

**Collaboration of Parents and School Team  
Members to Increase Students with Disabilities' Overall Success.**

**By**

**Megan Catherine Holly**

**May, 2004**

**A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State  
University of New York-College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Science in Education**

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Holly, M.C. (2004). *Collaboration of parents and school team members to increase students with disabilities' overall success*. Unpublished master's thesis, State University of New York-College at Brockport.

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## Acknowledgements

This research project would not have been possible without the expertise and guidance of *Dr. Moira Fallon* who was my most valuable resource throughout this process. I would like to acknowledge my grandmother for her support and inspiration. I also owe a great deal of gratitude to the Albion Elementary School for allowing me to complete my internship requirements within its classrooms and to conduct my research with the help of the principal, teachers and students.

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## Abstract

This study explores the collaboration of parents and school team members to increase students with disabilities' overall success. The subjects chosen to participate are from Albion Elementary School, consisting of ten students, five teachers and three parents. Each participant completed a yes/no checklist containing question regarding behavior charts, communication, backpacks and homework. These checklists were collected and analyzed.

Results from the data collected indicate that students do not have the same viewpoint as parents and educators regarding their backpacks being checked after school. These findings lay a foundation for future research to further explore students, parents and educators perceptions and viewpoints and how they compare to each other.

## Collaboration of Parents and School Team Members to Increase Students with Disabilities' Overall Success.

In an educational setting, it is believed that students benefit more by having active and involved parents. Increasing amounts of research also support the values and impacts of parent involvement and its impact on student achievement. As Epstein and Dauber (1993) state, children are more successful at all grade levels if their parents participate at school and encourage education and learning at home. Clark (1993) also finds positive associations between parent involvement, especially parental attitudes toward homework, and students' mathematics and literacy skills. In addition, Ames, et al. (1995) state that children's motivation, attitudes toward parent involvement, and perceptions of their parents' level of involvement are more positive when their parents receive frequent communications from their teachers.

During our studies this summer and fall in our cohort, we have discussed the importance and need for parent involvement and also collaboration with parents as a special educator. In my personal experience as a preschool teacher and intern for second graders, I have first hand identified the positive results of achievement from collaboration and parent involvement.

### *What Experts Concur*

Based on the theories of Eric Erickson, (Peterson, Hittie, 2003) human development takes place in a social community. Establishment of identity is a series of social experiences that shape self throughout life. Sharing self with others requires trust and confidence to begin commitment. Social community/cultural tools require a need for



social experiences that create individual crises; this is how one learns and grows as a person. Erickson concurs that what a person is born with... the environment shapes. The environment stated here can be referred to parents and teachers. A child can be born with certain intelligence but the shaping of oneself and one's identity comes from the support and community environment that can be created in collaboration and trust between teachers and family.

A second theorist is B.F. Skinner. B.F. Skinner (Peterson, Hittie, 2003) concurs that the learning process can be facilitated; after facilitation there is control of external events. Attention is a powerful reinforcer, operant conditioning, stimulus, response and manipulation of environment. Attention is the key element here. Students need attention from their teachers and their parents. This attention, done through involved parents and collaboration between school teams and home, acts as a facilitator in improving students' overall achievement. Therefore, I believe that parents can support their child's achievement with their participation and collaboration with the school team.

### *Research Question*

Does increased parent collaboration with school team, consisting of general educators and special educators improve overall academic achievement of second grade, low to middle class students with identified disabilities? When I completed reviewing the most recent research on this topic, I derived two themes that seemed to stick out among it all. The first theme is effective teacher and family collaboration. The second theme is student-oriented collaboration with relationship to academics.

## Review of Literature

### *Effective Teacher and Family Collaboration*

There has been a need for partnership between teachers and families. This has begun to be recognized in government policy in current moves towards inclusive education in this country (DFE, 1994) and in most of the member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (Labon, 1997). Cook & Swain conducted research on a school (Adamstun) undergoing reorganization into inclusion. All the parents and family members interviewed were positive about the educational opportunities and wider support their child had received during their time at Adamstun, almost all were also positive about the philosophy of children with special education needs attending their local general education classes. For all other interviewed parents, inclusion in their local school was the ideal (Cook & Swain, 2001).

Goodey (1992) pointed out that for parents of children with special education needs, their child can become their way of life and if threatened, then that family's whole existence is threatened. This is where the guided support from teachers and school teams become necessary. Collaboration is the key. With this information it is suggestive that local education authorities should clearly identify what they mean by, and want from, partnerships with parents. Parents need to be involved from the outset in the policy-making and the planning, and this includes the work with mainstream schools moving towards inclusive education (Cook & Swain, 2001). There is a crying need to know how parents and a school team view the student's education, as in Dale's (1996) 'negotiating model' of partnership.

This model of partnership recognizes that dissent may be a major factor in the parent-professional relationship and plans should be made to use it constructively. She describes it as

A working relationship where the partners use negotiation and joint decision-making and resolve differences of opinion and disagreement, in order to reach some kind of shared perspective or jointly agreed decision on issues of mutual concern. (Dale, 1996, p. 14)

If professionals and parents can accept the challenge of taking new roles and expectations by working creatively and cooperatively with each other and by establishing an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, children with diverse needs and capabilities can benefit enormously. (Wood, 1996, p. 173) Marshall and Mirenda conducted a study of parent-professional collaborative partnerships related to a design and implementation of positive behavior support interventions in the context of natural family routines. In each case, the intervention resulted in a marked decrease in the frequency and intensity of problem behavior as well as an improved quality of life for both the child and his or her family (Marshall & Mirenda, 2003).

Families and schools are equal partners in the education of children, with both contributing in major ways. To succeed, their partnerships must be based on mutual trust and respect, with educators taking the lead in developing and nurturing effective collaboration with families (Godber, Ester, & Amy, 1999). Taking action to build trust involves focusing on such issues as: equal partnerships, power and social inequalities, cultural continuity, informal social events, and communication, ensuring that parents have all necessary information, and recognizing that trust takes time (Gober, Ester & Amy, 1999). Moles (1993) describes school-family partnerships as the sustained mutual

collaboration, support, and participation of school staff and families at home or at the school site in activities and efforts that directly and positively effect the success of children's learning and progress in school. The parents need to be treated as equals because both parents and educators contribute in major ways to the education of young people. To succeed, the partnership must be based upon mutual trust and respect with educators taking the lead to develop and nurture effective collaboration with families.

### *Student-Oriented Collaboration in Effect to Academics*

During the last decade, issues relating to communication between families and teachers about homework have been examined intensely via a series of qualitative and quantitative studies. Initial exploratory studies on communication between families and teachers on the topic of homework point to the existence of a number of communication problems (Jayanthi, Bursuck, Epstein, & Cumbland, 1992; Jayanthi, Nelson, Sawyer, Bursuck, & Epstein, 1995). These problems include (a) failure to communicate often enough, early enough, consistently, and in a clear and useful manner; (b) exclusion of families from some of the most traditional forms of communication in schools (e.g., conferences); and (c) no communication between home and school (Nelson, Jayanthi, Brittain, Epstein, & Bursuck, 2002).

Families are students' first teachers as well as primary caregivers. Research shows that family involvement in education results in children achieving better grades and improved attendance, improved attitudes and behaviors in schools, higher graduation rates, and increased enrollment in higher education (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Family involvement in the planning, operation, and evaluation stages encourages quality by installing a sense of ownership in families and throughout communities. Ownership

bolsters commitment. Collaborating with parents to identify and develop needed services ensures that programming will be relevant to their children. Community schools experience increased parent involvement (Mondschein, 2001).

### *Gap*

After reviewing this research, an area that I would like to see explored more is the partnership between related services and families. How important is the relationship between families and therapist such as speech, occupational therapy, and physical therapy? Could a student significantly succeed at a higher level with this partnership occurring? A second area that I would like to see more research on is the length of time that is needed for the collaboration and partnership between families and educators? Will a student continue to increase in success the longer the time a strong partnership is created with home and school?

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, I believe that increasing parent collaboration with the school team, consisting of general educators and special educators, will improve overall academic achievement for students with identified disabilities. Through the studies and research that I have reviewed this proves to be true. Also, I feel that I see the need for this participation and collaboration every day in the school district. I have heard the students discuss and comment about the desire they have for participation in their academics from mom and dad. Attention is the biggest reinforcer, whether it is positive or negative. It is what each student wants and craves, especially his/her parents. Positive reinforcement attention is what needs to be the concentrate for the student by teacher and family. Collaboration and a home-school connection between families and school teams can

make this occur. A student is going to get attention, even by acting out negatively if needed. It is a lot easier to create positive reinforcement and bypass negative behavior. I feel that the question that I have chosen to research is one that I will use to conduct my own research in the spring. I feel that there is a need for as much research and awareness as possible on this subject.

It is imperative that collaboration between educators and families occur. Students with disabilities can achieve a higher level of overall success by this happening. A positive parent involvement and perception of their child as a student and a person can create an optimistic future for the child.

## Methodology

The research that I am planning to study is, does increased parent collaboration with school team, consisting of general educators and special educators, improve overall academic achievement of second grade, low to middle class students with identified disabilities’?

### *Subjects*

The subjects to be chosen to participate in this study are from Albion Elementary School. They will consist of second grade students, their parents and the students’ regular education and special education teachers. These subjects are described in Table 1 (see attachment) Description of Subjects.

### *Instruments*

The instruments to be used for this study consist of three checklists. These checklists are shown in Table 2 Checklist for Students, Table 3 Checklists for Parents and Table 4 Checklists for Educators. These instruments are formatted with particular questions designed to measure the collaboration and relationships among students, teachers and parents to increase students overall success. The researcher designed these instruments for the purposes of this study. Cathy Schwenk, an expert in this area, will insure validity of the instruments used. None of the questions on the checklist will change at any point in the research process, ensuring reliability of the instruments.

### *Procedures*

The checklists will be distributed in one week’s time by placing them in mailboxes for teachers, during class time for students and sent home with students for parents. Parents’ checklists will be accompanied by self-address stamped envelopes and

asked to return by March 19, 2004, through regular postage mail. Teachers' checklists will be returned by school mailbox by March 19, 2004. No identifying information will be associated with collection of the research. The instruments will be collected and analyzed by the researcher.

*Planned statistical analysis.* An independent t-test will be used to determine whether a statistically significant difference exists between two means. The independent variable will include the parents' participation and the dependent variable, the students' overall success. The descriptive statistics will include percents, means and standard deviations. The inferential statistics planned, will be an independent t-test, using Statistical Package for Social Sciences, Versión 12.0 (SPSS).

These are the subjects, instruments and procedures that are planned for this research. If there are any changes to occur or additional information gathered that will be revealed in the results section. The results section will also describe the statistical analysis in more detail.



## Results

Does increased parent collaboration with school team, consisting of general educators and special educators, improve overall academic achievement of second grade, low to middle class students with identified disabilities'? The analyses I had planned in the methods section was not computed due to wording of the questions on the checklists. Post hoc, a One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was computed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences, Version 12.0 (SPSS). It was used to determine if there was a significant discrepancy between parents, students and educators' responses to questions pertaining to homework, backpacks, communication and behavior charts.

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Information from the checklists was computed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences, Version 12.0 (SPSS). The means, percentages and standard deviations of the checklists are shown in Table 5.

### *Inferential Statistics*

An ANOVA was computed. No significant results were found across any of the three groups (students, parents or teachers) for the majority of the items on the checklist. The quantitative inferential results are displayed in Table 6. However, with one item a positive, significant difference occurred in how parents and educators responded to the question of checking students backpacks when they go home as compared to how students responded ( $f = 3.493$ ,  $p = .047$ ). Table 7 contains a graphic representation of students, parents, and educators' mean responses on the question pertaining to parents checking students' backpacks after school.

These results will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter of conclusions.

## Conclusions

Checklists were used to collect data in the areas of communication, the use of backpacks, homework and the use of a behavior charts between home and school through students, teachers and parents. This research was done to see if increased parent collaboration with school team, consisting of general educators and special educators improves overall academic achievement of second grade, low to middle class students with identified disabilities.

Some limitations that impacted this research conducted were small sample size, volunteers, bias and wording. The sample size chosen only consisted of about twenty-three volunteers. Questions on the checklist were not clearly stated. Upon review of data, an ANOVA was determined to be useful to the analyses. I believe that there is difficulty as an educator and as a parent to evaluate ones' own abilities. Are educators and parents capable of evaluating their parenting or educating abilities without bias? Is how they perceive they are performing, actually what is occurring?

### *Significance*

The results of this study concur with the review of literature that parents' participation is beneficial to students and their success. As Epstein and Dauber (1993) state, children are more successful at all grade levels if their parents participate at school and encourage education and learning at home. In addition, Ames, et. al., (1995) state that children's motivation, attitudes toward parent involvement, and perceptions of their parents level of involvement are more positive when their parents receive frequent communications from their teachers. However, a common theme displayed throughout the research process is the individual viewpoints of parents, students, educators and how

they compare. This was made evident with the checklist question on backpacks.

Students, parents and educators were asked if the child's backpack was checked for homework and notes from the teacher when the student came home from school. Parents and educators believed that yes it was, while students held the opposite viewpoint. These results could occur do to the fact that the student does not recognize or notice when the parent checks their bags after school. A student, teacher or parent cannot make assumptions as to what the other is thinking.

The significance of this study is important to others who work with students because collaboration and communication are the foundation to a student's success. It is imperative as an educator to do what is possible to create openness and high-quality communication lines. Families and schools are equal partners in the education of children, with both contributing in major ways. To succeed, their partnerships must be based on mutual trust and respect, with educators taking the lead in developing and nurturing effective collaboration with families (Godber, Ester, & Amy, 1999). As this study has exposed, what teachers or educators think or believe of what is going on, may not be seen the same by students and vice versa. Awareness to check for understanding during collaboration between family, team members, students, and administration is imperative for special educators.

### *Summary*

In the future, if I had this study to do over again I would use a larger population and more than one district. I would like to expand the population to more than one grade level and have more parent participation. I would like to include results from a city school district. I feel this could give information that is more substantial. I would also

make modifications to the methods used. I would use more of a qualitative study, with personal interviews. I would create questions for all subjects (parents, teachers, students). I believe by using personal interviews parents and educators will offer more information pertaining to the research question. The next step for research could be effective strategies for educators to encourage or improve parent involvement. Taking action to build trust involves focusing on such issues as: equal partnerships, power and social inequalities, cultural continuity, informal social events, and communication, ensuring that parents have all necessary information, and recognizing that trust takes time (Gober, Ester, & Amy, 1999). Collaboration between parents, students and educators is essential in developing students' overall success. Having knowledge of students and parents participation is essential in becoming an educator. As a special educator it is important to understand and be able to conduct and analyze research. By doing so I have reached a new level of understanding of my research question, made new relationships and improved my personal communication abilities. Having knowledge through research is critical in creating a successful classroom and beneficial in the navigation of being a life-long learner.

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Table 1

Descriptions of Subjects

<b>Student</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Disability</b>	<b>Socioeconomic Status</b>
1	Male	White	LD	Low
2	Female	White	LD	Low
3	Male	White	LD	Low
4	Male	White	LD	Low
5	Male	White	VI	Low
6	Male	White	LD	Low
7	Male	White	OHI	Low
8	Male	White	OHI	Low
9	Male	White	OHI	Low
10	Male	White	LD	Low

\*\* Parents were chosen from the above students.

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
1	General education teacher
2	General education teacher
3	General education teacher
4	General education teacher
5	General education teacher
6	General education teacher
7	General education teacher
8	General education teacher
9	Special education teacher



Table 2

Checklist for Students

**Directions:** Do not put your name on this and you may choose not to participate.

Read the question below and put a check mark for your answer in the yes or no box.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
I do my homework with help from my parents.		
After school, my mom and/or dad ask me about my day.		
On the weekend I spend time doing an activity with my mom and/or dad.		
My mom and/or dad check my backpack / book bag after school for notes or homework.		
I take my behavior chart home and give to my parents to be signed. "		

Table 3

Checklist for Educators

**Directions: Do not put your name on this and you may choose not to participate.**

Read the question below and put a check mark for your answer in the yes or no box.

Question	Yes	No
The student exhibits appropriate behaviors during academic class time.		
The student exhibits appropriate behaviors during free/recess time.		
The student exhibits appropriate behaviors when working with peers.		
The student returns weekly behavior chart when sent home to be signed.		
The student regularly leaves and returns to school with a book bag/backpack.		
The student can emotionally handle and control him/herself in a stressful situation.		
The student can emotionally handle and control him/herself during confrontation with peers.		
The student can demonstrate the ability to complete and return homework on a regular basis. (4 times a week)		
The student is capable of returning permission slips signed and in time.		
The student's parent(s) engage in discussions and question the development of their child.		
The student's parent(s) attend conferences about their child.		

Please state the student's overall academic standing (using a letter grade)

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Table 4

Checklist for Parents

**Directions: Do not put your name on this and you may choose not to participate.**

Read the question below and put a check mark for your answer in the yes or no box

Question	Yes	No
I know who my child's teachers are.		
I check my child's book bag every afternoon for homework and notes.		
I know the status of my child's academic progress.		
On weekends I plan and implement activities with my child.		
I spend meal times with my child.		
I question my child about his/her day and events in school.		
I read to my child, and/or encourage my child to read to me.		
I attend conferences and meetings about my child.		
I attend special events at school.		
I talk to my child specifically about his/her feelings in general.		
My child has friend(s) over at the house.		
My child goes over to a friend(s) house.		

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Means</i>	<i>Valid % Yes</i>	<i>Valid % No</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
1 Backpacks	.81	81.5	18.5	.396
2 Backpacks	.74	74.1	25.9	.447
3 Backpacks	1.00	11.1	88.9 (missing)	.000
1 Homework	.74	74.1	25.9	.447
2 Homework	.67	29.6	33.3	.492
1 Behavior Chart	.96	96.3	3.7	.192
1 Communication	.85	85.2	14.8	.362
2 Communication	.74	74.1	25.9	.447
3 Communication	.96	96.3	3.7	.192

Table 6

One Way ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Communication	Between Groups	.119	2	.059	.432	.654
	Within Groups	3.289	24	.137		
	Total	3.407	26			
Communication	Between Groups	.563	2	.281	1.462	.252
	Within Groups	4.622	24	.193		
	Total	5.185	26			
Communication	Between Groups	.030	2	.015	.381	.687
	Within Groups	.933	24	.039		
	Total	.963	26			

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Homework	Between Groups	.296	2	.148	.727	.494
	Within Groups	4.889	24	.204		
	Total	5.185	26			
Homework	Between Groups	.444	1	.444	2.000	.188
	Within Groups	2.222	10	.222		
	Total	2.667	11			

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
***Backpacks	Between Groups	.919	2	.459	3.493	.047
	Within Groups	3.156	24	.131		
	Total	4.074	26			
Backpacks	Between Groups	.296	2	.148	.727	.494
	Within Groups	4.889	24	.204		
	Total	5.185	26			

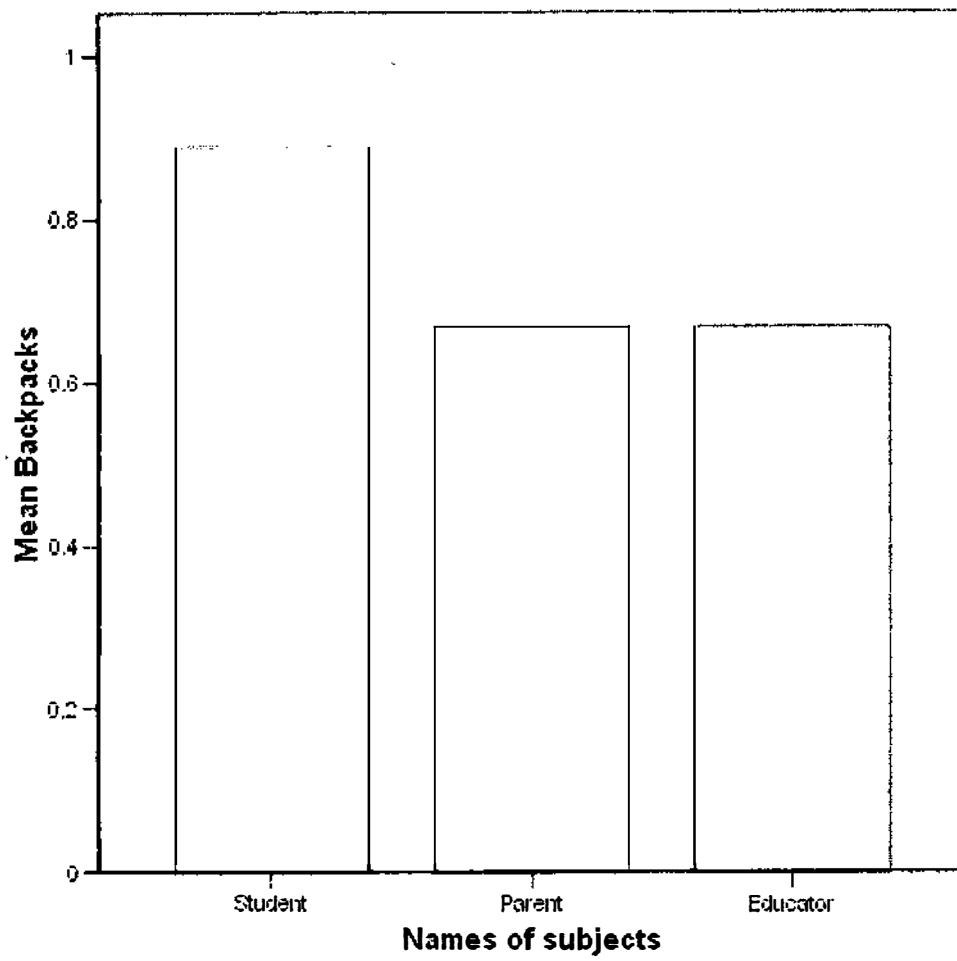
## Behavior Chart

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.030	2	.015	.381	.687
Within Groups	.933	24	.039		
Total	.963	26			

\*\*\*= p&lt;.05

Table 7

Bar Graph



The author Megan Catherine Holly was born in New York on .  
She attended Roberts Wesleyan College from 1996 to 1998; she transferred to Converse College in 1998 and received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Converse College in 2000. She began work toward a Master of Science in Education at the State University of New York College at Brockport in the Summer of 2003.