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Impact of a Transition-to-School Program on Parent Involvement and Teacher Satisfaction.

An Action Research Report
By Mary Akatu-Speakman

Impact of a Transition-to-School Program on Parent Involvement
and Teacher Satisfaction.

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The College of St. Catherine
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Advisor _____

Date _____

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to implement a transition-to-school program and evaluate its impact on parent involvement and teacher satisfaction. This action research study was conducted in a toddler and early childhood program at a Montessori school. This study involved teachers, administrators and parents. Prior to implementation of the transition-to-school program, a transition focus group was convened among teachers and administrators. In addition, data from previous years on parent attendance and involvement were gathered to measure any changes following implementation. The transition-to-school program was developed from feedback offered by teachers and administrators, and field research. After the transition to school program was constructed, implementation procedures were introduced to administrators, teachers and parents. Following implementation, evaluative surveys were administered to assess the impact of the program. The results of the research demonstrated that teachers, administrators and parents viewed the program favorably. The results show that the transition to school program positively impacted parent involvement and teacher satisfaction.

This paper will address the impact of a transition-to-school program on parent engagement and teacher satisfaction at a Montessori school. This Montessori school opened with four primary classrooms. Over the past twenty years, the school expanded to ten classrooms including toddler, primary and elementary programs. The school was successful with rigorous admission standards and lengthy waiting lists. However, in the last five years, the school has gone through tremendous change. Faced with socio-economic shifts in the community, enrollment declined as there were fewer applicants seeking admission to the school. The school was impacted by its high-cost private education in a district with top-rated public schools. As enrollment continued to fall, subsequently, several classrooms were closed. The closure included a disbanded elementary program, fewer primary classrooms and even few toddler rooms in operation. The school which once held a population of 200 students currently has 90 students enrolled. As of September 2013, the school had in operation three primary classrooms, two toddler classrooms, and an infant room (with no students enrolled). The staff has also been reduced from 40 in 2007 to 25 in 2013.

The changes over time have affected the school in a number of ways. It has impacted revenue and thereby reduced the availability of financial resources. Even though the school's current tuition rates are among the highest of any competitors in the area, low student enrollment has impeded financial viability. There have since been many cutbacks. A tight fiscal budget has restricted the quality of the program. There are fewer field trips, limited specialist programs offered, reduced classroom budget for materials and less experienced teachers (the more experienced teachers are not affordable). Current employee salaries have also been impacted and limited with modest pay raises per year.

Teacher salary rates are among the lowest in the area. Few employees are full-time and even fewer are entitled to full benefits. These limitations are a threat to the program quality. There is a need to develop a positive, vibrant school community that provides a sense of belonging, promotes involvement and encourages collaboration among all members.

A transition-to-school program is a proactive approach to building a collaborative school environment where parents, teachers and administrations are working together to provide a nurturing environment for children. Positive and healthy relationships in school can increase academic performance and build resilience (Vitto, 2003). Building a healthy schooling attitude and relationship begins with the transition to school process. The transition from home to school can be quite a challenging one for children and parents alike. Children often struggle adjusting to a classroom where routines, procedures and rules differ from child-care or home settings (Shore, 1998). The transition to school also involves making new friends and forming relationships with teachers. This requires pro-social and behavioral skills. All of these elements can impact how well children and parents adapt to the new environment and how well they are integrated into the new school community (Dockett & Perry, 2001).

The beginning of the academic school year follows a time of preparation and adjustment for teachers, administrators, returning students, and especially, new students and their families. School preparation, while essential to facilitate a successful start to the school year should be accompanied by effective transition policies for students and their families. School readiness is not only predicated on school officials prepared with plans and procedures. Nor is it solely contingent on the student's capability to meet the

demands of the grade level. Rather, transition to school is a key component of school readiness (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002).

Kagan and Neuman (1998) suggest that there are various interpretations when it comes to defining “transition to school”, one definition refers to a one time activity or set of activities undertaken by programs, families and children (at the end or beginning of the school year) to facilitate smooth acclimation to the new environment. Another defines transitions as a passage through programs that reinforce continuity in pedagogy, curriculum and disciplinary practices. The third meaning is an ongoing effort to connect children and families with their new setting.

The literature supports the benefits of transition practices that sustain and build on a child’s social, emotional and academic abilities (Ramey & Ramey, 1999). A thoughtful and effective transition to school program can greatly impact how well students and parents react and adapt to future transitions. Successful school transitions require a plan that involves coordination, collaboration and communication (National PTA & National Head Start Association, 1999). Such transitions require partners, notably parents, teachers and administrators. Parents play a pivotal role in successful transitions. Teacher participation is integral to implementing transition practices. All partners working together and communicating with one another foster an environment for successful transition to occur (Bohan-Baker, & Little, 2002).

In efforts to strengthen the program at this Montessori school, there must be in place a transition to school program that bolsters the overall experience of new and current families by creating a stronger community through various activities and events. There also should be in place procedures and plans that strengthen the quality of

communication, collaboration and coordination between teacher, administrators and parents (Pianta, Rimm-Kauffman & Cox, 1999) (Bohan-Baker & Little, April 2002).

These joint efforts will strengthen the quality of the program and the overall experience at the school.

The implementation of a transition to school program will effectively provide new students with a smooth transition to school while engaging parents and teachers in the process. An ongoing transition-to-school program was implemented at the school to bolster communication and community engagement between parents, teachers and administrative staff thereby retaining families and growing the school community.

Description of Research Process

The impact of the transition-to-school program was assessed using surveys, interviews, focus group discussions and, attendance records. First, data was collected from focus group discussions. The feedback from this source of information was used to design the transition-to-school program. The transition-to-school program was then implemented at the school. Attendance records were kept for all events to quantify the number of parents who participated in transition-to-school events. Records of attendance and participation were collected for the toddler transition night, ice-cream social, back to school night, peace day, Hispanic heritage month, fall picnic, book fair, curriculum night and adopt-a-family (See Appendix A).

Following implementation, surveys were administered to teachers, administrators and parents to measure the overall attitudes and perceptions of the transition-to-school program. The survey questions focus on communication, collaboration and overall satisfaction of the transition-to-school program. The teacher survey evaluating the

transition-to-school program consisted of thirteen questions (See Appendix B). The parent transition-to-school survey consisted of five questions (See Appendix C).

At the start of the action research process, I held a focus group with seven Montessori lead teachers. The group was comprised of three infant toddler teachers and four primary teachers. The group also reflected a diverse group of teachers with varying number of years of teaching experience at the school. The teachers expressed concern over the practice of a year round rolling admission process. After much discussion on the current challenges faces the school, they conceded that such a measure was necessary considering the low number of enrolled students. However, the teachers requested better coordination with the admissions director regarding information about new students. The discussion over the matter of a year-round open admission and late add-ons prompted this research. One of the goals of this research was to explore ways to support teachers and boost teacher satisfaction with the rolling admission process by creating a comprehensive, year-round, transition-to-school program (See Appendix D).

Following the initial focus groups with teachers, another focus group was held with five members of the administrative team. This group would include the head of school, director of admission, director of operation, events coordination and myself, the assistant head of school. At the conclusion of this focus group discussion, it became apparent that this research would involve creating and implementing a transition to school program for new students and their families that would 1. Support teachers by giving them tools to create smooth transitions for new students and their families and 2. Inform and engage new families as they begin their school experience (See Appendix E).

Following the teacher and administrative focus groups, the need and goals for a transition to school program began to emerge.

Formulating a comprehensive transition to school program required engaging teachers and administrators as partners in creating and implementing the program. A school wide meeting was held in May of 2013 with all faculty, staff and administrators to discuss creating an environment for smooth transitions. The outcome of that meeting yielded ideas for orientation and long-term community events (See Appendix F).

Collaboration was also sought from the owners of the school. In an interview with one of the owners of the school in June of 2013, she revealed some ideas on how to build relationships to encourage collaboration (See Appendix G).

Based on the focus groups discussions, meetings and interviews, I began to design the components of the transition to school program. The program focused on these areas:

- 1). Hosting activities before the start of the school year to connect parents and new students to the school.
 - 2). Creating volunteer opportunities that encourage participation while building connections between families, parents, teachers and administrators.
 - 3). Disseminating information through effective, efficient and regular communication between parents, teachers and administrators.
 - 4). Providing supportive tools for teachers that empower them to create smooth transitions for new students and their families.
 - 5). Collaboration among parents, teachers, administrators and owners in growing the school's outreach within the immediate community.
- Implementation of the transition to school program requires evaluation and assessment of the effectiveness of the programs goals. The surveys administered to teachers, administrators and parent were focused on

these five areas. Each area consisted of a multi-pronged approach to achieve the goals of the transition-to school program.

Hosting activities before the start of the school year. The first phase of implementation started in July of the previous school year. The roll out of the program began with a “Toddler Transition Education Night” for parents of currently enrolled toddler students who would be moving up to the primary classroom in the upcoming school year. All current toddler parents and Montessori teachers were invited to attend the Toddler Transition Education Night. The forum was a round table event and each Montessori teacher contributed in the discussion by highlighting the differences between the toddler and primary classrooms and what to expect in the primary classroom. Following the presentation, parents were given an opportunity to ask questions.

Before the start of the upcoming school year, the administrative staff began a new communication initiative. Over the course of the summer, a package was sent home to all enrolled families that contained related school forms including a form titled “All about my child”. These forms were to be completed and returned to school prior to the first day of school. The package also included classroom assignments and an invitation to an ice-cream social that would occur before the first day of classes. The purpose of the ice-cream social was to have the children visit their classroom, meet the classroom teacher and connect with other students and families.

Prior to the start of the school year, families were strongly encouraged to attend back to school night. This year, back to school night was reformatted to include a half hour meeting with the head of school and a half hour meeting with the classroom teacher. In the past, parents spent an entire hour in their child’s classroom. As part of the

transition to school program, the rationale for the change was to introduce parents to the head of school and encourage an open door communication policy with the head of school. During this half hour gathering, the head of school welcomed the parents to the new school year, gave out her contact information and covered all relevant school wide policies. Following the large group meeting, the parents went on to meet with their classroom teacher. Each teacher covered classroom related policies, gave out their contact information, classroom schedules and a hard copy of all information shared at back to school night.

Creating volunteer opportunities and building connections. Getting parents engaged and involved early on is the key to a successful transition to school program. During the first few weeks of schools, a list of parent volunteer opportunities was generated to provide a variety of activities and events that reflected the diversity of the school events and interests. The volunteer opportunities include room parents, peace day hosts, Hispanic heritage month presenters, book fair managers, aftercare hat parade party planners, classroom Halloween party helpers, adopt-a-family program coordinators, thanksgiving feast chefs, Diwali, Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa presenters, Black history month presenters, Valentines day helpers, Chinese new year presenters, Persian new year presenters, St. Patrick's day celebration organizers, field day helpers, science fair presenters and teacher appreciation day coordinators. Beginning at back-school night, parents were encouraged to sign-up as a volunteer for the various events. The sign-up also remained open for new additions throughout the school year. As these events approached, the school events coordinator contacted interested parents to confirm their participation and offer more information about the event. The early push to garner

volunteers increased awareness of volunteer opportunities, provided opportunities for early engagement and, established a core group of parent volunteers.

Communication: Effective, Efficient and regular communication. Using the school calendar, a transition to school program communication plan was created to effectively, efficiently and regularly communicate with parents and teachers. Parent notifications went out through mass email, print, Facebook and twitter once a week. As part of the transition to school program, the school's Facebook page was revamped and a twitter page was activated. Parents and teachers were encouraged to sign-up to receive information via these modes of communication. These social media tools provided additional avenues to engage the parent community.

In order to keep teachers informed and to check-in on progress with the implementation of the transition to school program, team meetings were scheduled more frequently. Each faculty and staff member was assigned a team: Montessori teaching team, instructional assistant teaching team, aftercare teaching team and administrative team. Each team met once a week. The meetings served as a forum for teams to receive information and to offer feedback on how well they were implementing the transition program.

Supportive tools for teachers: Creating smooth transitions through collaboration. Prior to implementation of the transition to school program, teachers were educated on the goals and components of the program. Each teacher was provided with a folder that contained the calendar of the school year, teaching schedule, classroom specialist schedules, class list, all about me forms and transition forms and original copies of other school related forms. The teachers were instructed on how to use the materials provided.

In addition, each teacher was asked to create a classroom transition package that would include all classroom related information (teacher's preferred contact information, classroom rules and expectations, birthday guidelines etc.) The classroom transition package was to be given out to all families assigned to that particular classroom irrespective of their enrollment date.

Team meetings were also the venue where teachers were given transition-to-school forms. The form was given to the teacher at least two weeks prior to student's start date in order to familiarize the teacher with the student before their first meeting. The transition-to-school form contained all relevant information concerning the child including student start date, date of birth, known allergies, medical conditions or dietary restrictions, parent contact information and any notable mentions about the child. The form also had a set of instructions for teachers on all the things that need to be prepared for the child prior to the first day of school. The list included preparation of a personalized cubby, folder, communication bag, nap bag and nametags for the new student. The various communication tools employed were designed to provide parents and teachers information to achieve the proper and effective implementation of the transition to school program.

Outreach: Building community among all partners in the community. Community events were introduced this year as part of the transition to school program to engage all members of the community in a large-scale school initiative aimed at building community. The events include an international school picnic, a family trip to the pumpkin farm, community festivals and a holiday giving project for the local community.

The various components of the transition-to-school program are essential to the successful implementation of a year-round, collaborative program to address parent involvement and teacher satisfaction. These initiatives launched in the transition-to-school require collaboration, communication and cooperation among all members of the school community. By focusing on these areas of the transition-to-school program, teachers were equipped to plan and prepare for new students and parents were given opportunities to engage and get involved in the life of the school.

Data Analysis

This action research study focused on data collected from teachers, parents and administrators. The rationale for gathering data from these different groups (teachers, parents and administrators) is based on the premise that the transition-to-school program impacts each group uniquely and each member may have differing perspectives based on their experiences. The primary method of data collection was focus groups, attendance records, interview and surveys. In addition, field observations by the researcher offer complimentary information in the analysis of focus group meetings and transition to school program implementation.

After gaining permission from the Head of School of the program, the teacher focus groups and administrative meetings were schedule in order to obtain preliminary information. All information collected was submitted anonymously. Permission was also granted to survey teachers, administrators and parents on the transition-to-school program (See Appendix J). The Head of school approved all surveys before the surveys were administered. The responses from the surveys remain on the school's survey database. The survey data collected does not include myself (as I serve as both teacher and

administrator). Attendance records were obtained from school records of attendance from the 2012 to 2013, and 2013 to 2014 school year (See Appendix A).

This action research examined the experiences of teachers and parents regarding the implemented transition-to-school procedures. The primary participants in this action research were teachers and parents. Administrators were secondary participants as they were not the primary focus of this action research. Teachers provided feedback through focus groups and surveys (See Appendix D, F and B). In the case of parent data, information was gathered based on the attendance records from the previous school year and from surveys (See Appendix A and C).

In the teacher focus group, the teachers expressed frustration with the late inclusion of new students to the classroom. They reported that there was not sufficient communication and support from the administration regarding the transition-to-school process for new students and their families. In fact, one teacher was quite angry to learn that a new four-year-old student had enrolled and was assigned to start in her classroom as late as May of current school year. The teachers argued that having new students added to the classroom after January disrupted an already normalized classroom, complained that their classrooms were not equipped to accommodate the preliminary lessons in January, and believed that it did not serve the best interest of the child to join the program late into the school year. Overall, the teachers were collectively displeased with impromptu additions to their classrooms. They suggested better communication and more collaboration between teachers and administrators, and a thorough examination of the current procedures for creating smoother transitions into the classroom (See Appendix D).

Following the teacher focus groups, another focus group was held with five members of the administrative team. This group included the head of school, director of admission, director of operations, events coordination and myself, the assistant head of school. Among this group, I addressed the concerns that were expressed in the teacher focus group. I highlighted the concerns from the teachers focus group about classroom disruption caused by mid to late-year enrollments. The administrative team agreed that year-round enrollment was not ideal but necessary to keep the school viable. The administrative team shared that they noticed teachers were often not prepared for mid-year new students on their first day of school. In their view, some teachers claimed to be unaware of the start date and specific program time of the new student. They also reported that teachers were visibly upset and shared that they did not want any new students added to their classrooms beyond January, particularly older children who had never been to a Montessori school. The chief concern expressed by this group was that teachers and administration were not working in tandem to create an environment where new families felt well received and knowledgeable about the transition-to-school process. According to the administrative staff, the result of the lack of collaboration between teachers and administrators was a disconnected and disengaged parent community. The administrative focus group formulated a few ways to bridge the divide in communication:

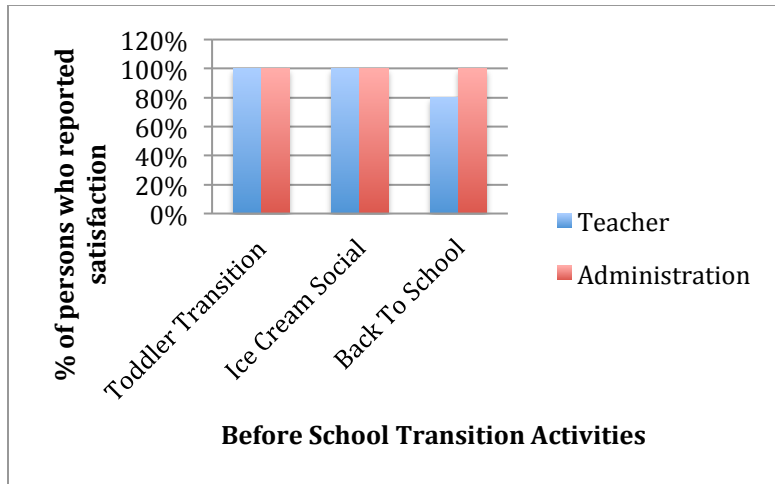
- 1) Provide teachers with the adequate information weeks in advance of the start date of a new student.
- 2) Prepare a list of transition-related items that teachers will be required to prepare prior to the student's start date.
- 3) Working with teachers, develop a transition packet for new families that include classroom-related information.
- 4) Informing and

engaging parents through more modes of communication (social media), weekly emails, and providing more opportunities for volunteerism (See Appendix E).

In the third focus group, the teachers and administrators met to review the upcoming school year calendar, gather new ideas for the orientation process and long-term community projects. The outcome of the focus group was a revised calendar that reflected input from teachers, assistants and administrators. A review of the orientation process introduced an ice-cream social before the first day of school, and a change in the format of back to school night. Also, new ideas were gathered for community events that would encourage collaboration among teachers, administrators and parents in an effort to build community and engage in outreach endeavors within the local community (See Appendix F). Based on the information retrieved from the focus groups with teachers and administrators, I structured a transition-to-school program and the implementation process begun.

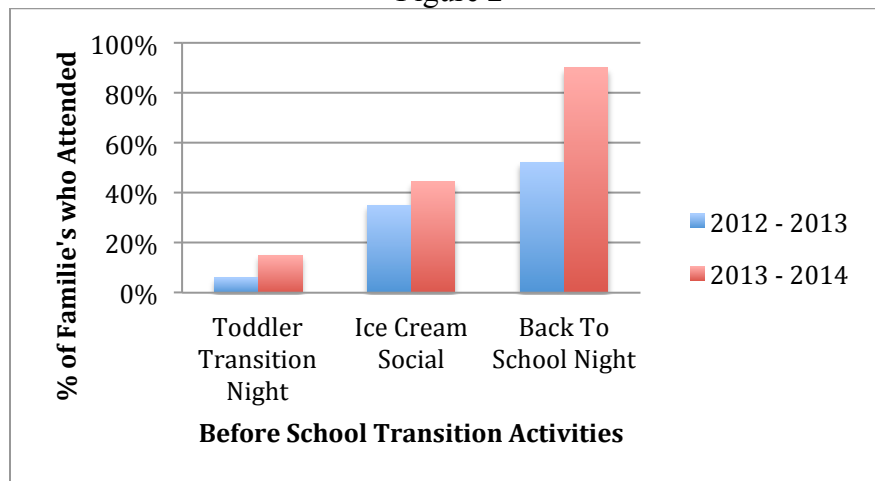
Evaluation of Before School Transition Activities. The goal of the before school transition activities was to promote early connections between new students, parents and teachers. The evaluation of the before school activities included the toddler transition night, ice cream social, and a revamped back to school night. Surveys from teachers and administrators, and attendance records revealed an overall favorability for these pre-start of the school year measures (See Figure 1).

Satisfaction with before school transition-to-school program activities.
Figure 1



In the teacher survey, all teachers agreed that the before school activities were beneficial in fostering early connections. Of the group of teachers surveyed, 80% of responders strongly agreed that these measures achieved the goal. Similarly, administrators also unanimously agreed that the before school transition activities were successful (See figure 1). Attendance records also show that there was an increase in parent attendance for the before school transition activities. Attendance at the toddler transition night increased 9.1% from the year before. Similarly, ice-cream social and back to school night attendance increased by 9.4% and 38% respectively (See Figure 2).

Attendance Records for Before School Transition Activities
Figure 2

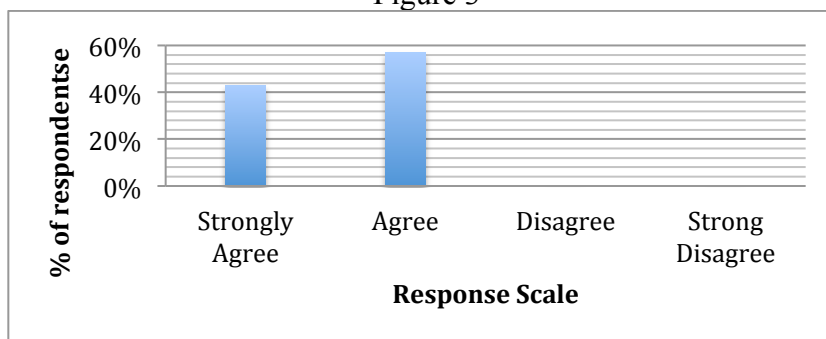


All administrators polled agreed that the early transition to school measures were beneficial and well attended. Some attributed the good turnout to good planning and teamwork among all members of the community.

Evaluation of creating volunteer opportunities and building connections. Of the nineteen parent volunteer events and activities, eight of those activities were introduced as part of the transition-to-school program. The nineteen parent volunteer opportunities generated ninety-nine parent interests. With the exception of Hanukkah and the Persian New Year, which had no parent volunteers, all other volunteer activities either meet or exceeded the target number (See Appendix I). It is worth noting that some parents signed up to participate in more than one activity. As reported in the transition-to-school parent survey, 99% of parents reported that they are informed of volunteer opportunities and are signed up to participate in school activities. These findings are significant as it reveals that almost all respondents reported that they are aware of volunteer opportunities (See Appendix I). This finding shows an uptick in the level of involvement as reported by the parents.

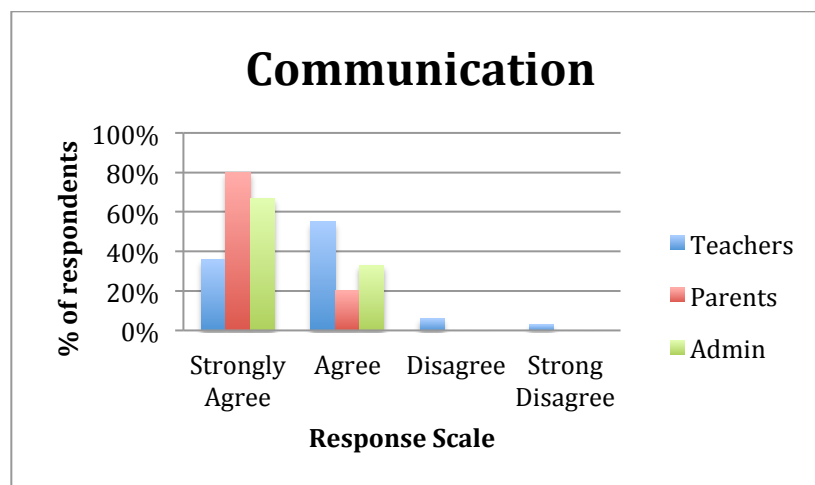
Parents who report both being informed of and signed-up for parent volunteer opportunities.

Figure 3



Evaluation of communication. In order to measure effective, efficient and regular communication, which is vital to the success of the transition-to-school program, parents, teachers and administrators were surveyed (See Appendix B, C and H). Four out of five teachers surveyed strongly agreed that they were kept up to date on the activities and events occurring at the school. Two-thirds of the administrative staff strongly agreed that they were informed of activities happening in the school. 54% of all parents surveyed agreed that they were satisfied with the level of communication at the school while 36% strongly agreed. The group of parents who were satisfied with the level of communication also reported satisfaction with the various modes of communication (See Figure 4).

Satisfaction with the level of communication as reported by teacher, administrators and parents. (Figure 4)



Among teachers and administrators, seven out of eight agreed that meetings were beneficial and informative. 66% of administrators agreed that they were satisfied with the level of collaboration between administration and staff (See Appendix B and H). The respondents to the surveys indicated satisfaction with the level and mode of communication between the administrators and teachers, and administrators and parents.

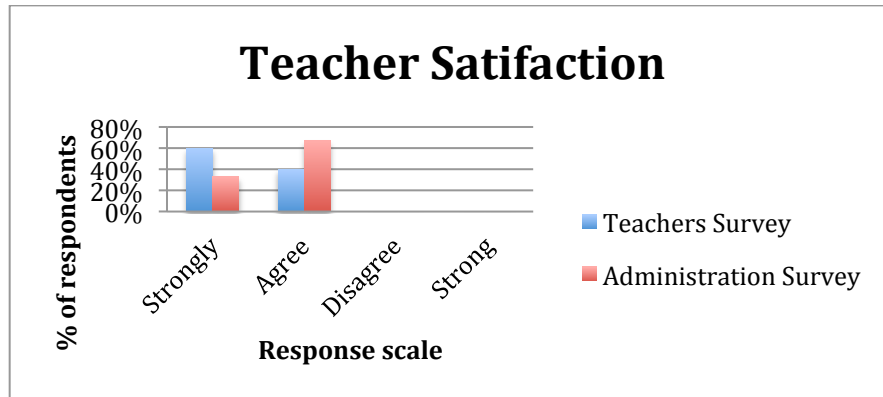
This would mean that the transition-to-school program has been successful in effectively, efficiently and regularly informing parents and teachers about school events and activities.

Evaluation of supporting tools for teachers. The administrative team was tasked with the responsibility of creating and administering tools for the teachers that could facilitate a smoother transition process. The administrative team reported that they were satisfied with the level of collaboration with the teachers and the execution of the support tools administered. The teachers reported in kind that they found the supportive tools helpful (See Appendix B and H).

Evaluation of outreach and community building initiatives. Both administrators and teachers reported that the outreach events in the transition-to-school program were well attended and successful (See Appendix B and H).

An overall evaluation of the processes and procedures put in place under the transition to school program yielded some important findings regarding the effectiveness of the goals of the program. 60% of the teachers reported that they were satisfied with the transition to school program while the other 40% strongly favored the program (See Appendix B). Administrators surveyed also seemed to agree that teachers appeared to be satisfied with the transition-to-school program. 66% of administrators reported that they agree and 33% strongly agree that teachers appeared satisfied (See Figure 5).

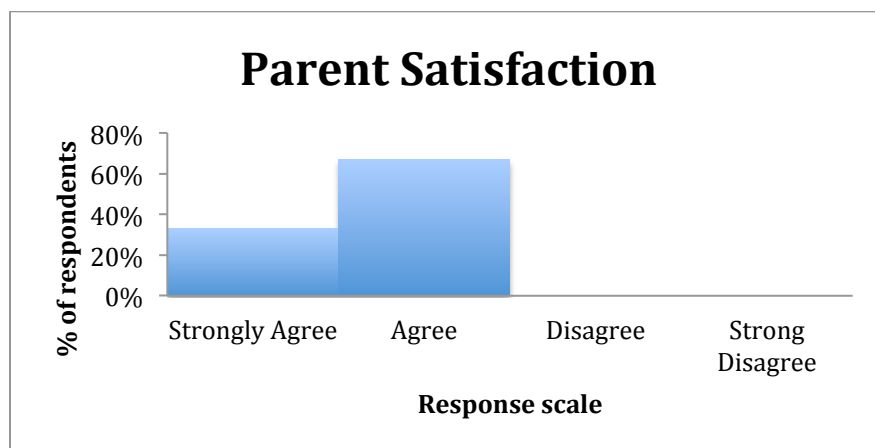
Teacher Satisfaction as reported by Teachers and Administrative staff
(Figure 5)



The satisfaction with the program was in large part attributed to better communication, collaboration and coordination between teachers and administrators. Teachers were notified of students start dates well in advance of their respective start dates, community events were held regularly, school events were well attended, parent involvement was stronger this year than in the previous year and outreach events were a collaborative effort among all members of the community.

Lastly, of the parents polled, 66% reported overall satisfaction with the program while another 33% were very satisfied with the program (See Figure 6).

Parent satisfaction with the program as reported by Parents
(Figure 6)



The data shows that parents were overall satisfied with the measures taken in the transition-to-school program. As the data presents, there was a noticeable improvement in the area of parent involvement. Parents showed early interest in participating in school events (See Appendix I). Parents also attended school events in greater numbers than the previous year. The peace day celebration, Hispanic heritage month and, the adopt-a-family initiative were events new to the school and there were a considerable number of parents who participated. There were measurable gains of attendance for the fall picnic and curriculum night. Both of those events had an increase of 22% and 24% respectively (See Appendix A). As the year-round program continues, more numbers will be gathered to track the success of the transition-to-school program through the 2013-2014 school year.

Action Research Plan

As evidenced by the data, the transition-to-school program and the measures taken to address teacher satisfaction and parent involvement showed a positive impact. Although it will require more time and evaluation to measure the lasting impact of the transition-to-school program, the early stages of implementation have proven to show great promise in addressing the concerns of dissatisfaction and apathy among teachers and parents. Overall, teachers reported greater satisfaction with the level of communication, community activities and the overall transition process. Teachers indicated that communication was more regular and effective and responded positively to the measures taken. Based on attendance records and other feedback, there was greater parent involvement and engagement. Parents participated in greater numbers than in the previous year. Parents reported that they were generally satisfied with the communication

and activities executed so far. Administrators also reported a greater satisfaction with the transition process and credited its success to effective planning and collaboration among the various stakeholders. This research shows that the transition-to-school program had a positive effect on teacher's attitudes while increasing parent involvement and engagement throughout the school.

The research highlights the importance of well planned transition-to-school program, the impact of such program on teacher's attitudes in accommodating healthy transitions and, how such a program can help support greater parent involvement. The importance of this program cannot be underscored. The result of the research has shown that teachers and parents are pivotal players in successful transition programs. Engaged and informed teachers become partners in executing policies and practices that orient and accommodate students and their families. Involved parents are active participants in the process and are overall more satisfied when invested in the life of the school. These efforts will be an important aspect of our collective administrative goals and focus for the remainder of this school year and the subsequent the school year.

The program has shown that effective coordination, collaboration and communication are the cornerstone qualities of a successful transition program. Since implementation of the transition-to-school program, the partnership between administration and teachers, teachers and parents, and parents and the school has been strengthened. As a result, the leaders of the school are more committed to continuing community building activities that engage all members of the community: administration, teachers, parents and students. In addition, school leaders have seen the importance of a continuous year-round transition program that extends beyond orientation but addresses

long-term partnerships with teachers and parents. The endeavors that will continue throughout the year will include a renewed focus on equipping teachers with appropriate tools that promote best practices in instruction and assessment of the students. Also, there will be a continued push to strengthen the teacher-parent communication of student progress. The school has benefitted from the implementation of the transition-to-school program as evidenced by the adjustments and policies instituted. Teachers are encouraged to build stronger partnerships with parents through classroom community events and parents are given more opportunities to volunteer.

Successful transitions make for a community of partners working together to strengthen the school's program, which will ultimately benefit the students. Successful transitions can lead to well-adjusted children who have a good attitude about school, are successful learners and thrive in a social environment where they are understood and accepted as unique individuals. These qualities greatly impact student learning. In addition, parents and teachers working in concert can impact student learning. A collaborative effort and involvement between parents, school and communities enhances the child's learning capacity and overall health (Kagan & Newman, 1998). Although this research does not focus on the direct impact the transition-to-school program had on student learning, research indicates a positive impact on student learning outcomes (Vitto, 2003).

The positive response to the changes implemented so far makes a case for a long-term transition program that addresses regular parent education, effective parent-teacher communication and employing best practices to address the needs of child who is just beginning their schooling experience. Regular parent education keeps parents informed

on curriculum goals and the progress of their child. Parents are more likely to be engaged partners when they are involved and informed (National Head Start Association, 1999). Effective parent-teacher communication becomes the vehicle to communicate and engage parents in the process. The progress of the child is contingent on well-trained teachers who employ best practices, which include creative teaching methods. As the transition to school program matures, these additional measures should be explored.

For future research, I am interested in studying the effects of the transition to school program on student success. What is the relationship between parent involvement and student success? How does collaboration between teachers and parents impact student success? By measuring the quality and quantity of the relationship between teachers and parents, what measurable impact is observed on the student's overall learning and progress? Further research would provide additional information on the impact of a comprehensive transition-to-school program on student learning and success. Based on the information gathered so far, it is important that schools invest in a well-planned, transition to school program that is both relevant to their school community and, engages all members of the community as partners. The impact of such a program can create stronger school communities where teachers are supported, parents are engaged and students thrive.

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APPENDIX A

Table 1.
Attendance Records

	2012-2013	2013-2014
Number of Students Enrolled	125	90
	Number of Parents in Attendance	Number of Parents in Attendance
Toddler transition night	8	14
Ice-cream social	44	40
Back to school night	65	81
Peace day	none	12
Hispanic heritage month	none	3
Fall picnic	90	85
Book fair	8	10
Curriculum night	55	61
Adopt-a-family	none	80

Note: Number of parents reflects one representative parent per family.

APPENDIX B

Transition to School Survey – Teacher
Number of respondents - 5

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The toddler transition night (held in June, 2013) was beneficial in communicating what to expect when moving up as well as addressing signs of readiness for moving up.	5				
The “All about my child” form was beneficial – I referenced the form and it was informative and provided insight about the children.	1	4			
The ice-cream social was beneficial – It was a good forum for the new students and returning students to begin connecting with the environment and teachers.	5				
Back to school night was well attended by my classroom parents.	4	1			
The international fall picnic was a success. It was well attended and it was a good community building activity.	5				
I am made aware of a new child starting in my class ahead of the child’s arrival.	5				
I am kept updated on the activities and events occurring at the school efficiently.	4	1			
Meetings are beneficial and informative.	5				
Overall, I am satisfied with the processes and procedures implemented.	3	2			

APPENDIX C

PARENT SURVEY

TRANSITION-TO-SCHOOL PARENT SURVEY

*Administered through surveymonkey.com

*33 respondents

TRANSITION-TO-SCHOOL PARENT SURVEY

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am satisfied with the level of communication from the school via email, print fliers, website, twitter and Facebook.	18	12	3	
I receive information from the school in a timely manner.	23	10		
I am informed of the volunteer opportunities and I am signed up to participate in school wide activities when able.	18	15		
I am satisfied with the feedback I have received on my child's progress.	18	14	1	
Overall, I am satisfied with the program.	22	11		

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP MEETING – TEACHERS

DATE: APRIL 17, 2013

Attendance:

- Four primary Montessori Teachers
- Three infant/toddler Montessori Teachers

Agenda:

- What aspects of the school are most concerning to you?
 - Rolling admissions process – constant influx of student into the classroom. Disruptive to the flow of the classroom.
 - Accommodating new families into an already normalized classroom – playing catch-up with new families.
 - Planning time – Not enough time to plan and prepare for the classroom.
 - Calendar – There is too much going on towards the end of the school year (April, May, June) – Could we space out school events so that we are not burdened with lots of activity at the end of the year?
 - Communication – Sometimes, teachers are not aware of what is going on. Often, parents find out information at the same time as teachers.
 - Aftercare staff doesn't have enough meetings – they need to know what is going on and have times to meet.

Suggestions for improvement:

- Weekly meetings among teacher, assistants and senior staff.
- Administrators communicating to teachers about events and activities weeks before the parents get the information.
- More collaboration with the administration in the planning of events and activities.
- Getting adequate information about a child before the child starts.

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP MEETING – ADMINISTRATORS

DATE: MAY 6, 2013

Attendance:

- Head of School
- Assistant Head of School
- Admission director
- Director of Operations
- Event Coordinator

Agenda:

- Ideas to boost enrollment
 - Participate in city fairs and festivals in the fall
 - Parent volunteerism and co-op options for tuition assistance
- Ideas to create a warm and nurturing environment for new families and teachers.
 - Before the start of school activities that encourage building community.
 - Follow up packet that is inquiry based – profile community needs.
 - Social media blitz to engage parents and teachers in activities going on at school
 - Hold a team-building seminar during set-up week (in August 2013) for teachers.
 - Host monthly parent education nights.
 - Host semester classroom activities to build relationships between families, and among teachers and parents.
 - Strengthen communication between teachers and administration, administration and parents, and parents and teachers.
- Greater collaboration between teachers and administrators: Transition to school for new students and their families.
 - Lack of strong partnership causing parent displeasure and disengagement.
- Supporting Teachers – Rolling admissions
 - Provide teachers with information of child and start date ahead of time – up to two weeks ahead.
 - Create a list of items that teachers need to prepare prior to the student's start date.
 - Develop with teachers a classroom package that includes: teacher contact information, classroom rules and expectations, newsletter (if applicable), specialist schedule and daily schedule.
- Informing and Engaging Parents
 - Create more modes of communication – starting a Facebook page and twitter account.
 - Getting parents signed-up to the website.
 - Sending a newsflash once a week – Tuesdays
 - Creating a list of events that we need parent volunteerism.

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP MEETING – TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

DATE: JUNE 17, 2013

Attendance:

- Head of School
- Assistant Head of School
- Admission director
- Director of Operations
- Event Coordinator
- Four primary Montessori Teachers
- Three infant/toddler Montessori Teachers
- Fourteen Instructional Assistants

Agenda:

- Review Calendar – Make all relevant changes for school events (2013-14)
 - Move science fair from June to May
 - Move graduation day to May
 - Incorporate two days for parent-teacher conferences
 - Merge curriculum night to one night
- Orientation ideas – Ideas to help with transitions of new students and families.
 - Introduce ice-cream social
 - Change the format for back to school night
 - Home visits for infants?
- Long-term community events.
 - Fall pumpkin patch trip
 - Fall international field trip
 - Occasional visits to the community library
 - Classroom community events – after hours or weekends
 - Classroom field trips

APPENDIX G

TRANSITION TO SCHOOL INTERVIEW

PERSON INTERVIEWED: Owner of the school

INTERVIEWER: Mary Akatu-Speakman

INTERVIEW DATE: August 6th, 2013

What are the components of a successful transition to school program?

I think you have to start early. When a parent calls for a tour, the moment you answer the phone, we have to engage them immediately. There needs to be follow-up phone calls. When they enroll, let's do a lunch meeting with their child. Something where the child and teacher can bond and spend time together. It is important to get to know the child before they start school. You also learn a lot about a child with the parent present. Let's find out what the child likes to do. Make a list of things – their favorite color, trips they've taken, their favorite snack. Where did they go to school? Have they been in school? Train teachers to observe which hand they use to eat, how they eat lunch... it tells so much. From the beginning, you have to get to know the child.

What are some ways we, as a school, can boost parent involvement?

Over the years, we have had a really active PTA. During the years of the elementary program, they did so much. They had a structure of president, vice president, secretary, treasurer... they were really active. But since then, it has dissolved. They used to donate money to the school. They gave us the bench out front, the fence, they sent teachers to conferences, they raised a lot of money. I really wish we still had that kind of parent community. That is one area we really need to work on. We have got to get these parents participating again. Maybe not in PTA, maybe a new group would come out and be involved again. I think we ought to try to get a core group of parents together. Do we have anyone? What are the classrooms doing to build relationships with parent and among parents. You need a parent community. When people feel the school love, they stay. We need to get them again. I think we need to call parents, check-in on them periodically. From the moment they call for a tour, to enrollment and beyond, we need to check in with them. Follow-up is so important. I want somebody in admin to take care of that. It is important to get some school events that parent will be attracted to – get to know what the parent like. What are parents nowadays doing? We need to appeal to them. This has to be a top priority.

What are some ways we can boost a positive and familial environment among our staff?

Make your meeting more teacher-centered. Give them opportunities to share and be heard. You may not agree on what they decide but you have to provide an environment that is open to listen to what they have to say. Do potlucks. Celebrate birthdays. Acknowledge people. Identify your 80% and your 20%. The 80% are the people who really love working here. The 20% are just here, it's a job. Know who your people are and celebrate them all.

APPENDIX H

ADMINISTRATIVE SURVEY

TRANSITION TO SCHOOL SURVEY – ADMINISRATORS

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 3

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am satisfied with the planning and preparation process prior to the start of the school year.	2	1			
I am satisfied with the level of collaboration between the administration and the staff in planning and executing activities for the school year.	2	1			
The ice-cream social was beneficial – It was a good forum for the new students and returning students to begin connecting with the environment and teachers.	3				
Back to school night was well attended and informative.	3				
The parent sign-up sheet promoted parent participation for events throughout the school year.	3				
The planned school activities have had a successful turnout.	3				
The teachers appear satisfied with the measures taken to assist in a smooth transition back to school.	2	1			
I am kept updated on the activities and events occurring at the school efficiently.	3				
Meetings are beneficial and informative.	3				

APPENDIX I

TABLE 2.
PARENT SIGN-UP FOR VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

Name of Volunteer Activity	Number of Parents Who Signed-up
Room Parents	12
Hispanic Heritage Month	2
Peace Celebration	7
Book Fair	3
Adopt-a-Family	5
Aftercare Holiday Party	4
Chinese New Year	2
Diwali	6
Hanukkah	0
Christmas	5
Kwanza	1
Black History Month	4
Dr. Seuss Day	10
St. Patrick's Day	6
Persian New Year	0
Earth Day	10
Teacher Appreciation Day	11
Field Day	11
<hr/> Total	99

Note: Some parents signed-up for more than one activity

APPENDIX J

The Jefferson Montessori School

Transition to School Survey 2013-2014

Thank you for filling out this survey.

The purpose of this survey is to assess the transition to the 2013-14 school year. In spring 2013, we had discussions about how to improve our procedures so that we were better prepared for the start of the school year (both for staff and for families).

We made some changes to the start of the school year process.

I would like to get your feedback on a few key areas.

Please feel free to share your ideas. We rely on your feedback to continue to make the appropriate adjustments. You are not required to submit your name on the survey.

Again, thank you for taking the time to complete the survey.

Ms. Mary
(Mary Akatu-Speakman)
Assistant Head of School