

University of Nevada, Reno

**Exploring Parent Involvement in Early Learning State Standards Documents**

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requirements for the degree of Master of Science in  
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by

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## Abstract

When children have parents who are involved in their preschool experience, this is likely to be related to positive child outcomes (e.g., Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004). Developed after the Good Start, Grow Smart initiative and No Child Left Behind (Grisham-Brown, Pretti-Frontczak, Hawkins, & Winchell, 2009), early learning state standards may reflect the importance of parent involvement in the early years. In order to discover how early learning state standards address parent involvement, Walsh, Lee, Casillas, and Hansen (in review) explored six national models of parent involvement (i.e., Family Support America's principles, National PTA's standards, NAEYC's guidelines for reciprocal relationships, NAEYC's principles for effective family engagement, Harvard Family Research Project model for family involvement, and Head Start's Parent, Family, and Community Engagement framework). Specifically, researchers identified seven categories that were common across these national sources and, in turn, these categories became the framework to code 51 early learning standards documents (Walsh et al., in review). These seven coding categories were based on commonalities across six models regarding parent involvement, and an eighth category entitled "Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified" (Walsh et al., in review) was also included. The present content analysis explored the content of information found in the eighth or other category in order to better understand what early learning standards documents are portraying regarding parent involvement at the early learning level. Findings indicate that content within the early learning standards documents was presented throughout the document as information and principles, standards, strategies, examples, and miscellaneous. Each theme contained three to six thematic elements and the theme of information and

principles had the most content within it. The present findings have implications for stakeholders revising early learning standards documents.

*Keywords:* early learning, content analysis, parent involvement, pre-kindergarten, qualitative, standards

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		
I	INTRODUCTION	1
	Education Standards and	
	Parent Involvement	2
	Theoretical Framework	8
	The Current Study	13
	Definitions of Terms	14
II	REVIEW OF LITERATURE	16
	Parent Involvement	16
	Parent Involvement in the Pre-K Setting	19
	Analysis of Early Learning State Standards	22
	Parent Involvement in Early Learning	
	State Standards	30
	Research Questions	34
III	METHOD	35
	Units of Analysis	35
	Coding Framework	37
	Procedure	39
	Data Analysis	39
	Establishing Trustworthiness	42
IV	RESULTS	43
	Themes and Thematic Elements	43
V	DISCUSSION	64
	Delimitations	65

Summary of and Discussion of Findings	65
Implications, Limitations, and Suggestions for Further Research	70
Conclusion	76
REFERENCES	78
APPENDIX	94



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 - <i>National Frameworks on Parent Involvement</i>	6
Table 2- <i>Themes and Thematic Elements with Number of Units</i>	44
Table 3- <i>Examples of Developmental Domains in Thematic Element 1C</i>	48
Table 4- <i>Examples of Subject Areas in Thematic Element 1C</i>	50

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The U.S. standards movement in elementary and secondary education began about three decades ago (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002), but it was not until the beginning of the twenty-first century that the field of early childhood education became a part of the standards movement (Seefeldt, 2005). Unlike state standards at the primary and secondary level, early learning standards tend to address a variety of areas, such as social skills, children's learning dispositions, social and personal development, as well as cover academic content areas (Logue, 2007). However, because of the emphasis being placed on early education as a key factor in increasing students' success in later grades, standards explaining what children can be expected to learn in early education have become increasingly important (Scott-Little, Kagan, Frelow, & SERVE, 2005).

Although various researchers have explored the content of early learning state standards, including examining how the standards address developmental domains (e.g., Neuman & Roskos, 2005; Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2006), less research exists which specifically addresses parent involvement in early learning state standards. This is surprising, given the positive impact of parent involvement on young children, as well as the importance of standards in early childhood education (Logue, 2007; Zeece & Wang, 1998). There are many benefits of parent involvement, including its contribution to student success (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992; Epstein, 1992; Izzo et al., 1999; Keith et al., 1998). In the pre-K setting, parent involvement has been shown to encourage cognitive, social, and personal skills (Zeece & Wang, 1998), as well as helping to prevent future delinquency (Zigler, Taussig, & Black, 1992). In addition, parent involvement, particularly by low-income families, has been shown to be associated with

lower grade retention rates, children’s higher reading achievements, and fewer years in special education by the time children were in eighth grade (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999).

Parent involvement is an integral part of a child's school experience and encompasses a variety of activities (Epstein, 2001). Parent involvement needs to be taken just as seriously as standards given the importance of its effects on student outcomes (Brilliant, 2008). Parent involvement and early learning standards can be part of the same system, seen in Figure 1, which also includes curriculum, assessments, teaching practices, and child outcomes. Figure 1 adds family involvement practices to the proposed system. It seems plausible that alignment between curriculum, assessments, early learning standards, and teaching practices along with family involvement practices help to build a coherent system to support positive child outcomes. It is important to note that the current study is focused only on early learning standards and parent involvement.

Figure 1. Early Learning Standards and Parent Involvement in One System

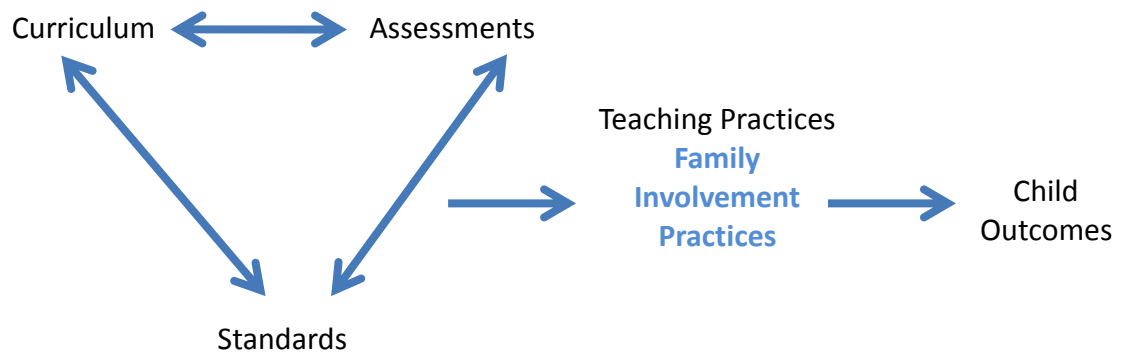


Figure 1. Adapted from “District of Columbia Common Core Early Learning Standards 101,” by L. Gordon (2013)

### **Education Standards and Parent Involvement**

The importance of parent involvement in the educational setting is not lost on the history of education. For example, Section 1118, Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act

is devoted solely to parent involvement and was designed to offer parents insight into their children's education in order to "more effectively share responsibility with their children's schools" (No Child Left Behind, Title 1, Part A, 2004, p. 1). This means that a fundamental area of No Child Left Behind is family involvement.

The United States, excluding Texas, Oklahoma, Alaska, Nebraska, Indiana, and Virginia, have adopted the K-12 Common Core standards, which also have a goal of bringing students, teachers, and parents together to ensure positive student outcomes (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). Traditional areas, such as math and language, are addressed, while non-traditional areas, such as parent involvement, are not explicitly included in the Common Core at present. Nonetheless, the Parent Teacher Association has created supporting documents for parents in English and Spanish to make the Common Core standards palatable to parents (May, 2013).

Along this line, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, or NAEYC, and the National Association for Early Childhood Specialists in the State Department of Education, or NAECS/SDE (2002), state that strong support for families is needed for early learning standards documents to support positive child outcomes. Young children have an innate desire to learn, and early learning standards can help families and teachers contribute to positive learning experiences for young children (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002).

Although the standards movement did not make an initial impact on early childhood education, with research and increased public awareness, creating standards at the pre-K level became increasingly more important (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002). With the recent implementation of the Common Core State Standards, NAEYC (2012)

urges the early childhood education field to join with the “knowledge and experience” provided by educators in “K-12 education to ensure that the Common Core meets its goals of promoting college and career readiness for all children” (p. 8).

There are risks associated with implementing standards, such as placing the requirement to reach standards on children's shoulders rather than teachers', but the benefits, including helping to focus curriculum and instruction, far outweigh the risks (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002). In fact, NAEYC and NAECS/SDE (2002) suggest that the process of educators, parents, and scholars discussing what should be included on standards documents can help create "strong reciprocal relationships" between families and the professional community (p. 4). These discussions can be especially critical in regards to the Common Core State Standards. As previously mentioned, the Common Core State Standards are enforced in K-12 , and early childhood educators should familiarize themselves with the Common Core as early learning standards linked to K-12 standards create a cohesive and unified approach (New York Prekindergarten Foundations for the Common Core, n.d.). The implementation of early learning standards in early childhood education can contribute to the connection between family, schools, and communities by establishing a more *unified approach* to young children's education (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002).

**Head Start and Parent Involvement.** Head Start, a major federal preschool program supporting low-income families, has empirically demonstrated the benefits of parent involvement. The Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES), which collects data from a nationally representative sample of Head Start programs, found that children with more involved parents showed more positive behavior, as well as

scored higher on emergent literacy and math assessments (Parent Involvement, 2006). In addition, “Head Start centers with high parent participation were more active in affecting institutional change in the community than Head Start centers where parent participation was low” (Midco, 1972 as cited by Powell, 1989, p. 84).

**National Frameworks on Parent Involvement.** An existing analysis on the early learning standards documents has considered a national framework, specifically the National Education Goals Panel description of school readiness, as the analytic framework (see Scott-Little et al., 2006). There are several national frameworks that address expectations for parent involvement. Table 1 presents the name of each organization and some examples of how each addresses expectations for parent involvement.

Table 1

*National Frameworks on Parent Involvement*

Name of Organization	Examples of Family Involvement
National PTA standards for family-school partnerships	“Standard 1: Welcoming all families into the school community” “Standard 2: Communicating effectively”
NAEYC principles for reciprocal relationships with families	“Guideline 5B: Practitioners work in collaborative partnerships with families” “Guideline 5C: Family members are welcome in the setting and there are multiple opportunities for family participation”
NAEYC principles of effective family engagement	“Principle 2: Teachers and programs engage families in two-way communication” “Principle 3: Teachers and families engage families in ways that are truly reciprocal”
Harvard Family Research Project model for family involvement	“Home-School Relationships” “Parenting”
Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework	“Positive Parent-Child Relationships” “Family Connections to Peers and Community”
Family Support America guidelines for family support practice	“Principle 3: Recognize families as resources and parents as leaders” “Principle 9: Model family support in all activities”

It is crucial to consider national standards on family involvement in regards to early learning standards because these national standards have been researched and/or explored in depth, helping to provide a framework for parent involvement in the early learning setting. Including parent involvement in early learning standards is important because parent involvement is crucial to a child’s early learning experience. Parent involvement is related to positive outcomes for children (Christenson et al., 1992;

Epstein, 1992; Izzo et al., 1999; Keith et al., 1998; Zeece & Wang, 1998; Zigler, Taussig, & Black, 1992).

Because early childhood classrooms can be under a variety of agencies, variation in state early standards is expected (Seefeldt, 2005). Early learning standards have been analyzed by several researchers (e.g., Dusenbury, Zadrazil, Mart, & Weissberg, 2011; Neuman & Roskos, 2005; Scott-Little et al., 2005). As one analysis revealed, there is variation in quantity and quality. There are dramatic differences between states "in the number and types of items [or standards] included in their standards documents" (Scott-Little et al., 2005, p. 17). Across standards documents, there is variation in quantity with the total number of standards being included in early learning standards documents ranging from 50 to 371 (Scott-Little et al., 2005) as well as quality. Not all states' early learning standards accurately reflect an appreciation for many interrelated developmental domains, with most focusing on the language and cognition domains (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2006). In fact, "the mean percentage of language and communication and cognition items is well over twice the mean percentage of standards items that address the physical, social–emotional or approaches toward learning domains" (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2006, p. 164). This should be concerning to educators and parents, considering that social-emotional development can be crucial to children's later school success (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2006).

Early childhood policies and standards include provisions for parent-school connections (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), but the ability to form peer and adult relationships is only addressed in about 8% of all states' standards (Scott-Little et al., 2006). Overall, there is much "variation between and within different types of early



childhood programs in the quality of connection to parents” (Powell, 2003, p. 141), although expectations for family-centered practices in early childhood education have been growing (Powell, 2003). According to Dunst, Johanson, Trivette, and Hamby (1991), family centered refers to "a combination of beliefs and practices that define particular ways of working with families that are consumer driven and competency enhancing" (p. 115). Regardless, Scott-Little et al. (2006) insist that in order to completely understand early learning standards documents, more research that analyzes the content of early learning standards documents is needed. Walsh et al. (in review) explored parent involvement in all 50 states' and the District of Columbia's early learning standards (a total of 51 documents), seeking to discover the extent state-level early childhood standards documents reflect the main points of six national organizations' family models regarding parent involvement. Through their research, Walsh et al. (in review) discovered that while many states' early learning standards address parent involvement, many standards are not supported by national organizations' frameworks for family involvement. Because of this, it is imperative to examine in what other ways states' early learning standards documents are addressing parent involvement, which is the basis of the current study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The current study was guided by both Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bioecological model and Joyce L. Epstein's (2001) six types of parent involvement, which helped to highlight the importance of parent involvement in children's education. There is special focus on the child in both approaches, with recognition that the child is, indeed, at the heart of all interaction regarding parent involvement (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Epstein,

2001). However, both approaches also consider the child's parents, teachers, and school environment, all of which play a crucial role in a child's education (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Epstein, 2001). Bronfenbrenner (1994) utilizes a systems approach, while Epstein (2001) uses a model of overlapping spheres of influence, with her six types of parent involvement falling into areas of overlap within those spheres.

**Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model.** Bronfenbrenner (1994) postulated that the ecological environment could be conceptualized into five organizational concepts: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) theory emphasizes studying the relationships among contexts, including during periods of transitions, such as beginning kindergarten. Instead of focusing on single subsystems, such as the family and education, Bronfenbrenner (1994) suggests analyzing the relationships between these systems in order to make inferences regarding the family.

The microsystem, in the broadest sense, is the immediate setting of the child in the family. It consists of the "activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting...containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of personal belief" (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 227). In sum, the microsystem consists of the child's immediate environment. This can include many different settings, such as family, school, and peer group. When applied to parent involvement, the teacher, parents, and other school faculty all play an integral role in the microsystem.

The mesosystem is made up of the connections and processes that occur between two or more settings containing the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This

includes connections between home and school. Essentially, the mesosystem is where parent involvement occurs. Bronfenbrenner (1994) cites the work of Epstein (1983) as an example of the mesosystem, using her work on "two-way communication and participation in decision making by parents and teachers" (p. 40). This two-way communication contributed to greater academic student success of children, as well as greater initiative and independence in children (Epstein, 1983, as cited by Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The exosystem is made up of the connections and processes taking place between two or more settings (i.e. school board or community center), with at least one of these settings not including the child. Although the settings in the exosystem do not contain the child, the events that occur in these settings can indirectly have an influence on the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). An example of this would be school board decisions that have to do with school policies regarding parent involvement.

The macrosystem is made up of the larger, cultural system, including the "belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options" that make up the first three broader systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40). Examples of influences found in the macrosystem could include major historical events and significant economic changes. A country in a recession, like the United States, generally has less money to put towards education, which can have an impact on the child. Because of the growing diversity in the United States, "the impact of cultural beliefs and broad ideological differences within the macrosystem can have a huge impact on school-family partnerships and student success" (Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2002 as cited by Patrikakaou et al., 2005, p. 11).

The last system, the chronosystem, is the passage of time. The chronosystem "encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also of the environment in which that person lives" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40). As a child grows older, completes pre-K, and transitions to kindergarten, he will have a variety of interactions and experiences due to the passage of time, such as new technology and new educational research (Coleman, 2013).

**Epstein's framework for six types of parental involvement.** While Bronfenbrenner's (1994) developmental ecological approach demonstrates conceptual importance of parent involvement, Epstein (2001) explains the important role of teachers and programs in parent involvement. She explores the roles of schools, communities, families, and children regarding education and how these separate roles intertwine to create partnerships that help benefit children and their education. Epstein (2001) asserts that these partnerships are important because of the emphasis placed on two aspects of the child: the school child and the home child brought together. While the extant research is clear that parent involvement is important for child outcomes (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Olds et al., 1997; Zeece & Wang, 1998), Epstein (2001) notes that there is still some confusion and disagreement on "which practices of involvement are important and how to obtain high participation from all families" (p. 3).

Epstein's (2001) model of family and school relations helps put the various components of parent involvement into context. The model consists of three overlapping spheres: the family, the school, and the community, and has both an internal structure and external structure. The model accounts for "history, development, and changing experiences of parents, teachers, and students" (Epstein, 2001, p. 27). The external

structure of the model takes into account time (including the age and grade level of the child) and the experiences of and pressures on family and schools. The internal structure focuses on interpersonal relationships and important patterns of influence (Epstein, 2001). The external and internal structures of the model are closely related, with the relationships found in the internal structure being influenced by time, experiences, actions, and attitudes of the external structure (Epstein, 2001). The model also reflects the importance of parent involvement as a variable that can be increased or decreased through the efforts of parents, teachers, students, and administrators (Epstein, 2001).

In addition to the model of family and school relations, Epstein (2001) also created a framework of six primary types of parent involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. These six parent involvement types "fall within the areas of overlap in the spheres of influence model" (Epstein, 2001, p. 43), as they deal with experiences of family and schools (the external structure) and interpersonal relationships (the internal structure).

The first type of parent involvement is parenting, which includes helping parents with child-rearing skills, understanding child development, and family support (Epstein, 2001). The second type of parent involvement is communicating (Epstein, 2001). Communicating includes both school-to-home and home-to-school communications, including communication with families regarding student progress and school programs. It is important that communication is not one-sided; in order to be meaningful, communication must be two-way, or even three-way and many-way, in order to effectively connect schools, families, students, and the community (Epstein, 2001). The

third type of parent involvement is volunteering, which involves families volunteering for different school programs and events.

Learning at home is Epstein's (2001) fourth type of parent involvement and includes families helping children with homework and other school-related activities and decisions, such as discussing what children have learned in class and monitoring school work. The fifth type is decision making, which involves families being included in school decision making through methods like the Parent Teacher Association, or PTA, and other parent organizations, such as school committees and councils (Epstein, 2001). Epstein's (2001) sixth type of parent involvement is collaborating with the community. Collaborating with the community includes coordinating the work of businesses and other community groups to help strengthen school programs and student learning (Epstein, 2001).

### **The Current Study**

The current qualitative study examined a portion of the data from Walsh, Lee, Casillas, and Hansen's (in review) study, which explored the inclusion of family involvement concepts in early learning standards documents. Specifically, the current study sought to discover the extent state-level early childhood standards documents reflected main points of six national organizations' family models regarding parent involvement. The six national organizations examined were: "1) Family Support America's principles, 2) National PTA's standards, 3) NAEYC's guidelines for reciprocal relationships, 4) NAEYC's principles for effective family engagement, 5) Harvard Family Research Project model for family involvement, and 6) Head Start's Parent, Family, and Community Engagement framework" (Walsh et al. in review, p. 8).

Using these six national organizations, Walsh and colleagues (in review) created a research-based and recognizable framework consisting of eight categories. Seven of the eight categories were based on the six national organizations' family models regarding parent involvement, and an eighth category entitled "Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified" was also included (Walsh et al., in review). This eighth category was included in order to account for information in the early learning standards documents that did not fit into the seven categories based upon the national organizations' family models regarding parent involvement. The present study explored the early standards documents content categorized into the category "Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified" in order to better understand what standard and non-standard information in this category is portraying regarding parent involvement at the preschool level.

### **Definitions of Terms**

**Pre-K.** The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines pre-kindergarten (pre-K) programs as a "distinct group of programs designed specifically to make sure that preschoolers are ready for kindergarten and will be succeeding in school by third grade" (Colker, 2008, p. 22). All pre-K programs are governed by high program standards, serve 3- and 4-year-olds, and center on school readiness. Pre-K programs do not have to be affiliated with public schools, although the majority (70%) are (Gillam, 2005 as cited by Colker, 2008). Pre-K programs are also sometimes referred to as preschool programs or early learning programs (Berger, 2015). As shown in the Appendix, eight early learning standards documents use the term pre-kindergarten, while five documents use the term preschool in the title.

**Parent involvement.** U.S. law defines parent involvement as "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (Public Education Network & National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, 2004, para. 5). These school activities could include parents helping their child's learning, being actively involved in their child's education, and serving as partners in their child's education. According to Epstein (1992), there are six types of parent involvement, each described in detail in the above theoretical framework section: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

**Standards.** Standards for children, specifically early learning standards, "define the specific behaviors, knowledge, and, sometimes, dispositions children should master by the time they enter kindergarten" (Logue, 2007, p. 38). Typically, they are designed to apply to children from ages 3-5 (Kagan & Scott-Little, 2004) and "must be appropriate for each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers and English learners, and for children with developmental delays and disabilities" (U.S. Department of Education, Definitions, 2014). Finally, early learning standards "must cover all the Essential Domains of School Readiness, and must be developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate" (U.S. Department of Education, Definitions, 2014, n.p.).

**Standards Documents.** Pre-K standards documents should "distinguish clearly between program standards and child outcome standards" (Bodrova, Leong, & Shore, 2004, p. 1). Standards should also "be written in ways that allow for appropriate, effective, assessment" (Bodrova, Leong, & Shore, 2004, p. 1). Standards documents typically "articulate what should be taught and what children should learn prior to



kindergarten entry" (Scott-Little, Lesko, Martella, & Milburn, 2007, para. 4). Scott-Little et al. (2005) categorized the content of early learning standards documents into five main categories: "physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches toward learning, language and communication, and cognition and general knowledge" (p. 2). Early learning standards documents, including the Nevada Pre-Kindergarten Standards document (2010), often include content in non-standard locations, such as an introduction, statement of purpose, history, and guiding principles section, all of which were examined in the current study.

## **Chapter II: Review of Literature**

### **Parent Involvement**

School-family partnerships can be incredibly beneficial for children and are centered on two aspects: parent involvement and parent engagement, but what is the difference between involvement and engagement? While involvement and engagement are commonly used interchangeably, they are possibly different dimensions of school-family partnerships (Fantuzzo et al., 2013). One definition of parent involvement is the variety of ways that parents participate in their child's learning, while engagement is considered a sub-strand of involvement that focuses on parent and child interactions (Fantuzzo et al., 2013). In another vein, Ferlazzo (2011) explains that a school seeking parent involvement tends to offer suggestions on ways parents can be involved, "identifying projects, needs, and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute" whereas a school seeking parent engagement tends to let parents take more of the lead, "listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about" (What's the difference?, para. 2). An example of parent involvement would be requesting parents bake cookies for a

school fundraiser, while home visiting would be an example of parent engagement (Ferlazzo, 2011). Both multi-dimensional constructs can be very helpful for not only students, but also for families, schools, and communities (Ferlazzo, 2011).

Children's potential greatly depends on the settings where they grow and learn, as well as the interconnections between those settings (Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005). In fact, more supportive bonds between settings create more potential for healthy development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979 as cited by Patrikakaou et al., 2005). The links between schools and families are one of these important connections. Although there is no sole list of techniques that encompass a family-school partnership (Decker, Decker, & Brown, 2007), one way that schools and families can build a connection is through parent involvement. Parent involvement has been widely found to be important and helpful in children's education (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995; Powell, Son, File, & Froiland, 2012; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). A substantial amount of research has found parent involvement to be an important contributing factor to student academic success (Christenson et al., 1992; Eldridge, 2001; Epstein 1992; Izzo et al., 1999; Keith et al., 1998; Woolley & Bowen, 2007). For example, parents who are encouraged to help with reading activities at home have children with documented reading gains (Eldridge, 2001). Children with involved parents also have more positive attitudes about school, improved attendance, and better homework habits than do children whose parents are less involved (Epstein, 2000).

However, parents themselves must feel like their involvement matters. Georgiou and Tourva (2007) found that a link exists between the "parental belief that their involvement matters and the propensity to actually get involved" in parents of elementary

and high school students (p. 480). Parent involvement was found to be ignited by a belief that it is helpful in children's school success (Georgiou & Tourva, 2007). In addition, parent involvement can lead to more successful social, behavioral, and academic outcomes (Ball, 2006; Marcon, 1999). Collins and Deloria (1983) suggest that these positive effects on school performance, confidence, and self-image can be long term, with positive effects still being seen up to 15 years after a child's preschool experience.

A meta-analysis by Fan and Chen (2001) explored the importance of parent involvement regarding students' academic achievement. This meta-analysis included 25 empirical studies that used "Pearson correlations between any of the parental involvement indicators and any of the achievement outcome variables" (p. 5). Indicators of parental involvement included parent-teacher communication and home supervision, while achievement outcome variables included GPA and test scores (Fan & Chen, 2001). It proved to be difficult to create an operational definition for the terms 'academic achievement' and 'parental involvement', as definitions turned out to be "diverse and very different across studies" (Fan & Chen, 2001, p. 5). Two types of meta-analyses were conducted. The first included all correlation coefficients between parent involvement and students' achievement, and the second averaged multiple effect measures within one study, with each study only contributing one effect size measure to the analysis (Fan & Chen, 2001). Fan and Chen's (2001) findings indicated an overall medium effect size of  $r=.25$ , which suggest that "parental involvement does have positive influence on students' academic achievement" (pp. 11-12). This finding confirmed the "intuition harbored by many educators and researchers, that parental involvement and students' academic achievement are positively related" (Fan & Chen, 2001, p. 12). In addition, certain

dimensions of parent involvement had either stronger or weaker relationships to students' academic achievement.

For example, "parents' supervision of children at home (e.g., home rules for watching TV, for doing school work, etc.), ha[d] the weakest relationship with students' academic achievement" although this finding should not be "interpreted simplistically" to mean that home supervision does not enhance children's education at all" (Fan & Chen, 2001, p. 13). On the other hand, "parents' aspiration and expectation for children's educational achievement appear[ed] to have the strongest relationship with students' academic achievement" (Fan & Chen, 2001, p. 13).

Fan and Chen's (2001) general conclusion was that although it may be easy to assume that parent involvement has a positive influence on students' academic achievement, because of the "multifaceted nature" of parent involvement and the "different measurements" for academic achievement, much of the empirical literature still remains inconsistent (p. 17). Finally, the study ended with a call for future researchers to pay close attention to the operational definitions and different dimensions associated with parent involvement and academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001). The current study helped to explore these various dimensions of parent involvement in the context of early learning standards documents.

### **Parent Involvement in the Pre-K Setting**

Parent involvement in the pre-K setting has proven to have just as many positive effects as it does in the K-12 setting. In addition, parent involvement is considered a key component of high-quality pre-K settings (Hilado et al., 2011). However, far less research exists exhibiting the importance of parent involvement in a pre-K setting as

compared to the K-12 setting (Arnold, Zeljo, & Doctoroff, 2008). Pre-K settings that feature family support components "are more likely to provide long-term benefits for children than programs that do not have such components" (Olds et al., 1997; Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993 as cited by Patrikakou et al., 2005). These long term benefits include improved receptive vocabulary skills (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004), as well as children's increased cognitive and social-emotional school readiness (Henrich & Blackman-Jones, 2006).

Zeece and Wang (1998) found that when a strong parent involvement component was included, Head Start children had improved cognitive, personal, and social skills. In addition, only early childhood programs with strong family support components have exhibited competence in preventing delinquency (Zigler, Taussig, & Black, 1992). Miedel and Reynolds (1999) found low-income families' continual participation in preschool and kindergarten activities was associated with lower grade retention rates, children's higher reading achievements, and fewer years in special education when children were in eighth grade. In addition, parent involvement may help enhance communication and motor skills in children (Marcon, 1999). Finally, Powell et al. (2010) found when comparing children with parents who were highly involved versus children with parents who were less involved, "children whose parents reported relatively high levels of involvement in school had a lower score in problem behaviors and a higher score in mathematics skills and social skills at the end of the school year" (pp. 284-285).

It is important to consider individual programs' definitions of parent involvement, which can vary greatly among administrators and across programs (Hilado et al., 2011). Administrators believe "involvement looks very different depending on the

characteristics of the population, the region of the state, and the general needs of the community" (Hilado et al., 2011, pp. 351-352). Henrich and Gadaire (2008) suggest that parents should be encouraged to take part in "active" types of parent involvement, like volunteering, rather than participating in more "passive" activities, such as asking parents to donate food for a school's canned food drive. In addition, Hilado et al. (2011) found that the number of resources a pre-K program had did not serve as a strong indicator of parent involvement; rather, the relationships between parents and teachers, including teachers personally inviting parents to be involved, stood as the strongest indicator of parent involvement. Sometimes, parents' perception of teacher responsiveness can have just as major of an impact as the parents' involvement. According to Powell et al. (2010), "parent involvement in school activities and perceived teacher responsiveness to children and parents" are two aspects of the parent-school relationship that "hold particular promise of enhancing pre-kindergarten effects on children" (p. 270). In addition, perceived teacher responsiveness significantly contributed to positive reading outcomes and social outcomes for children (Powell et al., 2010). Parents need to feel accepted by their children's teachers and in their children's classrooms, and teachers can help build that acceptance by expressing openness to suggestions, new information, and other types of comments about the classroom, as well as keeping supportive and friendly attitudes toward parents (Powell, 2001). Finally, Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (1999) note that program influences are another important factor which relate to rates of family involvement.

Not only does parent involvement in the pre-K setting benefit children, it also may benefit families. DiNatale (2002) concluded that "families who are involved in their

children's early learning classrooms have a better understanding of their children's education" (as cited by Morrison, Storey, & Zhang, 2011). In addition, parent involvement with the Head Start preschool program has been associated with an increase in parent-child activities at home (O'Brien et al., 2002). In sum, preschool serves "not only to acculturate children", but also to "prepare families to share the responsibility for their children's education" (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999, p. 436). In addition, when parents participate in school activities, they can gain information about their children's learning and development, as well as get knowledge regarding their child's abilities, which can help parents improve promotion of their child's school-related abilities (Powell, 2001).

### **Analysis of Early Learning State Standards**

It was not until the beginning of the twenty-first century that the field of early childhood education became a part of the standards movement (Seefeldt, 2005). While standards have directed K-12 schools' practices in education for over decade, the majority of the efforts in developing and implementing early childhood learning standards has occurred in more recent years (Scott-Little et al., 2006). The education of children five years of age and older is widely viewed as the responsibility of the states, while education at the pre-K level can take place under many different agencies, such as businesses, colleges and universities, churches, and community agencies, as well as the local, state, and federal government (Seefeldt, 2005). Because of this variation in agencies, many early education programs have little opportunity for give-and-take discussion about standards, though this does not mean that early educators are unaware of the standards (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002).

Scott-Little et al. (2005) performed an important and notable content analysis of early learning standards that provided much information on depth of early learning standards. The purpose of their study was to analyze the content of early learning standards, or as they defined them, "documents that articulate expectations for children's development and learning during the preschool period (ages 3-5 years)" (Scott-Little et al., 2005, p. 1). Standards documents were collected from 36 states. They specifically examined the extent that various dimensions, such as physical and socio-emotional, of development and learning have been addressed in early learning standards, as well as the emphasis being placed on each dimension (Scott-Little et al., 2005). In addition, the researchers explored how the extent and emphasis of specific indicators of children's learning and development were addressed in early learning standards (Scott-Little et al., 2005).

The documents were analyzed using a coding scheme developed after extensively studying National Educational Goals Panel's (NEGP) dimensions of school readiness, the early learning standards documents themselves, and research related to children's early development and learning (Scott-Little et al., 2005). The coding framework included five dimensions of learning and development: physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches towards learning, language and communication, and cognition and general knowledge (Scott-Little et al., 2005). Next, 36 total indicators were developed using each dimension. Using the coding scheme, each standard within a document was coded according to the indicator that best fit the content of the standard. Each standard was coded based on content and only for one indicator (Scott-Little et al., 2005).



The overall conclusion formed was that there is great variation in numbers and types of standards found each state's early learning standards documents (Scott-Little et al., 2005). Cognition and general knowledge was the dimension with the highest number of standards coded into it (38.6%), followed by language and communication (30.9%), social and emotional development (12%), approaches towards learning (10%), and physical well-being and motor development (9%) (Scott-Little et al., 2005). Scott-Little et al.'s (2005) study is important to recognize because their work shows that early learning standards are being revised, making it "an opportune time to examine the content of early learning standards and provide guidance for states as they are developing and revising standards" (p. 6). Finally, the study ends with a call for further research to be done to "better understand the content of standards and to determine the optimal balance of standards across different areas of children's learning and development" (Scott-Little et al., 2005, p. 7). The current thesis helped to answer this call by examining the important topic of parent involvement within the context of early learning standards.

Early learning standards include the cognitive domain, but also "address children's dispositions for learning and the social skills underlying school success in addition to addressing academic content areas" (Logue, 2007, p. 36). Although there has been some concern regarding early learning standards in preschool hindering appropriate practices for teaching young children (Teachers College, Columbia University, 2004), Grisham-Brown et al. (2009) found that young children can make "progress toward early learning standards within the context of naturally occurring classroom activities and routines" (p. 140). Instead of solely addressing academic subjects, such as literacy, mathematics, science, and creative arts, early learning standards can also help provide support for

teachers and programs in accommodating children's social and personal development (Logue, 2007). In fact, one main purpose of early learning standards documents was to improve teaching practices (Scott-Little, Lesko, Martella, & Milburn, 2007). This is positive, considering that teachers in early childhood and kindergarten can sometimes receive drastically different training, with some teachers being trained well in social and emotional development, as well as parental involvement, while other teachers' training involves a focus on instructing and assessing academic content (Logue, 2007).

Even though early learning standards are designed to benefit preschoolers, early learning standards also often designed to attempt to align with K-12 standards (Scott-Little et al., 2007). For example, New York Prekindergarten Foundations for the Common Core "have been revised to fully encompass the New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards" (n.d., p. 3). Discrepancies between early learning standards and kindergarten standards, as well as discrepancies between teacher training, can create challenges for teachers and students when children make the transition from pre-K to kindergarten (Logue, 2007). In order to reduce these challenges, most states are addressing, in some way, alignment with K-12 standards, which also could be a response to the federal Good Start, Grow Smart initiative (Scott-Little et al., 2007).

Because of the emphasis being placed on early education as a key factor in increasing students' success in later grades, standards explaining what children can be expected to learn in early education have become increasingly important (Scott-Little, et al., 2005). Because of this increasing importance, content analyses of early learning standards has been done by various authors (Dusenbury, Zadrazil, Mart, & Weissberg, 2011; Neuman & Roskos, 2005; Scott-Little, et al., 2005). The approach of a content

analysis has proven to be of great importance because of the dramatic differences between states "in the number and types of items [standards] included in their standards documents" (Scott-Little et al., 2005, p. 17), with the total number of standards included in early learning standards documents ranging from 50 to 371. Most K-12 programs rely on the Common Core (NAEYC, 2012). Early learning state standards frequently have to speak to a variety of standard sets, such as standards created for Head Start programs or literacy programs (Grisham-Brown, 2008 as cited by Grisham-Brown, Pretti-Frontczak, Hawkins, & Winchell, 2009). In addition, the creation of early learning standards often relies heavily on the consensus of experts in certain content areas, which may or may not include solid, scientific evidence (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). Along with the variation in types of standards, early learning standards are also underused by many professionals in "planning and assessing developmental learning strategies for individual and groups of children" (Logue, 2007, p. 40). This is unexpected, as some states are collecting information on preschoolers' progress toward statewide early learning standards (Grisham-Brown et al., 2009).

If such variation exists between states' early learning standards documents, then what exactly are these documents saying about early learning? Although most states' early learning standards outline basic subjects such as mathematics, literacy, and language, "differences appear to reflect the specificity of the indicators or benchmarks more than the particular domain or skill itself" (Neuman & Roskos, 2005, p. 137). About half of the states utilize traditional subject areas, such as mathematics, reading, and science, as basic resources for their early learning standards. The remaining states depend on domains set forth by the NEGP, The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework,

or a combination of multiple sources (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). Kagan and Scott-Little (2004) found that seven of the 29 states analyzed had "standards that addressed the five domains identified by the NEGP: physical and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches toward learning, language and literacy, and cognition and general knowledge", with language and literacy being the most commonly addressed domain, followed by cognition and general knowledge (p. 391). This focus on language and cognition domains with less emphasis being placed on social-emotional, physical, and approaches to learning domains suggests "not all states have consistently reflected early childhood research and theory in the content of their early learning standards" (Scott-Little et al., 2006). Approaches to learning is a domain that addresses "aspects of children's characteristic responses to learning situations, such as the child's curiosity, flexibility, or persistence" (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Head Start, Domain 7: Approaches to Learning, para. 2).

Much time, effort, various voices, and research has typically been involved in the creation of the early learning standards for all states. There is also evidence of implementation of these standards in the classroom. Considering implementation is important when examining standards because standards have little value if they are not actually being used in the classroom setting. The extensive research done on states' learning standards at all levels would be rather meaningless if they were not understood by teachers and parents and actually implemented. According to Scott-Little et al., (2007) even though in

2002 no state had a monitoring system in place to gauge the extent to which programs used the early learning standards, in 2005, respondents in 17 states

indicated that their state had developed a system to monitor the use of the early learning standards, and four states were in the process of developing a monitoring system (*Accountability for the Use of Early Learning Standards*, para. 1).

However, most states do not indicate a certain program for their early learning standards to be implemented; rather, the states hope their respective early learning standards “would be used in a variety of early care and education programs in the state” (Scott-Little et al., 2006, p. 156).

A study by Scott-Little, Lesko, Martella, and Milburn (2007) examined the implementation of early learning standards. Specifically, the purpose of their study was to “document and analyze trends in the development and implementation of early standards in the United States” (Purpose of This Study, para. 1). In order to do this, a survey was made by “members of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) Early Childhood State Collaborative on Student Standards Assessments (ECEA-SCASS), a collaborative group of state specialists engaged in implementing early childhood standards and assessments” (Methods, Survey Instrument, para. 1). The development of the survey began with a review of questions asked by Scott-Little, Kagan, and Frelow (2003), a look into issues regarding early learning standards found in recent literature, and an examination of the authors' own experiences with implementing early learning standards (Scott-Little et al., 2007). Next, a draft of survey questions was reviewed by a multitude of different stakeholder groups (Scott-Little et al., 2007). After incorporating suggestions from the different stakeholder groups, a 72-item instrument was created “with a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions that generally fell into the following categories: early learning standards, child assessments, program assessment,

and contact information" (Scott-Little et al., 2007, Methods, Survey Instrument, para. 1). The survey was then emailed to early childhood specialists in state departments in June, 2005 (Scott-Little et al., 2007). Forty-one states' stakeholders and the District of Columbia responded (Scott-Little et al., 2007). Because many states were "in the process of developing and implementing initiatives related to early learning standards and assessments at the time," the results of this study prove to be more useful for looking at trends across states rather than for giving specific information on single states (Scott-Little et al., 2007, Results, para. 1).

Overall, Scott-Little et al. (2007) found that 49 states and the District of Columbia have early learning standards, and most of these standards documents targeted the three to five year old range, although an increasing number were addressing the infant-toddler age group. The most commonly stated purpose of early learning standards documents was "to be a resource to improve the instruction or curriculum to be used in early childhood classrooms" (Scott-Little et al., 2007, Purposes of Early Learning Standards, para. 1). Every state indicated that their early learning standards had addressed alignment with K-12 standards (Scott-Little et al., 2007). Many states also reported they were addressing the concern of how to use early learning standards with children from special circumstances, such as low-income children, English-language learners, and children with disabilities (Scott-Little et al., 2007). In regards to implementation, the "vast majority of early learning standards are intended to be used in the state's prekindergarten program," although they are also used in a variety of other programs including Head Start, child care, and Even Start (Scott-Little et al., 2007, Implementation of Early Standards, para. 2). Rather than mailing standards documents out to parents and teachers

in the community or posting the documents on the web, the majority of states indicated that they were "disseminating the document widely" (Strategies to Support Implementation of the Early Learning Standards, para. 1). Thirty-six states were also providing in-service training regarding early learning standards, ranging in length from one hour to one year. Finally, the states indicated that they were very serious about making sure their early learning standards are actually being used, as the number of states with a monitoring system in place or under development has dramatically increased since Scott-Little et al.'s (2003) initial study.

Scott-Little et al. (2007) called for future research to "determine how early learning standards fit within the greater context of early care and education and what impact they might be having on the field" (Future Research, para. 3). To conclude, states are very active in the development and implementation of early learning standards, and further examination is needed regarding how to effectively use the standards to support teaching and positive child outcomes (Scott-Little et al., 2007). Given the relationship between positive child outcomes and parent involvement (Ball, 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001; Marcon, 1999), the current study aims to explore early learning standards for inclusion of parent involvement practices and information.

### **Parent Involvement in Early Learning State Standards**

Many early childhood policies and standards include provisions for parent-school connections (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Although "relationships form the foundation for future development" (National Research Council & National Institute of Medicine, 2000 as cited by Scott-Little et al., 2006, p. 164), emphasis on social-emotional development is lacking in early learning standards (Scott-Little et al., 2006).

Furthermore, Kagan and Scott-Little (2004) found that "states were very concerned with accommodating cultural, linguistic, and community differences, but few had developed strategies to address precisely how the standard should be used with children from different circumstances" (p. 391). The ability to form peer and adult relationships is only addressed in about 8% of all states' standards (Scott-Little et al., 2006), even though "kindergarten teachers believe their most difficult problem is children who lack the socio-emotional preparation for school" (Lewis, 2003, p. 66).

As stated previously, the current study expanded on the work of Walsh et al. (in review) by further exploring parent involvement content in the early learning standards documents. Citing a joint position statement of NAEYC and NAECS/SDE, who together stated that "the standards movement must consider that family relationships are critical to young children's development and learning" (p. 4), Walsh et al. found it important to examine 51 early learning standards documents (i.e., 48 contiguous United States, Alaska, Hawaii, and Washington D.C.) "for unifying and varying elements of family-centered practices" (p. 4). Dusenbury, Zadrazil, Mart, and Weissberg (2011) proposed that early learning standards needed to be analyzed in order to understand how well they reflect national model standards, and Walsh et al. chose to examine states' early learning standards documents using six national frameworks for family involvement, which are stated in Table 1. To recap, the six national frameworks are Family Support America's principles, National PTA's standards, NAEYC's guidelines for reciprocal relationships, NAEYC's principles for effective family engagement, Harvard's Family Research project model for family involvement, and Head Start's Parent, Family, and Community Engagement framework (Walsh, et al.). While many early learning standards documents



are written in a way that promote children's learning and development, these standards may omit guidelines for family engagement, and vice versa (Walsh et al.). In order to examine this phenomenon further, they explored to what extent early learning standards documents reflect broad and common themes from evidence based research and national family models or guidelines on working with families.

First, Walsh et al. (in review) collected the early learning standards documents for all 51 early learning standards documents using an extensive search of the World Wide Web. Any standards that were specific to kindergarten or infancy and toddlerhood were not included (Walsh et al.). Using the six national frameworks (as stated previously), a research-based, universal framework was created, composed of 41 parts (Walsh et al.). The 41 parts include: nine principles from Family Support America, six National PTA's standards, 10 key aspects of NAEYC's guidelines for reciprocal relationships, six NAEYC principles for effective family engagement, the Harvard Family Research Project model's three family involvement processes, and seven components for Head Start's Parent, Family, and Community Engagement framework. After extensively analyzing the 41 parts, common themes were developed based on reoccurring information found across the universal framework (Walsh, in review). Following the creation of these themes, 5 of the 41 original parts were eliminated because they did not accurately fit the themes, or they required too much interpretation (Walsh et al., in review). The remaining 36 parts were grouped into 8 categories used to code the early learning standards documents (Walsh, in review).

- Incorporate Families/Parent(s) Home Language
- Communication

- Community
- Advocacy or Decision Making
- Families/Parent(s) in the School Setting
- Parent(s)/Families-Child Relationships
- Families/Parent(s) as Teachers at Home
- Family Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified

Next, each state's document was electronically searched for three key terms (as well as all variations of each term): home, parent, and family (Walsh et al., in review). Each sentence where one of these search terms was found was placed into an Excel database and was called a unit (Walsh et al.). In order to enhance clarity and better understand context, areas surrounding each search term were also included in the database (Walsh et al.). Finally, each unit was coded as either being found in a standard location (within an actual state standard) or in a non-standard location (in the document but not in the actual standard) by three independent coders, who resolved any coding disagreements through discussion until consensus was reached (Walsh et al.). The eighth category, "Family, Parent, or Home, Not Otherwise Specified," used as an option to code units in the early learning standards documents is the focus of the current study.

The researchers began the analysis with the state of Nevada. Initial findings revealed that Nevada's pre-kindergarten standards emphasized aspects of the analytic framework (Walsh, Lee, Casillas, Hansen, & Reed, 2013). There were 31 total units found in Nevada's prekindergarten standards (Walsh et al., 2013), which means that the target words of home, parent, and family appeared approximately 31 times in the entire document. Out of the 8 possible coding categories (listed above), "Family, Parent, or

Home Not Otherwise Specified" had the highest frequency of units (14), followed by Families/Parent(s) in the School Setting (8) (Walsh et al., 2013). The researchers had adequate reliability with Krippendorff's alpha (Walsh et al., 2013). Because such a high frequency of units were coded into the category "Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified," the researchers found it very pertinent to examine the eighth category more in depth. Many of Nevada's prekindergarten standards were not coded as categories based on the six national frameworks for parent involvement, so what areas of the multidimensional construct of parent involvement were these standards covering? The researchers ended with a call for further research into this topic, and the current study investigated what topics of parent involvement were being addressed in Walsh et al.'s (in review) eighth category, not only in Nevada's early learning standards, but in all of the 51 early learning standards documents, as well.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative study adds to the current study (Walsh et al., in review) and other early standards studies (e.g., Logue, 2007; Neuman & Roskos, 2005; Scott-Little et al., 2005) that have explored the content of early learning standards. Walsh et al. (in review) explored the frequency of parent involvement information as defined by national organizations (see Table 1). As previously stated, the information in these national sources was condensed into eight categories, which provided a system to code the content that addressed parent involvement in the early learning standards documents. The eighth category was "Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified," which was not based on the six national organizations' family models regarding parent involvement. This means that this last category was intended to capture content that addresses parent

involvement but is not included in other categories that reflect the national parent involvement framework. The current qualitative study sought to create a better understanding of the content of 51 early learning standards documents by exploring the quality and quantity of information related to concepts of parent, family, and home. Also, this qualitative study sought to identify the content of parent involvement information in early learning standards documents that was included in the “Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified” category: (RQ1) What aspects of parent involvement and related concepts do early learning standards documents address? (RQ2) To what extent do these appearances occur?

### **Chapter III: Method**

#### **Units of Analysis**

The units of analysis for this study came from 51 early learning standards documents (the 50 United States and the District of Columbia). Early learning standards documents should “distinguish clearly between program standards and child outcome standards” (Bodrova, Leong, & Shore, 2004, p. 1). Early learning standards documents should also “be written in ways that allow for appropriate, effective, assessment” (Bodrova, Leong, & Shore, 2004, p. 1). These standards documents typically “articulate what should be taught and what children should learn prior to kindergarten entry” (Scott-Little, Lesko, Martella, & Milburn, 2007, para. 4). Scott-Little et al. (2005) categorized the content of early learning standards documents into five main categories: “physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches toward learning, language and communication, and cognition and general knowledge” (p.

2). The specific internet addresses (URLs) and titles of each of the 51 early learning standards documents used in this thesis can be found in the Appendix.

An extensive search of the World Wide Web was performed in order to obtain electronic copies of each state's early learning standards documents (Walsh et al., in review). It is important to note that much like Neuman and Roskos (2005), differences were discovered in the titles of the documents, with some using the term "standards," while others used terms such as "guidelines" and "foundations" (Walsh et al., in review). In addition, the current study was delimited to information regarding the care and education of preschool age children (3-5 years), excluding any information in the standards documents that explicitly addressed kindergarten and infancy/toddlerhood (Walsh et al., in review). After collecting all 50 states' early learning standards documents, a database was created in Microsoft Excel with each state receiving a separate column (Walsh et al., in review).

Next, using the 'find' feature on Adobe Acrobat Reader, each early learning standards document was searched for three primary search terms (Walsh et al., in review). The specific primary terms searched were *home* (which included homes), *parent* (including parents, parental), and *famil* (which included family and families) (Walsh et al., in review). Whenever any of these search terms (in any of the variations) appeared in a standards document, they were highlighted electronically (Walsh et al., in review). Next, sentences with the primary terms were entered into the Excel database. In addition, information that was near this information but did not directly include a search term was entered when it was highly relevant to the purpose of this work (Walsh et al., in review, p. 10). For example, examples of how the parent can be involved in the school may not

include a search term; nonetheless, this data includes important contextual information as was included. Finally, “the location of each unit was coded as either a *non-standard* location (e.g., introduction to the document) or a *standard* location” (Walsh et al., in review, p. 10). Including nonstandard locations meant that the entire document, including the introduction, purpose statement, history, guiding principles, and similar sections was searched for the key terms, rather than only the standards themselves. The aforementioned data collection steps were completed across approximately seven months.

### **Coding Framework**

As established in previous chapters, there are several national frameworks that address expectations for parent involvement. The frameworks used by Walsh et al. (in review) to code the 51 states' early learning standards were: National PTA standards for family-school partnerships, NAEYC principles for reciprocal relationships with families, NAEYC principles of effective family engagement, Harvard Family Research Project model for family involvement, Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework, and Family Support America guidelines for family support practice. These national frameworks on parent involvement helped to define the coding categories (listed below) created by Walsh et al. (in review).

Each unit of analysis was coded using the following categories:

- Incorporate Families/Parent(s) Home Language (Category 1)
- Communication (Category 2)
- Community (Category 3)
- Advocacy or Decision Making (Category 4)
- Families/Parent(s) in the School Setting (Category 5)

- Parent(s)/Families-Child Relationships (Category 6)
- Families/Parent(s) as Teachers at Home (Category 7)
- Family Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified (Category 8)

Some units were coded as more than one category. For example, in Minnesota's Early Learning Standards (2005), one non-standard unit was coded as Communication (Category 2) *and* Families/Parent(s) in the School Setting or Category 5 (Walsh, Lee, & Casillas, 2014). This unit was:

Children benefit when family members are invited to participate in ongoing communication about what is happening in their child's early education and care through discussions with caregivers, parent-teacher conferences, open houses, parent-child activity, parent education, transition-to-kindergarten sessions, and volunteer opportunities (Minnesota's Early Learning Standards, 2005, p. 5).

Coding was completed independently by three coders, and the initial codes before consensus were used to calculate reliability, and overall agreement before consensus for nominal data with three coders was Krippendorff's  $\alpha = .81$ , which indicated adequate inter-coder agreement across all three coders (Walsh et al., in review). Discussion in order to reach consensus happened for any disagreements (Walsh et al., in review). Over three fourths (76.5%) of the units in Walsh et al.'s (in review) study were coded into the eighth category, "Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified". This specific, eighth category was used "when the unit did not fit any of the other categories but acknowledged family, parent, or home" (Walsh et al., in review, p. 12). Any units coded into this eighth category were only given this code alone, while other units could potentially receive multiple codes (Walsh et al., in review).

## **Procedure**

In Walsh et al.'s (in review) study, the data was compiled and coded for all of the 51 early learning standards documents, including items in both standard and non-standard locations. In another content analysis of early learning standards, Scott-Little et al. (2005) found that developing a coding scheme helped to accommodate the wide variety of content, format, and length seen in states' early learning standards. The current qualitative study used counting (see Hannah & Lautsch, 2011; Maxwell, 2010) to explore the items categorized in the eighth category, or "Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified". The researcher analyzed these items by first reading over the entire database of items several times and then started to code. Specific details regarding this coding process can be found in the "Data Analysis" section. Next, the researcher refined detailed codes into thematic elements and then grouped those thematic elements into themes. A second researcher then examined the thematic elements and themes and decided if she agreed. This process was done to help establish trustworthiness. The second researcher then discussed whether or not she agreed with the first researcher's thematic elements and codes, and the two researchers came to a consensus in order to resolve any disagreements. Finally, frequency counts occurred to determine how many items, both in standard and non-standard locations, were included in each thematic element.

## **Data Analysis**

Analysis began by getting a sense of the entire database of items in category eight, "Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified." This method was suggested by Agar (1980), who advised that researchers should read complete transcripts several times while paying close attention to the details, trying to look at the transcript in its



entirety before breaking it into parts (as cited by Creswell, 2013). All units coded as an eight were transferred from the original Microsoft Excel sheet into a Microsoft Word document including state names in order to indicate which units came from each state. During this initial examination process, analytic memos were taken, which were a way to reflect on the coding process, as well as examine the researcher's thoughts or questions that occurred during the coding process (Glaser, 1965). Analytic memos were tracked using the track changes feature on Microsoft Word. To prompt the analytic memo process, the researcher asked herself questions, such as were certain phrases being seen frequently throughout all of the units? Were there any similar meanings being conveyed across units? Creswell (2013) also stressed the importance of analytic memos, stating that they are key in the "initial process of exploring a database" (p. 183).

After getting a sense of the entire database by reading, rereading, and taking analytic memos, the researcher continued the data analysis. The researcher "buil[t] detailed descriptions, develop[ed] themes or dimensions, and provide[d] an interpretation in light of [her] own views or views of perspectives in the literature" (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). The researcher had access to a variety of family involvement textbooks, had taken coursework that has included family involvement, and had been a graduate assistant in a family socialization course, all of which aided in the development of themes. However, the researcher remained aware of being open to codes emerging during the analysis, as suggested by Creswell (2013), rather than limiting codes to those only supported by research and existing experiences. Then, the researcher created a code for each unit categorized into "Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified." Similar to the content analysis of early learning standards by Scott-Little et al. (2005), the researcher

coded the units based on the content of the unit. Key words, such as "culture", "the child will", and "teachers should" helped the researcher to determine the appropriate code or codes for each unit. Each unit received up to three codes as mutually exclusive coding is not always possible (see Graneheim & Lundman, 2003), but most units received one code. The researcher stated a code or codes under each unit in the Microsoft Word document.

Next, the researcher refined detailed codes into thematic elements. This recoding occurred through the process of reading, rereading, and recording notable thoughts. Creswell (2013) describes themes in qualitative research as "broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (p. 186). The researcher then created a Microsoft Excel workbook to house all of the data.

The researcher then grouped thematic elements together to form themes. Generally in qualitative research, five to seven general themes should emerge (Creswell, 2013). Five themes emerged in the current study. The researcher then finalized the Microsoft Excel workbook to house all of the data coded into the eighth category. There were five different sheets with one of the five themes per sheet. Within a sheet, there was a column that corresponded to each thematic elements. A second researcher reviewed all the themes and thematic elements, as seen in the next section called "Establishing Trustworthiness."

Counting, a method sometimes used by qualitative researchers, was used in this process. Counting helps qualitative researchers with emphasizing the prominence of occurring themes (Creswell, 2013). Frequencies of codes were reported in the findings section in order to show frequency of occurrences of codes, as well as provide a

comparison of frequencies between codes. Total frequencies of codes found in each theme and thematic element can be seen in Table 2. Not all frequencies were compared, as doing so may have misrepresented the nature of the qualitative findings (Creswell, 2013).

### **Establishing Trustworthiness**

After an initial list of codes was refined and started to evolve into thematic elements, a second researcher, the thesis advisor, independently reviewed the researcher's thematic elements in order to establish trustworthiness. Silverman (2005) asserts that intercoder agreement will help to establish trustworthiness through reliability in qualitative research. Reliability, in qualitative research specifically, "refers to the stability of responses to multiple coders of data sets" (Creswell, 2013, p. 253). A total of 2,525 units fell into Walsh et al.'s (in review) original eighth category, "Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified". Units could be categorized in up to three thematic elements in the current study, which led to 3,138 placements of units. The second researcher disagreed with a total of 72 codes, or 2.29% of the first researcher's initial codes. The second researcher discussed with the first researcher any codes she thought could be interpreted in a different light. Any disagreements between the first researcher and the second researcher were discussed, and a consensus was reached. Discussed codes were then placed in different or additional locations agreed upon between the first and second researchers.

In addition, throughout the development of themes and thematic elements, the first researcher communicated with the second researcher to get feedback and input. For example, the second researcher provided valuable feedback when the first researcher was

developing specific names for each theme and thematic element. The second researcher also helped the first researcher combine and condense several of the thematic elements and themes before a final list of themes was created.

#### **Chapter IV: Results**

There were 2,525 units that were coded into the eighth category, "Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified." This was approximately 77% of the 3,300 total units that focused on family, parent, and home. From the analysis, five major themes emerged. These major themes were information and principles, standards about children, strategies, examples, and miscellaneous (see Table 2). The themes shed light on how the information on parent involvement was presented in the early learning standards documents. Each theme was supported by three to six thematic elements (see Table 2). The thematic elements and examples presented in this section help to address the study's first research question or what aspects of parent involvement and related concepts do early learning standards documents address. Major themes and multiple thematic elements with examples and frequency counts are reported in no particular order. Regarding frequency counts, because one unit could be categorized in up to three thematic elements in the current study, there were 3,138 placements of units. Frequency counts address the second research question of this study, or to what extent does the appearance of parent involvement information and related concepts occur.

#### **Themes and Thematic Elements**

After analyzing all of the units from Walsh et al.'s (in review) eighth category, "Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified," five main themes emerged. Each of these themes included three to six thematic elements, seen in Table 2.

Table 2

*Themes and Thematic Elements with Number of Units*

Theme	# of Units	Thematic Elements	# of Units
1. Information and principles	1,171	1A. Definitions	43
		1B. Purpose of standards/guidelines document	177
		1C. Developmental domains/subject areas	318
		1D. Child care/preschool setting	223
		1E. Culture and diversity (including language)	187
		1F. Family's role in child's development and learning	223
2. Standards about children	730	2A. Family	372
		2B. Home	243
		2C. Community	115
3. Strategies	864	3A. Specifically for teachers	296
		3B. To promote learning at/about home	322
		3C. To promote learning about family	213
		3D. To promote learning about community	33
4. Examples	330	4A. Child demonstrates knowledge/learning about family, home, and/or community	169
		4B. Involving families	23
		4C. Child learning or being prompted to learn at home/school	138
5. Miscellaneous	43	5A. Homemade	8
		5B. Headings, subheadings, sections	29
		5C. Organization/agency names	6

It was necessary to allow a unit to be coded into multiple thematic elements because of the varied content of the units. Some units contained a substantial amount of information, with different parts of that information fitting into different thematic elements. For example, a unit from the California Preschool Learning Foundations, Volume 3 (2012) was coded into three different thematic elements because of the large amount of information it contained:

The foundations are designed to promote understanding of young children's development of knowledge and skills and to help teachers, program administrators, families, and policymakers consider appropriate ways to support children's learning. These sources include formal educational course work on early learning and development; information on individual differences (especially disabilities); knowledge about the contribution of cultural and linguistic experiences to early development and English-language development, including the CDE's resource guide *Preschool English Learners: Principles and Practices to Promote Language, Literacy, and Learning* (2007); insights from children's families; and the practical experiences of preschool teachers and program directors. Many children effectively apply their advanced ability in their home language to understand concepts from the history–social science and science domains (p. xi).

This particular unit was coded into thematic element 1B: purpose of standards/guidelines document, thematic element 1C: developmental domains/subject areas, and thematic element 1E: culture and diversity (including language). Units with a small amount of information (e.g., a short sentence) were sometimes coded into multiple thematic elements as well, although this was not as likely.

**Theme 1: Information and principles.** The first theme captured information and principles for parents and/or educators. Theme 1 contained a total of 1,171 units. Most of the units in this first theme were found in nonstandard locations in the standards documents, such as in the documents' introduction or glossary. This theme was made up of six thematic elements.

***Thematic element 1A: Definitions.*** Thematic element 1A included definitions of terms found in the standards documents. There were 43 units coded into this thematic element, making it the thematic element with the least amount of codes in Theme 1: Information and Principles. Each unit coded into this thematic element contained one term, as well as a definition of that term. The majority of the 43 units came from nonstandard locations within the standards documents. Several of the units in this thematic element gave definitions for the term 'parent' or 'caregiver' and were located in a document's glossary. For example, the term 'curriculum' was defined in State of Maine Early Childhood Learning Guidelines (2005): "Glossary. Curriculum: The framework for the philosophy, goals, and expectations for guiding children's learning and engaging families in their children's development" (p. 33). Other units were interpreted as definitions based on the surrounding context, such as the definition of 'teacher' in this unit: "a child's teacher is anyone invested and involved in the child's learning: parents, caregivers, therapists, and doctors, as well as preschool and school teachers" (Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards, 2013, p. 3).

***Thematic element 1B: Purpose of standards/guidelines document.*** The second thematic element in Theme 1 contained information directed towards parents and educators on the purpose of the standards documents. Thematic element 1B included 177 units. Much like thematic element 1A, most of the units in thematic element 1B came from nonstandard locations within the standards documents. The units in this thematic element helped to explain the purpose of their respective standards documents, giving information such as who helped to create the standards, what types of settings the standards were designed for, and/or the goals of the documents. For example, in the

California Preschool Learning Foundations, Volume 2 (2010), the introduction of the document helped to explain who the document was designed for: "it is anticipated that teachers, administrators, parents, and policymakers will use the foundations as a springboard to prepare all young children for success in school" (p. xii). Some of the units in thematic element 1B also served to explain what the documents were not intended to do, such as the following unit from Wyoming's Early Learning Foundations (n.d.), which stated that the standards "are NOT used: To discredit the values, beliefs, or culture of any family" (p. 6).

***Thematic element 1C: Developmental domains/subject areas.*** Thematic element 1C intended to capture information regarding different developmental domains and/or specific subject areas learned and/or taught in the early learning setting. Thematic element 1C had 318 units coded into it, more than any of the other thematic elements found in Theme 1. Scott-Little et al. (2005) found five main dimensions (or domains) of learning and development in the early learning standards documents, as mentioned previously: "physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches toward learning, language and communication, and cognition and general knowledge" (p. 2). General information on each of these five domains was found in thematic element 1C of the current study.

Most of the units coded into thematic element 1C were regarding social and emotional development. An example of a unit regarding social and emotional development, as well as examples illustrating the other four developmental domains in thematic element 1C can be found in Table 3.



Table 3

*Examples of Developmental Domains in Thematic Element 1C*

Developmental Domain	Examples
Physical well-being and motor development	"Like all areas of a child's development, health and well-being must be considered within the context of each individual child. Early care, education, health, mental health, and family support providers must be aware of a child's health in order to individualize and promote their overall development and well-being" (Iowa Early Learning Standards, 2012, p. 12).
Social and emotional development	"Although the roots of relationships begin during the child's first days of life, they evolve rapidly throughout the preschool years as the child's world expands beyond the home environment. The quality of preschoolers' relationships strongly influence how they feel about themselves, ways they interact with others, how they approach and respond to new and challenging tasks, and shape their attitudes toward school and life-long learning" (Vermont Early Learning Standards, 2003, p. 7).
Approaches toward learning	"Children in Wisconsin will engage in diverse approaches to learning that reflect social and cultural contexts such as biology, family history, culture and individual learning styles" (Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards, 2013, p. 67).
Language and communication	"Different contexts such as the doctor's office, a restaurant, or taking care of a baby at home require different language, and children learn to adjust their language to the demands of the situation" (Wyoming Early Learning Foundations, n.d., p. 19).
Cognition and general knowledge	"Four-year-olds are assured of many opportunities throughout the day and year to grow and develop new cognitive skills when family members and teachers provide stimulating environments and new experiences and encourage them to make connections and exploring multiple solutions" (Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards for Four-Year-Olds, 2011, p. 125).

In addition to addressing the different developmental domains, thematic element 1C also captured specific subject areas addressed within the early learning standards documents. These subject areas did not necessarily fall within one of the five developmental domains but were still important to note. For example, many units contained information on technology, such as research regarding the effects of television on children or guidelines for parents on technology use in the home. On its own, technology does not fall into any of the five developmental domains, yet technology use in families has become an integral part of today's society, including in the early learning setting. An example of a unit in thematic element 1C which addressed technology can be found in Table 4. Examples of other subject areas addressed in the standards documents, such as science, history, visual and performing arts, and mathematics, are also seen in Table 4.

Table 4

*Examples of Subject Areas in Thematic Element 1C*

Specific Element of Development	Examples
Technology	"Educators and parents have been cautioned about the negative impact of background television, passive use of screen media, and the relationship between media use and child obesity. However, research findings remain divided and therefore can be confusing to educators and parents" (Foundations to the Indiana Academic Standards for Young Children from Birth to Age 5, 2012, p. 237).
Science	"Children are captivated by the natural world and physical events. They insist that teachers and family members answer their questions about the world around them. Adults support the development of children's scientific thinking by. • Modeling how to use new equipment and materials at home and in the classroom to explore and understand their world more fully" (Vermont Early Learning Standards, 2003, p. 16-17).
History and Government	"The early years are the ideal time for children to understand democratic norms and values (justice, equality, etc.) in their family, classroom and community" (Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning, 2007, p. 39).
Visual and Performing Arts	"Art engages English learners and children whose home culture might be different from the preschool culture. For children from diverse linguistic or cultural communities, arts-based activities can provide a link between home and preschool. Teachers welcome children's cultures to preschool programs when they encourage children and families to share songs, dances, poems, music, visual art, or art-related objects and practices from home" (California Preschool Learning Foundations, Volume 2, 2010, p. 1).
Mathematics	"Families and caregivers need to explore and learn what children already know and help them to

understand their knowledge as it relates to mathematics" (Foundations to the Indiana Academic Standards for Young Children from Birth to Age 5, 2012, p. 74).

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*Thematic element 1D: The child care/preschool setting.* The fourth thematic element in Theme 1 contained information regarding the child care or preschool setting. Thematic element 1D contained 223 units, ranking it tied as the second largest thematic element in Theme 1. This thematic element addressed different topics specific to the preschool setting such as school readiness, portfolios, and assessments and screenings. For example, District of Columbia Common Core Early Learning Standards (2012) give information on assessments, stating that "teachers use ongoing assessment practices designed to help them in planning for children's further learning and communicating with family members" (p. ii).

In addition, thematic element 1D contained information for families regarding choosing a child care setting, the variety of different child care settings, the transition between home and school, and the child care environment itself. A unit from South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines (n.d.) contains information for families on what to look for in a classroom, such as areas "that are supplied with materials related to a certain area such as reading, writing, discovery/science, blocks, etc." which "allow children to be actively engaged in hands-on learning experiences" (p. 77). Finally, thematic element 1D included information on family involvement and engagement in the preschool setting, such as the importance of interactions between parents and teachers and specific ways to be involved with a child's early learning experience. An example from Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for Ages 3 to 5 (2013) states some of the benefits of family

involvement, including "higher academic achievement levels and healthy development of social and emotional skills" (p. 12).

*Thematic element 1E: Culture and diversity (including language).* Thematic element 1E addressed information and principles regarding culture and diversity, including language, in families. This thematic element contained 187 units. Many of the units within thematic element 1E recognized that children and families come from a variety of different backgrounds and circumstances which need to be respected and valued. For example, a unit from Foundations: Early Learning Standards for North Carolina Preschoolers and Strategies for Guiding Their Success (n.d.) emphasized that "diversity is something to celebrate because families from different backgrounds bring a wealth of strengths, knowledge, and values to the preschool classroom" (p. 5). A great deal of the units in thematic element 1E also addressed the importance of home language, such as a unit from New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines: Birth through Kindergarten (2011), which stated that "support of the development of home language is strongly encouraged by all involved in relationships with the child and his or her family" (p. 14). Lastly, thematic element 1E also included units which provided information on children with special needs. A unit from Iowa Early Learning Standards (2012) provided an example of information regarding children with special needs:

Families who have children with identified special needs can and should seek out caring adults in early care and early education settings that are willing to make accommodations so their children can full participate in experiences that are made available to most children (p. 16).

*Thematic element 1F: Family's role in child development/learning.* The final thematic element in Theme 1, thematic element 1F, captured units which recognized the family's role in child development and learning. Thematic element 1F contained 223 units, tying it with thematic element 1D as the second largest thematic element in Theme 1. The goal of many of the units within thematic element 1F was to acknowledge that families are children's first and most important teachers, such as the following unit from Revised Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards for Four-Year-Olds (2012): "the family is the most significant contributor to children's lifelong learning and development" (p. 2). Other units simply recognized the family's role in different aspects of child development and learning, like this example from North Carolina: "children's growth and learning are greatly impacted by their physical environment, relationships with family members and others, and the community and culture in which they live" (Foundations: Early Learning Standards for North Carolina Preschoolers and Strategies for Guiding their Success, n.d. , p. 4).

**Theme 2: Standards about children.** The second major theme that evolved out of this qualitative study was regarding standards about children. All of the units within Theme 2 came from standard locations within the early learning standards documents, meaning that the units were all in standard locations addressing children's development. Theme 2 contained 730 units, or 28.91% of the total units analyzed in the current study. Many of the units in Theme 2 were coded into multiple thematic elements within the theme because they addressed more than one of the three main topics, which were family, home, and community. For example, a standard from Mississippi's Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Three-Year-Old Children (2013) addresses both family

and community: "understand self in relation to the family and the community" (p. 35).

All of the units within Theme 2 were standards or guidelines specifically about children in the early learning setting. Theme 2 included three thematic elements.

***Thematic element 2A: Family.*** The first thematic element in Theme 2 captured standards about children that in some way addressed family. Thematic element 2A contained 372 units, making it the largest thematic element in Theme 2. Many of the units were standards regarding children's ability to describe and recognize family. Some units specifically addressed a child's ability to name and identify family members, such as unit from Arizona Department of Education Early Learning Standards (2005): "child draws a picture of his/her family. Child points to or names family members in a photograph" (p. 7). Other units focused on a child's ability to demonstrate knowledge of other aspects of family, such as family culture and traditions, like a unit from Idaho Early Learning eGuidelines (2013): "asks questions about other's families, ethnicity, language, cultural heritage, and differences in physical characteristics" (p. 67). Many of the units also addressed a child's ability to identify his or her own role in the family, such as a unit from Foundations to the Indiana Academic Standards for Young Children from Birth to Age 5 (2012): "identifies oneself as a member of a specific family" (p. 187). A number of units in thematic element 2A were regarding a child's ability to separate from parents during the transition to a school setting, as well as a child's aptitude for communicating with family members. For example, a unit from Ohio Early Learning and Development Standards Domain: Language and Literacy Development (2012) stated that a child should be able to "participate in and often initiate communication according to commonly accepted expectations with family members and in social groups" (p. 3).

*Thematic element 2B: Home.* Thematic element 2B captured standards about children that had to do with home. This thematic element had a total of 243 units. Some units were regarding a child's ability to demonstrate knowledge of home, whether it was his or her own home or different types of homes. For example, some units addressed a child's knowledge of routines in the home, such as "describe daily routine" (Foundations to the Indiana Academic Standards for Young Children from Birth to Age 5, 2012, p. 188), while other units were specific to safety in the home, such as "utilizes appropriate safety procedures for home, school, outdoors, playground, vehicles, bicycles, etc." (Oklahoma Early Learning Guidelines for Children, n.d., p. 50). Many of these standards addressed a child's capacity to demonstrate learning at home in different subject areas, such as literacy, science, or technology. For example, a unit from State of Maine Early Childhood Guidelines (2005) addressed children's knowledge of technology at home: "identifies tools and technology used at home, school, and work" (p. 50). Lastly, a large number of units in thematic element 2B captured a child's ability to express knowledge in his or her home language. Many of these home language units were not regarding a child's ability to express knowledge about home or at home, as many other units in this thematic element were. However, these home language units still seemed best coded into thematic element 2B because they addressed a substantial part of a child's knowledge that comes from home language. An example of a home language unit comes from California Preschool Learning Foundations, Volume 1 (2008) and stated that a child should be able to "begin to use marks or symbols to represent spoken language in the home language or English" (p. 188).



***Thematic element 2C: Community.*** The final thematic element in Theme 2 included standards about children regarding community. Thematic element 2C had a total of 115 units, making it the smallest thematic element in Theme 2. The units in this thematic element captured a child's ability to demonstrate knowledge of different aspects of community. Many units addressed whether a child could demonstrate knowledge of roles and jobs in the community, such as "explores experience by taking on familiar roles in the home and community (firefighters, restaurant, doctor's office)" (Idaho Early Learning eGuidelines, 2013, p. 114). A great deal of units also sought to capture if a child could demonstrate knowledge of diversity in the community, as well as if a child could show respect for all people in the community, as expressed in this unit: "recognize respectfully the similarities and differences in people (gender, family, race, culture, language)" (Michigan Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten, 2013, p. 16). Finally, a number of units in thematic element 2C addressed a child's knowledge of safety and rules in the community. For example, a unit from Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (2014) stated that a child should be able to "understand the reason for most basic safety rules at home, in familiar settings, and in the community" (p. 33).

**Theme 3: Strategies.** The third theme that emerged from the current qualitative study was strategies. All of the units in this theme captured strategies specifically for teachers, as well as strategies for both parents and teachers to help promote children's learning. Some units in Theme 3 were specifically for teachers, while many other units could be interpreted as either being for teachers and/or parents. Theme 3 had 864 units coded into it, making it the second largest theme in this qualitative study. The units in

this theme came from both standard and nonstandard locations within the standards documents. It is important to note that many of the units were standards directed towards parents and/or teachers, meaning that many standards in the early learning documents were not explaining something the child should be able to know or do. Rather, many of the standard units in Theme 3 captured ways for parents and/or teachers to help children learn something they should know or do. The strategies making up Theme 3 were broken into four distinct thematic elements.

*Thematic element 3A: Specifically for teachers.* Thematic element 3A captured strategies that were specifically for early learning teachers. Unlike the other thematic elements in Theme 3, the units in thematic element 3A were strategies specifically for teachers and not for parents, meaning that the units in thematic element 3A were not coded into any other thematic elements in Theme 3. There were 296 units in thematic element 3A. The strategies for teachers in thematic element 3A varied. Some units captured strategies for teachers to demonstrate respect for all families, such as this unit from Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework Handbook (2004): "model respect for each child and that child's family members. Get to know each family: its structure, occupations, celebrations, activities, holidays, or family events that are important to the family" (p. 47). Other units in thematic element 3A addressed strategies for teachers to promote interaction with or between families, such as the following unit which stated that teachers should "post the daily schedule in the parent information area for families to become familiar with sequence of the day. Regularly update classroom or program message boards to keep information current and fresh" (Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood, 2009, p. 70). Many of the units in thematic element 3A expressed

strategies for teachers to promote children's learning at home, such as "encouraging parents/family members to read daily to their children, and to converse about what they read" (Missouri Early Learning Standards for Literacy, 2009, p. 13). Finally, some of the units in thematic element 3A captured strategies for teachers to ease children's transition from home to school, such as ensuring that "care away from home is consistent with the care the child receives at home when appropriate" (North Dakota Early Learning Guidelines, 2010, p. 20).

*Thematic element 3B: To promote learning at/about home.* Thematic element 3B intended to capture strategies to promote children's learning either at home or about home. Unlike the units in thematic element 3A, the strategies found in the units of thematic element 3B could be directed towards teachers and/or parents. Thematic element 3B had a total of 322 units. Most of the units in thematic element 3B were strategies to promote children's learning at home in a variety of subject areas, such as art, science, math, nutrition, literacy, and time. For example, a unit from Missouri Early Learning Standards Mathematics Parent's Guide (2009) illustrated a strategy to promote children's math knowledge at home: "if you have stairs inside or outside your home, use masking tape to number them. With your child, count the stairs as you walk up and down them" (p. 27). Many other units in thematic element 3B captured strategies to promote children's learning about home, including safety and technology in the home, as well as general knowledge about home, such as the following unit: "provide materials, literature, and activities that explore different types of homes (e.g., apartment buildings, motels, single-family houses, multi-family houses)" (New Jersey State Department of Education Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards, 2014, p. 87). Other units in thematic

element 3B captured strategies to promote the importance of home language, such as "use your home language when reading, singing, and playing word games with your children" (Foundations: Early Learning Standards for North Carolina Preschoolers and Strategies for Guiding their Success, n.d., p. 27).

***Thematic element 3C: To promote learning about family.*** While thematic element 3B captured strategies to promote learning at or about home, thematic element 3C captured strategies to promote children's learning about family. Thematic element 3C had a total of 213 units. Much like thematic element 3B, the strategies in thematic element 3C were intended for both parents and teachers. Many of the strategies in thematic element 3C were to promote children's learning about family in terms of culture and diversity, such as "read aloud books and tell family and traditional oral stories about children living in different climates and discuss how their food, clothing, and houses are different" (State of Alaska Early Learning Guidelines, 2007, p. 138). A great deal of units also captured strategies to promote children's learning about roles in the family and other general knowledge about the family, such as "include a dramatic play area with many props and authentic materials that allow children to create and reenact family roles, relationships, routines, and rituals" (Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards for Four-Year-Olds, 2011, p. 202). Finally, some units in thematic element 3C captured strategies to promote children's learning about family by examining different types of families, such as animal families. For example, Missouri Early Learning Standards Science Parent's Guide (2009) suggested that "if possible, visit a zoo or farm to observe parent animals with their babies. Look at pictures of parent animals and babies in books and magazines" (p. 30).

***Thematic element 3D: To promote learning about community.*** The last thematic element in Theme 3 captured strategies for parents and teachers to promote children's learning about community. Thematic element 3D had the least quantity of units in Theme 3, with 33 units. Some of the units in thematic element 3D addressed strategies to promote children's learning about the community in general, such as "point out where things are in the community" (Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards, 2014, p. 20). Other units in thematic element 3D were specific strategies to promote children's learning about roles and jobs in the community, such as "develop prop boxes around dramatic themes based on your children's interest and experiences in family and community occupations. Some examples include: shoe store, office, camping, grocery store, etc.)" (Oklahoma Early Learning Guidelines for Children Ages Three Through Five, n.d., p. 12).

**Theme 4: Examples.** The fourth theme that emerged in the current qualitative study captured specific examples in early learning standards documents. There were 330 units in Theme 4. Many of the units in Theme 4 were examples illustrating certain standards, while other units were scenarios demonstrating some aspect of the early learning standards documents, such as a strategy for teachers and/or parents or an important feature of family engagement. Theme 4 was made up of three thematic elements.

***Thematic element 4A: Child demonstrates knowledge of family, home, and/or community.*** Thematic element 4A captured examples of children demonstrating their knowledge of family, home, and/or community. This thematic element was made up of 169 units, making it the largest thematic element in Theme 4. Many units captured

examples of children demonstrating unique knowledge of their family, such as "child draws a picture of his family's Kwanza celebration" (Arizona Department of Education Early Learning Standards, 2005, p. 4). Other units were examples of children demonstrating knowledge of home, such as an example of a child who "plays a game in which she describes characteristics of an object she has brought from home, and the group guesses what object is in the bag" (California Preschool Learning Foundations, Volume 3, 2012, p. 69). Lastly, some of the units in thematic element 4A captured examples of children demonstrating knowledge of community, such as a child who can "talk about current events in his/her family and community" (Delaware Early Learning Foundations: Preschool, 2010, p. 36).

***Thematic element 4B: Involving families.*** Thematic element 4B captured examples of involving families in some capacity or another. There were 23 units in thematic element 4B. Many of the units in thematic element 4B were examples of communication happening between family and caregivers. For example, the following unit is an example of a parent sharing information about his daughter with a caregiver: "Mr. Bowen says, Natalia understands everything, but she is shy in new places. She may not talk very much at first, even though she talks all the time at home" (Foundations to the Indiana Academic Standards for Young Children from Birth to Age 5, 2012, p. 39). Other units in thematic element 4B were examples of different ways to involve families in the early learning setting, such as "a note will be sent home with each child to explain this activity" (Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework Handbook, 2004, p. 19) and "family pictures are hung on the walls. A group picture hangs as well. All group

members are represented, including the adults in the teaching team" (Colorado Preschool Social Studies Academic Standards, 2012, p. 12).

***Thematic element 4C: Child learning or being prompted to learn at home/school.*** The final thematic element in Theme 4 captured examples of children learning or being prompted to learn at home or school. Thematic element 4C had a total of 138 units. Many units in thematic element 4C were examples of children learning in some way or another, such as this unit from the California Preschool Learning Foundations, Volume 2 (2010) : "during a family-style meal, self-serves broccoli and carrots, and communicates, "This makes me strong!" while flexing arm muscle" (p. 86). Other units were examples of children being prompted to learn, such as a teacher prompting the question "how will they get to their new home?" (Wyoming Early Learning Foundations, n.d., p. 57). Finally, many units in thematic element 4C were examples of children learning in their home language, such as "observes the weather and describes in his home language, "The sun is out. It is a sunny day"" (California Preschool Learning Foundations, Volume 3, 2012, p. 81).

**Theme 5: Miscellaneous.** The fifth and final theme in this qualitative study captured units that did not fit into any of the previously discussed themes or thematic elements. Theme 5 was by far the smallest theme, with only 43 units. Although the units in Theme 5 did not necessarily fit into any other theme or thematic element, these units nonetheless seemed important to include in the current study because of their indirect links to family, parents, home, and/or community. The researcher also wanted to avoid having a theme or category similar to the eighth category "Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified". However, the thematic elements in Theme 5 provide distinctions

about the remaining 43 units of the current study while capturing the content of each unit. Theme 5 was made up of three thematic elements.

***Thematic element 5A: Homemade.*** An interesting finding throughout the coding process of this qualitative study was the use of the word 'homemade' in some early learning standards documents. There were eight units in thematic element 5A. Although the units in thematic element 5A did not fit into any other themes or thematic elements, the word 'homemade' indicated some type of involvement of the home, whether materials are coming from the home or are being used to learn about the home. Therefore, it seemed necessary to include the units in the current qualitative analysis. The units in thematic element 5A all included some type of homemade material, the most common being homemade instruments. For example, a unit from Foundations to the Indiana Academic Standards for Young Children from Birth to Age 5 (2012) states "they sing and like to make music using the variety of homemade instruments that Mrs. Leslie provides. Parents sent in marbles, rice, beans, and small metal balls" (p. 220).

***Thematic element 5B: Headings, subheadings, sections.*** Thematic element 5B also captured units that did not fit into any other themes or thematic elements in the current study. There were 29 units in thematic element 5B. This thematic element addressed headings, subheadings, and sections of the early learning standards documents that included one or more of the original search terms (family, parent, home, etc.) from Walsh et al.'s (in review) study. Most of the units in thematic element 5B were very short in length, such as "Social Studies, Family, and Life Skills" (New Jersey State Department of Education Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards, 2014, p. 85), and "Positive



Relationships with Children, Family, and Colleagues" (South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines, n.d., p. 19).

*Thematic element 5C: Organization/Agency names.* The third and final thematic element in Theme 5 captured organization and agency names. There were six units in thematic element 5C. Much like thematic element 5B, the units in thematic element 5C mentioned one of the original search terms (family, parent, home, etc.) from Walsh et al.'s (in review) study. However, the units in thematic element 5C did not fit into any other themes or thematic elements in the current study. For example, "accreditation processes such as those established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) help assure that high quality standards are present" (Minnesota's Early Learning Standards, 2005, p. 7).

## **Chapter V: Discussion**

The field of early childhood education became a part of the standards movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Seefeldt, 2005). Since then, standards explaining what children can be expected to learn in early education have become increasingly important (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002; Scott-Little et al., 2005). In a joint position statement, NAEYC and NAECS/SDE (as cited in Walsh et al., in review) stated that the standards movement has to consider that family is critical to young early childhood development and learning. The present study examined what aspects of parent involvement and related concepts were addressed in early learning state standards documents.

## **Delimitations**

This study was delimited to early learning standards documents, although parent involvement is just as important in the K-12 school years. This study was also delimited to 51 early learning standards documents (i.e., 48 contiguous United States, Alaska, Hawaii, and Washington D.C.). In addition, the current study was delimited to information regarding the care and education of preschool age children (3-5 years), excluding any information in the standards documents that explicitly addressed kindergarten and infancy/toddlerhood.

## **Summary and Discussion of Findings**

The current study sought to answer two research questions: (RQ1) What aspects of parent involvement and related concepts do early learning standards documents address? (RQ2) To what extent do these appearances occur?

The first theme to emerge from the current content analysis was information and principles. Out of the five primary themes that emerged, Theme 1 had the largest amount of units coded into it. Many of the units in this theme came from nonstandard locations within the early learning standards documents. This possibly implies that much important information about parent involvement and related concepts comes from locations outside the standards themselves, such as in the guiding principle section and other introductory areas. Theme 1 contained information on the standards documents themselves, such as the purpose of the documents (thematic element 1B), as well as definitions of a variety of terms (thematic element 1A). In addition, Theme 1 highlighted important information on the child care and preschool setting (thematic element 1D), such as information on school readiness, assessments and screenings, choosing a child

care setting, family involvement, and a child's transition from home to school. Thematic element 1E captured information on diversity and culture, including acknowledging the importance of diversity in families and children, information on children with special needs, and information on the importance of home language. The units in thematic element 1E about home language did not fit into Walsh et al.'s (in review) original Category 1, "Incorporate families/parents home language," because of the strict coding guidelines used by Walsh et al. (in review). Category 1 has informed by national models emphasized a program's incorporation of the home language, teachers use of home language, and/or communication between from programs/teachers is responsive to the families' languages. Some of the units in thematic element 1E were near misses to units in Walsh et al.'s (in review) Category 1 because they mentioned the importance of home language but not as Category 1 defined it. The last thematic element in Theme 1, thematic element 1F, captured the family's role in child development and learning. Units in thematic element 1F acknowledged that the family is a child's first and most important teacher and that the family plays an important role in shaping who a child becomes.

However, probably the most notable aspect of Theme 1 was thematic element 1C, which highlighted developmental domains and subject areas found in the early learning standards documents. Thematic element 1C was by far the largest thematic element in Theme 1. The domain of social and emotional development in regards to parent involvement and related concepts was the most frequently seen throughout the units in thematic element 1C, which somewhat contradicts previous findings of Scott-Little et al.'s (2005) content analysis. This is surprising and encouraging, because after analyzing the early learning standards of 36 states, Scott-Little et al. (2005) found that only 12% of

the standards were regarding social and emotional development. It is important to note that Scott-Little et al.'s (2005) study examined only the standards within the documents, while the current study examined the entire documents, including nonstandard locations. Because the majority of the units within thematic element 1C addressed social and emotional development, this could indicate that more of an emphasis is placed on social and emotional development in nonstandard locations within early learning standards documents. Again, this contradiction could be because the current study analyzed the entire state standards documents, while the study by Scott-Little et al. (2005) only examined the standards within each document, further solidifying that much important information about the parent, family, and home can be found in nonstandard locations within the documents.

The second theme that emerged captured standards about children. All the units in Theme 2 came from standard locations within the early learning standards documents and highlighted skills that a child should know or be able to do. Theme 2 was broken into three thematic elements- family, home, and community. Thematic element 2A captured standards about children regarding family. Many of the standards in thematic element 2A were regarding a child's ability to describe and recognize family, whether it was members of his or her own family, or different types of families. Thematic element 2A also captured standards on a child's ability to describe and recognize family culture, traditions, roles, and duties. In addition, many of the standards in thematic element 2A were about a child's ability to develop relationships with and communicate with family. Thematic element 2B captured standards regarding a child's ability to demonstrate knowledge at home, such as in reading or science, and about home, such as knowledge of

different types of homes. Standards expressing a child's use of home language were also in thematic element 2B. The third and final thematic element in Theme 2, thematic element 2C, captured standards about children's knowledge of community, including a child's knowledge of safety in the community and jobs in the community. Much like thematic element 1E, thematic element 2C contained units that did not fit in Walsh et al.'s original coding categories of Community (Category 3). Walsh et al.'s Category 3, Community, captured units which promoted the building of community or collaboration with the community primarily amongst parents and teachers, while units in thematic element 2C were specific standards for children regarding children's knowledge of community. Thematic element 2C also captured standards regarding a child's understanding of diversity in the community.

The third theme to arise in the current content analysis was strategies for both teachers and parents. Theme 3 was broken into four distinct thematic elements. Thematic element 3A captured strategies that were specifically for early learning teachers, such as ways to promote interaction with families and strategies to demonstrate respect for all cultures and families. The next thematic element, thematic element 3B, highlighted strategies to promote children's learning at or about home. Many of the strategies to promote learning at home were specific to different subjects, such as literacy, math, science, technology, nutrition, and art. Other strategies to promote learning at home were regarding knowledge of time, routines, and safety. Thematic element 3B also captured strategies to promote the importance of a child's home language. Next, thematic element 3C highlighted strategies to promote children's learning about different aspects of family including culture, diversity, nutrition, and roles.

Finally, thematic element 3D captured strategies to promote children's learning about community, such as rules in the community and jobs in the community.

Theme 3 could arguably be the most pertinent theme to parent involvement. While the majority of units in Themes 1, 2, 4, and 5 indirectly addressed parent involvement, such as offering information to parents and families, most of the units in Theme 3 (excluding thematic element 3A) explicitly addressed parent involvement. Specifically, Theme 3 included strategies for families to promote children's learning at home, which were all direct examples of family involvement. This indirect and direct connection to parent involvement is discussed in more detail in the 'Implications' section.

The fourth theme to emerge in the current content analysis was examples. Theme 4 was broken in to three thematic elements. The first thematic element in Theme 4, thematic element 4A, exhibited examples of children demonstrating knowledge or learning about family, home, and/or community. Many of these units were examples of the standards in Theme 2, such as an example of a child naming each person in his or her family, meaning that many of the units in Theme 4 were directly related to units in Theme 2. Thematic element 4A also captured examples of children demonstrating respect for different families and children. Next, thematic element 4B highlighted examples of involving families. Some of the examples were of communication between teachers and families and other types of family engagement. Thematic element 4B also included examples of representations of diversity in children and families. The last thematic element in Theme 4, thematic element 4C, captured examples of children learning or being prompted to learn at home or school, including examples of children learning in their home language.

The fifth and final theme that emerged from the current study was miscellaneous. Theme 5 captured units that featured one or more of Walsh et al.'s (in review) search terms, such as family, parent, or home. However, the units in Theme 5 did not fit into any of the previously mentioned themes or thematic elements. In order to prevent having another eight-type theme or category, since the goal of this study was to analyze the eighth or miscellaneous category in Walsh et al.'s (in review) study, Theme 5 was broken into three thematic elements. Breaking Theme 5 into these distinct thematic elements helped to distinguish it from Walsh et al.'s (in review) study. Thematic element 5A captured units that featured the word 'homemade', such as an example of children using homemade instruments. The second thematic element in Theme 5, thematic element 5B, included units that were either headings, subheadings, or sections in the early learning standards documents. Finally, thematic element 5C captured units which included names of organizations, agencies, or programs.

### **Implications, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Research**

**Implications.** This study has implications for practitioners, policy makers, and researchers. The impetus for the current analysis was because the majority of units focused on family or related concepts in the early learning standards documents were not aligned with national frameworks on parent involvement. This means that as state workgroups revise the early learning standards documents, they should consider the results of the current study to determine what current documents are actually saying regarding parent involvement. State standards are constantly changing. Content analysis (including the current study) helps policy makers to see the current state of early learning standards documents and hopefully use these analyses to discuss current information and

revise the documents. The findings of the current study coupled with Walsh et al.'s (in review) analysis aim to provide an overall landscape on the topic of parent involvement in early learning standards documents so that states, policymakers, educators, and parents can see what the topic includes and how the topic is currently being addressed.

Providing a landscape on the topic of parent involvement in early learning standards document is vital, as limitless research points to the importance of parent involvement in a child's school experience, including in the early years, as discussed in Chapter 2. If it is clear that parent involvement and the family play a positive and critical role in a child's school experiences starting in early childhood, early learning state standards documents should be reflecting this. It is also pertinent to note that the current study found family, parent, and home are being addressed in many different forms and ways in the early learning standards documents.

It seems particularly noteworthy that contrary to Scott-Little et al.'s (2005) study, which found that social and emotional standards were lacking in early learning standards documents, the current study found that more of an emphasis is placed on social and emotional development in nonstandard locations within early learning standards documents. The fact that important information on social and emotional development in children is found in nonstandard locations within the early learning standards documents implies that early learning standards documents, and presumably all state standards documents, should be examined holistically. While the actual state standards found in standards documents are extremely important and informational, the current study exhibits that much important information can come from nonstandard locations within the documents, as well.



The majority of units in the current study were found in Theme 1: information and principles, a theme that addressed information for parents, families, and teachers and included units from nonstandard locations within the documents. Because so many of the units regarding parent and family involvement were coded as information, these units may possibly be lip-service rather than a meaningful approach to involve and engage families that carries through to the actual standards. Many early learning standards documents may have found it necessary to address or acknowledge parents and the family in nonstandard locations, such as the introduction of a document. However, these acknowledgments and mention of families often seemed lacking in depth and possibly do not provide critical or helpful information to those reading the documents. How useful parents and educators find information on parents, families, and/or home in the early learning standards documents is an area that warrants further attention.

Along the same lines, when referring to early learning standards documents, educators often solely look at the standards themselves rather than information found in nonstandard locations. As the current study revealed that much important information regarding parent involvement came from nonstandard locations within the early learning standards documents, it may be practical and useful to move much of that information to standard locations. When teachers are referring to standards for children, information on parent involvement should be included in those standards rather than in nonstandard locations, which may be overlooked. Given the research on the importance of parent involvement in the early years, the early learning standards themselves should reflect that importance, rather than parent involvement being addressed in primarily nonstandard locations.

At a more practical level, this study has implications for early childhood educators and parents of young children. While it is extremely important for the importance of parent involvement to be reflected at the state and national level, including in early learning standards documents, parents and educators also need to be aware of its importance. Change begins in small ways. Parents and teachers first being made aware of the importance of parent involvement and then reflecting this importance in the teaching and learning process is an important first step to promoting positive childhood outcomes.

Finally, it is important to note that some early learning standards documents, such as the Missouri Early Learning Standards (2009), included separate documents for parents and educators. While this was not common among the early learning standards documents, having a separate standards document for parents did ensure that the family was explicitly being included. In documents such as Missouri Early Learning Standards Science Parents' Guide (2009), specific strategies were included for parents to help their children learn mathematics at home. Some may argue that strategies and standards specifically for parents should be integrated throughout the early learning standards documents without needing a separate document. However, states with a separate document for parents, such as Missouri, seemed to make family engagement much more implicit and necessary. Including separate documents with strategies and standards for parents may be one viable option for promoting parent involvement in early learning standards. The present study provides food for thought on the quality and quantity of parent involvement concepts in the extant early learning standards documents. Policy makers and other stakeholders of the early learning standards documents may need to

discuss if parent involvement concepts are best included in a separate parent document and/or in the early learning standards documents.

**Limitations.** There were several limitations to this study. First of all, because this was a qualitative study, there was possibility for researcher bias. As mentioned previously, the primary researcher had previous knowledge and experience in the area of parent involvement through her experience as a graduate teaching assistant in a family socialization class. The first and second researcher had a conversation about the role of bias in qualitative research and the first researcher wrote out possible sources of bias. Despite these attempts, previous knowledge on the topic could have biased her in analyzing the data of the current study, it is possible she could have entered into the data analysis portion of this study with some preconceived ideas and notions about what parent involvement should look like. There was also a possibility for similar bias from the second researcher, as this second researcher had already been immersed in the data for over a year when she checked the first coder's analysis. Nonetheless, the present study did have two coders' review the data, which helps to reduce bias and establish trustworthiness.

Another limitation of the current study is that state early learning standards documents are not long-standing documents. Throughout Walsh et al.'s (in review) initial collection of the early learning standards documents, as well as the process of writing this study, several documents were updated. While the majority of the early learning standards documents used in Walsh et al.'s (in review) study and the current study are the most updated versions, some states, such as New Hampshire, released an updated version of their early learning standards document after the initial data collection.

Although using a process that allows for multiple codes is a possibility in qualitative research (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003), it is possible that a mutually exclusive coding process may have strengthened this study. Because of the variation of the length of the units, ranging from phrases to a small paragraph, using multiple codes seemed like the best way to capture content rich units.

Finally, the current study did not include member checking. Sending the findings of the current study to stakeholders would have been ideal and helpful. Member checking would have also helped to enhance the reliability of the study. Unfortunately, member checking did not happen due to time and resource constraints.

**Future Research.** Few content analyses of early learning standards documents exist to date, so examining the content of early learning standards documents is important in future research. Other possible influences on child outcomes, such as community, nutrition, technology can also be explored to determine the extent of their inclusion in the early learning standards documents.

The current study analyzed 51 early learning standards documents on the topic of parent involvement, which amounted to a very large database of information to analyze (over 250 typed pages of information were analyzed in the current study). Future research should consider using NVivo or other qualitative research software to help with analyzing the large amount of data that presumably will come from analyzing 51 standards documents.

Another avenue for future research is to collect teachers' perspectives on the information found in this analysis and to explore the extent they think parent involvement information and related concepts should be included in the early learning standards

documents. This suggestion for future research aligns with Scott-Little et al.'s (2007) assertion that it is important to reveal how early learning standards fit within the greater context of early childhood education.

While the goal of the current study was to examine parent involvement in early learning standards documents, each document was originally searched (by Walsh et al., in review) for three search terms: family, parent, and home. Because the units in the current study were obtained using these search terms, many of the units analyzed do not necessarily directly address parent involvement explicitly. For example, many units were standards for children regarding their ability to identify family members. While units like this do mention family, they do not necessarily specifically state a method for parent involvement or family engagement. Future research could take the current study, along with Walsh et al.'s study, a step further and examine the units that specifically and explicitly address specific types of parent involvement.

Lastly, future research should further examine family engagement versus parent involvement in early learning standards. In an integrated review of the literature on family engagement in early childhood programs, Halgunseth (2009) noted that family engagement takes a "strength-based perspective by recognizing that all families are involved in their children's learning and well-being in some way" (p. 56). It is possibly important for future research to consider this strength-based perspective when examining family engagement versus parent involvement in the early childhood setting.

## **Conclusion**

Through a content analysis of all 50 states and the District of Columbia's early learning standards documents, this study helped to exhibit important information on

parent involvement and related concepts in the early learning standards documents. The content analysis suggested that family and parent involvement concepts can appear throughout the early learning standards documents, not just solely in the standards themselves. Overall, this study determined that the topics of family and parent involvement seemed to be addressed in the forms of information, strategies, standards, and examples throughout the early learning standards documents. State workgroups are encouraged to revise the early learning standards documents with considering the messages they want to send about parents, family, and home and if a separate document for parents would be beneficial (e.g., Missouri Early Learning Standards Science Parents' Guide, 2009). How useful parents and educators find information on parents, families, and/or home in the early learning standards documents is an area that warrants further attention. The current study's findings are nonetheless important because they help to demonstrate what aspects of parent involvement and related concepts are included in early learning state standards documents. Increased attention on family involvement in the standards portion of state standards documents can be the means through which improved practices are found throughout the country.

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## Appendix

<b>State</b>	<b>Web Address for Early Learning Standards Document</b>	<b>Title of Early Learning Standards Document</b>
Alabama	<a href="https://docs.alsde.edu/documents/65/Developmental_Standards_handbook.pdf">https://docs.alsde.edu/documents/65/Developmental_Standards_handbook.pdf</a>	Alabama Developmental Standards for Preschool Children
Alaska	<a href="http://www.eed.state.ak.us/publications/EarlyLearningGuidelines.pdf">http://www.eed.state.ak.us/publications/EarlyLearningGuidelines.pdf</a>	State of Alaska Early Learning Guidelines
Arizona	<a href="http://www.azed.gov/early-childhood/files/2013/06/earlylearningstandards.pdf">http://www.azed.gov/early-childhood/files/2013/06/earlylearningstandards.pdf</a>	Arizona Department of Education Early Learning Standards
Arkansas	<a href="http://www.arkansas.gov/childcare/programsupport/pdf/aecframework.pdf">http://www.arkansas.gov/childcare/programsupport/pdf/aecframework.pdf</a>	Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework Handbook For Three & Four Year Old Children 2004
California	<a href="http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/psfoundations.asp">http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/psfoundations.asp</a>	California Preschool Learning Foundations Volumes 1-3
Colorado	<a href="http://www.cde.state.co.us/cpp/earlylearningstandards">http://www.cde.state.co.us/cpp/earlylearningstandards</a> *Multiple documents listed under PDFs of Preschool Standards	Colorado Preschool Academic Standards *Multiple titles of documents based on subject matter
Connecticut	<a href="http://www.ct.gov/oec/lib/oec/earlycare/elds/ctelds.pdf">http://www.ct.gov/oec/lib/oec/earlycare/elds/ctelds.pdf</a>	Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards: What Children, Birth to Five, Should Know and Be Able to Do
Delaware	<a href="http://www.doe.k12.de.us/info/suites/students_family/earlychildhood/files/PresscELFFinalJul2010.pdf">http://www.doe.k12.de.us/info/suites/students_family/earlychildhood/files/PresscELFFinalJul2010.pdf</a>	Delaware Early Learning Foundations: Preschool
District of Columbia	<a href="http://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/DC%20Early%20Learning%20Standards2013.pdf">http://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/DC%20Early%20Learning%20Standards2013.pdf</a>	District of Columbia Common Core Early Learning Standards 2012
Florida	<a href="http://flbt5.floridaearlylearning.com/BT5_Uploads/feldsfyo.pdf">http://flbt5.floridaearlylearning.com/BT5_Uploads/feldsfyo.pdf</a>	Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards for Four-Year-Olds (2011)
Georgia	<a href="http://dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/content_standards_full.pdf">http://dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/content_standards_full.pdf</a>	Georgia's Pre-K Program Content Standards
Hawaii	<a href="http://p3hawaii.org/HELDS/st">http://p3hawaii.org/HELDS/st</a>	Hawai'i Early Learning and

	Standards	Development Standards: HELDS
Idaho	<a href="http://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Children/InfantToddlerProgram/EarlyLearningGuidelines/tabid/2280/Default.aspx">http://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Children/InfantToddlerProgram/EarlyLearningGuidelines/tabid/2280/Default.aspx</a>	Idaho Early Learning eGuidelines
Illinois	<a href="http://www.isbe.state.il.us/earlychi/pdf/early_learning_standards.pdf">http://www.isbe.state.il.us/earlychi/pdf/early_learning_standards.pdf</a>	Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards
Indiana	<a href="http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/earlylearning/indiana-foundations-february-2012-2v2.pdf">http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/earlylearning/indiana-foundations-february-2012-2v2.pdf</a>	Foundations to the Indiana Academic Standards for Young Children from Birth to Age 5
Iowa	<a href="http://www.state.ia.us/earlychildhood/files/early_learning_standarda/IELS_2013.pdf">http://www.state.ia.us/earlychildhood/files/early_learning_standarda/IELS_2013.pdf</a>	Iowa Early Learning Standards
Kansas	<a href="http://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/Early%20Childhood/Early%20Learning%20Standards/KsEarlyLearningStandards.pdf">http://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/Early%20Childhood/Early%20Learning%20Standards/KsEarlyLearningStandards.pdf</a>	Kansas Early Learning Standards: Building the Foundation for Successful Children
Kentucky	<a href="http://kidsnow.ky.gov/Improving-Early-Care/Pages/Tools-and-Resources.aspx">http://kidsnow.ky.gov/Improving-Early-Care/Pages/Tools-and-Resources.aspx</a>	Kentucky Early Childhood Standards
Louisiana	<a href="http://www.dcf.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/searchable/ChildDevEarlyLearning/Louisiana%20Continuum/20120203_ProgramsServing4.pdf">http://www.dcf.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/searchable/ChildDevEarlyLearning/Louisiana%20Continuum/20120203_ProgramsServing4.pdf</a>	Louisiana Standards for Programs Serving Four-Year-Old Children
Maine	<a href="http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/learning.pdf">http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/learning.pdf</a>	State of Maine Early Childhood Learning Guidelines
Maryland	<a href="http://mdk12.org/instruction/ensure/MMSR/MMSRpkFrameworkAndStandards.pdf">http://mdk12.org/instruction/ensure/MMSR/MMSRpkFrameworkAndStandards.pdf</a>	Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR): Framework and Standards for Prekindergarten
Massachusetts	<a href="http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs1/curriculum/20030401_preschool_early_learning_guidelines.pdf">http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs1/curriculum/20030401_preschool_early_learning_guidelines.pdf</a>	Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences
Michigan	<a href="http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/ECSQ_OK_Approved_422339_7.pdf">http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/ECSQ_OK_Approved_422339_7.pdf</a>	Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten
Minnesota	<a href="http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/EarlyLearn/index.html">http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/EarlyLearn/index.html</a> *link to pdf at bottom of page	Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards
Mississippi	<a href="http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/curriculum-and-">http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/curriculum-and-</a>	Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Three-Year-Old



	instruction/early-childhood *3 Year Old Standards, 2013 AND 4 Year Old Standards, 2013 were used (NOT Guidelines)	Children AND Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children
Missouri	<a href="http://dese.mo.gov/early-extended-learning/early-learning/missouri-early-learning-standards">http://dese.mo.gov/early-extended-learning/early-learning/missouri-early-learning-standards</a>	Missouri Early Learning Standards
Montana	<a href="http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/documents/mtelgs_001.pdf">http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/documents/mtelgs_001.pdf</a>	Montana's Early Learning Guidelines 2004
Nebraska	<a href="http://www.education.ne.gov/oec/pubs/ELG/3_5_English.pdf">http://www.education.ne.gov/oec/pubs/ELG/3_5_English.pdf</a>	Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for Ages 3 to 5
Nevada	<a href="http://www.nevadaregistry.org/fb_files/PreKStandards-FINAL.pdf">http://www.nevadaregistry.org/fb_files/PreKStandards-FINAL.pdf</a>	Nevada Pre-Kindergarten Standards, Revised and Approved: 2010
New Hampshire	<a href="http://www.education.nh.gov/instruction/curriculum/early_learning.htm">http://www.education.nh.gov/instruction/curriculum/early_learning.htm</a> *2014 official guidelines will be released in Summer of 2014. Draft was analyzed. When official document is released, it will be included.	New Hampshire Early Childhood Standards
New Jersey	<a href="http://www.nj.gov/education/education/guide/">http://www.nj.gov/education/education/guide/</a>	New Jersey State Department of Education Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards
New Mexico	<a href="https://www.newmexicoprek.org/Docs/PreKMaterials2011_2012/FY12_NM_PreK_Early_Learning_Guidelines_webversion_20110830.pdf">https://www.newmexicoprek.org/Docs/PreKMaterials2011_2012/FY12_NM_PreK_Early_Learning_Guidelines_webversion_20110830.pdf</a>	New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines: Birth through Kindergarten
New York	<a href="http://www.p12.nysed.gov/cia/i/common_core_standards/pdf/docs/nyslsprek.pdf">http://www.p12.nysed.gov/cia/i/common_core_standards/pdf/docs/nyslsprek.pdf</a>	New York Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core
North Carolina	<a href="http://www.earlylearning.nc.gov/Foundations/ToDownload.asp">http://www.earlylearning.nc.gov/Foundations/ToDownload.asp</a>	Foundations: Early Learning Standards for North Carolina Preschoolers and Strategies for Guiding Their Success
North Dakota	<a href="http://www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/docs/cfs/nd-early-learning-guidelines-for-ages-3-thru-5.pdf">http://www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/docs/cfs/nd-early-learning-guidelines-for-ages-3-thru-5.pdf</a>	North Dakota Early Learning Guidelines

Ohio	<a href="http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Early-Learning/Early-Learning-Content-Standards">http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Early-Learning/Early-Learning-Content-Standards</a>	Ohio's Early Learning and Development Standards in All Essential Domains of School Readiness (Birth-Age 5)
Oklahoma	<a href="http://digitalprairie.ok.gov/cdm/singleitem/collection/stgovpub/id/19703/rec/38">http://digitalprairie.ok.gov/cdm/singleitem/collection/stgovpub/id/19703/rec/38</a>	Oklahoma Early Learning Guidelines for Children Ages Three Through Five
Oregon	<a href="http://www.ode.state.or.us/gradelevel/pre_k/introfoundations.pdf">http://www.ode.state.or.us/gradelevel/pre_k/introfoundations.pdf</a>	Early Childhood Foundations and Born to Learn: Ages Birth to Five
Pennsylvania	<a href="http://www.pakeys.org/uploadedContent/Docs/PD/Standards/PreK%202010%20No%20Color.pdf">http://www.pakeys.org/uploadedContent/Docs/PD/Standards/PreK%202010%20No%20Color.pdf</a>	Pre-Kindergarten: Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood
Rhode Island	<a href="http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Instruction-and-Assessment-World-Class-Standards/Early-Childhood/ELDS/2013_Early_Learning_and_Development_Standards.pdf">http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Instruction-and-Assessment-World-Class-Standards/Early-Childhood/ELDS/2013_Early_Learning_and_Development_Standards.pdf</a>	RI Early Learning & Development Standards
South Carolina	<a href="http://ed.sc.gov/agency/programs-services/64/documents/EarlyLearningGoodStart.pdf">http://ed.sc.gov/agency/programs-services/64/documents/EarlyLearningGoodStart.pdf</a>	Good Start Grow Smart South Carolina Early Learning Standards for 3, 4, & 5 Year-Old Children
South Dakota	<a href="http://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/documents/EarlyLearningGuidelinesBook.pdf">http://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/documents/EarlyLearningGuidelinesBook.pdf</a>	South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines
Tennessee	<a href="http://www.tennessee.gov/education/standards/early_learning/TNELDS_4yearolds.pdf">http://www.tennessee.gov/education/standards/early_learning/TNELDS_4yearolds.pdf</a>	Revised Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards for Four-Year-Olds
Texas	<a href="http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147495508&amp;menu_id=2147483718">http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147495508&amp;menu_id=2147483718</a>	Revised Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines, 2008
Utah	<a href="http://www.schools.utah.gov/board/Meetings/Summary/materials/EARLYCHILDHOODSTANDARDS-DRAFTJAN2012.aspx">http://www.schools.utah.gov/board/Meetings/Summary/materials/EARLYCHILDHOODSTANDARDS-DRAFTJAN2012.aspx</a>	Early Childhood Standards
Vermont	<a href="http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/pdf/cdd/care/2006-03-29-VELS_booklet.pdf">http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/pdf/cdd/care/2006-03-29-VELS_booklet.pdf</a>	Vermont Early Learning Standards: Guiding the Development and Learning of Children Entering Kindergarten
Virginia	<a href="http://www.earlychildhood.vir">http://www.earlychildhood.vir</a>	Virginia's Foundation Blocks for

	<a href="http://www.ginia.gov/documents/foundationblocks.pdf">ginia.gov/documents/foundationblocks.pdf</a>	Early Learning: Comprehensive Standards for Four-Year-Olds
Washington	<a href="http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/development/docs/guidelines.pdf">http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/development/docs/guidelines.pdf</a>	Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines
West Virginia	<a href="http://wvde.state.wv.us/policies/p2520.15.pdf">http://wvde.state.wv.us/policies/p2520.15.pdf</a>	Early Learning Standards Framework Content Standards and Learning Criteria for West Virginia Pre-Kindergarten
Wisconsin	<a href="http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/documents/WMELS4thEditionBookletFULL.pdf">http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/documents/WMELS4thEditionBookletFULL.pdf</a>	Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards
Wyoming	<a href="http://issuu.com/elf3-5/docs/13-align-0001_early_learning_guides/5">http://issuu.com/elf3-5/docs/13-align-0001_early_learning_guides/5</a>	Wyoming Early Learning Foundations (ages 3-5)