HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY STUDIES
DISSERTATION DEFENSE FOR
NICOLE R. MORGAN

TITLE: EVALUATING THE ROLE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC
PRESCHOOL IN PREDICTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMERGENT LITERACY
SKILLS

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DATE: Thursday February 27, 2014
TIME: 12:00 pm-2:00 p.m.
PLACE: 312 BBH Building

Area of Specialization: Prevention and Intervention Research, Family Development

ABSTRACT

Preschool parental involvement is critical to fighting the war on poverty and strengthening children’s school readiness skills. Although there are many theoretical and empirical studies demonstrating that parent involvement promotes children’s academic success, stronger longitudinal studies are needed to understand which specific components of parental involvement predict Kindergarten emergent literacy skills. This dissertation has two primary
goals: (1) to clarify how parent involvement changes as a result of one year compared to two years of a universal preschool program; and (2) to clarify how specific domains of parent involvement relate to children’s emergent literacy skills in Kindergarten. Preschool children (ages 3-4 years) and their parents were recruited from an urban community. The total analytic sample included 290 children (n=145 entered at age 3; n=145 entered at age 4). Three hypotheses were partially supported. The first hypothesis was that the duration of preschool programming (2 years versus 1 year) would result in increased parent involvement. By using matched propensity score analyses, findings suggest that two years of preschool programming, compared to one year, improved parent-child talking activities and parent emergent literacy practices at home. Also, two years of preschool programming was marginally related to parents “showing up” at school (e.g., volunteering in class, field trips, and attending school wide events). The second hypothesis was that the quality of teacher-parent interactions would help explain the increased parent involvement. Teacher’s ratings of the quality of the relationship with the parent were positively related to parents making more visits to the library. The third hypothesis was that parent involvement would influence children’s school readiness skills, specifically emergent literacy skills. Parent talking activities predicted Kindergarten receptive vocabulary skills, and a composite of parents “showing up” at school activities was a significant predictor of receptive vocabulary. Lastly, visits to the library significantly predicted children’s Kindergarten letter word identification skills. Implications for parent involvement and future directions for preschool programs are discussed.