

# A Qualitative Study of Teacher Perspectives on the Gearing Up for Kindergarten Program



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## Abstract

In a national research study on children entering kindergarten, teachers estimated about one-third of children have some challenges in the transition and another 16 percent have significant difficulty in making the transition (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001). Transition to school is a key developmental step for young children. Gearing Up for Kindergarten is a prevention-focused parent and family education program that supports families and community involvement that research has shown to be effective in encouraging children's learning and social-emotional development. The current study addresses the value and benefits of such learning supports as perceived by kindergarten teachers involved in facilitating a specific intervention program in their local school context.

## Background

Research from the Harvard Family Research Project (Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006) suggests that "for children and youth to be successful from birth through adolescence, there must be an array of learning supports around them" (p 1). A variety of such "learning supports" exist and involve families, schools and early childhood programs.

In North Dakota, nearly 50,000 children ages 0-5 are preparing for school entry and need appropriate knowledge and skills. Gearing Up for Kindergarten is a commonly used educational program that targets families with children in the year prior to kindergarten entry, and parents and children attend together (either 10-week or 16-week sessions).

## Objectives

- ▶ Assess the perceived value of a school readiness intervention program from the perspective of kindergarten teachers.
- ▶ Identify primary themes of a school readiness intervention associated with benefits to parents and children based on feedback from kindergarten teachers.

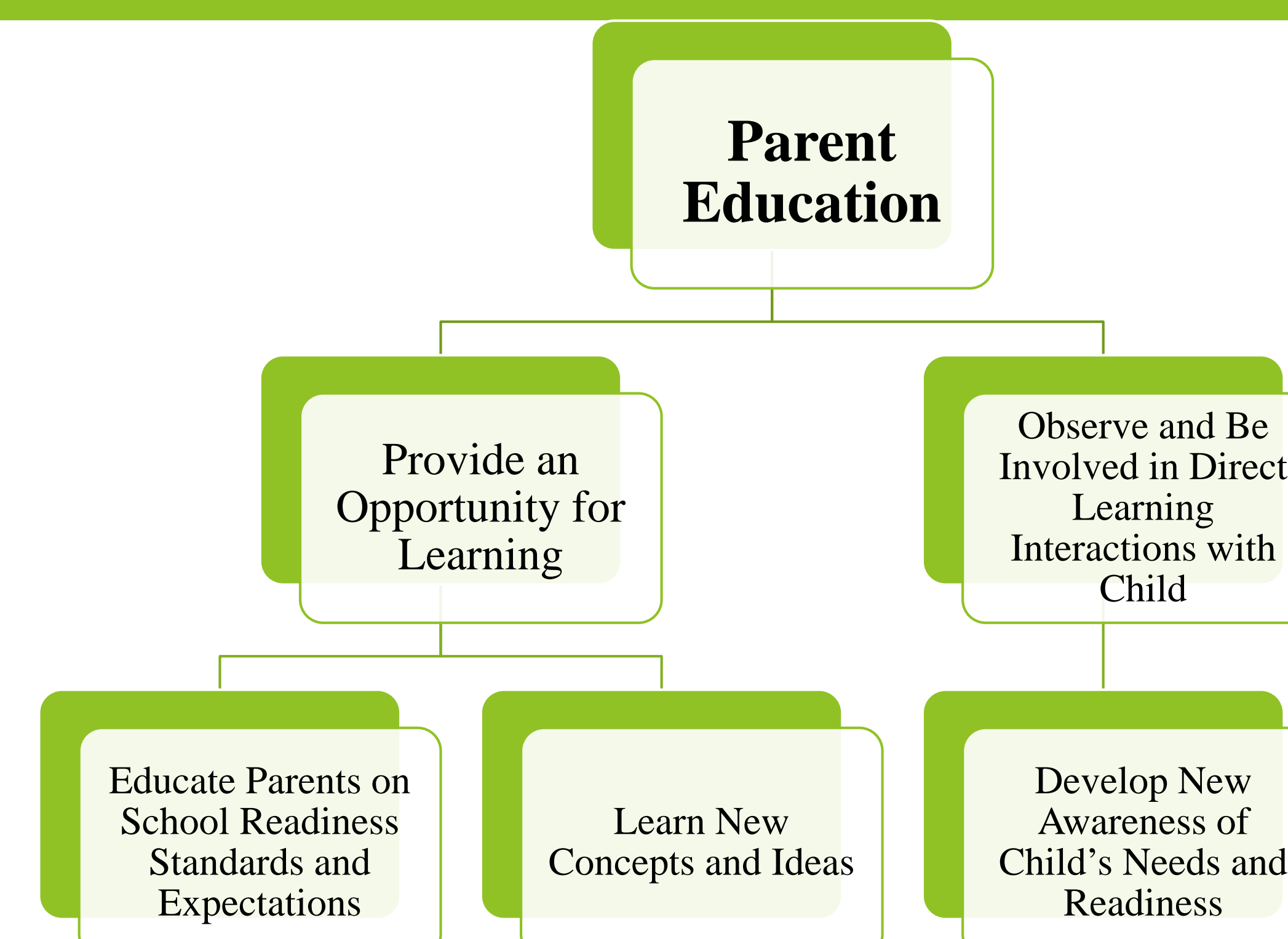
## Methods

- ▶ Qualitative interview study design with teachers delivering the Gearing Up for Kindergarten family intervention. 19 teacher participants were interviewed from 12 different program sites using a structured interview schedule.
- ▶ MAXQDA software was used to organize and code interview transcripts with kindergarten teachers. A systematic process of thematic analysis was employed to analyze 247 teacher statements and assemble the findings into 3 themes and related subthemes.

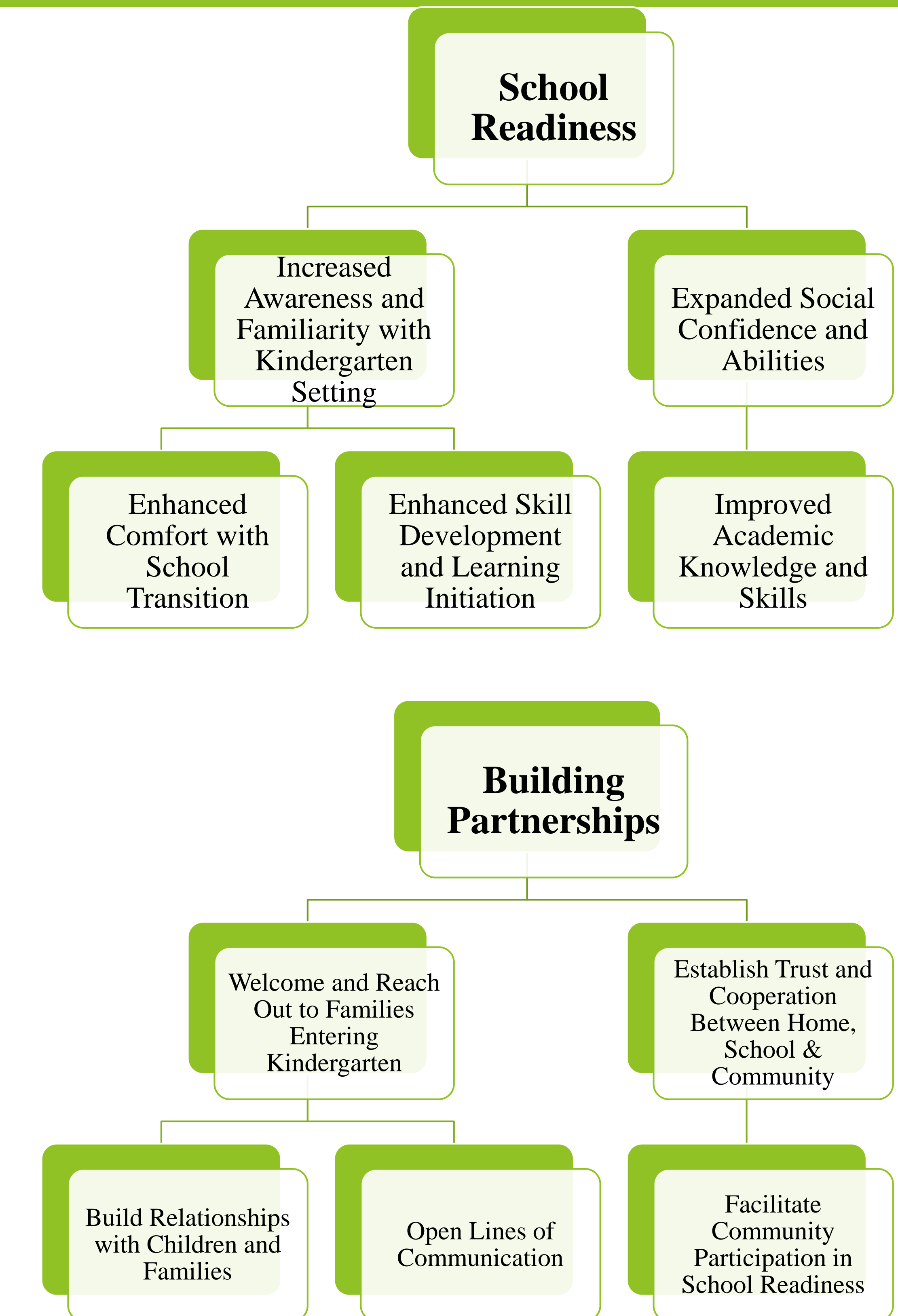
## Parents and Children in Gearing Up for Kindergarten



## Results



## Results



## Conclusions

- ▶ **Parent Education** – The program offers an opportunity to build a "learning community" that supports the transition to school, parent involvement and community investment in young children before a new year begins.
- ▶ **School Readiness** - Feedback furnished by teachers suggests program effectiveness in assisting the early academic skills, social abilities, and school knowledge and familiarity of pre-K children.
- ▶ **Building Partnerships** - Teachers highly valued the program as a connecting link to reach out to families and build relationships with incoming students and their parents well ahead of kindergarten.