

# Montessori Teacher Perceptions of Family Beliefs Regarding Young Children's Learning

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## Background/Literature Review

While Dr. Montessori urged both teachers and families to honor each child's potential by providing a wide array of meaningful learning opportunities, she did not address the need for close collaboration between teachers and families (Epstein, 2015; Montessori, 1923/1970). Effective family-teacher partnerships are essential for student achievement across all age levels (Carr, 2011). They are particularly crucial for the optimal development of young children (Arndt & McGuire-Schwartz, 2008; Knopf & Swick, 2008; NAEYC, 2010). A clear and accurate understanding of family priorities regarding their young child's education is essential for optimal teacher-family collaboration (Hauser-Cram, Sirin, & Stipek, 2003).

Parenting young children involves both guiding behavior and learning. Setting limits and providing appropriate guidance can be stressful (Gartrell, 2015; Boger et al, 2008). Encouraging children to learn beginning concepts, and providing meaningful, creative play-based learning experiences can be stressful for some families (Shah, Sobotka, Chen, & Msall, 2015) while others find great joy in raising their children. Montessori teacher understanding of parents' priorities and beliefs is explored in this study.

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## Research Questions

1. Do Montessori teacher perceptions of family beliefs regarding children's development align with family statements?
2. Do Montessori teacher perceptions of family beliefs regarding child raising and family life align with family statements?
3. Does the Montessori approach to education support families in being a parent and supporting children's development? If so, how?
4. Does the Montessori approach to education support teacher/family partnerships? If so, how?

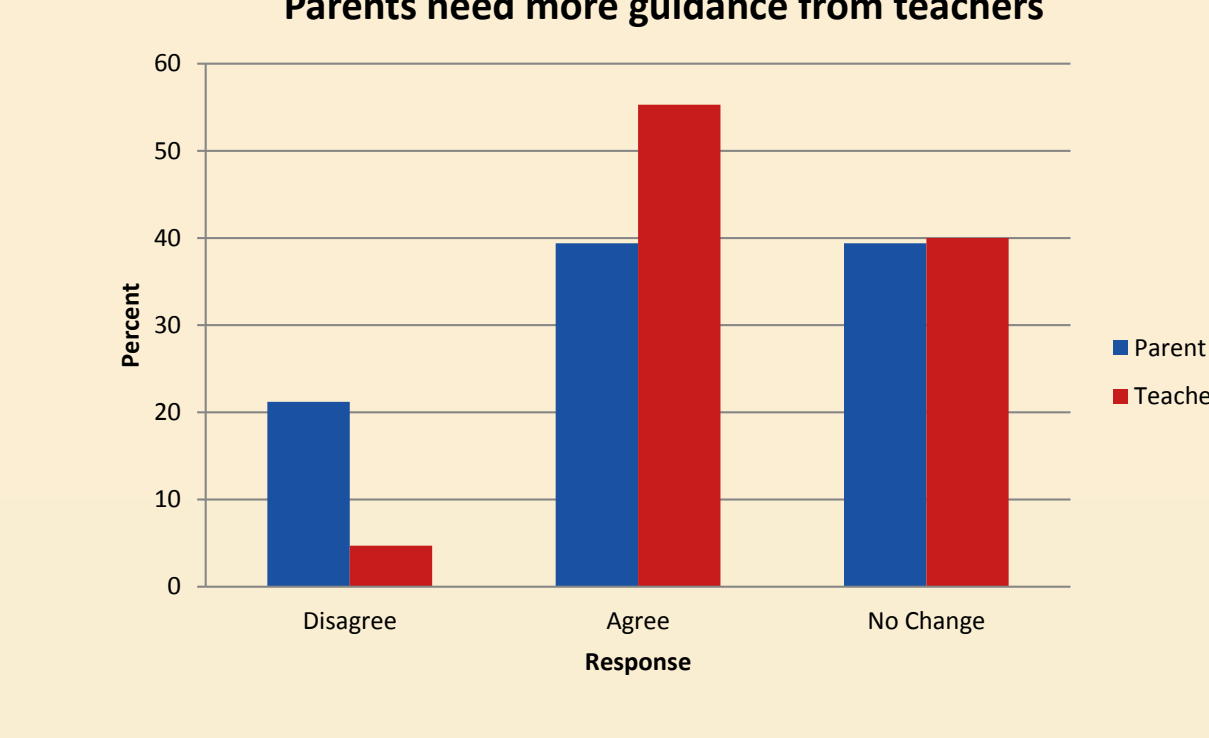
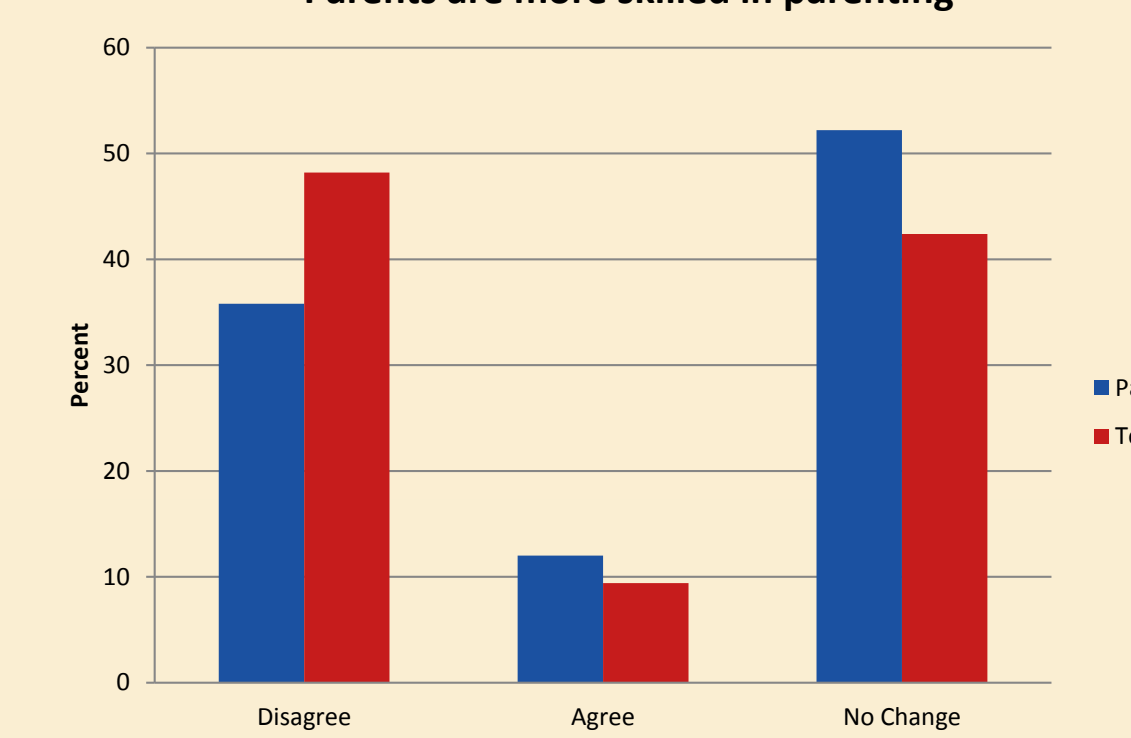
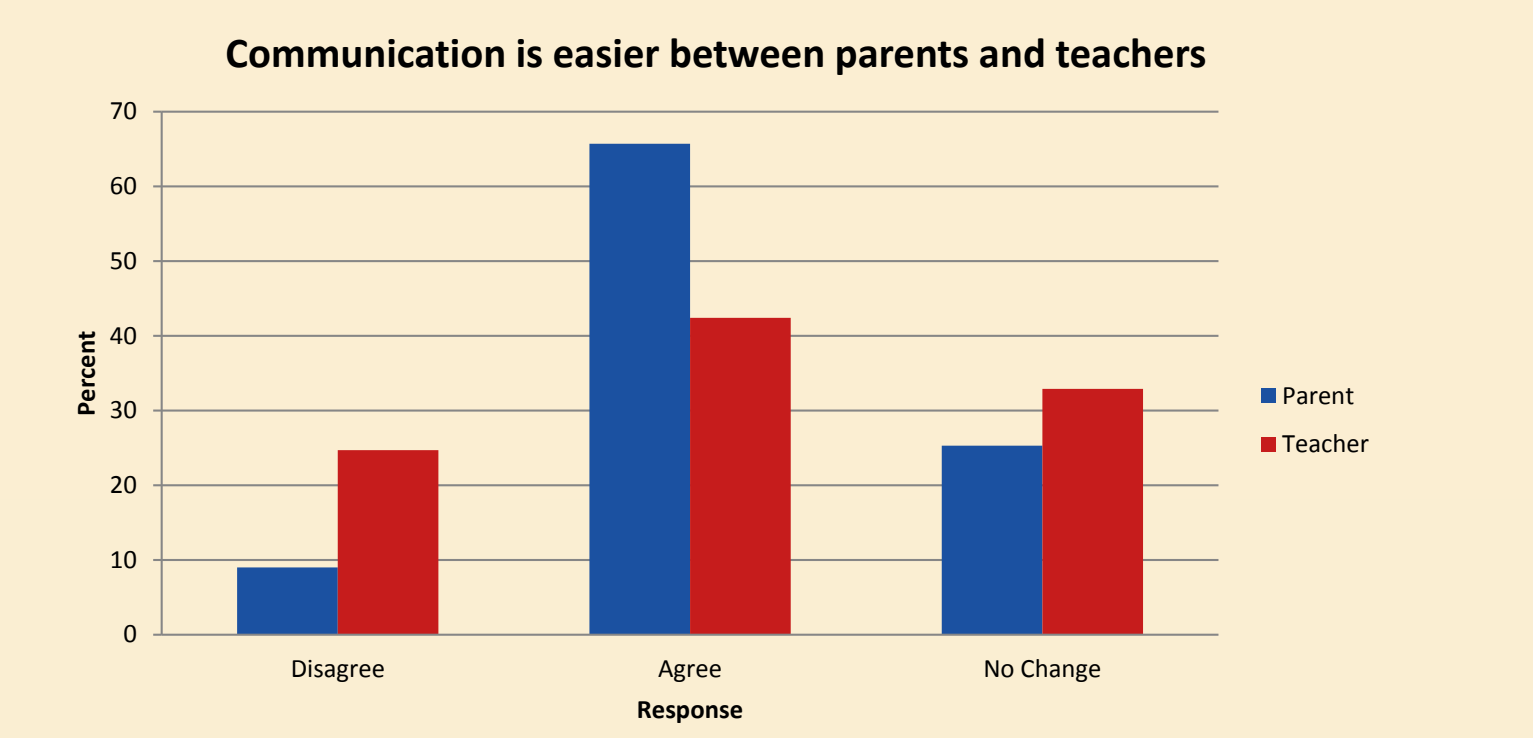
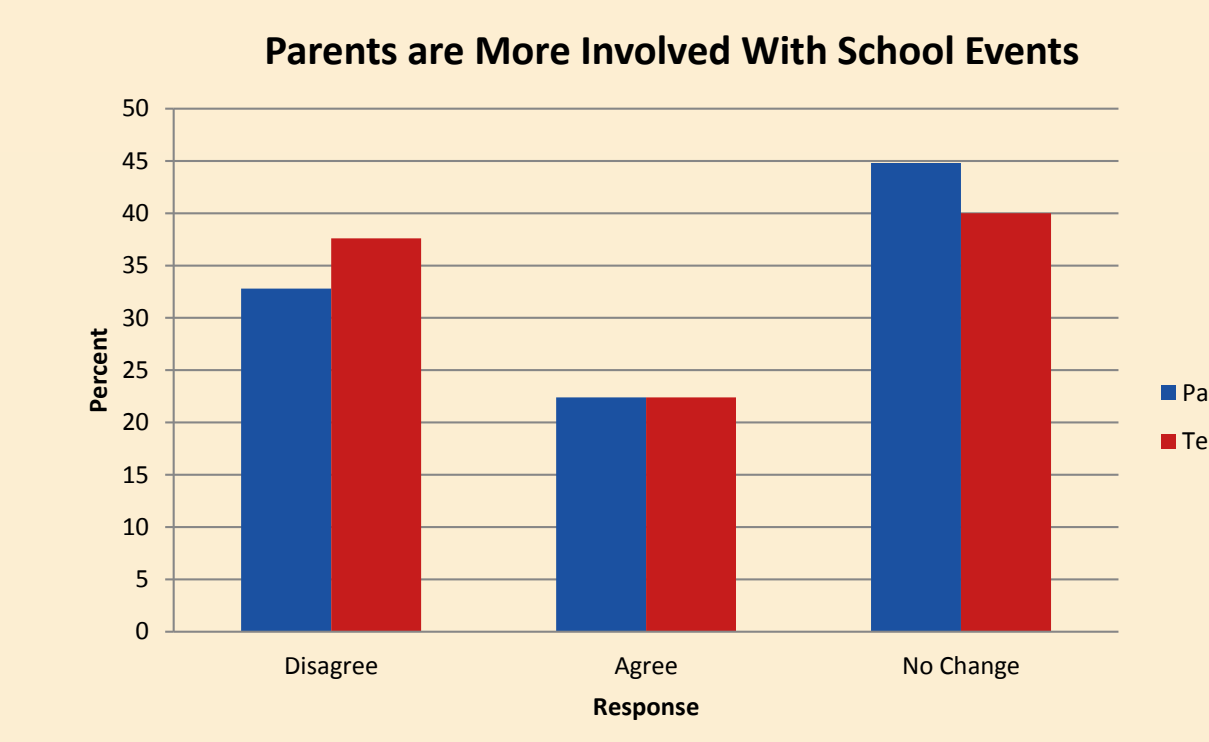
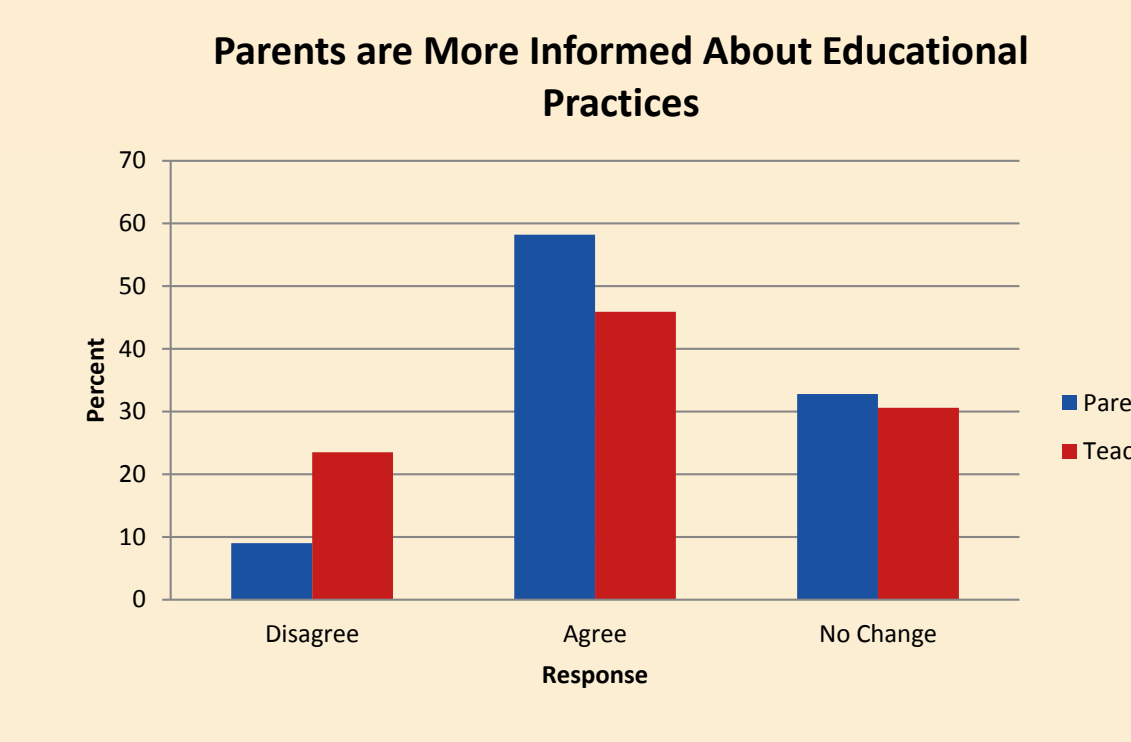
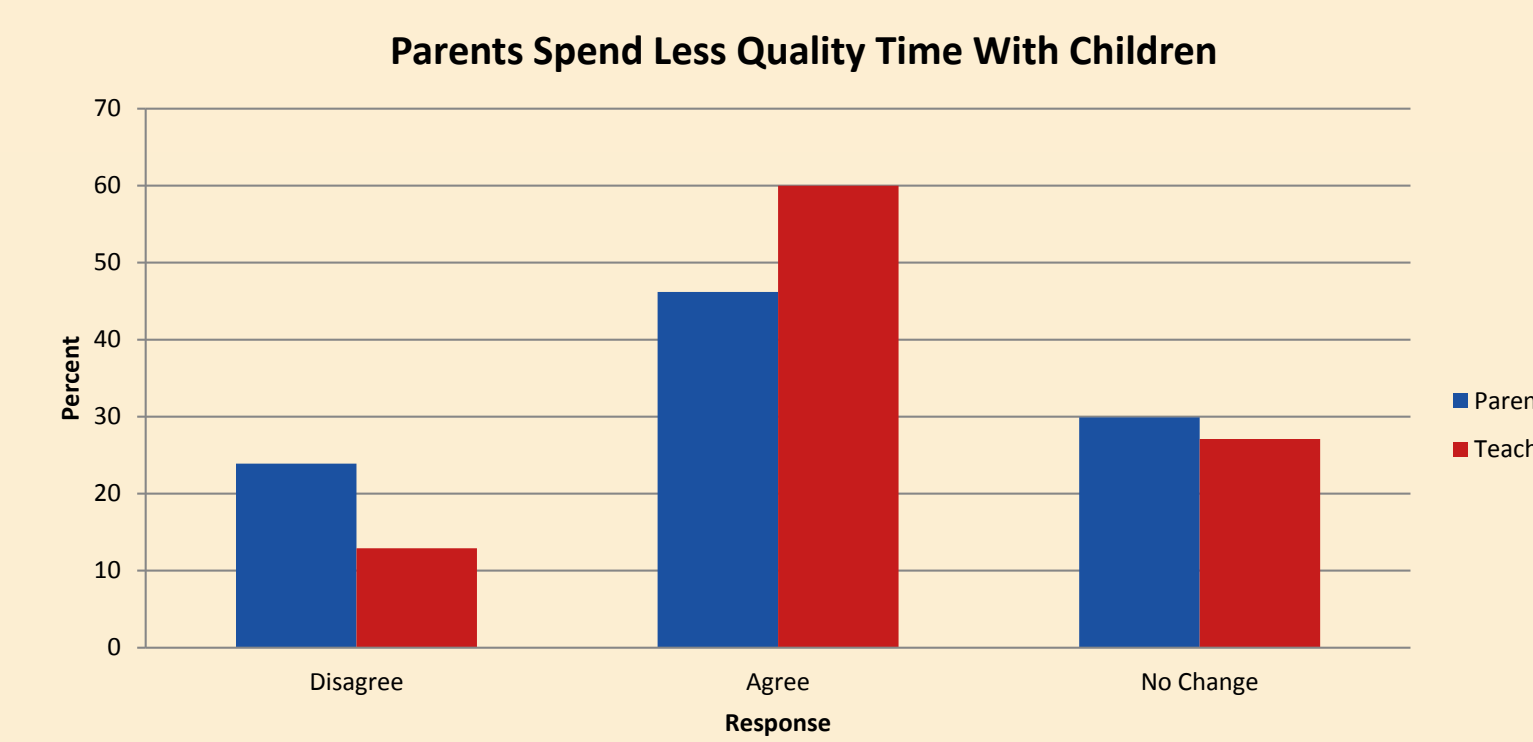
## Participants and Method

Montessori teachers and family members were invited to complete parallel surveys regarding family priorities and stressors. Teachers completed a twenty-seven item survey comprised of four demographic questions, seventeen Likert scale or yes/no questions, two forced ratings, and four open-ended questions. Family members completed a parallel survey containing twenty-six items, with four open-ended questions, sixteen Likert scale or yes/no items and two forced rating questions. Survey items addressed teacher perceptions of parenting issues as well as how Montessori education affects children's learning and development. All participants volunteered to be members of a panel facilitated by the Research Committee of the American Montessori Society. The survey was emailed to 218 teachers and 89 parents in September 2014. Eighty teachers (37%) and forty-nine family members (55%) completed the survey.

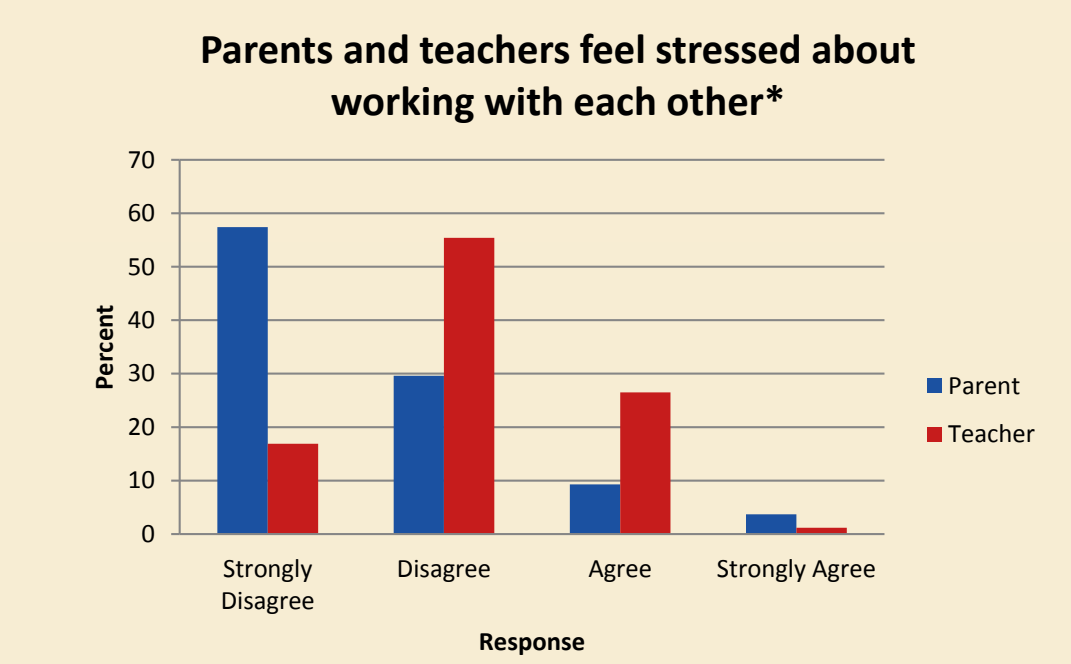
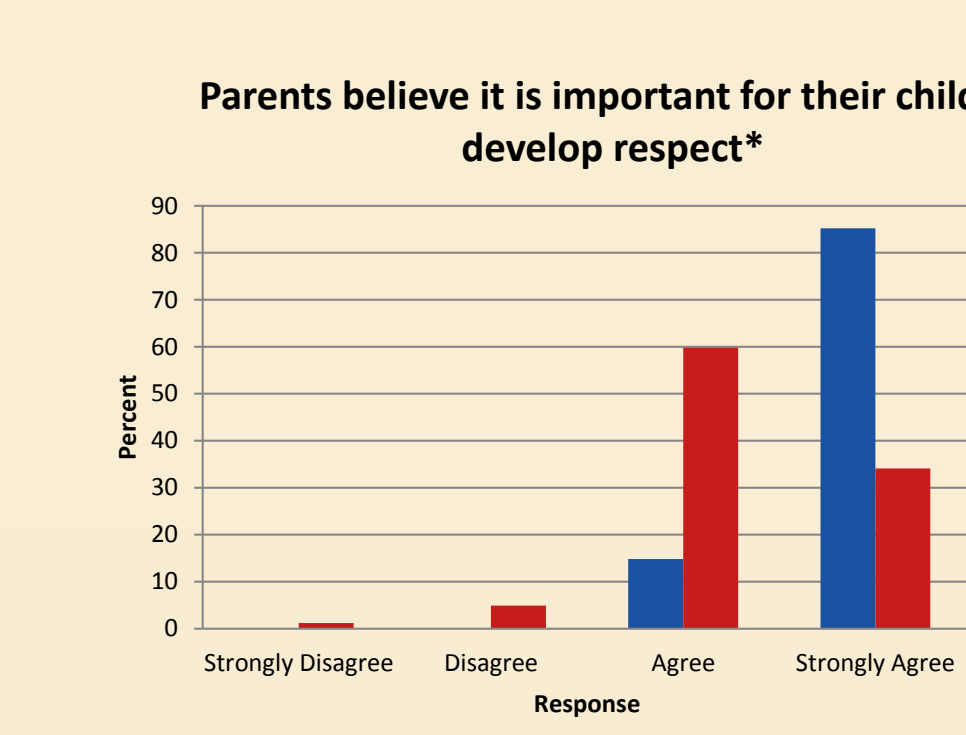
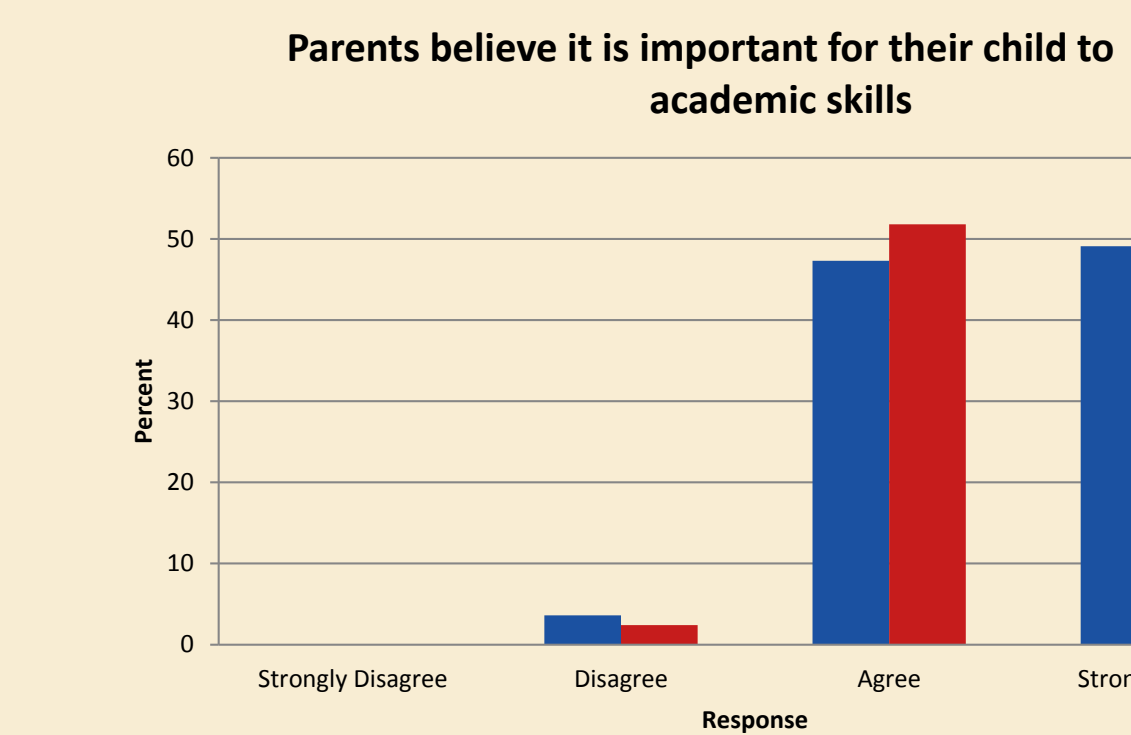
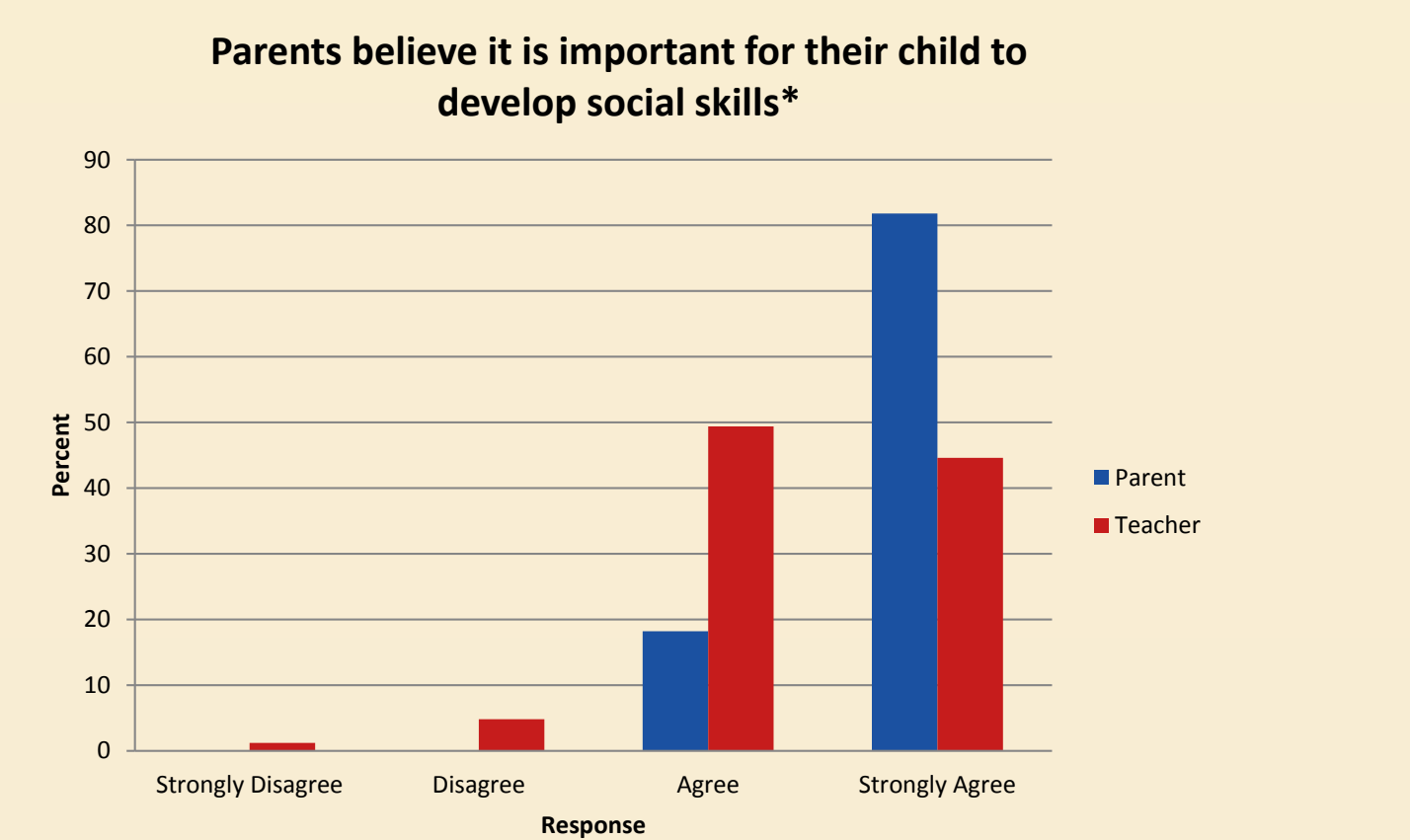
Analysis of variance between teacher predictions of family responses and actual family statements was conducted using a series of Chi-Square analyses and where necessary, Fisher's exact test. The overall level of significance is 0.05 for 13 different statements, but the individual level of significance for each statement was adjusted using Bonferroni's method to  $0.05/13 \approx 0.00385$ .

## Results

Teachers and families completed parallel surveys asking them to compare parenting practices and issues now with circumstance five years ago. Teachers were asked to predict how families would respond, and families simply stated their beliefs. There were no significant differences between teacher perceptions of family beliefs and family statements.



Teachers predicted family responses to six questions regarding learning priorities. Families stated their priorities. Significant statistical differences were found in two responses. Families believe it is more important for children to develop **social skills and respect** than teachers predicted. A third area of statistical difference was found between teacher and family statements regarding working together. **Teachers feel more stressed about working with families than families do about working with teachers.**



Statistical analysis provided Doug Baumann (Assistant Professor) and Erica Heying (Student Consultant), University of Wisconsin La-Crosse Statistical Consulting Center.

Photographs courtesy of Rochester Montessori School, Rochester, MN.

## Discussion: Implications for Montessori practices, next steps, study limitations

Responses to this survey suggest that Montessori teachers, in general, have an accurate sense of how families view parenting and communication now in comparison to five years ago. However, responses reveal a disconnect between what teachers believe families consider to be important and what families actually state is important. **Families hold learning social skills and learning to be respectful as more important than teachers predicted.**

Simply asking families about their priorities is the first step in building strong partnerships. Teachers will then be able to work effectively with families to provide meaningful information regarding children's development and learning. Study limitations: varied backgrounds of study participants. Teachers and families were not from the same classrooms. However, the number of participants (*n*) was adequate for establishing significance.