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Running head: COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Evaluating the Collaborative Efforts of Teachers and Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum

Disorders

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Abstract

Educators have emphasized the importance of parent involvement in the educational process for decades. The definitions of parent involvement, however, have changed over time with a current emphasis on genuine parent-school collaboration where parents are seen as partners in their child's education. Such collaboration is especially crucial when the children have special needs, such as those on the autism spectrum. Autism spectrum disorders pose unique challenges to the home-school relationship in part due to the child's communication and social impairments.

This study is part of a larger, ongoing study examining home-school relationships between parents and teachers of children with autism spectrum disorders. Participants were recruited from a local school district, and 21 parents and teachers of children with an autism spectrum disorder completed a packet of questionnaires. Two global questions were: (a) Is collaboration valued and valuable? and (b) What are the key aspects of collaboration? The first question was examined by analyzing feedback data from participants in a workshop designed to enhance home-school collaboration through use of a semi-structured parent-teacher discussion. To answer the second question, correlational analyses were conducted to explore associations between reports of relationship quality, home-school contact, and perceptions of the child's educational environments.

Evaluating the Collaborative Efforts of Teachers and Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

For many years, educators have emphasized the importance of parent involvement in the educational process (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992; Westling, 1996). Active parental involvement in the school is believed to have positive effects for the children, schools, and families (Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). The definitions of parent involvement, however, have changed over time. The current emphasis is on genuine school-parent collaboration, wherein parents are seen as active and integral partners in the education of their children (Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995). Such collaboration is especially crucial when the children have special needs, such as autism, which is a developmental disorder characterized by social impairments, communication difficulties, and repetitive behavior (Kelley & Samuels, 1977). The problems that these children face can pose difficulties for their families and teachers, and more regular communication and cooperative efforts are thought to be necessary between teachers and parents of children with autism. Legislation enacted within the last several decades has attempted to make such collaboration more accessible to parents. For example, the United States Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates that parents be provided with the opportunity to offer input into their children's educational program (Simpson, 1995).

Despite an apparently high level of agreement that parent-school collaboration is a worthy goal, it is not clear how to translate this ideal into practice. Even when parents and educators want to work together, effective collaboration can be constrained by multiple factors, such as a lack of time and economic resources, mutual mistrust, or insufficient skills or guidelines for resolving conflicts inherent in collaborative work (Cullingford & Morrison, 1999; Starr, Foy, & Cramer, 2001).

The present study was designed to explore the potential effects of a workshop on the educator-parent working relationship. The workshop, offered by a local schools district to educators and parents, was designed to: (a) increase the professionals' appreciation for parental input and (b) train school professionals and parents to use a semi-structured discussion that facilitates parent-school communication across ten areas of child functioning. The purpose of this study was to examine if (and how) participation in this workshop and subsequent collaborative discussion was related to later parent and teacher reports of the quality of their relationship, their communication efforts, and the parents' evaluation of the effectiveness of their child's educational environments.

To gain a better understanding of the importance of the study, it is necessary to review the history of home-school collaboration and examine what practices are currently in place. In the following pages, some of the relevant literature will be summarized on historical trends, current definitions of parent-teacher collaboration, collaboration for children with special needs, and the challenges posed by pervasive developmental disorders and, more specifically, autism.

Home-School Collaboration

Gareau & Sawatzky (1995) and Feuerstein (2000) reviewed the history of parent involvement in education in the United States across the last two centuries. According to these authors, prior to the introduction of public schooling, the family provided informal education to the young. In the early 1900s, the parent education movement began, mainly through the establishment of parent-teacher associations (PTAs). Until the 1940s, parents had regular contact with the schools; parents were seen as extensions of the schools and there was a greater sense of community and cultural uniformity. For example, parents would have everyday contact with teachers in smaller towns and rural areas. This changed, however, after World War II,

when family involvement lessened, perhaps due to technological, social, scientific, and cultural changes that decreased the amount of trust that existed between the school and the home.

Education was believed to be a function of the schools, and parental responsibility for the education of children lessened. Parental involvement within the schools therefore decreased as well (Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995). Since the 1970s, however, researchers have suggested that parents should have a larger role in school governance since they too are influenced by school decisions. At that time, small groups of administrators seemed to have the most authority over educational decisions (Feuerstein, 2000). In the 1980s, a school reform movement forced the administrative offices to relinquish some power to the local school councils, which were mainly comprised of parents. The power and influence given to these councils varied among individual school districts, but these organizations generally helped advise, develop long-term plans and projects, and allocate resources (Feuerstein, 2000).

In the 1990s, authors and educators have focused on parent-school collaboration, reflecting the general desire for increased participation of parents in the educational process (Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995). *Collaboration* seems to have replaced the term *parent involvement* in the literature because it is broader in nature and focuses on the relationship between the home and the school and how parents and educators work together, rather than merely focusing on the parents' role in education (Christenson, Rounds, & Franklin 1992; Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995). Recently, collaboration has been defined in a variety of different ways. Most definitions emphasize a process in which the parties involved interact to share responsibility and authority for basic decision making (Christenson et al., 1992; Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995). Christenson et al. (1992) characterizes home-school collaboration as partners working together toward a common goal and with shared power.

The Partnership Approach to Collaboration

It is important to realize that parents can be involved with their children's education without actually collaborating with educators. Parent involvement can be achieved in a variety of ways, including actual presence at the school, teaching at home, reading to/with children, or communicating with teachers. Involved parents are actively interested in and encourage their children's education. The distinction is that home-school collaboration is an attitude rather than activities, and occurs when parents and educators share common goals, view each other equally, and contribute to the collaborative process (Christenson et al., 1992).

In this approach, partnership is considered integral to the educational success of children. Academics will improve when parents and educators collaborate throughout children's educational careers (Christenson et al., 1992). This shared responsibility approach is thought to be necessary for several different reasons. First, schools alone cannot meet all children's needs. The number of at-risk children and problem situations that plague American society illustrates the need for collaboration. Second, a distinct boundary does not exist between home and school experiences for children; rather, the child seems to be mutually influenced by both, so both sides need to interact. Finally, a child's learning community is best suited for learning when the environments of the home, school, and community are linked together and coordinated to meet the children's needs (Fantini, 1983, as cited in Christenson et al., 1992).

Characteristics of Collaboration

Researchers have attempted to define collaboration more specifically. For example, Gareau and Sawatzky's qualitative study (1995) included participants affiliated with the same school: a principal, a counselor, a teacher, and two parents. Data was obtained through two in-depth, semistructured interviews with each individual. From these interviews, the researchers

identified several characteristics of collaboration, which have also been discussed by others in the field:

Communication. Gareau and Sawatzky (1995) found that all participants believed that collaboration is impossible without good home-school communication. Open and honest communication was often encouraged. Parents felt their strongest needs were to be informed and to feel as if teachers listen to them (Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995). Christenson et al. (1992) also identified communication as a critical component in establishing effective home-school collaboration. Formal communication usually occurs through parent-teacher conferences, open houses, or PTA meetings while informal communication occurs through notes and phone calls. When there is little or no communication between the two parties, each may interpret that the lack of availability signifies a lack of concern for the child.

Relationship factors. According to Michael et al. (1992), teacher-parent collaboration requires that both parties approach each other and the process with mutual respect and trust, and attempt to maintain an equal balance of power, which has been demonstrated by other researchers as well.

The participants in Gareau and Sawatzky's study (1995) realized that parents and educators need to be positive and supportive towards one another. People must positively recognize the contributions their partner makes. Negativity can impede the progress of collaboration. Both parties also recognized the importance of establishing personal connections with each other. Parents and teachers should care for each other in addition to the child of interest. Educators sometimes feel that they have more responsibility to initiate this element of the relationship. Honest communication can contribute to trust and mutual respect being formed

over time, and many believe that deeper levels of collaboration would only be reached once trust and respect for each other were achieved.

If true collaboration is going to occur, then the parties need to see each other as equals. Parents do not always feel that this exists, although literature suggests that educators realize and acknowledge that parents can teach them a great deal about the child and thus contribute to the child's education (Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995). Parents often seem to worry how the school and its educators perceive them. They feel vulnerable and powerless in their dealings with school administration (Christenson et al., 1992; Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995). The school system struggles with how much power and influence parents should be allowed over school decisions and is frustrated by the parents who choose not to be involved. Teachers worry that involved parents will challenge their competence, attack or criticize them, or blame them for the children's problems (Christenson et al., 1992). Despite the emphasis on equality, conflicts and fears of inadequacies from both parties are sometimes inevitable in collaboration.

Schoolwide commitment. Teachers cannot work toward effective collaboration alone: School officials and administrators should make an effort to see that their schools are committed to collaborative relationships. Educators need to adopt that approach in working with each other and their superiors because parents recognize and appreciate such an atmosphere (Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995).

Factors Hindering Collaboration

Despite efforts to try to enhance parent involvement in the schools and subsequent home-school collaboration, studies have identified some problems in doing so. These problems can stem from problems within the parent-teacher or parent-school relationship, the teachers or

parents lacking the necessary skills or knowledge for effective collaboration, or the structure within the schools.

Relationship factors. In summarizing the context for their qualitative research study, Sheridan and Kratochwill (1992) cited findings from several studies (e.g., Power, 1985; Becher, 1986; Edge, Strenecky, McLoughlin, & Edge, 1984, all cited in Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992) that identified relationship factors that can prevent effective collaboration. It is hard to build relations among parents and teachers if a competitive relationship between the two exists or the relationship is full of conflict. Value conflicts can prevent sincere and meaningful relationships from being formed. Additionally, teachers struggle with how to involve parents in the process and still maintain their role as experts. Parents often feel as if they themselves are the experts when dealing with decisions regarding their own children; thus, when dealing with a child's problem and attempting to find a solution, parents and teachers both perceive themselves to be more competent than the other.

Factors due to a lack of skills and knowledge. Other researchers have identified alternative reasons for the low levels of parents' involvement and collaboration with schools (Michael et al., 1992; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992; Alborz, 1993). Traditionally, schools have not made direct efforts to involve parents in the educational process. At the same time, however, parents have been hesitant to approach the schools, perhaps due to a lack of skills on how to interact with the professionals. Many parents have reported that they would like more involvement, but they are unsure how to access such school resources (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). Alborz (1993) suggests that parents who have an inside knowledge of how the system works are generally more successful in establishing good relations with teachers. Parents who

feel as if they possess some power are more likely to have a sense of control in the process and thus become more proactive in the collaboration (Michael et al., 1992).

The lack of professional training for educators with regard to promoting parent involvement might be another explanation for the barrier that prevents the establishment of effective partnerships. Teachers and other personnel often receive no training in how to work with parents and are unsure how to seek collaboration with them (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). Teachers also identify the challenge in changing established patterns of behavior and moving toward collaborative efforts (Sperry, Whaley, Shaw, & Brame, 1999).

Factors due to the schools. Both parents and teachers have identified some problems based on the schools that prevent good collaboration. Traditionally, schools have not made a direct effort to involve parents in the educational process (Alborz, 1993). Some parents feel as if schools are too bureaucratically organized and that this prevents their involvement. Parents also feel as if the schools lack a systematic process for involving them in collaboration and are unsure how to access the necessary resources (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). The parents who believe that they understand how the schools work or who believe they hold some power are more likely to be proactive in collaboration and thus have good relationships with teachers (Alborz, 1993; Michael, Arnold, Magliocca, & Miller, 1992). Educators have identified a lack of support from the administration and inadequate resources as barriers that prevent the establishment of effective collaboration (Sperry et al., 1999).

In summary, parent-school collaboration has been advocated as a desirable educational goal, but one that can be difficult to achieve. Parent-school partnership in special education, however, is considered so essential that federal law has specifically mandated it. The unique

status of parent-teacher collaboration when children have diagnosed learning, behavioral, psychological, or medical problems is considered in the following section.

Home-School Collaboration for Children with Special Needs

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142) granted parents of handicapped children the right to more extensive participation in decisions regarding educational placement, goals, and treatment (Donnellan & Mirenda, 1984). This act also prompted new research and a growth in innovative service models. Educators have more resources available to them now than they did prior to the passage of that legislation (Olley & Rosenthal, 1985). In 1985, an amendment to this law stressed the critical need for a collaborative relationship (Michael et al., 1992).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, P.L. 105-17) ensures that children with disabilities receive individualized educational services at public expense (Simpson, 1995). After the appropriate program has been identified for each child, the least restrictive educational setting is also selected (Simpson, 1995). More recent amendments to this act in 1997 call for better collaboration across service delivery systems, particularly parents and providers (Sperry et al., 1999). Different parts of IDEA demonstrate how this can be achieved. This plan outlines the goals for the family and child and the services necessary to meet those goals and should be considered to be a partnership between parents and professionals. Part B emphasizes the importance of parent participation in the development of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

An IEP must be in place before a child can receive any special education or other necessary services. It must be reviewed or revised at least annually. The format for developing IEPs differs across states and school districts. IEPs were designed to be a cooperative document

that would promote input from parents and educators, rather than to be legally binding contracts. They do, however, clarify the respective involvement of parents and educators (Simpson, 1995).

More specifically, the IEP has two basic components: (a) meetings between parents and educators to decide a student's educational program and (b) the document that summarizes the decisions made during these meetings (Simpson, 1995). These two components offer several different functions. The IEP is a written commitment of resources to enable a child with a disability to receive whatever special education or related services are necessary. It is a management tool used to ensure that the child is receiving services that are appropriate and in accordance with his/her special needs. Further, the IEP can be a monitoring device used to determine if the child is receiving the agreed upon free appropriate public education (FAPE) and making progress toward the projected goals and outcomes (Simpson, 1995).

Research on Collaboration in Special Education

The law has been written in a way that is supposed to make it easier for parents of children with special needs to participate in effective collaboration and thus enjoy the benefits from collaboration. Although the law itself cannot guarantee parental satisfaction with collaboration, research has shown that parents who perceive themselves to be actively involved in the educational process are more apt to view the school and the educators favorably and are more likely to express satisfaction with their child's educational program (Westling, 1996). Westling (1996) reviewed seven studies that investigated what type and how much involvement parents desired. More than 1800 participants (parents of children with disabilities and parents of children with no disabilities) in two of the studies were compared in terms of their involvement in the educational process (Salisbury & Evans, 1988; Yanok & Derubertis, 1989, both as cited in Westling, 1996). Both studies questioned parents of children in general education and special

education classrooms. Findings from the first study revealed that the majority of special education parents believed that they had sufficient opportunities for involvement, were satisfied with their level of involvement in educational decisions, and had experienced recent teacher contact. The second study showed that mothers of children in special education requested involvement more often and were more satisfied with their degree of involvement than parents of children in general education.

Another study of 99 families also revealed that special education parents were satisfied with the school program (Meyers & Balser, 1987, as cited in Westling, 1996). The study noted that parents of a higher socioeconomic status and with more education were more likely to be involved with the schools. They found that 86% of the parents participated in the IEP process, 52% were involved in parent groups, and 47% had regular or frequent communication with the schools.

The other studies did not find as much involvement in the process. In one study with 325 participants, the primary reason for the lack of involvement was due to the inability to schedule a time when both parties could meet (Leyser, 1985, as cited in Westling, 1996). Nevertheless, most of these participants (85% in each of the studies) did not identify communication problems and expressed satisfaction with their child's educational program.

Based on these findings, Westling (1996) made several conclusions and observations. He concluded that parents of children with disabilities desire to be more involved in the school than parents of children in general education, and they typically are. They want the opportunity to influence the educational program and seek opportunities to do so beyond the IEP process, such as parent groups. Almost all participants desired regular communication with the school.

These findings seem to indicate that parents of children with special needs are generally satisfied with the education their children are receiving and their own role within the process. More research needs to focus, however, on the perceptions of parents of children with autism, since this is a disorder that has been identified as being one that demands more special attention and collaboration (Starr et al., 2001). Because working with children with autism poses unique challenges to teachers and parents alike, generalizations about parental satisfaction with special education services and programs should not be assumed to be true of parents of children with autism as well.

Challenges Posed by Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD) and Autism

Recent changes in education and the law are increasing the number of students with special needs that are being included in the general education classrooms (Starr et al., 2001). Bang and Lamb (1996) found that general education teachers can become frustrated when trying to meet the needs of all their students (as cited in Starr et al., 2001). General education teachers report needing more resource support or training, especially in the area of pervasive developmental disorders (PDD); thus, the behaviors typical of children with PDD appear to be especially challenging and perplexing to educators (Starr et al., 2001). Pervasive developmental disorders, of which autism is one, have been identified as the group of disorders that necessitate the most additional training.

Autism is characterized by a variety of symptoms, which may include: difficulty relating to people objects and events; lack of interaction with other children; avoiding eye contact; inability to accept affection/be touched, insistence that the environment and routine remain unchanged; compulsive and ritualistic behaviors, self-stimulatory behavior; tantrums; violent behavior toward others, etc (Nielsen, 1997; Gray, 1998). The impairment of language

development in children with autism is one of the biggest problems for parents and educators. Additionally, some of these behaviors that children with autism demonstrate would be difficult for inexperienced teachers to manage in the classroom. The behaviors associated with autism presents challenges to both parents and educators. Both groups can harbor different misconceptions about autism and hold discrepant views that can make effective collaboration more difficult. For example, parents and teachers often disagree whether or not mental retardation is present and therefore may find it difficult to agree to an appropriate educational program (Starr et al., 2001).

Parent-Teacher and Parent-Professional Views of Autism and Collaboration

The idea of collaboration for educators working with parents of children with autism is not a new topic. It has been discussed in the literature in the most recent decades. For example, Donnellan and Mirenda (1984) summarized some the literature focused on how autism professionals have changed their views of parents over the years and what attitudes or assumptions can prevent productive work with parents of children with autism. Professionals, not just educators, have had to revise their roles and attitudes in order to accept parents as partners. Traditionally, teachers have considered themselves to be experts because of their comprehensive training and the general attitude society held about parent-professional relationships. This has changed, however, as parents have been encouraged to seek out, understand, accept, and follow professional recommendations regarding the child's education and treatment. In addition, such parental effort is thought to result in progress and improvement on the child's part (Lortie, 1975, as cited in Donnellan & Mirenda, 1984). Parents who do not treat professional advice as such or who do not seek such services may be considered uncooperative. Therefore, professionals can adopt negative assumptions toward parents and

families in general. To foster genuine collaboration, professionals must recognize such assumptions and evaluate parents in a new light (Donnellan & Mirenda, 1984).

Donnellan and Mirenda (1984) list recommendations for professionals that are particularly relevant in the school setting. Professionals should remember that parents share concern for the child's long-term functioning, want what is best for the child, and want to be and should be actively involved in the educational process. Furthermore, any educational intervention program should involve families as much as possible, while acknowledging the families' rights to opt for minimal participation. Parents should be seen as the experts in their child's history, behavior, and needs, and therefore should have as much membership in the educational planning team as they desire. Parents should always have full access to all diagnostic and educational information.

In their background research, Stone and Rosenbaum (1988) mentioned several studies that investigated parent and teacher perceptions of autism. In their rationale for this research, the authors highlighted the prominent roles that educators and parents have in the treatment of children with autism. Parental involvement is now seen as a vital component of the treatment program. Studies have shown parents to be effective agents of change and play key roles in facilitating generalization of learning from the school to the home and larger community. Both parents and teachers should possess a current understanding of the disorder, since parent-teacher collaboration is important for treatment success. Divergent views regarding autism could possibly obstruct meaningful and productive educational programming and planning.

Sperry et al. (1999) performed a qualitative research study that examined the unique views of families and service providers regarding services for young children with autism. Participants included 30 parents and 22 service providers divided into two focus groups in which

trained professionals facilitated interviews. Themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis revealed that parents and service providers concur on many points. Both parents and providers recognized the need for collaboration. Parents knew sharing a common goal with the professionals had positive impacts for their children, while professionals emphasized collaboration as the coordination of services and a multidisciplinary team that included parental involvement. Parents and providers agree that services need to be family centered while being structured to meet the diverse needs of individual families. Parents desired more control over decisions affecting the lives of their families and should choose what services they wished to employ, while professionals thought that it was more important that families each had equal access to services. Parents believed that it is necessary for every person in contact with their children to have the proper training, and professionals further emphasized the importance for this training to be ongoing.

The areas of divergence between teachers and parents in this study may be representative of the different perspectives of parents and professionals and are not necessarily disagreements per se. The parent groups also revealed themes of the inaccessibility of some services and legislation that supported the rights of their children. Parents stated that they had to deal with many obstacles when trying to obtain services for their children with autism. They also mentioned their children's rights to early intervention and a free appropriate public education with inclusion in the least restrictive environment possible. Some expressed a desire for a national policy that would protect all children with autism and ensure that they were receiving the necessary services. The areas of divergence for the service providers were unrelated to collaboration in education. Overall, the findings from this study acknowledged that both groups

understood that the children with autism would ultimately benefit from a mutually respectful partnership between the two.

Helps, Newsom-Davis, and Callias (1999) examined the teachers' views of autism and their training needs because conceptualizations of autism have caused confusion over its nature and etiology. Participants included 72 teachers and support staff who were compared to a control group of ten mental health professionals on their knowledge and understanding. Teachers emphasized a need for further training: only ten percent of mainstream teachers had received any training, while 50% of the special school teachers and 40% of the support staff had received some type of training in autism. Teachers identified a particular need for training and support regarding behavioral management and teaching methods. Teachers differed from the mental health professionals in their beliefs that children with autism do not have learning difficulties, that most have special talents or abilities, and that autism is an emotional rather than a developmental disorder. These views are at odds with some of the most important diagnostic characteristics of the disorder.

These findings illustrate that the majority of teaching staff lacked a basic theoretical understanding of autism, most likely due to inadequate training. Teachers in the mainstream schools generally had poorer knowledge of autism and had received less training. This has the potential to create serious problems in the classroom, especially since the inclusion movement is gaining acceptance in practice (Helps et al., 1999). Problematic situations in the classroom and such grave misunderstandings about the basic nature of the disorder could complicate any teacher efforts to form meaningful relationships with parents.

Other researchers have found that the complex nature of autism spectrum disorders can pose unique challenges to a collaborative partnership. Parents and teachers can both have

misconceptions of cognitive, emotional, and developmental characteristics of autism (Stone & Rosenbaum, 1988). A needs assessment for training teachers revealed that autism was identified as the highest priority disability that necessitated further training (Arick, Falco, & Brazeau, 1989, as cited in Starr et al., 2001).

A study by Starr et al. (2001) examined the parental perceptions of and satisfaction with the education their children with pervasive development disorders were receiving. Information was collected from parents of 69 children. The study revealed some interesting findings. The majority of parents were satisfied with their child's overall education (more than 70% of the respondents answered approximately 75% of the items assessing the classroom environment and educational team favorably). Some communication problems were also mentioned, however, with 45.5% believing that the team does not meet often enough and that the parent does not meet with the teacher on a regular basis. Interestingly, parents of nonverbal children or younger children were more favorable in their evaluations than were children of verbal children or older children. The researchers identified possible reasons for these findings. First, higher functioning (verbal) children appear more capable, so their needs might be less understood. Second, parents of younger children might have been more satisfied overall because home-school communication is usually more frequent in the primary grades; in turn, this communication may contribute to more effective collaboration.

Current Study

The research summarized above demonstrates that discrepant views of autism between teachers and parents do exist and that these differences have the potential to prevent effective collaboration. These studies further illustrate the need for continued study of teacher-parent relationships and how to improve home-school collaboration for children with autism. While a

great deal of the research shows that many parents are satisfied with their child's educational program and their relationships with the teachers, these findings cannot be presumed to apply to autism as well. For example, the lack of shared understanding about the disorder has been hypothesized to prevent the formation of effective working partnerships between the teachers and the parents.

This study involved collecting questionnaire responses from parents and teachers in order to explore two major research questions regarding parent-teacher collaboration. First, is collaboration valued by and valuable to teachers and parents of children with autism? Second, what are the important aspects of collaboration and how are they related to perceptions of the child's educational environment?

To explore the first question, I examined responses from attendees at a workshop that demonstrated to teachers and parents how to communicate together using a semi-structured discussion (The Autism Spectrum Disorder Child Profile Discussion Guide; Kunce, Doepke, & Mace, 2001). This guide was designed to facilitate discussion about ten areas of child functioning relevant to autism (e.g., communication, challenging behaviors, etc.). I hypothesized that teachers and parents who completed the collaborative discussion would report: (a) more positive home-school relationships, (b) increased levels of parent-teacher interaction, (c) more positive perceptions of the classroom environment, and (d) more positive evaluations of the ASD Discussion Guide versus evaluations of a "typical" parent-teacher conference.

To explore the second research question regarding the key aspects of collaboration, I planned to investigate other possible correlates of parent-teacher relationship quality. Specifically, I wanted to answer three exploratory questions: (a) Do parent and teacher reports of relationship quality correlate with parent-teacher contact (especially teacher outreach)?, (b) Are

parent and teacher reports of relationship quality correlated with evaluations of the child's educational environment?, and (c) Is parent-teacher contact correlated with evaluations of the child's educational environment?. For each question, I hypothesized that these variables would be correlated in a (low) positive direction.

Method

Participants

Two overlapping groups participated in the study. All educators and parents of the 31 children with autism spectrum disorders in a school district in a moderately sized Midwestern community were invited to attend a district-sponsored workshop on parent-teacher collaboration. All 25 workshop participants were female, with 6 parents and 19 educators attending. No other demographic data was gathered on workshop participants.

Approximately two months after the workshop, all teachers and parents of children with autism in the district were invited to participate in a questionnaire study on teacher-parent relationships. Recruitment occurred through flyers distributed at local parent support groups, and two letters were sent with school district permission and assistance to all applicable teachers and parents. All recruitment materials clearly stated that neither parents nor educators were under any obligation to participate in the research project, that all data would be kept strictly confidential, and that, specifically, data shared with the school district or in reports of the research would be presented so that no individuals could be personally identified. Those who agreed to participate received a thank-you gift of two free video rental coupons.

Participants in the questionnaire study included 21 educators and parents of children with autism spectrum disorders, including 5 parents and 7 teachers who had attended the workshop. Ten parents (9 mothers, 1 father) completed the questionnaire packets. The majority of the

parents were over the age of 40 ($n = 6$), but three fell in the age range of 31-40 and one was under the age of 30. All parents had at least completed high school, and more than half the parents had graduated from a 4-year college or attended some type of graduate program ($n = 6$).

Eleven educators (10 females, 1 male) completed questionnaire packets. Most of the teachers ($n = 7$) were over 40 years of age, one was between 31-40, and two were under 30 years of age. Seven teachers had completed some graduate school, while the other four had completed their graduate school programs. The teachers held the following occupations: special education teachers ($n = 5$), early intervention teachers ($n = 3$), regular classroom teacher ($n = 1$), teaching aide or assistant ($n = 1$), and speech pathologist ($n = 1$). Educators worked with the children for an average of 3.48 hours per day (range 1 to 7 hours). Finally, only two of the teachers had never had another student with an autism spectrum disorder. The other teachers had worked with an average of 3.54 other children with an autism spectrum disorder (range from 1 to 20).

Altogether, there were 15 different children (13 males and 2 females) and families represented in the sample. This is less than the total number of adult respondents ($n = 21$), because four of the teachers and parents were matched to one another and two of teachers responded about the same child. The children ranged in age from 5 to 16 ($M = 10.79$). Of the children for whom parents provided demographic data, eight were males and two were females. All children had autism spectrum disorders: autism ($n = 6$), high functioning autism or Asperger's syndrome ($n = 3$), or a pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified ($n = 1$). On a simple 3-point scale ranging from mild to severe, most parents classified the severity of their child's disorder as moderate ($n = 6$), while three identified it as mild (1 missing data).

Measures

Discussion Evaluation Scale (Kunce & Doepke, 2001). This 11-item form was developed by the workshop presenters and used both as part of the evaluation of the workshop and in the questionnaire study. Items asked participants to evaluate the collaborative parent-teacher discussion (either a parent-teacher conference or the ASD Discussion Guide) and were similar to items used in standard treatment evaluations (e.g., Intervention Rating Profile-15, Martens et al., 1985). Examples of items include “I believe that this parent-teacher discussion was an acceptable method for improving my child/student’s educational program” and “I would recommend parent-teacher discussions like this one to other teachers and parents of children with autism spectrum disorders.” The items used a 1-5 likert scale, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Collaboration Beliefs Scale (Kunce & Doepke, 2001). This measure was used as part of the evaluation of the workshop and included general items tapping beliefs about collaboration (e.g., “I believe that teacher-parent collaboration is important” and “I believe that teachers and parents should be equal partners in educating children”). These 7 items used a 1-6 likert scale, with 1 meaning strongly disagree and 6 meaning strongly agree.

Background Information Forms. This measure asked basic demographic information of both the parents and teachers. Parents provided information about their child with an autism spectrum disorder (e.g., child’s age, diagnosis, severity of disorder, etc.), the parent and their family (e.g., relationship to the child, age, education, income, etc.), and their autism awareness (e.g., reading articles and books, attending autism conferences or meetings, etc.). Teachers provided similar information about their ages, education, positions with the school district,

amount of contact per day with the child, the total number of students they have had with autism, and their autism awareness.

Parent-Teacher Involvement Questionnaire and Parent-Teacher Involvement Measure (PTIQ and PTIM; Kohl et al., 2000). These measures include parallel but not identical sets of scales for parents and teachers that were designed to assess various dimensions of parent-school relationships. The parents completed the PTIQ (26 items) and the subscales measured the dimensions of relationship quality, parent's involvement and volunteering at the school, parent's endorsement of child's school, and frequency of parent-teacher contact. The teachers completed the PTIM (21 items) and their variables included the parent's comfort in their relationship with the teacher and the school in general, the parent's involvement and volunteering at the school, and parent-teacher contact. Reported subscale reliabilities (Cronbach's α) range from .67 to .93.

Perceived Teacher Outreach Scale (PTOS; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000). This scale has 10 items that measure parents' perceptions of teacher behaviors thought to encourage parent involvement (e.g., "Does your child's teacher share information with you in a positive way?" and "Does the teacher try to make you feel comfortable when you meet?"). Prior research indicates that the scale has good internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$).

Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale (PTRS-II; Vickers & Minke, 1995). This 23-item measure supplemented the data gathered by the PTIQ and PTIM by providing a broader picture of the underlying quality of parent-teacher relationships. The test has two subscales: (1) The Joining Subscale ($\alpha = .98$ for both parent and teacher versions) assesses mutual affiliation and support (e.g., "We cooperate with each other") and (2) Communication to Other Subscale ($\alpha = .85$ for teachers and $\alpha = .86$ for parents) that assesses parent teacher communication to the other person (e.g., "I tell this teacher/parent when I am pleased").

Classroom Environment Scale (CES; Starr et al., 2001). This 24-item measure was designed specifically to gather information from parents of children with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders. The scale assesses parent's perceptions of the quality of the child's classroom environment (e.g., "Classroom routine is predictable" and "Child understands what is required of him/her in classroom"; $\alpha = .94$). Teachers were asked to complete the same form.

Phone Survey. In addition to the questionnaire packets, one phone call was made to participants who completed a collaborative discussion based on the ASD Discussion Guide and who were also in the formal questionnaire study. These phone calls, approximately 10-20 minutes in length, were used to gather less structured information regarding participant perceptions of the parent-teacher interview and ongoing parent-teacher collaboration. The questions asked were: (a) "Please tell me how the parent-teacher discussion went. I am especially interested in any positive or negative experiences you had during the discussion with the parent/teacher," (b) "If any, what changes or ideas have been implemented at school based on the discussion?" and (c) "If any, what effects do you think the discussion has had or will have on your relationship with the teacher/parent?"

Procedures

As previously described and with the assistance of the school district, all parents and educators of children with autism were invited through two separate recruitment letters to participate in both the workshops and the questionnaire study. Workshop participants provided evaluative feedback (the Collaboration Beliefs Scale and the Discussion Evaluation Scale) at the conclusion of the first workshop. They completed these same measures after actually holding the collaborative discussion and attending the second workshop.

Data gathering for the questionnaire study entailed mailing questionnaire packets to the interested parents and teachers midway through the academic year. Parent packets were comprised of the Background Information Form, Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire, Parent Teacher Relationship Scale, Perceived Teacher Outreach Scale, Classroom Environment Scale, and the Discussion Evaluation Scale (sample packet is included in Appendix A). Teacher packets were comprised of the Background Information Form, Parent Teacher Involvement Measure, Parent Teacher Relationship Scale, Classroom Environment Scale, and the Discussion Evaluation Scale (sample packet is included in Appendix B). All participants completed the measures approximately three months after a parent-teacher discussion (either the ASD Discussion Guide or a recent parent-teacher conference). Thus, workshop participants who were also in the questionnaire study completed the Discussion Evaluation Scale a third time several months later. Furthermore, this overlapping group of participants also received a follow-up phone call (the Phone Survey) approximately four months after having the collaborative discussion. The questionnaire packet was the first wave of data collection in a larger, ongoing study. Another follow-up is planned for three months after completion of the first packet.

Research Design and Data Analyses

A primary goal of this study was to evaluate the possible immediate and long-term impact of workshop training on the teacher-parent relationship, teacher-parent contact, and the child's educational environment. Ideally, the research design would have involved random assignment of interested educators and parents to a workshop and control condition. This was not possible, however, because of the nature of the workshop and local needs for training. That is, the workshop was offered to all parents and educators of children with autism to meet district needs.

Thus, the original research design called for a matched control group design. The “treatment” participants would have been educators who completed the semi-structured parent-teacher interview (the ASD Discussion Guide) based on workshop training and the “control” participants would have consisted of educators and parents recruited from the same school district who did not complete the ASD Discussion Guide together.

Unfortunately, despite active recruitment efforts, sufficient control and treatment groups could not be formed for three reasons. First, the sample size was insufficient to complete a 2 (workshop training) X 2 (parent/teacher) design (the cell sizes ranged from four to seven people). Second, the mean age of children in the “treatment” group ($M = 6.67$) was significantly lower than the mean age of the “control” group ($M = 14.37$), $t(18) = 11.54$, $p < .001$. Third, the control group participants also different from the treatment group in that all the controls were participants in a social group run by the researchers for high functioning children with autism. Therefore, an adequate control group could not be formed and planned group comparisons could not be calculated. Instead, descriptive and correlational analyses were used to summarize participant responses.

Results

Evaluations of the Teacher-Parent Discussion: Is Collaboration Valued and Valuable?

At the end of the first workshop, participants' ($n = 25$) general beliefs were very positive about teacher-parent collaboration, as shown by their mean score on the Collaboration Beliefs Scale ($M=5.78$, $SD=.37$, on a 1-6 likert scale). Participants also seemed optimistic about conducting a parent-teacher discussion using the ASD Discussion Guide. The mean score for the Discussion Evaluation Scale of 4.28 ($SD = .40$, on a 1-5 likert scale) fell between “agree” and “strongly agree”, and indicating that they believed it would have positive effects. There was a

significant positive correlation between participants' general beliefs about collaboration and their perceptions of the ASD Discussion Guide, $r = .418$, $p < .05$.

At the end of the second workshop, participants ($n = 23$) again completed the Collaboration Beliefs Scale and the Discussion Evaluation Scale about their actual experiences holding a collaborative parent-teacher discussion using the ASD Discussion Guide. The participants remained positive in their general views of collaboration ($M = 5.75$, $SD = .50$) and in their specific evaluation of the ASD Discussion Guide ($M = 4.53$, $SD = .43$). Once again, participants who reported more positive general beliefs about collaboration rated the discussion more positively, $r = .604$, $p < .01$.

Three-month follow up data was available on a subsample of 12 workshop participants (5 parents and 7 teachers), who once again completed the Discussion Evaluation Scale in the context of participating in the questionnaire study. Their mean score of 4.14 ($SD = .57$) shows that the participants overall felt the discussion was a suitable and effective intervention months later. Furthermore, the range of scores (3.36 to 4.82) reveals that nobody felt the discussion was inappropriate or harmful.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to see if there were any significant differences among the participants' mean scores at the three different points in time (the first workshop with 25 participants, the second workshop with 23 participants, and the study with 12 participants). This test did reveal a significant difference, $F(2, 54) = 3.25$, $p < .05$. A Tukey B post hoc test showed that the participants' mean score at the end of the second workshop was significantly higher than their mean score when completing the evaluation form at the three-month follow-up.

Two additional items were included on the Discussion Evaluation Scale in the questionnaire packet. The first item asked how much interest the teacher/parent seemed to have

in providing information and ideas (1 = none to 6 = very great interest). The mean for this item was 4.73 ($SD = 1.56$) and the scores ranged from 1 to 6. The second item asked participants to rate the type of effects the discussion has had on the working relationship with the teacher/parent (1 = very negative to 6 = very positive). All participants perceived the collaborative discussion as having effects that were at least somewhat positive ($M = 5.18$, $SD = .87$). The range of scores from 4 to 6 indicates that no participants perceived that the using the parent-teacher discussion based on the ASD Discussion Guide had produced harmful or negative effects.

Both of these items also correlated significantly with the overall mean score on the Discussion Evaluation Scale ($r = .745$, $p < .01$; $r = .875$, $p < .01$ respectively). Thus, the more positive people were about the discussion as a whole, the more likely they were to feel that the other party was genuinely interested in providing ideas and information and to feel that there had been positive effects on the working relationship.

Seven of the twelve questionnaire study participants who completed the ASD Discussion Guide completed the brief phone survey. I spoke to four parents and three teachers, and all were still positive about their experiences using the ASD Discussion Guide. No negative feedback or experiences were reported from any participant. All respondents stated that they would like to see every parent and every teacher of children with autism use it, preferably at the beginning of the school year so ideas and routines can be implemented from the start. Three of the parents and two teachers felt they already had good relationships with the other party, but all reported increases in the amount of contact and improvements in relationship quality. The other parent and teacher who did not mention a positive relationship prior to using the ASD Discussion Guide felt that they had learned more about the other party and the child (at either home or school).

The Questionnaire Study: What Are the Key Aspects of Collaboration?

Parent and teacher analyses were run separately from one another for two reasons. First, parallel but not consistently identical measures were used to assess constructs of interest for teachers and parents, thus it was impossible to collapse data across parents and teachers for all measures. Second, running analyses separately made it possible to detect different patterns of correlation among parents and teachers.

Tables 1 and 2 present, respectively, the parent and teacher correlational analyses that will be explained in detail in the following sections. The measures are grouped by the primary constructs of interest: relationship quality, contact/outreach, and the child's educational environment.

Is relationship quality correlated with teacher-parent contact/outreach? As shown in the middle portion of the first column in Table 1, no significant parent correlations between relationship quality and contact scales were significant at $p < .05$. Generally, there were low positive correlations between all the measures. The Perceived Teacher Outreach Scale (PTOS) and the PTIQ Relationship Subscale had a marginal but not significant correlation ($r = .597$, $p < .069$). This suggests that parents who believe the teacher is actively reaching out to them also report a more satisfied and positive relationship with their child's teacher.

As shown in Table 2, there was a significant teacher correlation between the PTRS Joining Subscale and the PTRS Communication to Other Subscale ($r = .621$, $p < .05$). This indicates that teachers who describe themselves as demonstrating outreach behaviors to the parents (the PTRS Communication to Other Subscale) report a positive relationship quality with the parents.

Is relationship quality correlated with perceptions of the child's educational environment? As shown in Table 1, three of four possible parent correlations between relationship quality and

the child's educational environment were significant or marginally significant. The PTRS Joining Subscale was significantly correlated with the PTIQ School Endorsement Subscale ($r = .719, p < .05$) and it was also significantly correlated with the CES ($r = .890, p < .01$). The other measure of relationship quality, the PTIQ Relationship Subscale was marginally significant with the CES ($r = .613, p < .06$). Thus, the parents' reports of relationship quality with the teachers seem to be associated with their overall perceptions of their child's school and the classroom environment. Because the CES was specifically designed to assess the classroom environment for children with autism, these findings demonstrate that the more positive parents feel about the relationship with the teachers, the more likely they are to view the classroom as appropriate for a child with autism.

These results were not replicated with the teachers. Both the PTIM Relationship Subscale and the PTRS Joining Subscale had low positive correlations with the CES, but neither was significant. Thus, in contrast with parents, relationship quality and perceptions of the child's classroom environment do not seem to be strongly related for teachers.

Is parent-teacher contact/outreach correlated with perceptions of the child's educational environment? For parents, only one significant correlation was obtained: between the PTOS and CES ($r = .668, p < .05$). Positive parental perceptions of the quality of teacher outreach were associated with positive perceptions of the child's classroom environment. There was no correlation between the PTIQ School Endorsement Subscale and the PTIQ Contact Subscale ($r = .094, ns$). Parents' general endorsement of the school appears to have little to do with the amount of contact they have with the teacher.

There were no significant correlations among these constructs for the teachers. The amount of contact that teachers have with the parents was not related to their perceptions of the child's educational environment.

Additional Analyses

Because a lack of shared understanding of autism between parents and teachers has been hypothesized to prevent the formation of effective home-school relationships, additional analyses were done some of the items included in the Background Information Forms to assess the participants' awareness and understanding of autism. The parents and teachers who completed the questionnaire packet considered themselves to be fairly knowledgeable about autism. An item on both the parent and teacher Background Information Form asked participants to compare their knowledge about autism to other parents and teachers in central Illinois. The mean parent response indicated that most parents believed they knew as much or somewhat more than other parents ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.22$). Scores ranged from 1 (much less) to 5 (much more). Like the parents, most teachers also felt they were at least as knowledgeable or somewhat more knowledgeable about autism compared to other teachers in central Illinois. Interestingly, their mean score was actually higher than the parents ($M = 3.73$, $SD = .90$). This was not significant, however, $t(18) = -.123$, $p < .903$.

Many of the parents and teachers had also attempted to increase their awareness of autism (see Table 3). The Background Information Forms asked participants to report how often they had engaged in the following behaviors during the last two years: (a) read one or more articles or books on autism, (b) attended autism conferences or workshops (national, state, and local), and (c) regularly attended an autism team or group meetings.

Parents generally had higher mean scores on these variables than the teachers; however, only two of these differences were significant. Parents read more books ($\underline{M} = 48$, $\underline{SD} = 63.26$) than teachers ($\underline{M} = 4.56$, $\underline{SD} = 3.17$), $t(17) = 2.17$, $p < .05$. There was also a trend for parents to attend more autism team or group meetings ($\underline{M} = 11.71$, $\underline{SD} = 10.55$) than teachers ($\underline{M} = 4.36$, $\underline{SD} = 6.92$); however, this was only of marginal significance, $t(16) = 1.634$, $p < .09$. As seen in Table 3, the standard deviations for these variables are much larger for the parents than the teachers, which indicates a greater range in the parent responses and thus different levels of parent activity.

Discussion

Parental involvement within the schools has changed dramatically throughout the last century, with the recent emphasis placed on a meaningful, collaborative, and equal relationship between teachers and parents (e.g., Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995). Such a relationship is thought to be particularly important for teachers and parents of children with special needs. Given the complexity of many of the disorders and the problematic behaviors associated with them, it follows that teachers and parents of these children would especially need to know how to collaborate with each other. Studies have shown that autism spectrum disorders in particular should warrant increased parent-teacher collaboration due to their complicated nature (e.g., Starr et al., 2001).

This study asked two global questions regarding parent-teacher collaboration. First, I wanted to examine if collaboration was valued by and valuable to the parents and teachers of children with autism spectrum disorders. Overall, the workshop attendees exhibited very strong support for parent-teacher collaboration. This supports the research of Sperry et al. (1999), which showed that parents and professionals recognize the need for collaboration. Workshop

participants were positive in their general beliefs about the value of collaboration and also in their initial perceptions of a time-intensive collaborative discussion. The ASD Discussion Guide follows the partnership approach to collaboration that Christenson et al. (1992) suggests is so important. The ASD Discussion Guide was also designed so that parents and teachers would view each other as equals; ideally this would prevent the parties from each feeling that they were the experts and more competent than the other. Such feelings have been identified as problems that hinder collaboration (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). Teachers in this study may struggle working with parents who typically have more knowledge and awareness about autism than they do.

Workshop participants remained positive after immediately having the discussion (assessed at the end of the second workshop) and the smaller sub-sample in the questionnaire study was still positive three months later. Although there was a significant decrease in the overall evaluation of the parent-teacher discussion from the end of the second workshop to the questionnaire study, it not clear what caused this decline or if it is of practical significance. Of greatest concern is the possibility of selection bias; that is, only 12 of 25 participants chose to participate in the questionnaire study. Although this was a similar response to recruitment requests by non-workshop participants, it is possible that those who more positively or negatively viewed their home-school relationships and collaboration attempts elected to participate. Therefore, results from this study must be interpreted with caution.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that no participants who completed the phone survey reported any negative or harmful effects to the parent-teacher relationship after using the collaborative discussion based on the ASD Discussion Guide. This should be carefully interpreted, as attempts to contact the remaining participants were not successful. Also, because

participants were giving direct feedback that was not anonymous, they might have been reluctant to express negative reactions. Overall, however, it appears that the ASD Discussion Guide could be an effective tool in improving parent-teacher collaboration. Anonymous participant responses in the Discussion Evaluation Scale (DES) were all at least fairly positive when they were collected at three different points in time. Specific items on the version of the DES in the questionnaire packet asked participants to rate how much interest the other party had during the discussion and how effective the discussion was overall. The positive trends continued for these items.

The second global research question focused on the important aspects of collaboration. Specifically, I asked three questions about the relationships among relationship quality, parent-teacher contact/outreach, and the perceptions of the child's educational environment. There was strongest parent support for the second question (Is relationship quality correlated with perceptions of the child's educational environment?). Relationship quality was highly correlated to perceptions of the child's school, and perhaps more importantly, the child's classroom environment. The measure used to assess the classroom environment was designed specifically for children with autism spectrum disorders or other pervasive developmental disorders; therefore, parents evaluated how appropriate the classroom is. Perhaps parents who view the classrooms favorably believe the teachers make more of an effort and genuinely care about the children. This could translate into positive parental perceptions of the parent-teacher relationship. Or, parents who genuinely like and respect the teacher might be more apt to hold favorable impressions of the classroom environment. Additionally, there could be a real impact between the two. Better relationships and collaboration could improve the class environment if

teachers implemented ideas learned from the parents into the classroom or parents incorporated other ideas used at school into the home.

In contrast, the relationships among these constructs for teachers were less evident, as most of the correlations of interest were positive but not significant. If the sample size were larger, clearer correlational patterns might emerge.

There were few significant correlations for the first question (Is relationship quality correlated with parent-teacher contact/outreach?), which suggests to me that the quality of contact with the other party (rather than the amount of contact or involvement) is more important in predicting relationship quality. This supports the newer emphasis on collaboration and a partnership approach as the variables that most matter to effective home-school relationships, rather than the amount of parent involvement within the schools. Gareau and Sawatzky (1995) and Christenson et al. (1992) identified the importance of the quality of parent-teacher communication to the collaborative process. If quality of contact is more important than the amount, then parents might be more involved when they are unhappy with their child's educational environment, which would not lead to positive reports of relationship quality. Alternatively, parents could be happy with their relationships and have very little contact with the teachers or schools. Thus, the match between what people perceive to be as necessary contact and what they actually receive may be a better predictor in how positive they are when assessing their home-school relationships.

There were mixed findings regarding the importance of teacher outreach. The main idea that seems apparent is that the quality of teacher outreach behaviors seemed to be the most important predictor of relationship quality. Perceived teacher outreach was significantly related with parental perceptions of their child's classroom environment and marginally significant for

parents' reports of relationship quality. These findings are consistent with research by Gareau and Sawatzky (1995) that suggested that parents feel the need to be informed and feel that the teacher is listening to them. Teacher outreach had low to moderately positive correlation coefficients with the rest of the measures for the other parent measures of the constructs.

Teachers' report of their own outreach was significantly correlated with the quality of relationships with the parents. This is similar to findings by Gareau and Sawatzky (1995), where their teacher participants felt the need to initiate more of the outreach in order to establish better communication and relationships with the parents. Most of the other teacher outreach correlations in this study were again low to moderately positive, and it was even negatively correlated (but nonsignificant) with the teacher's perceptions of the child's classroom environment. I was surprised to see that teachers' report of their behaviors did not appear to be related to their evaluations of their students' classroom, but perhaps if the teachers feel there are problems in the classroom, they would try to make more contact to the parents.

The most visible relationships among the three constructs emerged for parents, as relationship quality and the amount of teacher outreach were each significantly related to how they perceived their child's educational environments (both the classroom and school). Among the parent participants, positive feelings about the parent-teacher relationship and the quality and amount of teacher outreach appear to influence how satisfied and happy they are with their child's classroom and school as a whole. Although the findings can be generalized only with caution because of small sample size and the possibility of selection bias, they might suggest that if teachers were better trained about teacher outreach behaviors, more parents would be satisfied with their child's educational experiences.

Limitations of Study

First, the small sample size was problematic for the study. I wanted to investigate whether a collaborative discussion using the ASD Discussion Guide would have more positive effects on the home-school relationship and be more positively viewed than a typical parent-teacher conference. Unfortunately, this was not possible, as there were not enough participants to form matched control groups and test the original group comparison hypotheses. The lack of many matched parent-teacher pairs also prevented the interesting examinations of how similarly (if at all) parents and teachers perceived each other, their relationships, and the child's classroom environment.

Second, the study design was correlational and not experimental; therefore, no causal conclusions can be determined from the relationships that emerged among the three constructs. It is not known exactly how the variables influenced each other.

Third, the possibility of selection bias also cannot be overlooked. It is possible that the people who were already satisfied or those extremely dissatisfied with their home-school relationships may have been more likely to participate in the workshops or the questionnaire study. Because only half of the total children with autism spectrum disorders are represented in the sample, the results cannot be generalized without caution or presumed to apply to the entire district or to the broader autism population.

Future Research

As summarized previously, the results of this study are both positive and promising, but the study needs to be replicated with a larger sample. Although there were active efforts to recruit participants for this study and the district was helpful, any future school districts wanting to investigate their home-school relationships might have to be more involved in order to

increase the number of participants. The only way to completely avoid selection bias was if the study was somehow made mandatory, which would undoubtedly require strong school district support and assistance and raise ethical concerns about coercion.

Teacher outreach appeared to be an important variable in this study; therefore, future research might focus on how to improve those behaviors and see if that was again related to reports of relationship quality and perceptions of the child's educational environments. I also speculated that the match between the contact and involvement people want with what they feel they are receiving might influence their satisfaction with the home-school relationship. Later work might more examine that hypothetical match and what role (if any) it actually plays in relationship satisfaction.

Finally, in hindsight, this study seemed to focus more on parental expectations for the teacher and the school. Although all of the teacher measures were either parallel or identical to the parent measures, I think future research could focus more on teacher needs and how the schools and school districts can better help them with the formation of good home-school relationships. Previous literature has demonstrated that many teachers feel that they lack the resources and knowledge to effectively work with families of children with special needs, especially autism spectrum disorders. The workshops and the ASD Discussion Guide were designed as an attempt to improve home-school collaboration, and they received favorable reviews from the participants. When speaking by phone to some of the parents and teachers who held the collaborative discussion, nearly every person suggested that the district mandate that the workshops be held at the beginning of the school year and that every educator who has a student with autism attend. Some even suggested that use of the Discussion Guide be written into the child's Individualized Education Program. It would be interesting to hold the workshops at the

beginning of the year and then track participants throughout the year, looking for changes in their collaboration and relationships. If the workshops were not mandated, matched groups could be formed (according to the children's gender, age, and severity of disorder) and compare people who completed the discussion with those that did not. Only then could more causal conclusions be made about the important aspects of collaboration and the effectiveness of the ASD Discussion Guide.

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Table 1

Correlational Parent Analyses By Construct

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
RELATIONSHIP SCALES								
1. PTIQ Relationship Subscale	--							
2. PTRS Joining Subscale	.678*	--						
CONTACT/OUTREACH SCALES								
3. PTRS Communication to Other Subscale	.204	.091	--					
4. PTIQ Involvement Subscale	.125	-.274	-.488	--				
5. PTIQ Contact Subscale	.281	.297	.377	-.325	--			
6. Perceived Teacher Outreach Scale (PTOS)	.597+	.470	.228	.116	.531	--		
EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT SCALES								
7. PTIQ School Endorsement Subscale	.309	.719*	-.348	.170	.094	.412	--	
8. Classroom Environment Scale (CES)	.613+	.890**	.114	-.327	.432	.668*	.675	--

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

+Marginal significance ($p < .10$)

Table 2

Correlational Teacher Analyses By Construct

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
RELATIONSHIP SCALES						
1. PTIM Relationship Subscale	--					
2. PTRS Joining Subscale	.709*	--				
CONTACT/OUTREACH SCALES						
3. PTRS Communication to Other Subscale	.133	.621*	--			
4. PTIM Involvement Subscale	-.044	.046	.296	--		
5. PTIM Contact Subscale	.054	-.153	.210	-.138	--	
EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT SCALES						
6. Classroom Environment Scale (CES)	.456	.143	-.163	.040	-.054	--

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and T-Tests of Parent and Teacher Responses About Autism Activities

Activity	Parents	Teachers	t
Reading books or articles	48.1 (63.26)	4.56 (3.17)	2.174*
Attending national, state, or local conferences	3.78 (6.16)	2.4 (1.43)	.655
Attending autism team or group meetings	11.71 (10.55)	4.36 (6.92)	1.634+

* $p < .05$ +Marginal significance ($p < .10$)

Appendices

Appendix A: Parent Questionnaire Packet

Appendix B: Teacher Questionnaire Packet

Today's Date _____

APPENDIX A
Background Information (Parent Form)

Please complete this information sheet. We are asking these questions so that we can describe the group of people participating in the study and better understand your child's experience. Skip any questions that you cannot answer or feel uncomfortable answering.

Information about your child with an autism spectrum disorder

1. Age of child in years _____
2. Gender of child ☐ male ☐ female
3. What is your child's primary diagnosis?
 ☐ Autism ☐ High Functioning Autism or Asperger's Disorder
 ☐ PDD-NOS/Atypical Autism ☐ Other _____
4. At what age was your child diagnosed? _____
5. Overall, how severe is your child's autism spectrum disorder:
 ☐ mild ☐ moderate ☐ severe
6. How does your child communicate?
 ☐ Mostly through language/talking
 ☐ Mostly through writing or typing (non-facilitated)
 ☐ Mostly through gestures
 ☐ Mostly through sign language
 ☐ Mostly through pictures
 ☐ Other _____

Information about you and your family:

- 1 Your relationship to your child with an autism spectrum disorder
 ☐ mother ☐ father
 ☐ Other (please describe) _____
- 2 Your age ☐ under 30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ over 40

(CONTINUED ON BACK)

Information about you and your family (cont.):

- 1 Highest level of education completed
 - ☐ Elementary (0-8 years)
 - ☐ Some high school (1-3 years)
 - ☐ High school graduate
 - ☐ Some college (1-3 years)
 - ☐ 2-year College graduate (or other similar post high school training/degree)
 - ☐ 4-year College graduate
 - ☐ Some graduate school or professional training
 - ☐ Graduate school or professional program graduate

- 2 What is your approximate household income before taxes?
 - ☐ Under \$10,000
 - ☐ \$10,000 to less than \$20,000
 - ☐ \$20,000 to less than \$35,000
 - ☐ \$35,000 to less than \$50,000
 - ☐ \$50,000 to less than \$75,000
 - ☐ \$75,000 to less than \$100,000
 - ☐ \$100,000 or more

3. Compared to other parents of children with autism in Central Illinois, how much do you know about autism spectrum disorders?

1	2	3	4	5
Much Less	Somewhat Less	About the Same	Somewhat More	Much More

4. Check all of the following that you have done during the past two years
 - ☐ Read 1 or more articles or books on autism. If yes, how many? _____
 - ☐ Attended a major (state or national) autism conference or workshop. If yes, how many? _____
 - ☐ Attended a local (or regional) autism conference or workshop. If yes, how many? _____
 - ☐ Regularly attended some kind of autism team or group meetings. If yes, how many? _____

**PTRS II --Parent Form
(Vickers & Minke, 1995)**

Directions: Please think about your relationship to your child's teacher. For each item, indicate how frequently it describes your interactions and relationship with the teacher.

	Almost Never	Once in A While	Some- times	Frequently	Almost Always
1. We cooperate with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I respect this teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I expect more from this teacher than I get.	1	2	3	4	5
4. We see this child differently.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I don't like the way this teacher talks to me.	1	2	3	4	5
6. This teacher respects me.	1	2	3	4	5
7. We have different views of right and wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
8. We trust each other.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I ask this teacher for suggestions.	1	2	3	4	5
10. It is difficult for us to work together.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I tell this teacher when I am worried.	1	2	3	4	5
12. We have similar expectations of this child.	1	2	3	4	5
13. This teacher tells me when s/he is pleased.	1	2	3	4	5
14. We agree about who should do what regarding this child.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I tell this teacher when I am pleased.	1	2	3	4	5
16. This teacher keeps his/her promises to me.	1	2	3	4	5
17. When there is a behavior problem, I have to solve it without help from this teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I ask this teacher's opinion about my child's progress.	1	2	3	4	5
19. When things aren't going well, it takes too long to work them out.	1	2	3	4	5
20. We are sensitive to each other's feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I tell this teacher when I am concerned.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Communication is difficult between us.	1	2	3	4	5
23. When there is a problem with this child, this teacher is all talk and no action.	1	2	3	4	5

Perceived Teacher Outreach Scale (Parent Form)
(adapted from Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000)

Directions: These questions ask you to evaluate the teacher's communication efforts. If the question simply does not apply (e.g., you are answering #4 but do not take your child to school each morning), circle n/a.

	Very Infrequently	Infrequently	Moderate Amount	Frequently	Very Frequently	
1. Does your child's teacher share information with you in a positive way?	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
2. Does the teacher answer your questions in a helpful way?	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
3. Does the teacher try to make you feel comfortable when you meet?	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
4. Does the teacher greet you in the morning when you take your child to school?	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
5. Is it easy to talk to or meet with your child's teacher?	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
6. Does the teacher encourage you to come to school to visit or help?	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
7. Does the teacher let you know when your child is having trouble at school?	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
8. Does the teacher let you know when your child is doing something well at school?	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
9. Does the teacher tell you specific ways that you could help your child do better?	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
10. Do the teacher's suggestions work in helping your child?	1	2	3	4	5	n/a

Parent and Teacher Involvement Questionnaire -

You are your child's first and most important teacher. When your child goes to school, teachers become important to him/her. You and the teachers can work together to help your child do well in school. So, we would like some information about your relationship with your child's school teacher and your involvement in your child's school life.

Please indicate the number that best completes each statement:

	More Than Once Per Week	Almost Every Week	Almost Every Month	Once or Twice a Year	Never	Not Applicable
1. In the past year, you have called your child's teacher.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
2. In the past year, your child's teacher has called you.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
3. In the past year, you have written your child's teacher.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
4. In the past year, your child's teacher has written you.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
5. In the past year, you stopped by to talk to your child's teacher.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
6. In the past year, you have been invited to your child's school for a special event (such as a book fair).	NA	0	1	2	3	4
7. In the past year, you have visited your child's school for a special event (such as a book fair).	NA	0	1	2	3	4
8. In the past year, you have been invited to attend a parent-teacher conference.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
9. In the past year, you have attended a parent-teacher conference.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
10. In the past year, you have attended PTA meetings.	NA	0	1	2	3	4

	A Great Deal	A Lot	Some	A Little	Not At All	Not Applicable
15. You feel comfortable talking with your child's teacher about your child.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
16. You feel your child's teacher pays attention to your suggestions.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
17. You ask your child's teacher questions or make suggestions about your child.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
18. You send things to class like story books and other things.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
19. You help your child at home with subjects that he/she is having difficulty with.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
20. You take your child to the library.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
21. You make sure that your child gets his/her homework done.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
22. You volunteer at your child's school.	NA	0	1	2	3	4

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	A Great Deal	A Lot	Some	A Little	Not At All	Not Applicable
11. You feel welcome to visit your child's school.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
12. You enjoy talking with your child's teacher.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
13. You feel your child's teacher cares about your child.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
14. You think your child's teacher is interested in getting to know you.	NA	0	1	2	3	4

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
23. Your child's school is a good place for your child to be.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
24. The staff at your child's school is doing good things for your child.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
25. You have confidence in the people at your child's school.	NA	0	1	2	3	4
26. Your child's school is doing a good job of preparing children for their futures.	NA	0	1	2	3	4

Classroom Environment Scale (Parent Form)
(Starr et al., 2001)

Directions: Please describe how strongly each item describes the OVERALL educational environment(s) that your child has the most contact with during the school day.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
1. Classroom layout makes it easy for child to locate areas for work and play	1	2	3	4	DK
2. Visual aids supplement classroom instructions	1	2	3	4	DK
3. Classroom routine is predictable.	1	2	3	4	DK
4. Classroom is a calm environment.	1	2	3	4	DK
5. Class timetable is clearly visible in classroom.	1	2	3	4	DK
6. Child is provided with an individual visual schedule.	1	2	3	4	DK
7. Child's work area is cluttered.	1	2	3	4	DK
8. There are too many children in child's class.	1	2	3	4	DK
9. Child is adequately prepared for changes in class routine.	1	2	3	4	DK
10. Child understands what is required of him/her in classroom.	1	2	3	4	DK
11. Child's teacher(s) mainly emphasizes failure of child.	1	2	3	4	DK
12. Child is learning useful life skills at school.	1	2	3	4	DK
13. Child is not progressing as well as s/he could in classroom.	1	2	3	4	DK
14. Teacher(s) is always looking for success in child.	1	2	3	4	DK
15. Child spends too much time in "time out" in school.	1	2	3	4	DK
16. Child has been suspended because of his/her behavior.	1	2	3	4	DK
17. Child's teacher(s) regularly documents child's performance.	1	2	3	4	DK
18. Child's aide/assistant(s) assumes primary responsibility for child.	1	2	3	4	DK
19. Child's teacher(s) assumes primary responsibility for child.	1	2	3	4	DK
20. Child's teacher(s) uses positive methods when teaching.	1	2	3	4	DK
21. Child's teacher(s) does not provide enough opportunities for peer interactions.	1	2	3	4	DK
22. When child displays challenging behavior teacher is usually able to determine a cause.	1	2	3	4	DK
23. Child is included in most classroom activities.	1	2	3	4	DK
24. Parents feel welcome to observe child in classroom.	1	2	3	4	DK

(DISCUSSION EVALUATION SCALE)
Evaluation Form
A Specific Parent-Teacher Discussion

In the following questionnaire, we would like you to evaluate the effects of a specific parent-teacher interaction.

If you completed a parent-teacher discussion using the Autism Spectrum Disorder Child Profile-Discussion Guide, please answer the questions with regard to that discussion.

If you did not, please answer these questions with regard to a regularly scheduled, formal parent-teacher conference held with this parent/teacher last fall. (Note: This probably occurred in October or November).

If you did not attend either of the above, please answer about your most recent parent-teacher conference or extended discussion.

I am answering the following questions about (CHECK ONE)

_____ Parent-teacher discussion held using the ASD Child Profile-Discussion Guide
Held on _____ (approximate date)
Lasted about _____ minutes (approximate time)

_____ A regularly scheduled, formal parent-teacher conference held with this parent/teacher last
Fall (Fall 2001)
Held on _____ (approximate date)
Lasted about _____ minutes (approximate time)

_____ My most recent parent-teacher conference with this parent/teacher (If you have not had a
formal parent-teacher conference this year, please answer with regard to your most recent
extended discussion with this parent/teacher).
Held on _____ (approximate date)
Lasted about _____ minutes (approximate time)

***Please answer the items
on the back about
this discussion or conference!***

Remember: We want you to evaluate the discussion or conference identified on the other side of this page.
 Answer all of the following items about that *SPECIFIC* discussion.

Circle the number to show how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

		Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5		
1.	I believe that this parent-teacher discussion was an <i>acceptable</i> method for improving my child/student's <i>educational program</i> .	1	2	3	4	5		
2.	I believe that this parent-teacher discussion resulted in <i>permanent improvement</i> in <i>teacher-parent collaboration</i> .	1	2	3	4	5		
3.	I believe that this parent-teacher discussion added only a little bit to what I and the teacher/parent already know.	1	2	3	4	5		
4.	I believe that this parent-teacher discussion resulted in <i>permanent improvement</i> in my child/student's <i>educational program</i> .	1	2	3	4	5		
5.	Overall, I had a positive reaction to this parent-teacher discussion.	1	2	3	4	5		
6.	I liked the procedures used in this parent-teacher discussion.	1	2	3	4	5		
7.	I believe that this parent-teacher discussion was an <i>acceptable</i> method for improving <i>teacher-parent collaboration</i> .	1	2	3	4	5		
8.	I believe that this parent-teacher discussion was <i>effective</i> in improving my child/student's <i>educational program</i> .	1	2	3	4	5		
9.	I experienced discomfort during the use of this parent-teacher discussion.	1	2	3	4	5		
10.	I believe that this parent-teacher discussion was <i>effective</i> in increasing <i>teacher-parent collaboration</i> .	1	2	3	4	5		
11.	I would recommend parent-teacher discussions like this one to other teachers and parents of children with autism spectrum disorders.	1	2	3	4	5		
12.	During this discussion, how much genuine interest did the teacher/parent seem to have in providing you with information and ideas?							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
		None	A little	Some	Pretty much	A great deal	A very great deal	
13.	What type of effects do you think this discussion has had on your working relationship with this teacher/parent?							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
		Extremely Negative	Very Negative	Somewhat Negative	Somewhat Positive	Very Positive	Extremely Positive	
14.	To date, about how many times have you talked to the teacher/parent SPECIFICALLY to follow up on topics or ideas from THIS discussion? _____							
15.	To date, about how many new ideas have been implemented in school based on THIS parent-teacher discussion? _____							

Today's Date _____

APPENDIX B

Background Information (Teacher Form)

Please complete this information sheet. We are asking these questions so that we can describe the group of people participating in the study and better understand your student's experience. Skip any questions that you cannot answer or feel uncomfortable answering.

1. Your gender ☐ male ☐ female
2. Your age ☐ under 30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ over 40
3. Highest level of education you completed
 - ☐ Elementary (0-8 years)
 - ☐ Some high school (1-3 years)
 - ☐ High school graduate
 - ☐ Some college (1-3 years)
 - ☐ 2-year College graduate (or other similar post high school training/degree)
 - ☐ 4-year College graduate
 - ☐ Some graduate school or professional training
 - ☐ Graduate school or professional program graduate
4. What is your position with the school district (e.g., 3rd grade teacher, speech therapist, etc.)? _____

If different from above, what is your position as an educator with regard to the child with autism (e.g., a speech therapist who functions as a classroom teacher for the child)

5. About how many hours per day do you teach, supervise, or work with the child with autism? _____
6. Other than this child, about how many students with autism spectrum disorders have you worked with? _____
7. Compared to other teachers in Central Illinois, how much do you know about education interventions for children with autism spectrum disorders?

1	2	3	4	5
Much Less	Somewhat Less	About the Same	Somewhat More	Much More
8. Check all of the following that you have done in during the past two years
 - ☐ Read 1 or more articles or books on autism. If yes, how many? _____
 - ☐ Attended a major (state or national) autism conference or workshop. If yes, how many? _____
 - ☐ Attended a local (or regional) autism conference or workshop. If yes, how many? _____
 - ☐ Regularly attended some kind of autism team or group meetings. If yes, how many? _____

PTRS II--Teacher Form
(Vickers & Minke, 1995)

Directions: Please think about your relationship to this parent. For each item, indicate how frequently it describes your interactions and relationship with the parent.

	Almost Never	Once in A While	Some- times	Frequently	Almost Always
1. We cooperate with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I respect this parent.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I expect more from this parent than I get.	1	2	3	4	5
4. We see this child differently.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I don't like the way this parent talks to me.	1	2	3	4	5
6. This parent respects me.	1	2	3	4	5
7. We have different views of right and wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
8. We trust each other.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I ask this parent for suggestions.	1	2	3	4	5
10. It is difficult for us to work together.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I tell this parent when I am worried.	1	2	3	4	5
12. We have similar expectations of this child.	1	2	3	4	5
13. This parent tells me when s/he is pleased.	1	2	3	4	5
14. We agree about who should do what regarding this child.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I tell this parent when I am pleased.	1	2	3	4	5
16. This parent keeps his/her promises to me.	1	2	3	4	5
17. When there is a behavior problem, I have to solve it without help from this parent.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I ask this parent's opinion about the child's progress.	1	2	3	4	5
19. When things aren't going well, it takes too long to work them out.	1	2	3	4	5
20. We are sensitive to each other's feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I tell this parent when I am concerned.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Communication is difficult between us.	1	2	3	4	5
23. When there is a problem with this child, this parent is all talk and no action.	1	2	3	4	5

Parent and Teacher Involvement Measure — T

INSTRUCTIONS:

A number of teachers have mentioned to us that their attempts to get parents to be more involved in their child's school life are not as successful with some parents as with others. With that in mind, we would like you to answer the following questions about your relationship with this student's parents and their involvement with the school.

	More Than Once Per Week	Almost Every Week	Almost Every Month	Once or Twice a Year	Never
1. How often has this child's parent called you in the past year?	0	1	2	3	4
2. How often have you called this child's parent in the past year?	0	1	2	3	4
3. How often has this child's parent written you a note in the past year.	0	1	2	3	4
4. How often have you written a note to this child's parent in the past year?	0	1	2	3	4
5. How often has this child's parent stopped by to talk to you in the past year?	0	1	2	3	4
6. How often has this child's parent been invited to visit your school for a special event (e.g., book fair) in the past year?	0	1	2	3	4
7. How often has this child's parent visited your school for a special event (e.g., book fair) in the past year?	0	1	2	3	4
8. How often has this child's parent been invited to attend a parent-teacher conference in the past year?	0	1	2	3	4
9. How often has this child's parent attended a parent-teacher conference in the past year?	0	1	2	3	4
10. How often has this child's parent been invited to attend PTA meetings in the past year?	0	1	2	3	4
11. How often has this child's parent been to PTA meetings in the past year?	0	1	2	3	4

12. How much is this parent interested in getting to know you?
☐ 0 Not At All ☐ 1 A Little ☐ 2 Somewhat ☐ 3 Interested ☐ 4 Very Interested
13. How well do you feel you can talk to and be heard by this parent?
☐ 0 Not At All ☐ 1 A Little ☐ 2 Somewhat ☐ 3 Well ☐ 4 Very Well
14. If you had a problem with this child, how comfortable would you feel talking to his/her parent about it?
☐ 0 Not At All ☐ 1 A Little ☐ 2 Some ☐ 3 Comfortable ☐ 4 Very Comfortable
15. How often does this parent ask questions or make suggestions about his/her child?
☐ 0 Never ☐ 1 Occasionally ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Often ☐ 4 Very Often
16. How much do you feel this parent has the same goals for his/her child that the school does?
☐ 0 Not At All ☐ 1 A Little ☐ 2 Some ☐ 3 A Lot ☐ 4 A Whole Lot
17. How often does this parent send things to class like story books or objects?
☐ 0 Never ☐ 1 Occasionally ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Often ☐ 4 Very Often
18. To the best of your knowledge how much does this parent do things to encourage this child's positive attitude towards education (e.g., take him/her to the library, play games to teach child new things, read to him/her, help him/her make up work after being absent)?
☐ 0 Not At All ☐ 1 A Little ☐ 2 Some ☐ 3 A Lot ☐ 4 A Whole Lot
19. How often does this parent volunteer at school?
☐ 0 Never ☐ 1 Occasionally ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Often ☐ 4 Very Often
20. How involved is this parent in his/her child's education and school life?
☐ 0 Not At All ☐ 1 A Little ☐ 2 Somewhat ☐ 3 Involved ☐ 4 Very Much Involved
21. How important is education in this family?
☐ 0 Not At All ☐ 1 A Little ☐ 2 Somewhat ☐ 3 A Lot ☐ 4 A Whole Lot

Classroom Environment Scale (Teacher Form)
(Starr et al., 2001)

Directions: Please describe how strongly each item describes the OVERALL educational environment(s) that this student has the most contact with during the school day. When asked specifically about the “child’s teacher(s),” respond with regard to the teacher(s) the child has the most contact with, including yourself if applicable.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
1. Classroom layout makes it easy for child to locate areas for work and play	1	2	3	4	DK
2. Visual aids supplement classroom instructions	1	2	3	4	DK
3. Classroom routine is predictable.	1	2	3	4	DK
4. Classroom is a calm environment.	1	2	3	4	DK
5. Class timetable is clearly visible in classroom.	1	2	3	4	DK
6. Child is provided with an individual visual schedule.	1	2	3	4	DK
7. Child’s work area is cluttered.	1	2	3	4	DK
8. There are too many children in child’s class.	1	2	3	4	DK
9. Child is adequately prepared for changes in class routine.	1	2	3	4	DK
10. Child understands what is required of him/her in classroom.	1	2	3	4	DK
11. Child’s teacher(s) mainly emphasizes failure of child.	1	2	3	4	DK
12. Child is learning useful life skills at school.	1	2	3	4	DK
13. Child is not progressing as well as s/he could in classroom.	1	2	3	4	DK
14. Teacher(s) is always looking for success in child.	1	2	3	4	DK
15. Child spends too much time in “time out” in school.	1	2	3	4	DK
16. Child has been suspended because of his/her behavior.	1	2	3	4	DK
17. Child’s teacher(s) regularly documents child’s performance.	1	2	3	4	DK
18. Child’s aide/assistant(s) assumes primary responsibility for child.	1	2	3	4	DK
19. Child’s teacher(s) assumes primary responsibility for child.	1	2	3	4	DK
20. Child’s teacher(s) uses positive methods when teaching.	1	2	3	4	DK
21. Child’s teacher(s) does not provide enough opportunities for peer interactions.	1	2	3	4	DK
22. When child displays challenging behavior teacher is usually able to determine a cause.	1	2	3	4	DK
23. Child is included in most classroom activities.	1	2	3	4	DK
24. Parents feel welcome to observe child in classroom.	1	2	3	4	DK

(DISCUSSION EVALUATION SCALE)
Evaluation Form

A Specific Parent-Teacher Discussion

In the following questionnaire, we would like you to evaluate the effects of a specific parent-teacher interaction.

If you completed a parent-teacher discussion using the Autism Spectrum Disorder Child Profile-Discussion Guide, please answer the questions with regard to that discussion.

If you did not, please answer these questions with regard to a regularly scheduled, formal parent-teacher conference held with this parent/teacher last fall. (Note: This probably occurred in October or November).

If you did not attend either of the above, please answer about your most recent parent-teacher conference or extended discussion.

I am answering the following questions about (CHECK ONE)

_____ Parent-teacher discussion held using the ASD Child Profile-Discussion Guide

Held on _____ (approximate date)

Lasted about _____ minutes (approximate time)

_____ A regularly scheduled, formal parent-teacher conference held with this parent/teacher last
Fall (Fall 2001)

Held on _____ (approximate date)

Lasted about _____ minutes (approximate time)

_____ My most recent parent-teacher conference with this parent/teacher (If you have not had a
formal parent-teacher conference this year, please answer with regard to your most recent
extended discussion with this parent/teacher).

Held on _____ (approximate date)

Lasted about _____ minutes (approximate time)

***Please answer the items
on the back about
this discussion or conference!***

Remember: We want you to evaluate the discussion or conference identified on the other side of this page.
 Answer all of the following items about that *SPECIFIC* discussion.

Circle the number to show how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

		Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5		
1.	I believe that this parent-teacher discussion was an <i>acceptable</i> method for improving my child/student's <i>educational program</i> .	1	2	3	4	5		
2.	I believe that this parent-teacher discussion resulted in <i>permanent improvement</i> in <i>teacher-parent collaboration</i> .	1	2	3	4	5		
3.	I believe that this parent-teacher discussion added only a little bit to what I and the teacher/parent already know.	1	2	3	4	5		
4.	I believe that this parent-teacher discussion resulted in <i>permanent improvement</i> in my child/student's <i>educational program</i> .	1	2	3	4	5		
5.	Overall, I had a positive reaction to this parent-teacher discussion.	1	2	3	4	5		
6.	I liked the procedures used in this parent-teacher discussion.	1	2	3	4	5		
7.	I believe that this parent-teacher discussion was an <i>acceptable</i> method for improving <i>teacher-parent collaboration</i> .	1	2	3	4	5		
8.	I believe that this parent-teacher discussion was <i>effective</i> in improving my child/student's <i>educational program</i> .	1	2	3	4	5		
9.	I experienced discomfort during the use of this parent-teacher discussion.	1	2	3	4	5		
10.	I believe that this parent-teacher discussion was <i>effective</i> in increasing <i>teacher-parent collaboration</i> .	1	2	3	4	5		
11.	I would recommend parent-teacher discussions like this one to other teachers and parents of children with autism spectrum disorders.	1	2	3	4	5		
12.	During this discussion, how much genuine interest did the teacher/parent seem to have in providing you with information and ideas?							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
		None	A little	Some	Pretty much	A great deal	A very great deal	
13.	What type of effects do you think this discussion has had on your working relationship with this teacher/parent?							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
		Extremely	Very	Somewhat	Somewhat	Very	Extremely	
		Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	Positive	Positive	
14.	To date, about how many times have you talked to the teacher/parent SPECIFICALLY to follow up on topics or ideas from THIS discussion? _____							
15.	To date, about how many new ideas have been implemented in school based on THIS parent-teacher discussion? _____							