acquire knowledge through inquiry.

Parent Supporting the Child's Interests

While parents may stimulate preschool children's interests through the provision of toys or the arrangement of experiences, Leibham et al. (2005) discovered that parental influence on interest maintenance is more about acknowledging the child's continuing interest than it is about meeting a specific quota of interest-related experiences. If we trust students to learn, we should support what they are interested in learning. These interests will shift over time and are often based on what they see in media or what shows are popular on TV.

Parent Making the World a Classroom

Parents may be tempted to provide their children with devices such as iPads throughout the day to help promote learning and entertainment. Preschoolers should have less screen time and more time learning from real-world experiences. A growing body of evidence indicates that

young children's excessive screen time is related to several adverse health consequences (Stiglic & Viner, 2019). Young children learn best through hands-on activities such as physical play, outdoor play, community events, and social interaction with family and friends. Preschool children learn a lot at school, but parents should find out-of-school learning opportunities in their community or at home. Examples of home and community-based learning opportunities include children's museums, parks, and libraries. Additionally, parents can take advantage of community activities, including fairs, livestock shows, rodeos, music performances, and other festivals that provide opportunities for children to informally learn about their world. Parents can conduct low or no-cost learning activities at home that help their child understand their world. These may include tracking cloud movement and discussing how this affects weather, creating a simple weather chart, making a rainbow with a water nozzle on a sunny day, or coloring the four seasons. Parents can teach their children about science through gardening or growing potted plants. Young children can learn early math measurement concepts by using their hands or fingers to measure length, blocks for measuring area, or using juice in a cup to demonstrate capacity. Children love learning and exploring their world, and parents can encourage these activities and answer questions along the way.

Parent Developing Learner Independence/Responsibility

Children in preschool have an innate desire to discover and learn. Opportunities to gain independence are critical for developing a sense of self, self-esteem, and a tolerance for frustration and resilience (Levine & Philips, 2022). There are numerous activities that preschoolers can do daily at home to foster independence. Children want to engage their world. Parents can support learner independence by asking children what interests them, providing resources to support their learning, and allowing children to do tasks independently. Additionally, parents can provide children with an area set aside for learning with low-cost resources and allow the child time to learn without parental involvement. When a child asks for help, the parent can work collaboratively with the child to find the answer rather than providing the answer immediately. This ensures that the child continues to learn and establishes a learning partnership. This learning partnership allows the child to observe the parent's learning, and as the child becomes an independent reader, the parent can shift to assisting the child in finding the answers they seek.

Parent Cooperating with the Child to Learn

The basis for future academic performance in school is built on responsive interactions and language-rich experiences for children in their early years (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2020). Parents should interact and talk with their children about their interests. Parents cooperate with their child on learning when they allow children to pursue their interests at home, provide resources to enable them to learn about their interests, and use community resources to let their children see the wider world as a classroom. With preschool children, this may require the parent to read books to the child that help the child learn about her interests. Parents can cooperate by asking the child about their interests and searching for low-cost community learning opportunities related to those interests.

Parents Expanding their View of Education

According to Thomas (2017), providing children with opportunities to study outside of the classroom can be beneficial. It is important to highlight that "learning outside" is a broad

concept with no clear definition. Some of the few examples are outdoor play, environmental education, adventure, and recreational activities. Learning outside is more inspiring and realistic and has a more significant influence on young children. Parents should see the whole world as a classroom for their children- including their home and community. Likewise, parents should find opportunities to informally teach their children about the world as they live life. If there is a solar eclipse or another astronomical event, it can be an opportunity to talk about planets and stars. Children are interested in these, and parents do not need expert knowledge to help their children learn about these things. Parents truly can support school-based learning by supporting student learning at home. Most parents, regardless of SES or education level, can teach their children shapes, numbers, letters, matching, sorting sizes, or days of the week. They can take their children to the library and find books about topics that interest their children. They can read these books to their children. Parents can take children to a community garden or a children's museum. These informal learning opportunities are home-based PI that are low-cost in terms of both money and expertise.

We have summarized research about PI, demonstrated that it has positive effects on social and academic outcomes, and provided nine specific practices from homeschool settings that can be used as PI with early childhood students. Examples are low-cost, require little expertise, and have a demonstrated history of use (in the homeschool setting). Further many parents will have engaged in some of the practices while teaching their children at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools need to understand these home-based PI practices inspired by homeschool practices, but it is also essential that they envision them as critical components of the school's PI. Early childhood educators must expand their view of PI from school-based activities and embrace and encourage home-based PI. Next, we discuss how early childhood educators can leverage increased home-based PI to increase school-based PI.

Leveraging Home-Based PI to Increase School-Based PI

We have deliberately focused on home-based because these are things that parents can do that are low cost, do not require additional time (i.e., visits to the school), and do not require expertise. The goal is to encourage parents to be involved in their child's education at home, assuming that increasing PI at home will also increase PI at school. To do this, schools should conduct activities within the four categories of support we identified earlier: Communicate, Partner, Support, and Encourage. First, schools should communicate that education is a home-school-based partnership. Effective communication strengthens the partnership between the school and parents. Most schools have efficient ways of reaching parents, like newsletters, websites, and messaging. But very few schools have the same method of getting feedback from parents, such as polls or surveys. Schools with information and communications technology, including messaging groups, social media platforms, email, and interactive phone systems, can help improve the exchange of important information.

The next stage is establishing a partnership that emphasizes the value of parents supporting school-based activities and the importance of the school supporting home-based learning activities. This begins with the establishment of productive connections and the building of trust with each parent. Teachers must exhibit their faith in the ability of parents to assist their children. The school can provide staff development training on the importance of PI and equivalent training for parents. A successful PI requires the cooperation of parents and teachers, which creates friendly school environments that encourage active parent engagement. Scheduled home visits allow teachers to provide guidance on home-based activities.

Third, schools must provide PI support for school-based learning. Provide parents with a list of the mastery skills required at each grade level for their children. Invite parents to talk about their hopes and concerns for their children, as well as how school-based PI can help them achieve those goals. Teachers can use workshops or scheduled virtual parent meetings to provide parents with home-based goal suggestions. Schools that promote PI at home can provide parents with the assistance they require to implement instructional strategies that are appropriate for their children's individual schoolwork. Use workshops and other school-based activities to inform parents about what is going on in their children's classrooms. Find meaningful ways for a parent to help if they can volunteer. Involving parents in classroom activities and school events has been shown to increase parents' confidence and attendance.

Finally, early childhood educators must encourage PI in school-based learning as well as home-based activities. Parents can be encouraged to participate in PI by keeping them informed and soliciting their feedback. Schools can invite parents to use the family resource center and provide workshops on related topics. Teachers can be flexible when scheduling quarterly parent meetings, encouraging parents to attend and discuss new goals for their children. Teachers and parents collaborate on areas of concern in the child's development within the school and home environments.

Using Common Ground to Support School-Based PI

Barger et al. (2019) provided an excellent list of school-based PI. We recommend that schools consider starting school-based PI on common ground. Some common ground may exist based on parents' experiences teaching their children at home with the school's support during the pandemic. Our local school survey conducted within the local schools was not aimed at extending generalized conclusions to a broader population. Instead, its primary objective was to pinpoint concrete areas where schools can engage parents to increase school-based involvement. The responses gathered from our local schools affirm that parents perceive school-based involvement as a significant contributor to their child's academic success.

Our task here is not to report the total findings of the survey, which we will do elsewhere, but to demonstrate that early childhood educators should determine what parents believe about PI before engaging parents in PI. For example, Table 6 provides information about what school-based PI parents believe positively affects social adjustment at school. They value the types of things that schools traditionally do for PI (i.e., parent-teacher conferences, attending school programs, regular communication). The task of the school is to determine the plan for engaging parents and encouraging targeted school-based PI. We probed deeper and asked parents to identify the most critical school-based PI. The parents who answered the survey indicated that parents maintaining regular communication with teachers was most important to them. Therefore, the school should create a medium for regular parent-to-teacher communication. Then, once this communication channel is open and functioning, use it to encourage other school-based PI and support home-based and aspirational PI. This is one community school setting; we would encourage schools to conduct a similar survey of what parents value to see what common ground exists and use that as a starting point to engage parents in school-based PI.

Table 6

Percentage of Parents who Strongly Agree or Agree that a Specific School-Based PI Activity

Contributes to Social Adjustment

School-based PI activity	Percentage of parents who agree or strongly agree	Barriers that can be addressed through this PI
1. It is important to attend parent-teacher conferences.	96.3	Individual Parent and Family Factors
2. It is important to attend open houses.	94.5	Individual Parent and Family Factors
3. It is important to attend and support school programs (including student performances and athletics)	94.6	Parent-Teacher Factors and Child Factors
4. It is important to volunteer in the classroom.	87.3	Parent-Teacher Factors and Child Factors
5. It is important to maintain regular communication with teachers.	96.4	Parent-Teacher Factors and Child Factors
6. It is important to serve on the school board or other school offices.	61.8	Societal Factors
7. It is important to participate in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), or other similar parent organizations.	83.6	Societal Factors

The agreement that exists between the school and the parents who participated in the survey demonstrates an opportunity to address some of the barriers Hornby and Lafaele (2011) identified. Earlier, we identified specific actions that schools can take for each of the four levels of barriers in Tables 1 through 4. Using the results of this survey, we can align specific school-based PI activities with school actions that can help address the various barriers. The last column in Table 6 aligns barriers that we believe can be addressed through a specific action by the school. For example, schools can use communication and direct invitations (from Table 1) to encourage parents to attend parent-teacher conferences and open houses. In this way, schools can proactively address existing individual parent and family factors that may serve as barriers to PI using activities that parents and teachers agree are valuable activities. Next, schools can focus on building partnerships between home and school (Table 2) through efforts to increase parent volunteerism at the school. This can help to dismantle parent-teacher barriers to PI. Further, schools encourage parents to remain involved in specific PI activities related to their children who have learning disabilities, are in gifted and talented programs, or have behavioral problems (Table 3). They can do this through regular communication about their child. This will help address barriers related to child factors. Finally, in the survey, parents rated serving on school boards and in school offices as low compared to the other PI activities. Schools can work to

encourage parents from all backgrounds to participate in school organizations (PTA/PTO) or serve in school offices, including the school board. In this way, the school is working to remove societal or economic barriers to PI related to parent involvement in school governance and policy (Table 4). In addition to expanding the pool of parents involved in these types of PI, recruiting parents for leadership roles from a broader range of families is also likely to help increase the number of families that see education as a genuine partnership.

Conclusion

PI in early childhood education plays a critical role in academic, socio-emotional, and behavioral outcomes. According to Barger et al. (2019), when parents know what their children are learning in school, they can help or provide related opportunities to target these skills. PI in preschool and pre-kindergarten helps lay the groundwork for parent-school relationships. Parents gain the knowledge and skills needed to collaborate with teachers and other school personnel during these years. These abilities and knowledge are critical in a child's early years for encouraging early academic and social skills that predict later school performance.

Low-income families frequently face numerous challenges in providing high-quality preschool programs for their children. As a result, there is a significant early achievement gap between low- and high-income children. If we help parents help their children develop throughout the preschool years, children are better prepared for school, have fewer behavioral problems, and have better social skills. Effective PI initiatives can help close the achievement gap for children from low-income families. The home-based PI activities that homeschool families inspire are within reach of most families, including those in poverty. Schools can help address family resource shortfalls that prevent families from conducting some of the home-based PI we recommend by making resources available in learning centers or libraries that parents can check out as needed.

Parents must believe they can make a difference and assist their children in reaching their full potential. They will be more involved if they believe their efforts are valued, but parents must set a good example. Home-schooling families provide several evidence-based examples of how PI looks in action. A study of parents of children enrolled in Head Start, for example, discovered that home-based parenting practices, such as reading and learning activities, predicted significant growth in areas of attention and language skills during preschool, as well as a reduction in behavioral problems (Fantuzzo et al., 2004).

We identified specific home-school methods that could serve as a reference point for traditional early childhood education. Our research revealed that most of these home-school practices are PI-based and correspond to what home-school families call instructional practices. Notably, most of these techniques are low-cost and accessible to most parents, but they involve a shift in school and parents' attitudes toward education and what it means to educate and learn.

PI in early childhood education lays the groundwork for parent-school partnerships. Parents gain the knowledge and skills needed to collaborate with teachers and other school personnel during these years. We identified significant barriers and provided specific low-cost, evidence-based procedures for parents and schools to collaborate to overcome these challenges. We recommend that early childhood educators teach, support, and encourage parents to conduct these home-based PI activities at home. With an emphasis to increase the partnership focus, home-based PI may be an essential starting point for schools.

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