

Public Abstract

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Title: PARENTS' AND PARENT EDUCATORS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE PARENTS AS TEACHERS HOME VISITING PROGRAM IN A SMALL RURAL, MID-WEST COMMUNITY

Risk factors for poor school achievement exist in all parts of America, but more frequently in low-income areas. Rural children live in poverty during their preschool years at a higher rate than their urban and suburban counterparts (Grace et al., 2006; O'Hare, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Young children in rural areas are more likely to experience the majority of their early learning in their own homes or the homes of relatives or neighbors (Grace et al., 2006).

Home-visiting programs have the potential to provide education, support, and delivery of services to rural families, yet they are currently the target of intense national scrutiny. This case study examined how and why families in a rural community engaged in a particular home-visiting program, Parents as Teachers. The study's focus was to understand which service components rural parents found most beneficial, and how best to leverage these in ways that deepen parents' engagement in the program.

Findings suggest that parents and parent educators alike consider home visits to be the most important service component, through which parent educators build close relationships with parents and tailor services to best meet families' needs. Families valued parent educators who were sensitive to their goals for participating, closely matched services to meet the needs of their family, and affirmed culturally inspired parenting practices. Implications suggest home visits are critical in encouraging rural parents' retention, engagement, and follow-through in home-visiting programs. Further, home visits provide a means for providing parent education, individualizing services, and enhancing parent-child interactions.