

PREKINDERGARTEN AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES WITHIN  
THE ENVIRONMENT OF INCREASED EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

By

LACY ANN SKINNER

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Lacy Ann Skinner

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Recent changes in educational expectations as well as an increase in governmental funding for pre-k programs have lead to several changes within the field of early childhood education. The current study evaluates early childhood teachers' beliefs about aspects of accountability and classroom management strategies. In addition, teachers were asked about the perceptions they have of how the accountability aspects are viewed by their school systems. Kindergarten and pre-k teachers were recruited from a public school district in Texas as well as surrounding private schools. Participants provided their responses through the completion of two Q-sorts as well as the questionnaires developed for the current study. Analyses revealed that teachers are less likely to endorse strategies that encourage self-regulation when they believe their school systems prioritize evaluation of teachers. There were no differences found, regardless of the grade or the setting in which teachers taught, regarding the beliefs about discipline and behavior management strategies or characteristics of their teaching. More differences were found regarding the relationships between perceptions of accountability and classroom practices for how the school system viewed accountability than were found regarding the beliefs the teachers

themselves hold. Discussions of the current findings are explained in relation to accepted developmentally appropriate practices. Implications of the current research as well as limitations and recommendations for further research are discussed.

## CHAPTER 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in January 2002, teachers and schools have become more accountable to show academic progress through improved test scores. While the law does not directly impact early childhood education with respect to testing, the indirect effects are significant as they trickle down to pre-kindergarten (pre-k) and kindergarten teachers.

Furthermore, the number of children receiving early education has been increasing the past few decades. The number of preschool and kindergarten children increased two-fold between 1973-1993 (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), and the growth has continued. Based on surveys of state funded pre-k administrators collected by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) enrollment of four year olds in state funded pre-k programs has steadily increased from 14% in 2001-2002 to 28% during the 2010-2011 school year (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2011). Furthermore, much of the education of children under the age of five is now occurring as part of the public school system. State-funded pre-k programs now serve more than one million 3 and 4 year olds while many more receive education through Head Start and other programs who receive state funding for their pre-k programs (NAEYC, 2009)

While the total numbers of children attending pre-kindergarten have increased, which children have access to state funded pre-k programs continues to vary amongst the 38 states that do fund pre-k. Some states offer universal pre-k such as Florida, Georgia and Oklahoma, while some states do not fund pre-k programs. However, in most states offering pre-k programs, the students must meet certain criteria to enroll.

Since the current proposed study is designed to take place in Texas, information specific to Texas's early education system will be provided throughout.

The initiative for public preschool in Texas started during the 1985-1986 school year with half day programs for at-risk four year olds. Currently Texas Education Code Section 29.153 mandates that all districts with 15 eligible four year old students must provide a free Public Preschool Program; services can also be provided to three year olds. Children eligible for the free program include those who are three or four years old and have limited English proficiency, are homeless, qualify for free or reduced lunch, have a parent on active military duty or killed or injured on duty, as well as children who were or are in foster care (1995b). Kindergarten must be provided to all five year olds in the state of Texas in either a half-day or full-day program (Texas Education Code 1995a & c).

The purpose of this chapter is to review current literature in relation to the expectation of early childhood education to prepare students for school not only with academic skills, but also regarding appropriate social and emotional skills. The review begins with a discussion of the current trend of accountability within education and how that is impacting early childhood education. Despite a national focus on educational accountability, vast differences still exist between the states with respect to their early education programs, three specific examples of which will be described. Another impact of the accountability in later grades has been the fact that some educators are attempting to align the expectations in early childhood education with the expectations later in a child's education. Following, will be a discussion of behavior problems of young children, by examining the long term impact of such behaviors, how they

develop, and how teachers can address behavioral concerns. Next will be a discussion the early childhood educators. Specifically, their training, experience, beliefs and expectations, will be explored regarding how they impact the children's education. Finally, the purpose of the current study and research questions will be described.

### **Changing Expectations**

Many recent changes have impacted early childhood education, including increased public funding for pre-k programs and legislation such as NCLB. Simultaneously, kindergarten teachers, regardless of their own approach to teaching, report that there is an obvious shift to a more academic focused kindergarten (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Although the demands regarding academic expectation, as evidenced through tests and expectations from teachers in later grades, have increased for early childhood educators and led to changes regarding their expectations of what is taught in kindergarten, it is important that any changes to the curriculum continue to be developmentally appropriate (NAECS, 2000). However, evidence suggests that many early learning state standards do not align with current research in that they focus more on language and cognition than other areas of readiness including social-emotional functioning (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Freelow, 2006). This shift in focus for early childhood education is also evidenced through the fact that younger teachers put a higher emphasis on academics than do older teachers despite the indication that in order to have school success children benefit from positive social relationships (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003). However, research has suggested that the ability to maintain friendships provides a source of emotional support that is beneficial in adjusting to increasing school demands during kindergarten, whereas student rejected early by peers is predictive of lower academic performance later in the school year (Ladd, 1990).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) also has expressed concern that with the change in teaching techniques in order to focus on expected curriculum that experiences such as rich play, collaborating with peers, and other opportunities for social and emotional development are diminishing (2009). Addressing skills beyond a strictly academic curriculum are important because a child's ability of self-regulation is necessary in order to be able to learn the academic skills (Bodrova & Leong, 2005).

Children's ability to self-regulate their behaviors is related to executive functioning skills, which include the ability to inhibit behaviors, use working memory and use cognitive flexibility. Despite the importance of these skills, they are rarely taught directly to students. However, one controlled study compared students in a high quality pre-k program geared towards children in families which were economically disadvantaged. The children were randomly assigned to groups that were taught using a curriculum that focused on teaching executive functioning skills (Tools of the Mind) or classes who were exposed to a curriculum that focused literacy skills through a balance of reading, writing and listening (Diamond, Barnett, Thomas, & Munro, 2007). The Tools curriculum used concrete reminders such as pictures and songs to remind students of their role and jobs at particular times, ways to regulate the behaviors of others as a step towards learning to regulate their own behavior, using private speech to regulate themselves and during rule-switching activities and engaging in mature, dramatic play that they had to plan out before beginning. The students' executive functioning skills were tested using novel tasks which required them to use inhibition, working memory, and cognitive flexibility in order to complete the task correctly. The results of the study

indicated that children exposed to the Tools curriculum did in fact demonstrate better executive functioning skills than did the students in the literacy curriculum classes (Diamond, et.al., 2007). The implication of these findings may be significant in the long term both because of their hypothesized impact on social skills, but also because executive functioning skills have been shown to be much more predictive of school success than a child's IQ level.

Furthermore, throughout the guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice laid out by NAEYC, the importance of skills in domains other than cognitive development is emphasized, notably, enhancing development and learning through comprehensive curricula that includes physical, social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Some examples include teaching children to build relationships through which they can learn, setting clear and reasonable limits on the children's behaviors so children learn to control themselves, listening to and respecting children's feelings in order to guide them through problem solving, and providing children with ample opportunities to engage in play in order to enhance their learning. In fact, NAEYC points out that high-quality play can benefit important skills such as self-regulation, linguistics, cognition and social skills (2009). A purpose of the current proposed research is to evaluate the effect of the recent increase in academic focus on teachers' perceptions of the opportunities children are afforded to learn and practice social-emotional skills. In order to more fully understand how changing expectations are impacting early education a discussion of accountability within education and the variation between programs that exists follows.

### **Impact of Accountability**

One driving force behind the change in focus in early childhood settings is the increase in accountability throughout publicly funded education systems. In trying to

make schools more accountable several strategies have been implemented in an attempt to assess the current system most commonly testing the children directly; however, other methods have been suggested some of which are discussed below.

## **Testing**

The influence of NCLB has led to teachers in public school early childhood settings to face pressure to demonstrate that students perform academically. While NCLB does not mandate testing in early childhood settings, students are tested as early as third grade, requiring they have a strong foundation before that point in time. Therefore, pressure is placed on preschool through second grade teachers to help prepare students for what they will be held accountable for later (NAEYC, 2009). Also, a number of states are beginning to use accountability tests in kindergarten which they attempt to link to state funded pre-k education the year earlier (Meisels, 2007). Some states have begun to require readiness assessments prior to entering kindergarten. In Texas this has taken form as the voluntary Texas Kindergarten Readiness System (KRS). Private licensed child care centers, private and public pre-ks as well as Head Start classes are all eligible for KRS and there is no fee to participate. Centers that choose to participate then provide data on the pre-k program which is then linked to each student's performance on a reading diagnostic instrument administered during the beginning of the student's kindergarten year. Starting in 2013, centers that met predetermined criteria linking the prekindergarten data and students' performance on the literacy assessment will be awarded the PreK Center of Excellence (TEA, 2012). However, NAEYC (2009) recommends that any decisions that have an impact on children's enrollment or placement should not be based on a single assessment.

### **Impact of assessment in early literacy**

One stated goal of the use of tests within an accountability system is to insure that students have the strong foundation for academic skills before even entering school. The national focus on development of early learning standards can be seen through President Bush's Good Start, Grow Smart initiative, voluntary standards for literacy, language and pre-reading skills, and the requirement by Congress for Head Start to collect data on what children know and can do (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004). This changing emphasis of increasing academic focus had frustrated many educators to the point that experienced teachers are leaving the field (Wesley & Bussye, 2003). Despite the focus of early literacy in many states' standards there are also many important skills within early literacy which are not addressed as part of the developed standards (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2006).

### **Other possible measures of accountability**

Typically accountability is measured in terms of the performance of individual students on an assessment. However, due to the limited reliability and validity of such measures with young children, finding other ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the education has been proposed. One specific method suggested was to evaluate the quality of the classroom that the child is in through standardized observation (Pianta, 2003). When assessing the quality classrooms regarding accountability, researchers have demonstrated that children in kindergarten classrooms where teachers exhibit high quality instruction and emotional support, are more equipped to handle a variety of settings thereby diminishing off-task and noncompliance behaviors (Rimm-Kaufman, La Paro, Downer, & Pianta, 2005). Regardless of the specific form of assessment used, when evaluating the impact of early education instruction it will be important to also take

into consideration instruction in kindergarten through third grade and not just look at pre-k (Bogard, Traylor, & Takinishi, 2008). One way this has been done in Kansas for their early intervention and early childhood special education programs is through the use of a curriculum based assessment that requires a team of raters to evaluate the child's performance. The team consists of professionals from different backgrounds as well as parents at times. The system Kansas has developed as part of accountability reports required by the Office of Special Education Programs is entered into a computer system that aligns with data for K-12. Therefore, the data reports not only how the child is currently doing, but longitudinal data collection will be possible and will assist in the evaluating the effectiveness of services provided (Greenwood, Walker, Hornbeck, Hebbeler, & Spiker, 2007). Although the system from Kansas described above focused on accountability for special education intervention and services, similar systems could be implemented to evaluate the effectiveness of other early childhood programs such as state funded pre-k.

The Texas Education Agency has provided a teacher accountability system where teachers are evaluated through multiple evaluation criteria. The teacher is evaluated through a teacher appraisal system that is conducted each year through a collaborative process of the teacher and administrator. Goals are set each year which are monitored through observation, review of data, obtaining professional development, implementation of strategies, and conferencing with other professionals. Data sources available to them to evaluate progress on these goals include the state standardized assessment, benchmark assessments, student reading levels, student attendance rate, rate of students promoted, placed or retained at the end of the year and data sources

from special education, physical education, art, music, English as a second language, bilingual, and gifted and talented programs. In addition, teachers' performances are evaluated across eight domains including active successful student participants in the learning process, learner-centered instruction, evaluation and feedback on student progress, management of student discipline, instructional strategies, time and materials, professional communication, professional development, compliance with policies, operating procedures and requirements, and improvement of academic performance of all students on the campus. Teachers then receive ratings of exceeds expectations, proficient standard, below expectations or unsatisfactory for each domain. Those receiving below expectations in two or more domains or unsatisfactory ratings in one or more domains are then considered teachers in need of assistance and an intervention plan is developed for those teachers (TEA, 2005).

### **Variation Among Pre-k Programs**

Despite the increase in accountability throughout the country, the quality and expectations of programs across the states varies greatly for the 38 states that provide some form of state funding for preschool programs. Furthermore, although there has been a recent rush to enroll 4 year olds in readiness programs, few states have been evaluated positively in terms of their efforts to monitor these programs' quality. For instance, as of 2008-2009 only two states, Alabama and North Carolina, offer programs which are considered by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) to meet all ten benchmark standards they set forth to identify quality early education. However, Texas was one of only five states that did not require schools to instruct many of the NIEER determined benchmarks in the preschool settings, yet Texas spent the most money and had the highest number of 3 and 4 years enrolled in state funded

programs (Barnett, Epstein, Friedman, Sansanelli, & Hustedt, 2009). The research based benchmarks which NIEER uses to measure programs include teacher and assistants credentials and training, class size, staff to student ratio, comprehensive early learning standards based on the National Education Goals Panel (i.e. motor, social/emotional, academic, language, cognition, general knowledge), comprehensiveness of services, and opportunities for parent involvement (Barnett, Epstein, Friedman, Sansanelli, & Hustedt, 2009). The measures used by NIEER are based on state policies and may not reflect what occurs in the classrooms.

**North Carolina.** As one of the six states meeting all 10 NIEER standards, North Carolina's pre-k program will be described below. In North Carolina, the pre-k program now falls within the new department of Office of Early Learning which focuses on pre-k through third grade with a goal of better aligning the school programs. In addition, they are taking part in the First School initiative to become more responsive to the needs of more diverse and younger students than have historically been served in public education (Public Schools of North Carolina, n.d.). North Carolina's More at Four requires pre-k programs which receive state funds to have high quality instruction. In addition, the teachers must have a bachelor's degree (or be working towards it) with specialization in birth to kindergarten and attend teacher in-service training. Assistant teachers must have a Child Development Associates or meet NCLB requirements. Class sizes cannot be over 18 with a ratio of one staff member for each nine children. Support services are available including parent involvement, kindergarten transition. The program is a full day program for at-risk students with lunch and breakfast or snack provided (Barnett, Epstein, Friedman, Sansanelli, & Hustedt, 2009; Public Schools of

North Carolina, n.d.). The Department of Public Instruction has put together guidelines to help plan curriculum for all preschool students in the state by providing educators and parents with particular skills and abilities important for children their age as well as ideas for developing those abilities. The information provided was designed as a companion to early publication on early childhood programming and provided information on diversity, active learning, and development (approaches to learning, emotional/social development, health/physical development, language development/communication, and cognitive development), and involvement of community members outside of the school setting (Work, n.d.).

**Florida.** While the state funded pre-k programs in North Carolina and Texas are for at-risk students, Florida's program is available to all four year olds. Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Program (VPK) is administered by cooperation of the Department of Education, the Agency for Workforce Innovation, and the Department of Children and Families (Florida Department of Education, n.d.). In the 2008-2009 school year 67% of the four year olds in Florida were enrolled in the program (Barnett, et al., 2009). The three NIEER benchmarks that Florida's policy met were comprehensive early learning standards, maximum class size of 18, and site visits to monitor program. Florida also requires that the teachers have a CDA or equivalent when working during the school year and a bachelor's degree if teaching in the summer program. During the school year the staff to student ratio is 1:10, but during the summer it is 1:12 and therefore did not meet the benchmark standards. Assistant teachers have to have completed a 40 hour training course, and teachers must complete 10 hours of in-service a year (if they have a bachelor's must complete 120 hours every five years). Meals and

snacks are provided at day long programs, but not all programs are day long (Barnett, et al., 2009). Florida's Department of Education (FLDOE) developed education standards for the Voluntary Prekindergarten program which focused on physical health, approaches to learning, social and emotional development, language and communication, emergent literacy, mathematical and scientific thinking, social studies and the arts, and motor development. There are subcategories within each area with descriptions of what the student should be able to do (FLDOE, 2008). Accountability for the Florida VPK is measured using the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener that evaluates how well a provider prepares the student to be ready for kindergarten by assessing a child's overall development and his readiness for kindergarten based on the education standards discussed above (FLDOE, n.d.).

**Texas.** Within the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Early Childhood Education encompasses both pre-k and kindergarten. Based on the NIEER benchmarks, Texas met only the four standards of having comprehensive early learning standards, requiring teachers to hold a bachelor's degree with specialized training as a generalist in Early Childhood through grade 4, and they must attend 150 hours of in-service over five years. However, there is no limit to class size or staff to student ratio; guidelines for class size are recommended but not required. While support services are required, the exact nature of the services is determined locally. In addition, while schools are not required to provide a meal, most school districts do provide at least breakfast or lunch (Barnett, Epstein, Friedman, Sansanelli, & Hustedt, 2009). Curriculum guidelines for pre-k in Texas have been developed through The University of Texas System and TEA developing. The use of the guidelines is voluntary as there is no state required

curriculum for pre-k (UT & TEA, 2008). The pre-k guidelines were developed to link to school readiness and align with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) required in K-12. The learning domains include social and emotional development, language and communication, emergent literacy reading and writing, mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts, physical development and technology.

### **Alignment Between Early Childhood Education and K-12 Education**

Despite the variability in the quality of early childhood programs described above there are national movements made to more closely align what children learn during their early education years to what they will be expected to learn throughout their later education. The alignment would not only include areas of academic achievement, but the argument for focusing on challenging behaviors will also be discussed.

#### **Academic achievement**

One aspect that impacts the quality of an early education program is the academic achievement not only during those years, but also in the future. Because of the increase of dependence on early childhood education and spending for the pre-k programs it is important to determine effective and beneficial strategies to use in pre-k and kindergarten classrooms to prepare the students for future classes. However, aligning curriculums and expectations from pre-k and up does not mean simply making the same information easier for the younger children; learning sequences must also be considered. Additionally educators should consider development of behaviors typically focused on in early education such as self-regulation, engagement and focused attention to continue through the early elementary school grades (NAEYC, 2009).

Through the analysis of data from two studies--the National Center for Early Development and Learning Multi-State Study of Pre-k and the State-Wide Early

Education Programs Study, Howes and colleagues (2008) determined that children in high instructional climate classrooms had increased understanding of pre-reading skills and receptive language. In a high instructional climate classroom teachers provided more opportunities to learn, promoted higher-order thinking, gave relevant feedback, encouraged communication and reasoning, were sensitive to their interactions with students' interactions all in an environment of respect and enthusiasm for learning. The instructional climate proved to have more of an impact on students' performance than specific structural requirements.

Several states have begun the process of aligning the early childhood curriculum with later grades, and some programs have been monitored. While a discussion of all states is beyond the scope of this study, the following discussion will give a few examples including Texas, Oklahoma, and Georgia. The Texas Education Agency was awarded money for the Texas Reading First Initiative (TRFI) under the NCLB Act. While the focus of these initiative is on K-3 educators, materials for pre-k teachers are also provided in the areas of language, early literacy, mathematics, science and social studies which align with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum with the intention to help pre-k teachers prepare curriculum that will help students be successful in later grades (Texas Reading First Initiative, n.d.). While academic progress is important, the emotional development of the children must not be overlooked because when children are emotionally well adjusted they are more likely to have success in the early years of school (Cybele, 2003).

Some state funded pre-k programs have been successful in improving the academic achievement of the students. For example, the Tulsa universal pre-k program

has shown an increase in pre-reading, reading, prewriting, spelling, math reasoning and problem-solving abilities better than what had previously been reported by average pre-k programs, but not quite to the level of other excellent early intervention programs (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005).

In addition to Oklahoma, Georgia also has an extensive pre-k program, the progress of which was evaluated through the Georgia Early Childhood Study. The impact of Georgia's pre-k program was evaluated in comparison to Head Start, private preschool, and children not attending any preschool. The programs were evaluated by directly assessing the children at the beginning and end of pre-k, the beginning of kindergarten and the end of first grade. The direct assessment measures included Color Bears, Number Naming and Name Writing, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III, Oral and Written Language Scales, Story and Print concepts, The Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing, Children's Attitude Towards School, and specific subtests from the Woodcock Johnson Test Achievement III. In addition, teachers were asked to assess the children's skill levels regarding behavior, social, communication, and academics. Children in all Georgia's preschool programs (pre-k, Head Start, and private preschool) developed skills at the same rate and gained more skills than would be expected based on national norms of children their age during preschool; however by the end of the first grade many of the gains had been lost (Henry, et al., 2005). Despite the fact that states have begun to implement and track standards for pre-k education, the majority of state funded pre-k classrooms do not have high levels of instructional climate, and overall gains during pre-k years tend to be small (Howes, et al., 2008).

Therefore, continued research is needed regarding what programs are most effective with long term impacts for the youngest students within the public education system.

### **Behavior as a focus of pre-k**

While the pressure and need to enroll children in early education has increased, researchers have expressed concern for some time that placing children in childcare promotes aggression and noncompliance (Bates, et al., 1994; Belsky, 1986; 2002; NICHD Early Childcare Research Network, 2003; Vandell & Corasaniti, 1990). A longitudinal study conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Early Childcare Research Network found results similar to those proposed by Belsky nearly two decades earlier. In particular, the more time a child spent in nonmaternal care through the first 4 and a half years the more likely the child was to be described as exhibiting more externalizing problems by mothers, caregivers, and teachers. This was true at 4 and a half years of age as well as in kindergarten. Additionally, those children were found to demonstrate problem behaviors, disobedience, and aggression at at-risk levels (NICHD Early Childcare Research Network, 2003). Additionally, students in pre-k programs are three times more likely to be expelled than students in higher grades. Expulsion rates in pre-k are related to higher student to teacher ratios, teacher stress and longer days, but not teacher education, experience or credentials (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam, 2008). Whether or not students are expelled from pre-k programs is important because it likely speaks to behavior problems in those settings, and if pre-k is to be an integral part of early education having reduced access to that setting may prove to be harmful for future learning particularly for students with behavior problems. Therefore, it will be important

to identify what pre-k programs are effective and can minimize the negative impacts found by earlier researchers.

Students exhibiting behavior problems are a common concern among teachers in early childhood settings. In fact, studies suggest that about 40% of preschool children exhibit some form of challenging behavior such as hitting or arguing at least once a day while, approximately 10% of the students exhibit six or more antisocial acts a day (Willoughby, Kupersmidt, & Bryant, 2001). Therefore, evaluating factors related to such behaviors is imperative in order to determine effective strategies to minimize the negative behaviors and their impact. Below is a discussion of the development and impacts of challenging behaviors including the ability for challenging behaviors to interfere with learning, have impacts throughout education, as well as social and emotional development. Then positive reinforcers and time-out are two strategies discussed as a way to address the challenging behaviors within the classroom.

### **Development and Impact of Challenging Behaviors**

Teachers must keep in mind the developmental appropriateness of particular behaviors and determine whether or not the problem behavior is outside the scope of what is considered typical for that child's age (Campbell 1995; Willoughby, Kupersmidt, & Bryant, 2001). Some behavior problems are to be expected due to the developmental level of preschool aged children. For example, preschool children commonly have a tantrum, push another child, or do not talk in particular situations (Campbell, 2002). However, consistent or severe challenging behaviors can be indicative of continuous, long-term problems, and despite the severity of the challenging behavior, they are something that early childhood educators must deal with several times each day.

A discussion of challenging behaviors includes not only aggressive behaviors, but also noncompliance. Young children often try to exert some independence over their environment, which adults sometimes interpret as refusal to complete tasks requested of them. As mentioned earlier, some degree of a challenging behavior of this type is to be expected; however, when the behavior continues and is disruptive to the child and others in her environment then the problem must be addressed (Campbell, 1995). Rimm-Kaufman and colleagues (2005) found that noncompliance occurs less frequently in structured teacher-directed and whole class kindergarten settings when in high quality classrooms. High quality classrooms include teachers who are sensitive to the needs of the individual students, modifies activities based on the students' needs, uses proactive approaches to discipline, promotes learning through scaffolding, establishes joint attention, guides students' attention, and is familiar with children's academic needs (Rimm-Kaufman, La Paro, Downer, & Pianta, 2005).

### **Long Term Impacts of Challenging Behaviors**

Behavior problems have been found to be relatively consistent during childhood. Children who at a young age were described to have difficult behaviors tend to demonstrate similar behaviors in preschool and kindergarten with their peers and teachers as well as continue such difficult behaviors into elementary school (Campbell & Ewing, 1990; Keane & Calkins, 2004). Challenging behaviors in early childhood education do not merely affect the child at that time; many children continue to have behavior problems later in elementary school and further in life. In a longitudinal study which followed preschool students through third grade found that students who were identified as having acting out problems in preschool continued to have behavioral problems during first, second and third grade (Egeland, Kalkoske, Gottesman, &

Erikson, 1990), and one study found that preschool behavior problems at the age of five were the strongest single predictor of antisocial outcomes of 11-year-old children (White, Moffitt, Earls, Robins, & Silva, 1990). However, when looking at participation in pre-k programs and later behavior problems, programs in some states found no difference when looking at teacher reports of behavior in fifth grade, but when looking at specific consequences, such as in school suspension, corporal punishment, suspension and expulsion, students who attended pre-k had fewer behavior consequences in fourth grade than those who did not based on data from Florida schools (Gilliam & Zigler, 2004).

Additionally, boys who as early as preschool were described as having difficult temperaments continued to have stable behavior problems five years later and were more likely to be in an adverse family condition than children whose behavior improved during those five years (Stormont, 2001). A cross-sectional study found that while there were low levels of diagnosed Conduct Disorder in early childhood, the incidence rate increased through adolescence in girls and through middle childhood and adolescence for boys while the behaviors were more aggressive when younger turning to more 'status'-related, such as stealing, in adolescence (Maughan, Row, Messer, Goodman, & Meltzer, 2004).

Through a review of several studies, Campbell (1995) found that much data supported the idea that young children who are identified as hard to manage have about a 50% probability of continuing to have difficulties throughout elementary school and into early adolescence. In addition, this review found that early externalizing problems

exhibited by preschoolers lead not only to other externalizing problems, but also to academic problems and internalizing behavior problems (Campbell, 1995).

### **Relationship between challenging behaviors and academic difficulties**

Problem behaviors interfere with learning in a number of ways. For example, research has shown that problem behaviors are sometimes maintained due to negative reinforcement of the behavior through the removal of academic task demands. Additionally, teachers tend to spend more time teaching students who are not exhibiting problem behaviors because teaching students with problem behaviors can be punishing to the teacher (Carr, Taylor, & Robinson, 1991). Egeland and colleagues (1990) reported that students who were described as acting out in preschool continued to function poorly through early elementary school including scoring poorly on achievement tests.

The relationship between problem behaviors and academic difficulties can be conceptualized as cyclical. Factors such as behavioral problems can lead to a negative cycle of increasing behavior problems and poor academic performance (Arnold et al., 1999). More specifically, during early education, children who exhibit aggressive and disruptive behaviors are less likely to receive teaching, thereby reducing their exposure to critical academic skills. Further, children with poor pre-literacy development are more likely to engage in disruptive behaviors (Arnold, 1997). Thus, the students with the most critical academic need are more likely to misbehave and less likely to receive the needed instruction. Therefore, determining how the emotional well being of children is being addressed in early childhood education is important as its impact goes beyond simply disruptive behaviors.

## **Early challenging behaviors and later social and emotional difficulties**

Students engaging in acting out behaviors in preschool were found to struggle in many other ways during early elementary school including emotional health, social skills, and attending behaviors (Egeland, Kalkoske, Gottesman, & Erikson, 1990). Similarly, children who were aggressive in first grade had difficulties in third grade in relation to behavioral, academic and social adjustment (Flanagan, Biermn, & Kam, 2003). Also, kindergarten and preschool children who, based on peer reports, were aggressive had difficulty entering into social situations. The aggressive children were more likely to try to enter social relationships in disruptive ways such as initially interrupting or crowding between others. Although aggression was not used initially to engage with others, following failures to engage aggressive children were more likely to engage in aggression (Wilson, 2006).

## **Behavioral Interventions**

Because challenging behaviors can have such a long impact on various aspects of a child's life, it is important that the early education teachers have strategies that they use to address these behaviors. One of the most commonly used behavioral strategies is positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement can take many forms beyond rewarding the student with a tangible some of which are described below.

Educators have many opportunities to provide positive reinforcement throughout the day through the use of verbal reinforcers (e.g. show appreciation, ask child to help you, talk to child about what he is doing) and nonverbal reinforcement (e.g. display work, give a high-five, tangible rewards) (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2003). Children who often display challenging behaviors also behave correctly at some point in time. During those times, giving the child positive reinforcement, which acts as feedback to the child

to help him replace the inappropriate behaviors with appropriate behaviors, is important (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2003). Simply because a technique is meant to be a positive reinforcer, that does not mean ensure its effectiveness. Only when the desired behavior increases as a result of the intervention can it be determined the technique was reinforcing; the impact of a particular reinforcer will vary between individuals and over time within the same individual (Wolery, 2000). Therefore, praise can be an effective method to change a student's behavior if it is reinforcing to that child; while providing tangible rewards may be a more effective strategy for another student.

### **Teacher Factors that Influence Early Childhood Education**

There have been numerous factors over the past few years that have impacted how early childhood educators are viewed and trained. In addition to the emphasis what students learn as a measure of how effective a teacher is, this increased emphasis on student performance is impacting how early childhood educators are trained, licensed, evaluated and selected (New & Cochran, 2007). Due to the increased scrutiny and higher expectations of early childhood educators and their students, it is necessary to examine what factors lead to effective education of young children. The following discussion includes how early childhood educators are trained as well as how their various beliefs (e.g. about individual children, focus on social and academic goals, outside pressures, and struggle with policies that differ from their own beliefs) can impact their classrooms and how they teach.

### **Training and Experience of Early Childhood Education Teachers**

In general, kindergarten teachers are required to have four year degrees, but this is not often the case for preschool children despite the evidence that preschool teachers with better education and more specialized training are more effective while lack of the

education and specialization limits the effectiveness of the educational programming for those preschool children (Barnett, 2004). Further evidence for the need of specific certification comes from another study that examined elementary school personnel. Evidence from that study supported that teachers who lack certification or have a non-standard certification had a more negative impact on student achievement than did certified teachers (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005). While the study looked at elementary school teachers as opposed to specifically early childhood education teachers, the concern is important to note because with the rising demand for early education teachers, the use of alternatively certified or working out of certified area could increase and the impact it will have on the education of young children will need to be monitored.

Research has indicated that when evaluating effectiveness of pre-k teachers, more than just the degree is important. Quality education at the pre-k level must also be evaluated based on what occurs on a daily basis within the classroom (Early, et al., 2006). Some researchers have found that teachers' education and experience has a significant impact on preschool students performance regarding literacy and mathematics skills related to their. More specifically teachers with bachelor's degrees in early childhood education as well as those with more experience had students who showed more increase in letter recognition and some math concepts from fall to spring of their pre-k year (Brown, Molfese, & Molfese, 2008).

Often the training in early childhood occurs as a one time workshop; however, that training model is not effective (Kupersmidt, Bryant, & Willoughby, 2000). Some studies have looked at the effectiveness of teacher training programs on reducing or

preventing aggression and disruption among preschool children. Bryant and colleagues (1999) evaluated 17 empirical studies of interventions for problem behaviors among preschool children and they found teacher training to be the category with the fewest number of studies. In fact only three of the studies identified the teachers as part of the treatment focus.

### **Teacher Beliefs, Perspectives, and Expectations**

Teacher beliefs are developed over time and influenced by their personal experiences and training. How teachers perceive their roles and their students impact how they teach and handle problems within their classrooms. The strong relationship between what teachers believe and their planning, instruction and classroom practice has received significant support from a long line of research (Pajares, 1992).

Furthermore, what a teacher believes can influence her expectation of her students' performances, and it is therefore important to study how teachers apply their own beliefs within the expectations of the classroom (Fang, 1996).

Teachers' beliefs about individual children can impact how they interact with them. In particular, in one study, teachers were interviewed about students and then observed in their classrooms. Researchers observed that the teachers tended to behave with more negative affect toward the children about whom they had expressed negative feelings during the interviews (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002).

**Teachers' beliefs regarding academics and behavior.** Further findings of Stuhlman and Pianta found that the kindergarten and first grade teachers' behaviors did not change with relation to how they viewed academic progress of the students, but rather the teachers' behaviors did vary based on changes in child's compliance or emotional responses (2002). This finding suggests that while teachers may report that

academics are most important, their behavioral responses to students suggests that children's behavior and emotional responses are, in fact, more important to them. This finding is consistent with studies that have found that many kindergarten teachers have traditionally felt that being able to satisfy social demands, including self-regulatory behaviors, is more of a priority than having developed academic skills when preparing students to be ready for school (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003). However, when compared to kindergarten teachers, preschool teachers have traditionally tended to focus more on independence and a positive self concept, whereas kindergarten teachers tended to focus more on acquiring basic skills and knowledge (Stipek & Byler, 1997). At the time of Stipek and Byler's study (1997) they suggested that the less emphasis on basic skills in the preschool settings could have been due to the limited pressure from administration and principals as compared to what was felt by the kindergarten teachers. Therefore, currently teachers working in state funded pre-k programs, within the environment of increase of accountability, may have begun to align their expectations more along with those of kindergarten teachers than previously.

Although teachers' beliefs may not always result in differences in their teaching strategies, observations of early childhood education teachers revealed that teachers who described their beliefs as aligned with developmental appropriate practices tended to engage in emergent literacy and language development activities and use child-directed choice/play time, where as the teachers with more academically oriented beliefs tended to use preplanned curriculum with teacher-directed learning in organized classrooms with consistent routines (McMullen, et al., 2006).

Researchers have hypothesized that teachers' beliefs about the importance of literacy and mathematic skills would be related to students' achievements in these areas, research has not supported this assumption. In fact, the relationship between teacher's beliefs and changes measured in preschoolers literacy and mathematic skills was found to be very weak (Brown, Molfese, & Molfese, 2008). However, their study only examined beliefs regarding academic skills and did not address teachers' beliefs regarding social-emotional functioning.

Another difference has also been noted regarding the age of the teacher and their focus within the classroom. Younger teachers seem to have higher expectations for academic skills than teachers with more experience. The reasons for why younger teachers have higher academic expectations and similar social expectations as compared to older teachers is not clear, but it is hypothesized that the higher expectation could be related to changing expectations regarding student achievement levels (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003).

Teachers' perceptions of issues beyond academics can also impact how they address those concerns. For instance, when considering challenging behaviors, a teacher's perspective on those behaviors may influence how she addresses them within her classroom. For instance, Kindergarten teachers have less tolerance for aggressive behaviors than for shy, unsocialable or prosocial behaviors demonstrated by students. However, because teachers are likely to perceive the aggressive behaviors as being related to external or situational factors, they intervene by promoting positive social interactions, closely monitoring the child, or reporting the behavior to administration or parents (Arbeau & Copland, 2007).

**Teachers' perceptions of their own abilities.** How teachers perceive their abilities can also have an impact on the students. In previous research, teachers reported feeling that they were not competent to handle challenging behaviors (e.g. outbursts, noncompliance) (Monahan, Marino & Miller, 1996). Further, teachers who feel less effective may be more likely to develop conflictual relationships with their students (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hamre, Pianta, Downer, & Mashburn, 2007). Students who have conflictual relationships with their teachers early on have been found to continue to have difficulty with achievement and discipline through middle school (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hamre, et al., 2007). Therefore, understanding how teachers' perceive their abilities to handle challenges they are likely to face in early childhood settings will assist in developing more appropriate ways to train and provide support to the early childhood educators.

**The impact of outside influences on beliefs.** Teacher and care giver beliefs can sometimes be impacted by what they think the child should achieve before moving to the next level of education. Several groups from public, private and family child care centers believed that in order for children to be ready to enter kindergarten they must be emotionally, physically, and cognitively ready in addition to having social skills that help them in working with other children (Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes, & Karoly, 2008). While, kindergarten teachers' beliefs, at least in one small study, were impacted by pressures from first grade teachers, the kindergarten teachers with a more teacher-directed approach were more likely to feel pressure from first grade teachers and feel less likely to have control over their curriculum than did teachers with a more child-centered approach (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006).

The impact of accountability with increased use of formal assessments in early childhood settings may have a more subtle impact on the beliefs of teachers. Regardless of a teacher's experience or education, the use of an assessment tool seemed related to stronger beliefs about the importance of the skills assessed. In other words, before using a specific measure (Measurement and Planning System), the teachers considered the skills the measure assessed to be less important than they did after using the measure for a few months, and they considered those skills more important than teachers who did not use the measure felt (Kowalski, Brown, & Pretti-Frontczak, 2005). In England, similar changes in public policy have led to increased focus on literacy and numeracy in early childhood education have been implemented, and researchers have found that teachers' senses of professional feeling have been lowered as an unexpected consequence of the new policies (Wood, 2004).

**The disconnect between beliefs and policy.** To further compound the problem, kindergarten teachers admit that their beliefs about what a child should be able to do when entering kindergarten and what policy is telling them they have to do are often not in alignment with each other. This disconnect is frustrating teachers, leading to increased feelings of pressure, and leading teachers to believe they do not have enough time to devote to social and emotional development as well as exploration (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). However, some experienced kindergarten teachers have found ways to use lessons they had done in the past by integrating the state requirements (TEKS) into the lessons, but simply adapting old lessons can be ineffective if the lessons are not re-evaluated for the content of the activities (Goldstein, 2008).

## **Purpose and Research Questions of the Current Study**

The purpose of the current study was to examine early childhood teachers' perspectives and priorities within the current educational climate of increasing academic expectations and accountability. The study explored differences between different groups of early education teachers regarding their beliefs about behavior management strategies to use when teaching and characteristics of their teaching. Furthermore, the study examined how teachers' differing perspectives of criteria used to evaluate teachers and school wide performance. Specific groups compared were pre-k and kindergarten teachers as well as teachers in public and private schools. Information was also gathered about the teachers' education and experience.

Specifically, the following questions were addressed. 1) Do teachers' perceptions of the accountability systems currently used to evaluate their performance and to evaluate the settings in which they work predict their perceptions of characteristics of their teaching and discipline and management? 2) Do pre-k and kindergarten teachers from public and private schools differ with respect to their beliefs about the characteristics of their teaching and discipline and management strategies?

The hypothesized finding of the first research question included that the higher participant's rated the criteria of accountability, the less importance they would place on the classroom practices that tended to be more developmentally appropriate. For the second research question, it was hypothesized that teachers in private and public settings would differ in their priorities regarding the characteristics of their teaching and discipline and behavior management strategies. In particular, it was expected that teachers in private schools will have priorities that align more with developmentally appropriate practices than that of the public school teachers due to the increase of

accountability within the public school system. Regarding the difference between pre-k and kindergarten teachers, it is predicted that kindergarten teachers will have priorities less in line with developmentally appropriate practices than those of pre-k teachers; however, the difference between public pre-k and public kindergarten will likely be less than those of private pre-k and private kindergarten.

## CHAPTER 2 METHODS

Teachers' perspectives have been evaluated regarding various aspects of education including how beliefs are related to classroom practices (McMullen, et al., 2006; Pajares, 1992), expectations of and interactions with students (Fang, 1996; Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002), required skills of their students (Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003; Stipek & Byler, 1997), and beliefs about the teacher's own skills (Monahan, Marino, & Miller, 1996). In order to further that knowledge, the current study evaluated teachers' perspectives with about aspects of accountability and classroom practices. Specifically, the questionnaires and Q-sort exercises described below were designed to evaluate whether or not teachers' beliefs about aspects of accountability such as teacher evaluation and school wide evaluation could predict teachers' beliefs about characteristics of their teaching and discipline and behavior management strategies. In addition, the teachers from different grade levels and settings were evaluated regarding whether or not their beliefs about discipline and behavior management strategies, as well as characteristics of their teaching varied. This chapter will describe how participants were recruited, demographics of those who did participate, and the measures used to evaluate teachers' beliefs. Additionally, procedures and statistical analyses used for the current study will be discussed.

### **Study Participants**

Participants included 99 pre-k and kindergarten teachers from both public and private schools. To recruit public school teachers, 31 principals of public elementary schools in a large Texas school district were contacted and provided with a letter

explaining the method and scope of the study (Appendix A). Of the 31 principals solicited, four declined, seven did not respond. Twenty principals did allow for their teachers to participate; however, only teachers from 14 schools were used. Once approval was obtained from the school district, the eligible teachers were provided with a separate letter describing the scope of the study and the rights of the participants (Appendix B). The first 30 public pre-k teachers and 30 public kindergarten teachers to agree participated in the study.

To recruit teachers from private schools, principals and directors of 82 different private schools in Texas were contacted by the principal investigator. School directors were contacted via e-mail or by phone through contact information available on their websites. The e-mails consisted of the same letters provided to the public school principals (Appendix A) that included information regarding the focus of the current study, request for participants, and contact information. The information e-mails and phone calls were followed up by at least one phone call when responses were not received from the initial contact efforts. Of the 82 private schools contacted, 26 directors declined to participate, 43 others did not return contact attempts, and 13 agreed to allow teachers to participate. Information regarding the 13 private schools that did agree to participate is provided in Appendix C including the grades served, accreditations, and schools' missions or philosophies. After principals agreed, teachers in the private schools were provided with written information describing the study and participants' rights (Appendix B). Thirty private school pre-k teachers, and nine private school kindergarten teachers participated in the study.

All public school teachers, both pre-k and kindergarten, are required to have a bachelors degree. The private school teachers represent a range of degrees and certifications. In many cases, participants seemed to not understand the questions regarding their educational degrees and licenses or certifications in that their responses seemed irrelevant. For example, on the question about licenses or certifications, some teachers responded that they had “CPR” certification. In addition, those two questions were often not responded to, despite other questions on the same page being completed.

The 99 participants included 97 females and two males. The average age of participants was 40.52 years, with a range of 22 to 65 years. Most of the participants were Caucasian (73.0%), followed by Mexican (11.5%), African American (4.2%), Pacific Islander (3.0%), and Native American, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Asian, other Latino, other ethnicity each at 1.0%. Four people (4.2%) responded as multi-ethnic with one person responding as Caucasian and Native American, two as Caucasian and Mexican, and one as African American, Native American and other Latino. Regarding where participants worked previously, 21.2% had never worked in a different setting than where they were currently working. Participants had worked in their current setting from only a few months up to 32 years, with the average being 6.2 years. See Table 2-1 for a summary of the participants’ demographic information.

### **Measures**

Instruments for the current study included previously developed instruments (i.e. Q-sort) as well as questionnaires created to collect information regarding the participants’ beliefs and demographic information. Details for each instrument are described below.

## **Teacher Belief Q-sort**

In order to evaluate teachers' priorities and beliefs about discipline and behavior management as well as teachers' classroom practices, the Teacher Belief Q-Sort (TBQ; Rimm-Kaufman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta, & LaParo, 2006) was used. The TBQ examines teachers' beliefs related to three categories: approach to discipline and behavior management, characteristics of teaching, and their beliefs about children. For each category of belief, 20 items are presented. Participants are asked to align each item with one of five anchor statements, ranging from "least characteristic of my beliefs about (category)" to "most characteristic of my beliefs about (category)." Participants are further instructed that each of the five anchors can only have 4 items assigned to it. The advantage of this procedure is that it requires the participant to provide a range of priorities, rather than simply indicating that all items are either very characteristic or not at all characteristic.

Although the TBQ includes three scales (approach to discipline and behavior management, characteristics of teaching, and their beliefs about children), the authors stated that the scales stand alone, and therefore, can be used independently. For the purpose of this study, two scales were used: Approaches to discipline and behavior management (Behavior) and characteristics of teaching (Teaching).

## **Validity of the TBQ**

**Content validity.** Rimm-Kaufman and colleagues established content validity for the TBQ by conducting a series of focus groups in which teachers were asked to identify the most and least important priorities from among the beliefs under consideration. Participants were also asked to rate specific items on a scale from 1 to 5 regarding the degree to which the statements represented each construct, with 1 being

not at all representative, and 5 being very representative. Each item received a rating of either 4 or 5.

To further establish content validity, 10 other participants completed the TBQ. The participants then completed a questionnaire regarding how closely their priorities matched their responses on the extremes of the Q-sort. All participants reported that the TBQ items were either a “good” or “excellent” match to their own beliefs.

**Criterion-related validity.** In the development of the TBQ, Rimm-Kaufman and colleagues (2006) completed a principal components factor analysis in which they specified the number of factors for each analysis and then used varimax rotation ( $p = .05$  as the cutoff) to determine if the factors were due to chance. For both of the Q-sorts, two factors emerged accounting for 21.3% and 24.1% of the variance of the Behavior and Teaching Q-sorts respectively. (See Appendix G for for the specific items that loaded onto each factor). Factor scores were then computed by summing the values of the items that loaded highly on each factor (Rimm-Kaufman, et al., 2006). In another study examining criterion related validity, the TBQ was found to be sensitive to differences between teacher training and experiences (Rimm-Kaufman, et al., 2006).

### **Reliability of the TBQ**

Reliability of the TBQ was established using a test-retest procedure. Forty-four teachers completed the TBQ twice within a year. Reliability was calculated using Spearman correlation coefficients ranging from .50 to .95 ( $M = .71$ ;  $SD = .11$ ) (Rimm-Kaufman, et al., 2006). In the current study only the Q-sorts of Behavior and Teaching were administered (see Appendix D).

## **Scoring of the TBQ**

Responses from each teacher's Q-sort were compiled into four subscales based on the factors identified by the TBQ developers. For the current study, responses were coded on a 1 to 5 scale corresponding to the Anchor assigned by the participant. The range fell between 1 being equivalent to least characteristic and 5 being equivalent to most characteristic of the participants' beliefs. To compute the TBQ subscale scores, the items which were found to load highly on the factors previously identified as critical (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2006), were added together after reverse coding those items which were found to negatively load onto the factor.

The factors previously identified by Rimm-Kaufman and colleagues (2006) included two subscales of the Behavior Q-sort, Teacher Direction (five items) and Emphasis on student's self-regulation and autonomy (Self-regulation; seven items) and two subscales of the Teaching Q-sort, Values spontaneity, process, and collaboration (Spontaneity; nine items) and Emphasis on children's social experience and choice (Social Experience; nine items). (A listing of which items load on to each of the four subscales is available in Appendix H.)

## **Accountability Questionnaire**

To determine participants' perceptions of evaluation criteria, both for teacher as well as school-wide evaluation, a questionnaire, the Accountability Questionnaire, was developed by the researcher. The Accountability Questionnaire consists of 16 Likert-style items, ranging from 1 ("Not at all important") to 5 ("Very Important"). Of these 16 items, 10 specifically addressed criteria used to evaluate teachers, and 6 specifically addressed criteria used to evaluate schools. The questionnaire was developed for this

study. Items are based on published evaluation criteria for teachers and schools, as described below.

### **Teacher performance evaluation**

Questions regarding accountability as related to teacher evaluation were derived from the teacher evaluation system set forth by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). This evaluation system is the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) which consists of 51 evaluation criteria that fall into 10 domains (TEA, 2005). The 10 domains include 1) active successful student participations in the learning process, 2) learner-centered instruction, 3) evaluation and feedback on student progress, 4) management of student discipline, 5) management of instructional strategies, 6) management of time and materials, 7) professional communication, 8) professional development, 9) compliance with policies, operating procedures and requirements, and 10) improvement of academic performance of all students on the campus (TEA, 2005). (Please see Appendix E).

### **School-wide performance evaluation**

All public schools in Texas are evaluated by the state Department of Education, the Texas Education Agency (TEA), annually. The primary criteria used for school wide evaluation is student performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), a high stakes standardized assessment administered beginning in the third grade (TEA, 2010). School-wide evaluation criteria for elementary schools take into account TAKS test scores by grade and subject, percent of student population that take the test, percent of students who score above cut-offs on their first attempts, and the students' performance compared to the previous year. Based on these evaluation criteria, schools receive ratings of Exemplary, Recognized, Academically Acceptable, or

Academically Unacceptable. Other information collected by the TEA, but not used to rate schools, includes attendance rates, discipline reports, dropout rates, completion of high school, and college readiness (TEA, 2010).

### **Questionnaire development**

Information from the PDAS system as described above was used to develop questionnaire items for the Accountability Questionnaire (TEA, 2005). The 10 domains used to evaluate teachers were listed as statements corresponding to five-point Likert scales. Participants were asked to rate each item based on their perception of its importance (Participant's View), as well as their perception of their schools' view of its importance (School's View). Participants were also asked to rank, in order of importance, the top three teacher evaluation items regarding both the Participant's View and School's View.

For the school-wide evaluation section, items were derived from published school-wide assessment criteria for public schools, as well as from information published by private schools regarding their priorities. As with the teacher evaluation items, the school-wide evaluation items were also listed as individual items corresponding to the same five-point Likert-type scale and were rated for both the Participant's View and the School's View. In addition the participants ranked the top three school-wide evaluation criteria based on the Participant's View and the School's View.

Scales were derived for the Accountability Questionnaire by adding the responses to each of the items across the four categories: Participant's View of teacher evaluation, School's View of teacher evaluation, Participant's View of school evaluation, and School's View of school evaluation.

## **Demographic Questionnaire**

In order to collect information about the participants, demographic information was also collected. Participants were asked to provide information about the setting in which they currently work, where they have previously worked, subjects they teach, gender, ethnicity, years in their current job, years working with the same age students, number of students in their class, number of adults assigned to their classroom, education the teachers received and licenses or certifications.

## **Pilot Study of Questionnaires**

To explore content validity of the Accountability Questionnaire and Demographic Questionnaire, they were first shared with faculty with expertise in this area. The questionnaire was then shared with a focus group of 3 teachers who were asked to provide feedback on item clarity, and the extent to which the questionnaire reflects evaluation criteria in their settings.

## **Procedure**

The study was approved by the University of Florida Institutional Review Board prior to approval from the district and schools as described above. Whenever possible, the teachers were provided with the consent forms before the date of the administration; however, on some occasions due to logistical difficulties, teachers were given the consent at the beginning of the administration. The participants were given time to read over the consent with the test administrators stressing that their participation was voluntary. Once teachers agreed to participate in the study, they were assigned a participation number so that the information collected remained confidential.

As soon as one or more teachers had consented to participate in a school, test administrators went to the school at a time negotiated with the school principal. Most

participants completed the questionnaires in small groups of 4-5 teachers. On a few occasions, only one teacher in a school agreed to participate; in those cases, the participant completed the questionnaire with only the test administrator present. The largest group of teachers to complete the questionnaires in a group consisted of 8 individuals. Test administrators included the primary researcher as well as five other district Licensed Specialists in School Psychology who had been trained by the primary researcher to administer the materials.

The procedure for administering the TBQ and questionnaires included the following steps:

1. Participants were provided with a packet of testing materials. The testing materials included an envelope with written instructions (Appendix F), the two TBQ scales (Behavior and Teaching, Appendix D), the Accountability Questionnaire, and the Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix E). The test administrator instructed the participants to complete the TBQ scales first.
2. Administration of the TBQ. Each Q-sort (Behavior and Teaching) was color coded to help participants keep the items separate. Each scale consisted of a small envelope that contained five anchor cards, 20 item cards, and a response sheet for participants to record their responses (Appendix G). In addition to the written instructions, the test administrator reviewed the process for completing the Q-sort. The teachers were asked to place the five anchor cards on the table, ranging from "least" to "most." Next, participants were asked to sort the 20 item cards into the five categories, with only four item cards on each anchor. Once the cards were sorted, participants recorded their answers on the response sheet.
3. Test administrators circulated among to the participants to insure that they understood the instructions and were able to complete the Q-sort task appropriately. The test administrators provided additional instruction to participants as needed. Only one of the 99 participants did not sort the cards equally among the five categories, and that participant's data was not included in the analysis of the Q-sort data.
4. After the participants completed the Behavior and Teaching Scales of the TBQ, they were instructed to complete the Accountability and Demographic Questionnaires. Instructions for the Questionnaires were included on each section of the Questionnaires, but also reviewed by the test administrators.

5. Code numbers had been assigned to each of the packets prior to administration, and once participants completed all three tasks, they returned the response materials to the coded envelope to be returned to the test administrator.

### **Analyses**

Initially, the demographic information provided by the participants was summarized using descriptive statistics.

Then, the first research question focused on the relationship between teachers' views of accountability and their priorities on the Behavior and Teaching Q-sorts. In order to evaluate these relationships, several bivariate correlations were conducted.

The second research question focused on differences between the different participant groups (pre-k versus kindergarten and public versus private schools) regarding their priorities within the classroom (Behavior and Teaching Q-sorts). Due to the non-random assignment of participants, as is the nature of non-experimental studies, multiple regressions were determined to be the appropriate statistical analyses. An additional factor of the non-experimental design that leads to choosing multiple regression analyses, is the fact that the sample size for the participant groups are not equal (Keppel & Zedeck, 1989). Multiple regressions were conducted examining the relationships between what grade a teacher taught (pre-k or kindergarten) and the setting taught in (private or public school) and participants' responses on the four TBQ subscales: Teacher Direction, Self-regulation, Spontaneity, and Social Experiences. The chosen analyses also accounted for the possible interaction between the teacher grade and school type. Additional multiple regressions were conducted examining participants' ages and years working in the current setting to determine if those factors related to the TBQ subscale regardless of the settings worked in by the participants.

Table 2-1. Means and standard deviations of demographic information.

Participant's current work setting		Age (years)	Years at current job	Years with same age children
Public pre-k	<i>M</i>	43.00	6.50	6.35
	<i>SD</i>	9.24	7.50	6.03
	<i>n</i>	30	30	30
Private pre-k	<i>M</i>	41.31	6.48	9.73
	<i>SD</i>	12.62	6.76	7.72
	<i>n</i>	29	29	28
Public kindergarten	<i>M</i>	37.39	6.50	6.44
	<i>SD</i>	9.21	5.23	6.09
	<i>n</i>	28	27	27
Private kindergarten	<i>M</i>	39.44	3.56	8.22
	<i>SD</i>	12.12	2.35	6.18
	<i>n</i>	9	9	9

## CHAPTER 3 RESULTS

The purpose of the current study was to evaluate early education teachers' beliefs about various aspects of accountability and classroom practices. Specifically, the following research questions were examined: 1) Do teachers' perceptions of the accountability systems currently used to evaluate their performance and to evaluate the settings in which they work predict their perceptions of characteristics of their teaching and discipline and management strategies? and 2) Do pre-k and kindergarten teachers differ with respect to their beliefs about the characteristics of their teaching and discipline and management strategies? Chapter 3 includes information regarding the results of the current study including correlations to examine relationships between beliefs about accountability (Accountability Questionnaire scales) and classroom practices (TBQ subscales). In addition results from the multiple regression analyses to determine differences between the different groups of participants (pre-k versus kindergarten and public versus private school) regarding their beliefs about classroom practices (TBQ subscales) are reported. Finally, several exploratory analyses are also discussed.

### **Relationships between Views of Accountability and Priorities in Classroom Management Strategies**

In order to determine whether teachers view of the accountability system is related to their priorities regarding Behavior and Teaching, correlations were computed. See Tables 3-1, 3-2, 3-3, and 3-4 for the results of the analyses and further specific discussion of the results below.

To answer the first research question of "Do teachers' perceptions of the accountability systems currently used to evaluate their performance and to evaluate the

settings in which they work predict their perceptions of characteristics of their teaching and discipline and management strategies?” bivariate correlations were conducted. The variables included in the correlations were the four Accountability Questionnaire scales (Participant’s View of teacher evaluation, School’s View of teacher evaluation, Participant’s View of school evaluation, and School’s View of school evaluation) and the four TBQ subscales (Teacher Direction, Self-regulation, Spontaneity, and Social Experience). Among those 16 correlations only one was found to be significant. Specifically, School’s View of teacher evaluation was found to be significantly and negatively correlated with Self-regulation ( $r = -.236, p = 0.022$ ).

Due to only one of the overall accountability scales being found to be related to the participants’ responses on the TBQ subscales, correlations were also conducted for the separate evaluation criteria. The separate evaluation criteria consisted of the 10 evaluation criteria for teachers and the six school wide evaluation criteria both for both the Participant’s View and the School’s View. Refer to Appendix E for the individual items. The findings are described below.

### **Characteristics of Teaching**

Regarding both of the Teaching TBQ subscales (Spontaneity and Social Experience), only one accountability criteria within the School’s View of teacher evaluation scale, importance of managing instructional strategies, was found to be positively correlated to Spontaneity ( $r = 0.230, p = 0.026$ ).

### **Discipline and Behavior Management Strategies**

Regarding the Behavior TBQ subscales (Teacher Direction and Self-regulation), Self-regulation was found to be negatively correlated to two accountability criteria within the School’s View of teacher evaluation scale. The criteria were management of

instructional strategies ( $r = -0.276, p = 0.006$ ) and complying with policies, procedures and requirements ( $r = -0.256, p = 0.012$ ).

The other Behavior TBQ subscale of Teacher Direction was found to correlate with eight of the accountability criteria. Three of the accountability criteria correlated with Teacher Direction subscale were within the Participant's Views scales. The specific criteria were 1) Participant's View of teacher evaluation criterion of providing feedback and evaluating student progress ( $r = 0.305, p = 0.003$ ); 2) Participant's View of school evaluation criterion of student performance on standardized assessment ( $r = 0.034, p = 0.001$ ); and 3) Participant's View of school evaluation criterion of discipline reports conducted throughout the year ( $r = 0.0235, p = 0.023$ ).

The five other significant correlations with the Teacher Directions subscale were from the School's View accountability scales. Three were teacher evaluation criteria: 1) students actively participating in learning ( $r = -0.283, p = 0.005$ ); 2) providing feedback and evaluating student progress ( $r = 0.204, p = 0.048$ ); and 3) complying with policies, procedures and requirements ( $r = 0.210, p = 0.042$ ). The other two were related to school evaluation criteria: 1) student performance on standardized assessment ( $r = 0.290, p = 0.006$ ); and 2) discipline reports conducted throughout the year ( $r = 0.224, p = 0.030$ ). The correlation matrices for all of the evaluation criteria and Q-sort scales can be seen below in Tables 3-1 through 3-4.

### **Differences regarding Priorities in Classroom Management Strategies**

To address the question of "Do pre-k and kindergarten teachers differ with respect to their beliefs about the characteristics of their teaching and discipline and management strategies?" several multiple regressions were computed. Before analyses could be completed, for each criteria of grade taught (pre-k or kindergarten) and setting

(public or private), each participant was assigned a value of 1 or -1 with kindergarten being -1, pre-k 1, private school -1 and public school 1. The interaction between the two variables was assessed by creating a dummy variable. The interaction dummy variable was created by multiplying the dummy codes used for grade taught and setting. Grade taught, setting the participants worked in and the interaction of the two variables were entered as the independent variables, while the dependent variables consisted of the four Q-sort subscales described earlier (Teacher Direction, Self-regulation, Spontaneity, and Social Experience). Below are descriptions of the multiple regressions calculated and the related results. The means Q-sort subscales for each of the groups can be seen below in Table 3-5; refer to Table 3-6 through 3-9 for the results of the multiple regressions described below.

### **Beliefs about Discipline and Behavior Management**

Multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable of Self-Regulation Q-sort subscale (Table 3-6) was not significant ( $R^2 = .037$ ,  $F(3, 93) = 1.196$ ,  $p = .316$ ). The second multiple regression was for the dependent variable of Teacher Direction Q-sort subscale (Table 3-7) was not significant, ( $R^2 = .052$ ,  $F(3, 92) = 1.699$ ,  $p = .173$ ).

### **Beliefs about Characteristics of Teaching**

To address participants' beliefs about characteristics of their teaching styles, additional multiple regressions were conducted. Again the relationships between the independent variable of what grade a teacher taught (pre-k or kindergarten) and the setting taught in (private or public school), as well as the possible interaction between the teacher grade and school type were included in the analyses. A multiple regression for the dependent variable of the Spontaneity Q-sort subscale (Table 3-8) was not significant ( $R^2 = .006$ ,  $F(3, 91) = 0.196$ ,  $p = .899$ ). The multiple regression for the

dependent variable of Social Experience Q-sort subscale (Table 3-9) was not significant ( $R^2 = 0.033$ ,  $F(3, 93) = 1.045$ ,  $p = 0.376$ ).

### **Differences between Groups Regarding Views of Accountability**

Although the primary goal of the current study was to assess the participants' views of accountability and how that related to their beliefs, it was also of interest to determine if there were any differences between the settings that participants worked in and their views of various accountability criteria. Therefore, additional multiple regression analyses were conducted to address the question with Teacher type (pre-k versus kindergarten) and School type (private versus public schools) being used as the independent variables while the dependent variables were the four view of accountability scales (Participant's View of teacher evaluation, School's View of teacher evaluation, Participant's View of school evaluation, and School's View of school evaluation). The means for all accountability scales can be seen in Table 3-10.

### **Participant's View of Accountability**

Multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable of Participant's View of teacher evaluation criteria was not significant ( $R^2 = 0.114$ ,  $F(3, 94) = 0.413$ ,  $p = 0.744$ ). While the result from the multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable of Participant's View of school wide evaluation criteria was also not significant ( $R^2 = 0.006$ ,  $F(3, 85) = 0.178$ ,  $p = 0.911$ ). See Table 3-11.

### **Perceptions of School Systems' Views of Accountability**

Teachers were also asked how important they felt the evaluation criteria were viewed by their school system (School's View). The teachers were asked the same questions for teacher and school evaluation as they had been for the Participant's View, but were asked to rate how important they believed the school system they worked in

viewed criteria. The results from the multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable of School's View of teacher evaluation criteria was not significant ( $R^2 = 0.027$ ,  $F(3, 92) = 0.862$ ,  $p = 0.464$ ). Multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable of School's View of school evaluation criteria was significant ( $R^2 = 0.183$ ,  $F(3, 85) = 6.29$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). As can be seen in Table 3-12, both independent variables of Teacher type and School type were significant for School's View of school evaluation criteria.

### **Impact of Age and Years**

In addition to the originally hypothesized questions, interest in how the participants' ages and years at their current job impacted their perceptions led to additional analyses. However, none of the additional multiple regression analyses with the independent variables of participant's age or years in current job were significantly related to participant's scores on the Q-sort scales regardless of the settings in which they taught (all  $ps > .05$ , see Table 3-13).

### **Perceptions of Which Evaluation Criteria are Most Important**

When asked to rate the various areas of accountability on Likert scales for both their views and their perceptions of how their school system viewed the accountability, participants' responses varied only for the importance school systems placed on school wide criteria. However, participants were also asked to rank the top three teacher and school evaluation criteria for both the Participant's View and School View. Graphs are presented for each of the four categories (Participant's View of teacher evaluation, School's View of teacher evaluation, Participant's View of school evaluation, and School's View of school evaluation) including the combination of each of the top three ranked criteria as well as what was ranked first, second and third (Figures 3-1 through 3-16).

Each of the ten criteria used to evaluate teachers was ranked at least by one participant as one of the top three criteria used to evaluate teachers (Figure 3-1). Regardless of the grade taught or school setting, the majority of teachers ranked “students actively participating in the learning process” as the most important criteria used to evaluate teachers’ performances with 77 of the 96 (80.2%) participants ranking that criteria as one of the top three including 50 teachers ranking it as the most important criteria (Figure 3-2). When examining which criteria teachers ranked as being at least one of the top three, it was fairly evenly distributed among teacher type and school type. However, the criteria that participants considered specifically as second (Figure 3-3) or third (Figure 3-4) most important varied for teacher type and school type.

While the participants had relatively similar viewpoints as to what was important when evaluating teachers, their opinions varied regarding school’s views. When asked which criterion they felt their school systems viewed as most important when evaluating teachers (Figure 3-6), the majority of public school kindergarten teachers believed that criteria was “improved academic performance of the students”, while public school pre-k teachers were split between “improved academic performance of the students” and “students actively participating learning”. The most frequent response by private school pre-k and private school kindergarten teachers was “students actively participating in learning.”

Participants were also asked to rank order the top criteria used to evaluate schools (Figures 3-9 through 3-16). More public school teachers responded “regular attendance” was the most important (Figure 3-10), whereas more private school teachers responded “communication with parents” was the most important criteria used

to evaluate schools. What teachers ranked as second and third were more similar across teacher type and school type (Figures 3-11 and 3-12). The School's View of the top three school evaluation criteria varied between school types (public versus private schools). The criteria of "student performance on standardized assessment" was ranked first (Figure 3-14) by 82.5% of public school respondents; whereas only 13.2% of the private school respondents ranked standardized assessment as the School's View of the most important school-wide evaluation criteria. The criteria rated as the School's View most important school wide evaluation criteria within the private schools was "communication with parents" (39.5% of respondents).

Table 3-1. Pearson correlation matrix for Teacher's View of teacher evaluation criteria and TBQ subscales.

Evaluation criteria		Teacher Direction	Self-regulation	Spontaneity	Social Experience
Teacher's View of teacher evaluation scale	Correlation	.085	.027	.060	.056
	Significance	.411	.794	.565	.587
Teacher evaluation items:					
A) Students actively participating	Correlation	-.123	.122	.113	.137
	Significance	.234	.235	.279	.184
B) Learning-centered instruction	Correlation	.049	-.094	.080	.064
	Significance	.638	.362	.441	.536
C) Evaluating student progress	Correlation	.305*	-.137	-.017	.019
	Significance	.003	.183	.872	.853
D) Management of student discipline	Correlation	.102	.066	-.068	.177
	Significance	.326	.522	.517	.084
E) Management of instructional strategies	Correlation	.043	.020	.135	.043
	Significance	.680	.846	.193	.675
F) Management of time and materials	Correlation	.100	-.008	.013	-.100
	Significance	.333	.939	.900	.333
G) Professional communication	Correlation	-.088	.187	-.083	-.024
	Significance	.396	.068	.425	.813
H) Participating in professional development	Correlation	-.073	.118	.063	.092
	Significance	.480	.252	.548	.374
I) Complying with policies and procedures	Correlation	.104	-.054	.110	.048
	Significance	.315	.604	.292	.639
J) Improved academic performance	Correlation	.054	.025	.032	-.073
	Significance	.603	.812	.760	.480

\* Significant  $p < .05$

Table 3-2. Pearson correlation matrix for School's Views of teacher evaluation criteria and TBQ subscales.

Evaluation criteria		Teacher Direction	Self-regulation	Spontaneity	Social Experience
School's View of teacher evaluation scale	Correlation	.133	-.236*	.125	.047
	Significance	.202	.022	.231	.652
Teacher evaluation items:					
A) Students actively participating	Correlation	-.283*	-.032	.146	.101
	Significance	.005	.755	.159	.328
B) Learning-centered instruction	Correlation	.048	-.199	.169	.040
	Significance	.647	.052	.103	.702
C) Evaluating student progress	Correlation	.204*	-.170	.083	.014
	Significance	.048	.098	.425	.891
D) Management of student discipline	Correlation	.119	-.111	.104	.064
	Significance	.251	.283	.319	.534
E) Management of instructional strategies	Correlation	.061	-.276*	.230*	.099
	Significance	.558	.006	.026	.337
F) Management of time and materials	Correlation	.021	-.120	.019	.029
	Significance	.841	.249	.859	.781
G) Professional communication	Correlation	.088	-.100	-.029	-.099
	Significance	.398	.330	.781	.338
H) Participating in professional development	Correlation	.137	-.092	-.058	.061
	Significance	.184	.371	.581	.557
I) Complying with policies and procedures	Correlation	.210*	-.256*	.102	.016
	Significance	.042	.012	.327	.876
J) Improved academic performance	Correlation	.131	-.094	.002	.014
	Significance	.207	.360	.986	.895

\* Significant  $p < .05$

Table 3-3. Pearson correlation matrix for Teacher's Views of school evaluation criteria and TBQ subscales.

Evaluation criteria		Teacher Direction	Self-regulation	Spontaneity	Social Experience
Teacher's Views of school evaluation scale	Correlation	.159	-.084	.030	-.036
	Significance	.143	.437	.785	.741
School evaluation items:					
A) Attendance rate of students	Correlation	.156	-.097	.043	.055
	Significance	.134	.350	.685	.597
B) Retention rate of students	Correlation	-.092	.005	.036	.003
	Significance	.390	.965	.733	.977
C) Perf. on stand. assessment	Correlation	.344*	-.151	.009	-.183
	Significance	.001	.155	.932	.084
D) Year discipline reports	Correlation	.235*	-.075	-.040	-.132
	Significance	.023	.471	.706	.201
E) Communication with parents	Correlation	-.015	.060	-.142	.070
	Significance	.885	.565	.174	.499
F) Input from parents/ community	Correlation	-.067	.046	.104	.078
	Significance	.522	.661	.325	.454

\* Significant  $p < .05$

Table 3-4. Pearson correlation matrix for School's Views of school-wide evaluation criteria and Q-sort scales.

Evaluation criteria		Teacher Direction	Self-regulation	Spontaneity	Social Experience
School's Views of school evaluation scale	Correlation	.137	-.154	-.141	-.145
	Significance	.209	.155	.196	.178
School evaluation items:					
A) Attendance rate of students	Correlation	-.020	-.098	-.026	-.080
	Significance	.845	.343	.808	.442
B) Retention rate of students	Correlation	-.084	.015	-.069	-.092
	Significance	.430	.884	.517	.385
C) Perf. on stand. assessment	Correlation	.290*	-.200	-.194	-.207
	Significance	.006	.058	.069	.051
D) Year discipline reports	Correlation	.224*	-.082	-.126	-.102
	Significance	.030	.432	.230	.325
E) Communication with parents	Correlation	.140	-.085	-.082	-.081
	Significance	.179	.415	.437	.433
F) Input from parents/ community	Correlation	.021	-.108	.057	.085
	Significance	.844	.299	.589	.413

\* Significant  $p < .05$

Table 3-5. Means and standard deviations for TBQ subscales

Participant's current work setting (possible range)		Teacher Direction (5-35)	Self-regulation (7-35)	Spontaneity (9-45)	Social Experience (9-45)
Public Pre-k	<i>M</i>	11.97	19.80	28.03	31.21
	<i>SD</i>	1.92	2.86	5.20	4.39
Private Pre-k	<i>M</i>	11.66	19.69	27.30	31.70
	<i>SD</i>	1.90	4.29	3.776	3.49
Public Kindergarten	<i>M</i>	12.71	19.48	26.79	31.90
	<i>SD</i>	2.66	3.53	4.57	4.43
Private Kindergarten	<i>M</i>	11.22	21.78	31.13	31.44
	<i>SD</i>	2.86	3.53	2.42	4.10

Table 3-6. Regression analysis of Teacher Direction TBQ subscale

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>p</i>
Grade level taught	-.002	.27	-.01	.93
Type of school	.47	.27	.21	.08
Interaction of grade level x school type	.77	.27	-.17	.15

Note.  $R^2 = .052$ , ( $N = 95$ ,  $p = .17$ ).

Table 3-7. Regression analysis of Self-regulation TBQ subscale

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>p</i>
Grade level taught	-.50	.43	-.14	.24
Type of school	-.48	.43	-.13	.26
Interaction of grade level x school type	.77	.43	.21	.08

Note.  $R^2 = .037$  ( $N = 96$ ,  $p = .32$ ).

Table 3-8. Regression analysis of Spontaneity TBQ subscale

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>p</i>
Grade level taught	-.19	.56	-.04	.73
Type of school	-.01	.56	-.02	.87
Interaction of grade level x school type	.42	.56	.09	.46

Note.  $R^2 = .006$ , ( $N = 94$ ,  $p = .90$ ).

Table 3-9. Regression analysis of Social Experience TBQ scale

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>p</i>
Grade level taught	-.52	.48	-.12	.29
Type of school	-.41	.48	-.10	.39
Interaction of grade level x school type	.83	.48	.20	.09

Note.  $R^2 = .033$ , ( $N = 96$ ,  $p = .38$ ).

Table 3-10. Means and standard deviation of accountability scales

Participant's current work setting (possible range)		Teacher's view of teacher evaluation (10-50)	School's View of teacher evaluation (10-50)	Teacher's view of school-wide evaluation (6-30)	School's View of school-wide evaluation (6-30)
Public Pre-k	<i>M</i>	46.57	45.67	25.44	27.37
	<i>SD</i>	3.65	4.55	2.42	2.53
Private Pre-k	<i>M</i>	46.83	43.40	24.28	23.00
	<i>SD</i>	3.67	5.48	3.25	3.50
Public Kindergarten	<i>M</i>	46.62	45.96	25.14	27.86
	<i>SD</i>	3.86	4.58	4.03	3.00
Private Kindergarten	<i>M</i>	48.00	44.00	25.38	25.50
	<i>SD</i>	2.18	6.65	3.20	3.34

Table 3-11. Regression analysis summary for Participant's View about accountability

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>p</i>
Teacher evaluation criteria				
Grade level taught	-.34	.43	-.09	.43
Type of school	-.43	.43	-.12	.32
Interaction of grade level x school type	.32	.43	.09	.46
School evaluation criteria				
Grade level taught	-.26	.41	-.08	.53
Type of school	-.12	.41	-.04	.77
Interaction of grade level x school type	.24	.41	.07	.56

Note. Teacher:  $R^2 = .01$ , ( $N = 97$ ,  $p = .74$ ). School:  $R^2 = .01$ , ( $N = 88$ ,  $p = .91$ ).

Table 3-12. Regression analysis summary for School's View about accountability

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>p</i>
Teacher evaluation criteria				
Grade level taught	-.71	.61	-.14	.25
Type of school	-.11	.61	-.02	.86
Interaction of grade level x school type	.79	.61	.15	.20
School evaluation criteria				
Grade level taught	-.96	.41	-.26	.02*
Type of school	.94	.41	.25	.02*
Interaction of grade level x school type	.55	.41	.15	.18

Note. Teacher:  $R^2 = .03$ , ( $N = 95$ ,  $p = .46$ ). School:  $R^2 = .18$ , ( $N = 88$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

\*  $p < .05$

Table 3-13. Regression analysis summary for participant's age and years at current job

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>p</i>
Teacher Direction				
Participant's age	.002	.03	-.10	.42
Years at current job	.005	.04	.13	.27
Self-regulation				
Participant's age	.007	.04	.23	.06
Years at current job	.005	.07	-.09	.47
Spontaneity				
Participant's age	.005	.05	.11	.37
Years at current job	.003	.09	.04	.77
Social Experience				
Participant's age	.002	.04	.06	.62
Years at current job	.11	.08	.18	.14

Note. Teacher Direction:  $R^2 = .04$ , ( $N = 90$ ,  $p = .17$ ).

Self-regulation:  $R^2 = .04$ , ( $N = 91$ ,  $p = .15$ ). Spontaneity:  $R^2 = .02$ , ( $N = 89$ ,  $p = .47$ ).

Social Experience:  $R^2 = .05$ , ( $N = 91$ ,  $p = .12$ ).

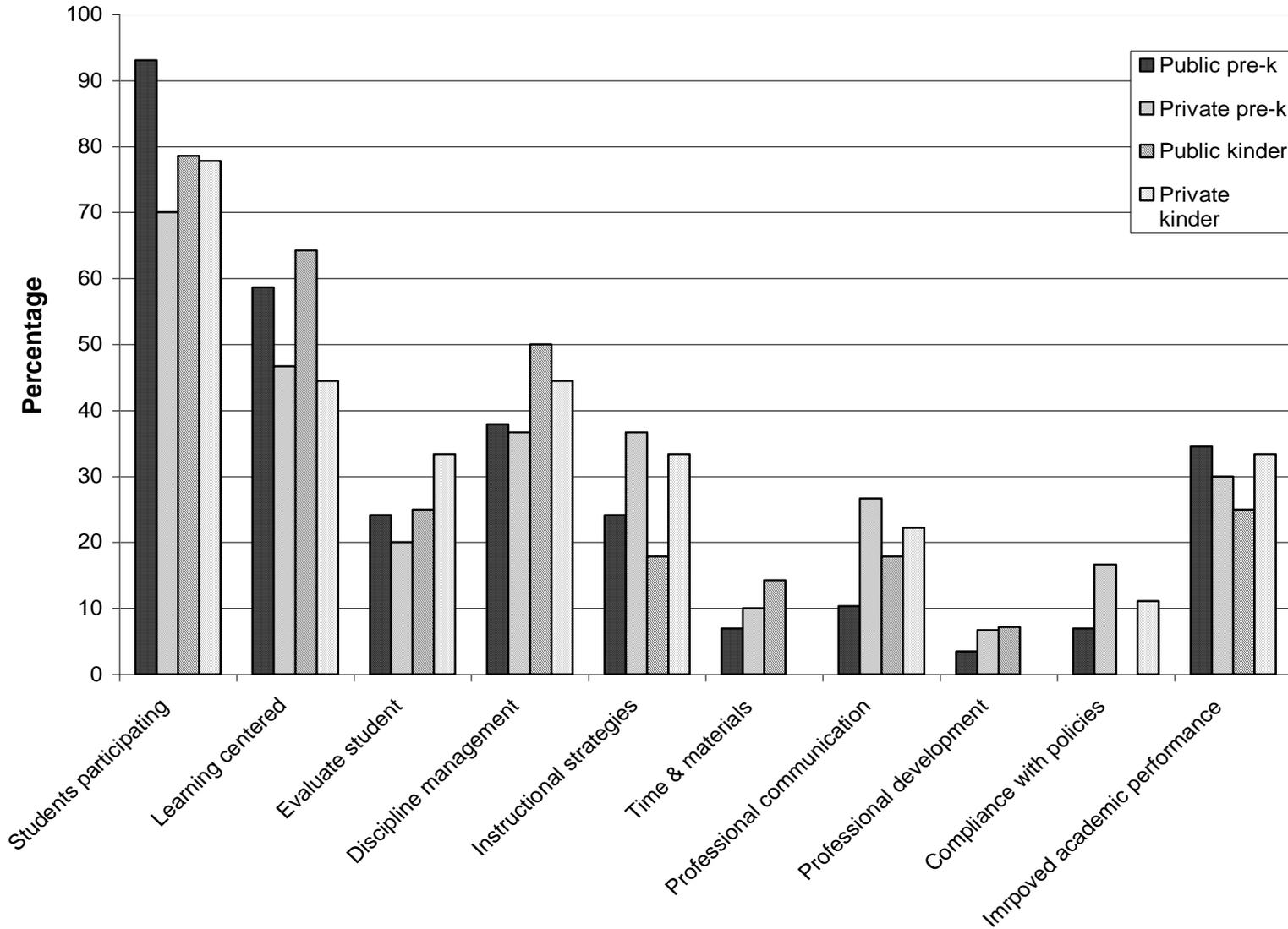


Figure 3-1. Participant's View of teacher evaluation criteria (combination of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd rankings)

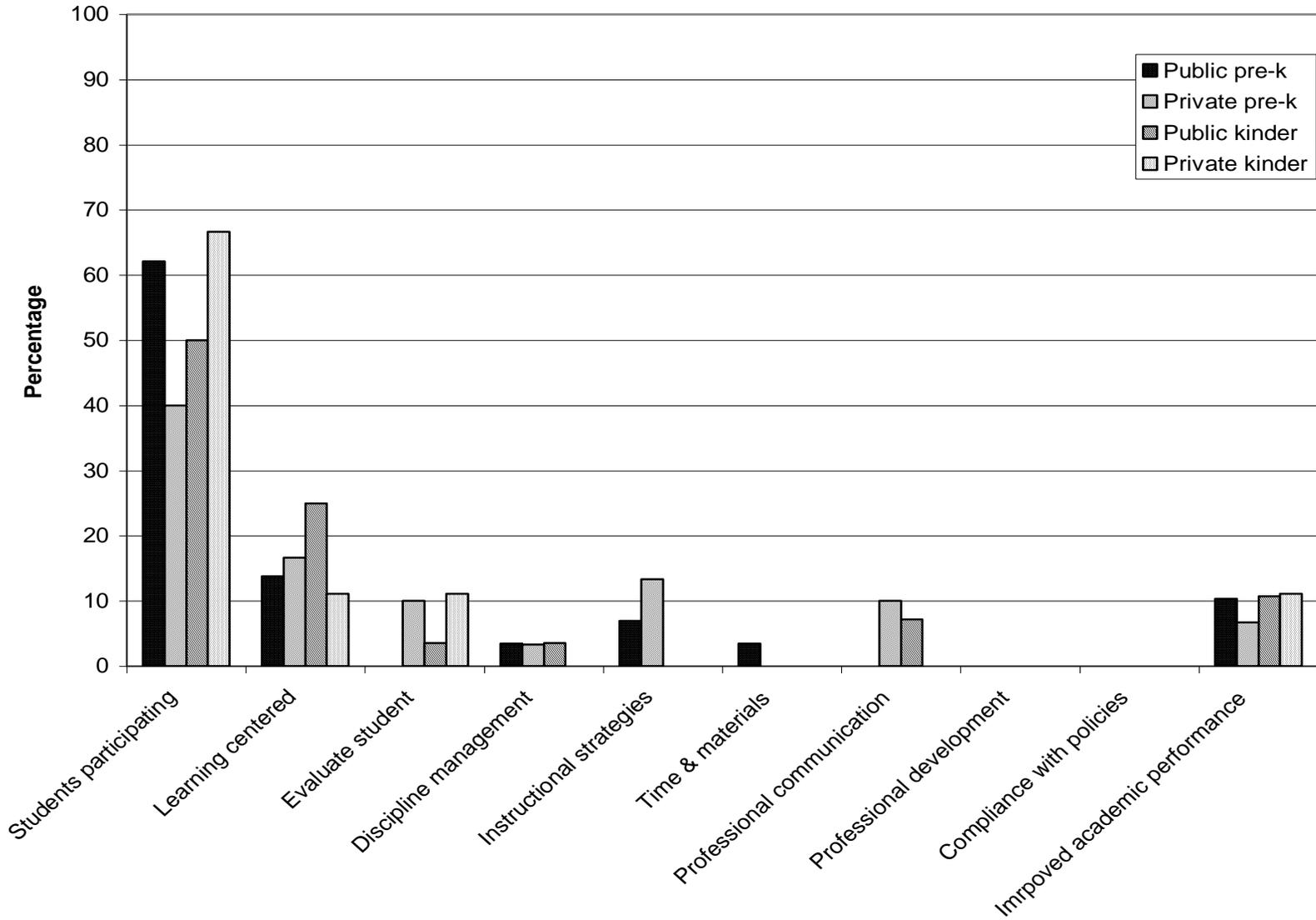


Figure 3-2. Participant's View teacher evaluation criteria ranked first

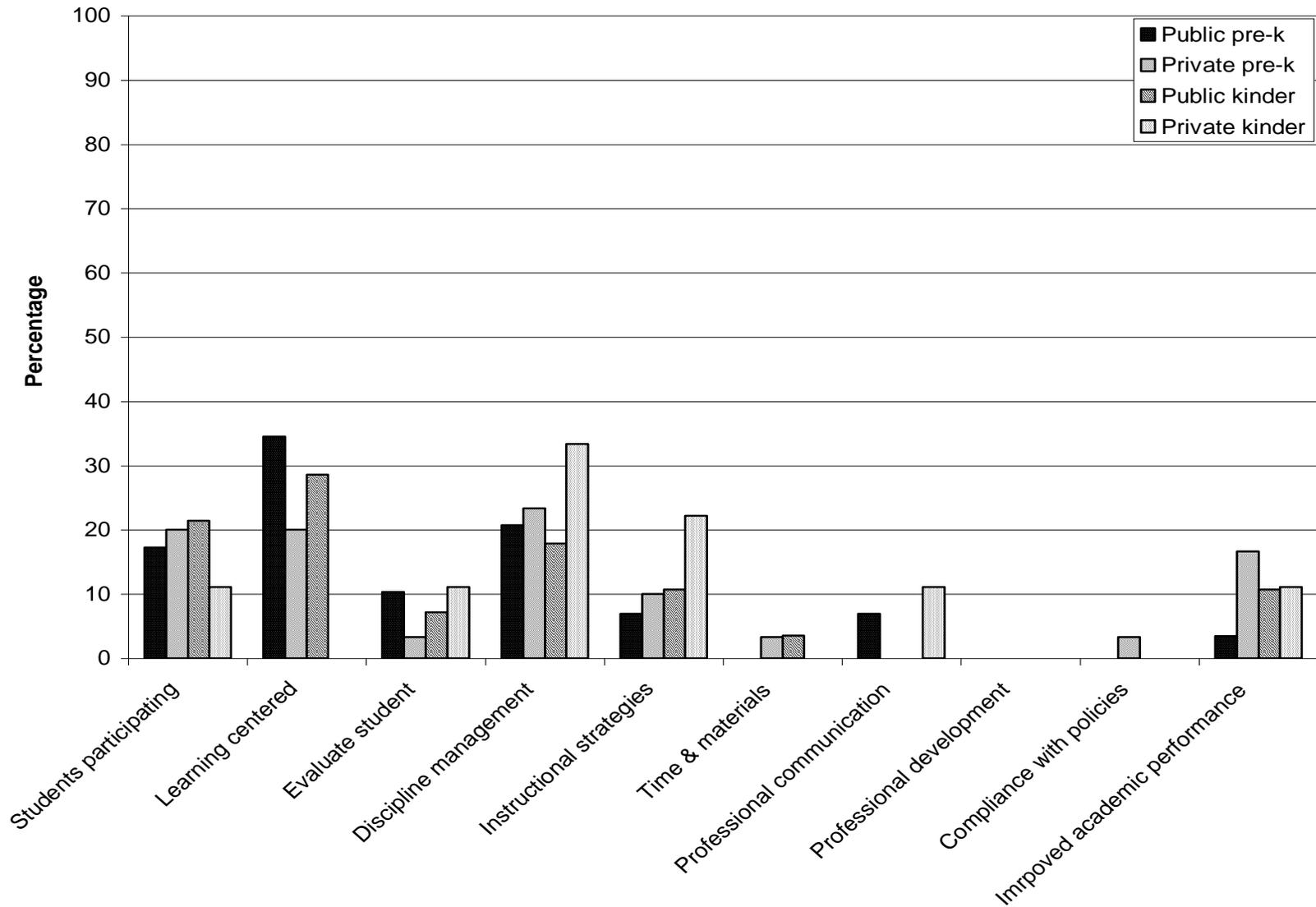


Figure 3-3. Participant's View teacher evaluation criteria ranked second

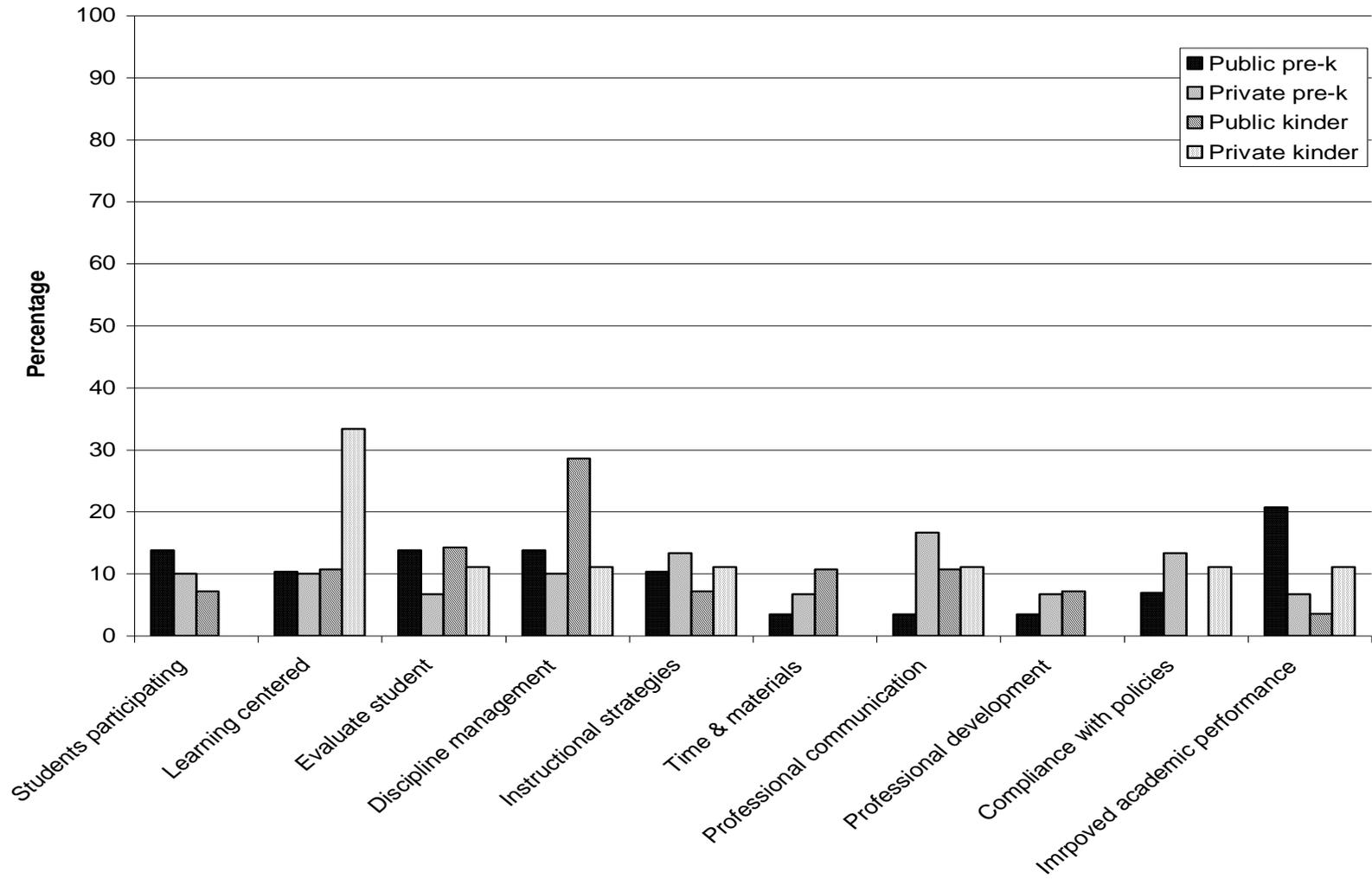


Figure 3-4. Participant's View teacher evaluation criteria ranked third

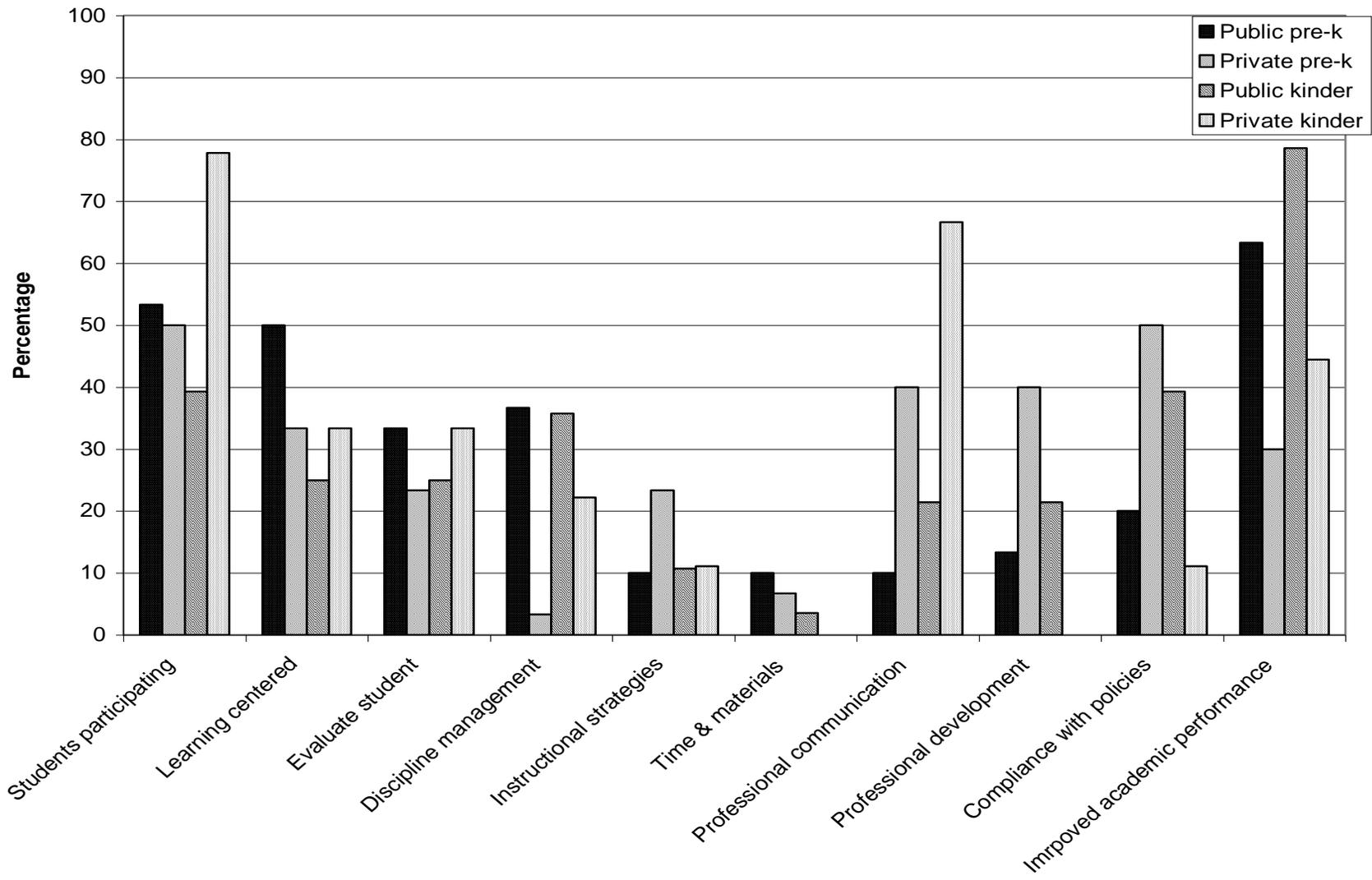


Figure 3-5. School's View of teacher evaluation criteria (combination of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd rankings)

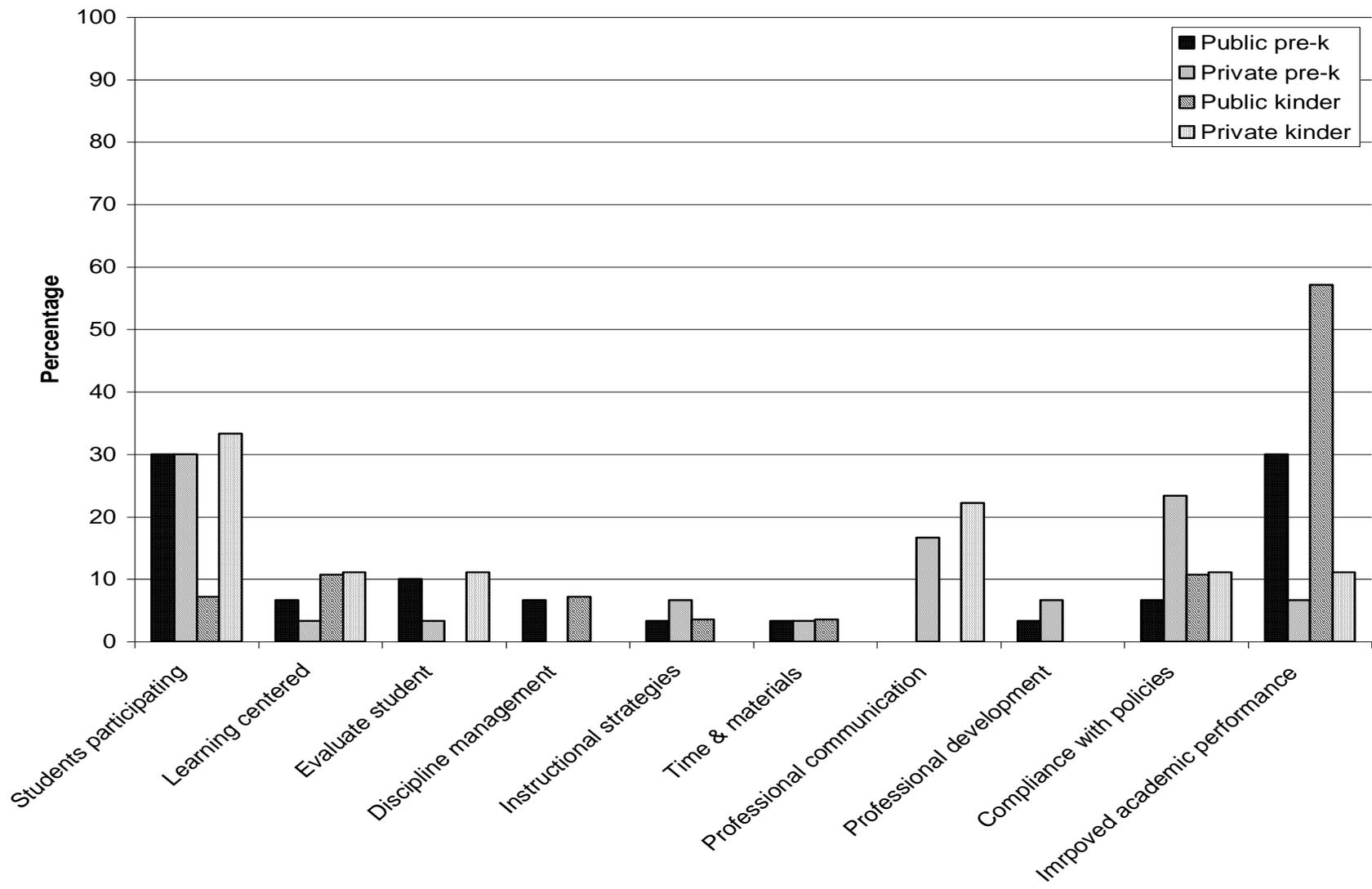


Figure 3-6. School's View teacher evaluation criteria ranked first

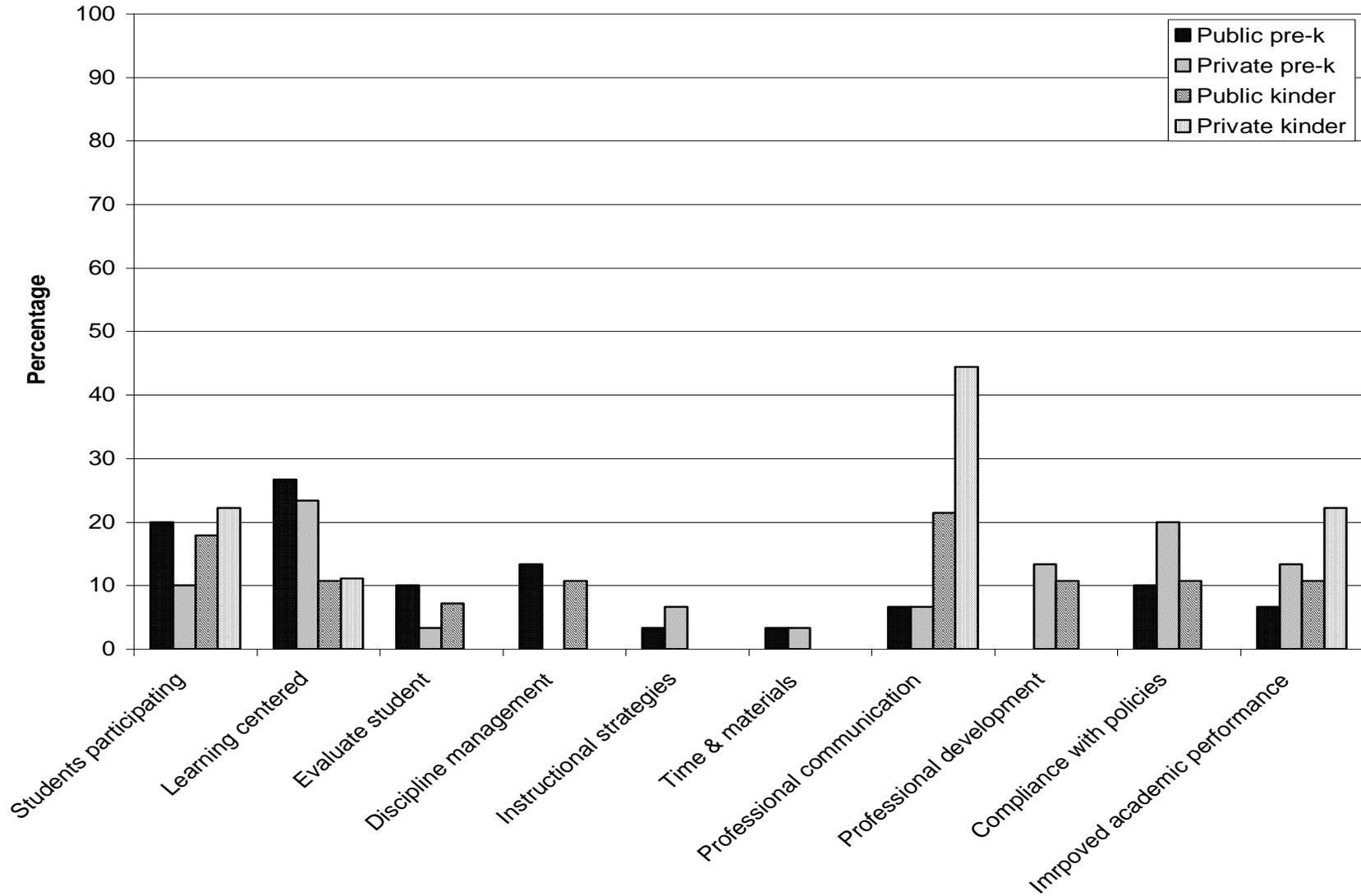


Figure 3-7. School's View teacher evaluation criteria ranked second

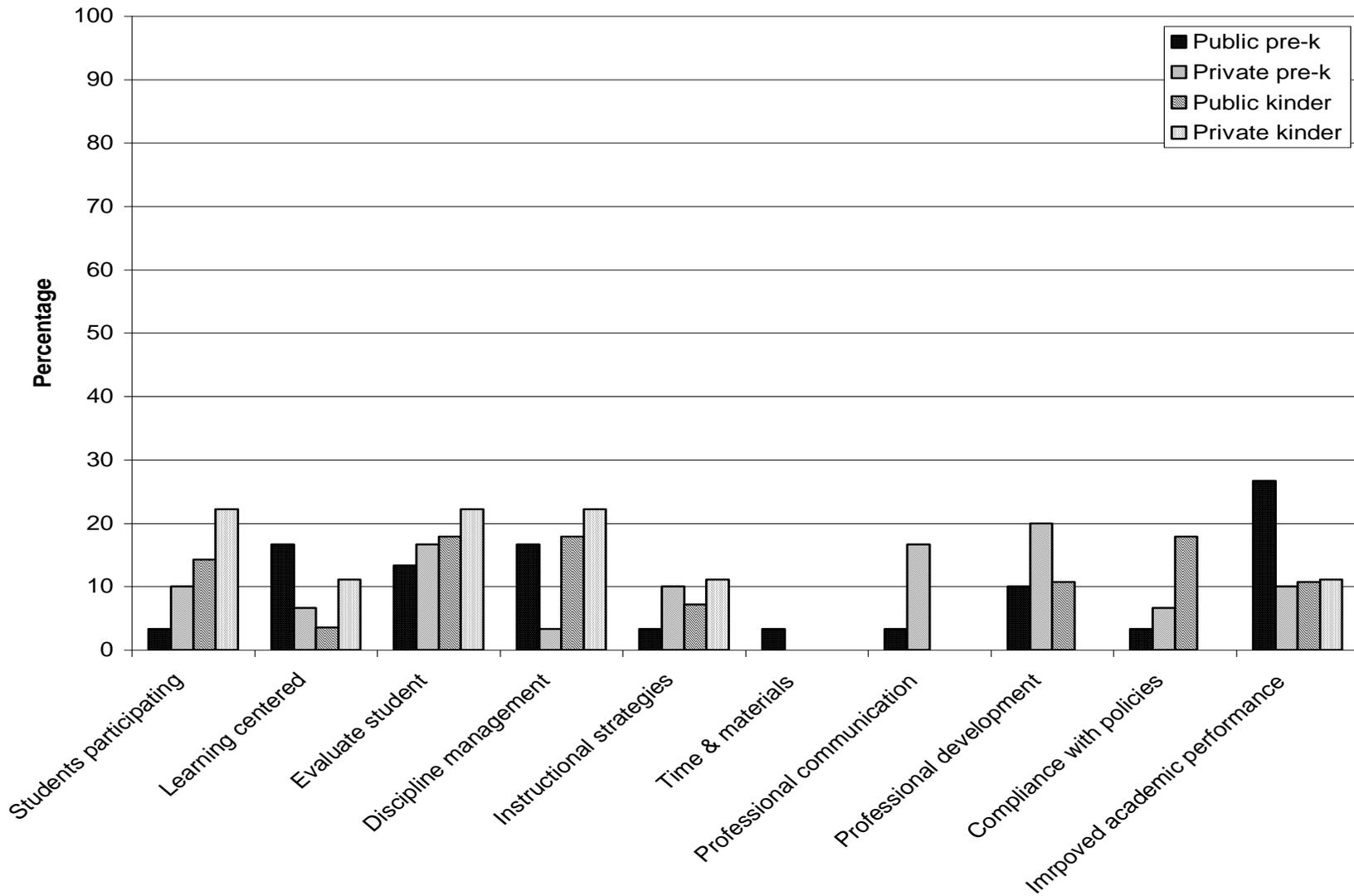


Figure 3-8. School's View teacher evaluation criteria ranked third

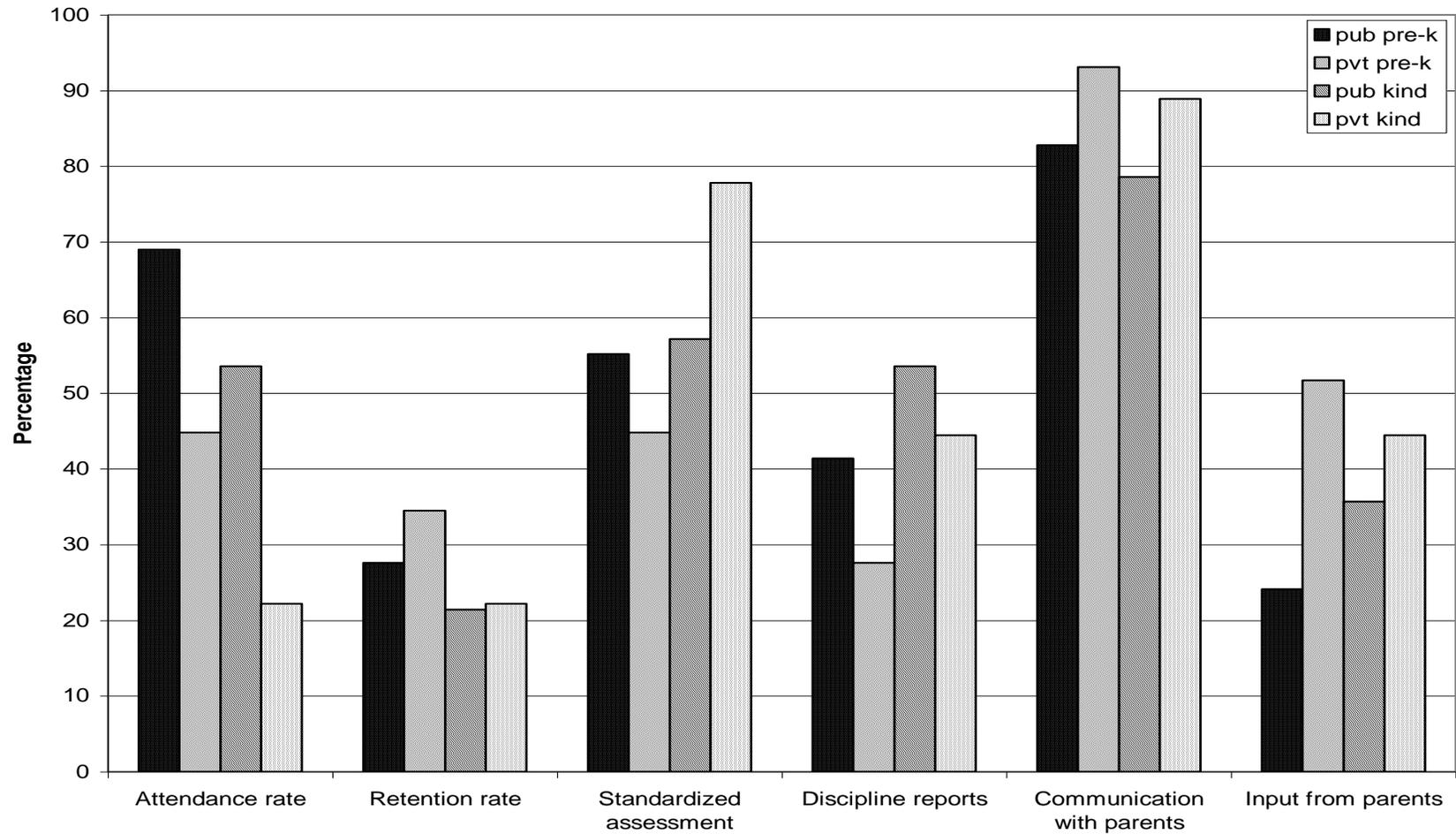


Figure 3-9. Participant's View of school-wide evaluation criteria (combination of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd rankings)

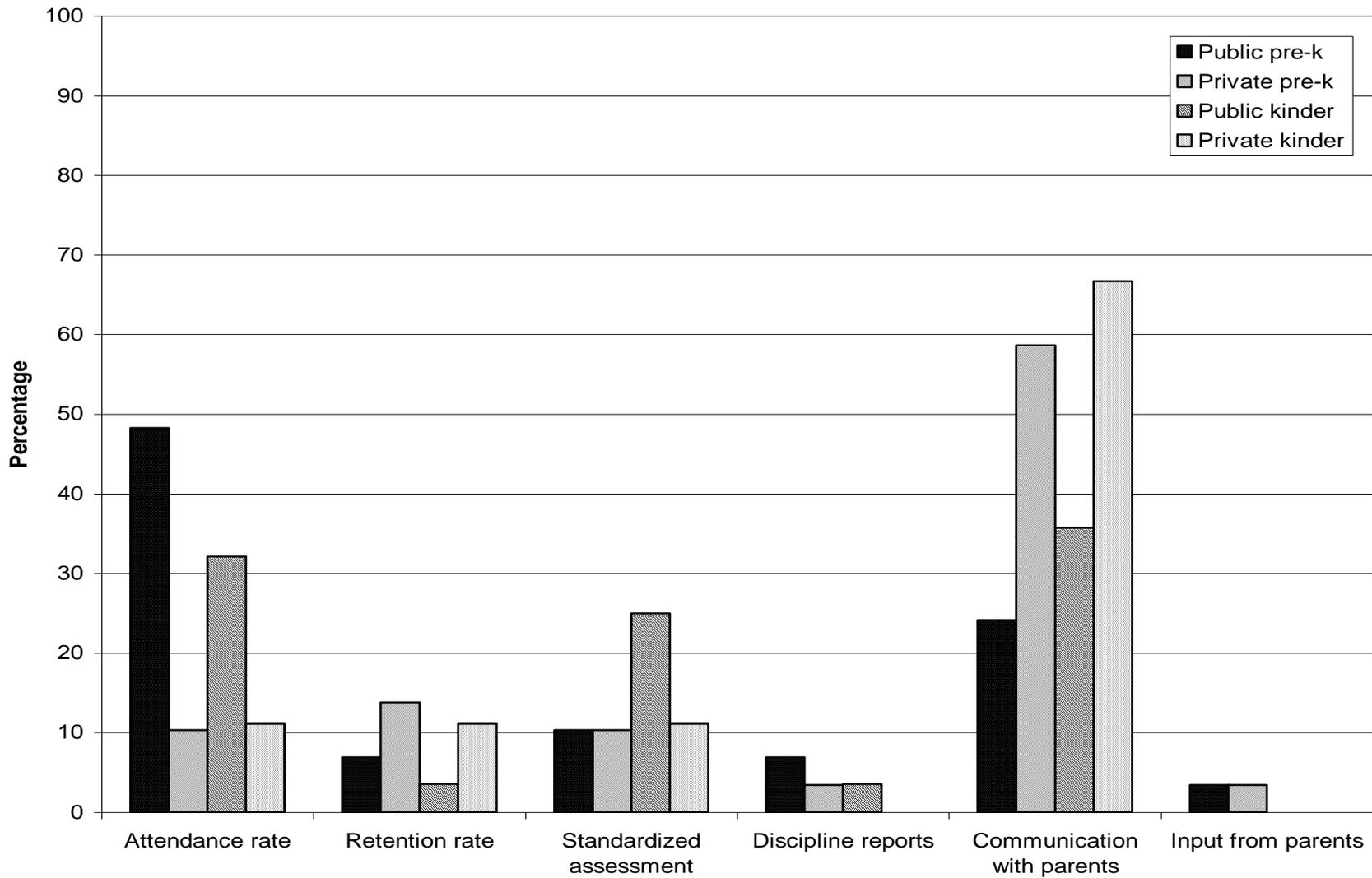


Figure 3-10. Participant's View school-wide evaluation criteria ranked first

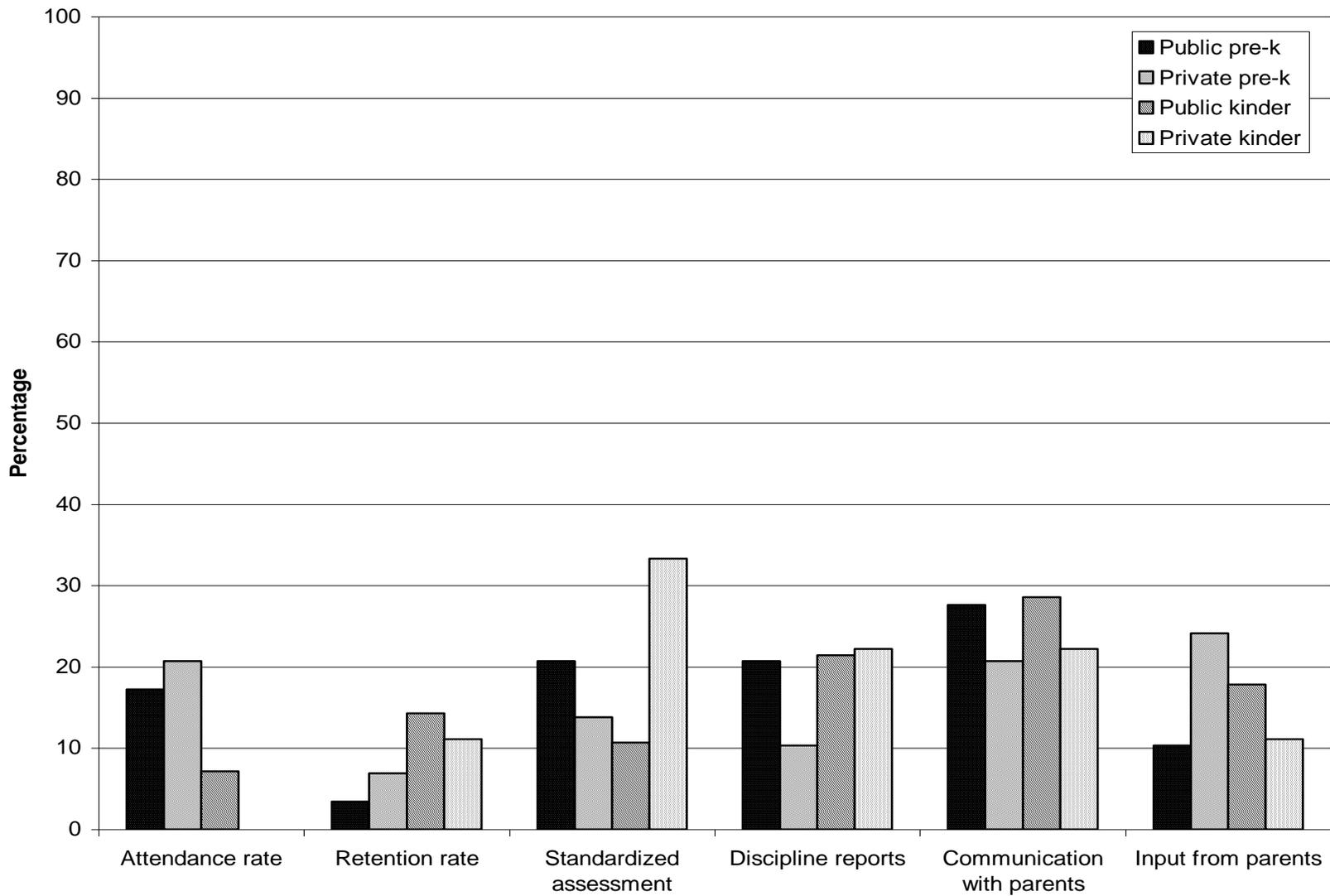


Figure 3-11. Participant's View school-wide evaluation criteria ranked second

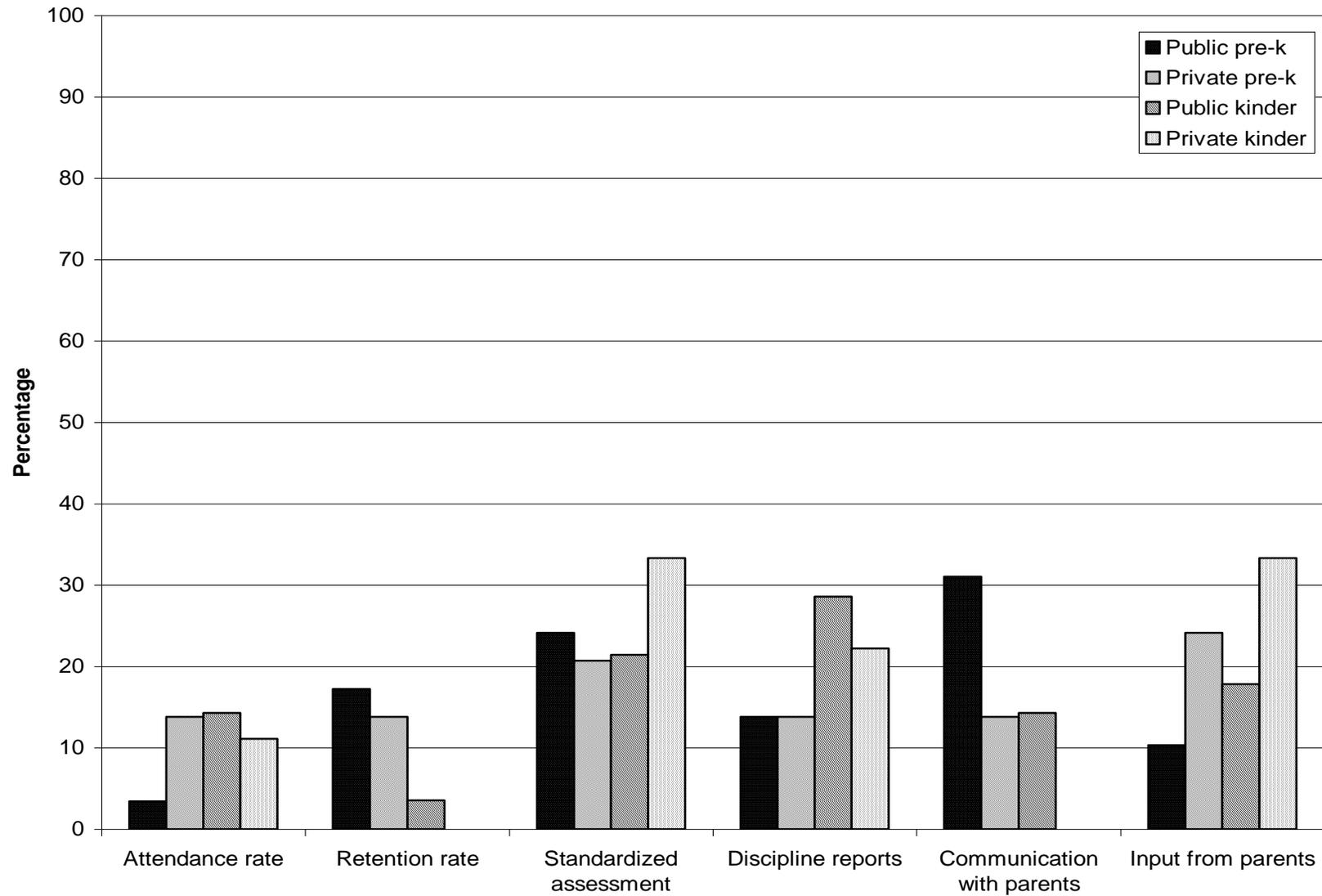


Figure 3-12. Participant's View school-wide evaluation criteria ranked third

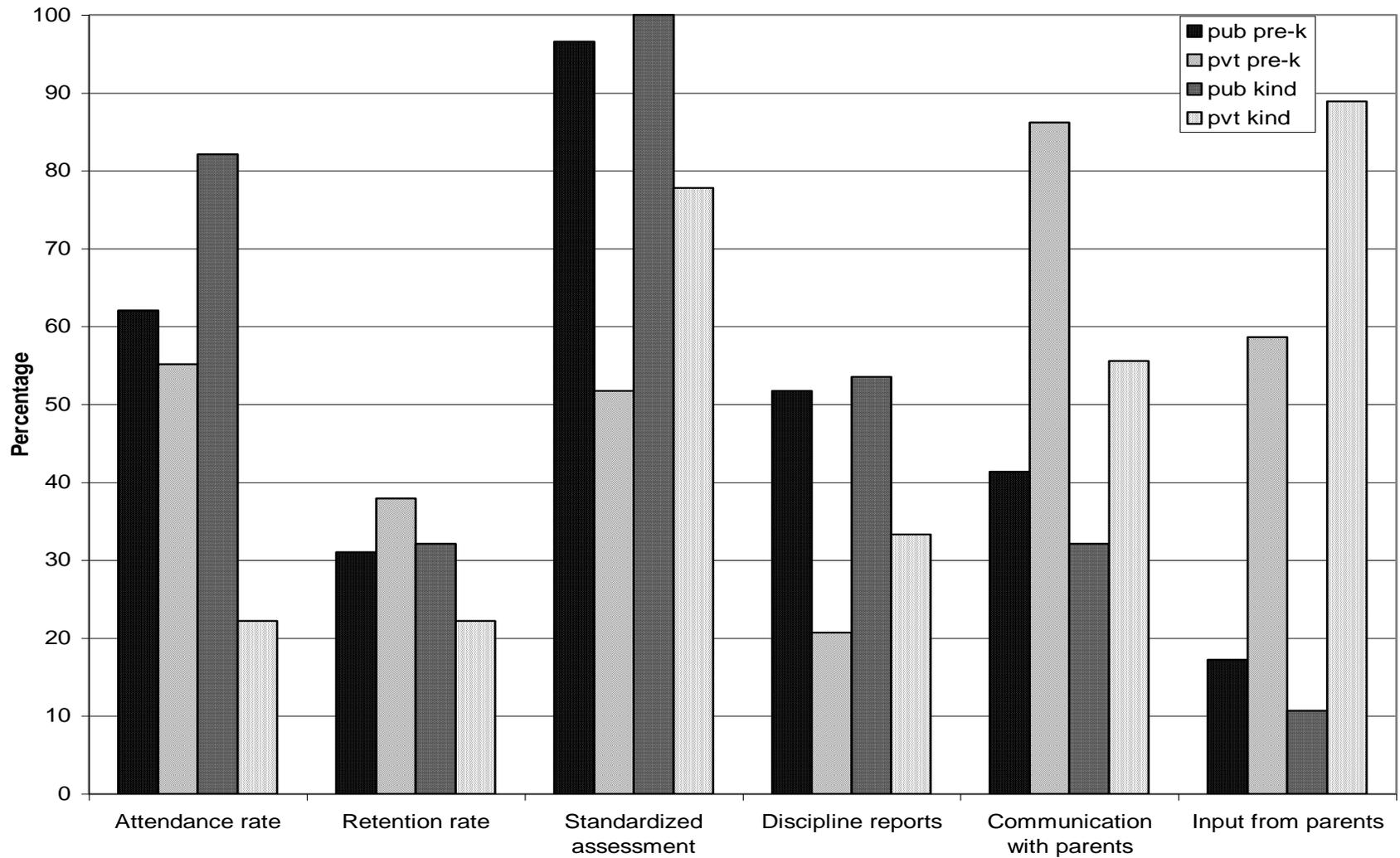


Figure 3-13. School's View of school-wide evaluation criteria (combination of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd rankings)

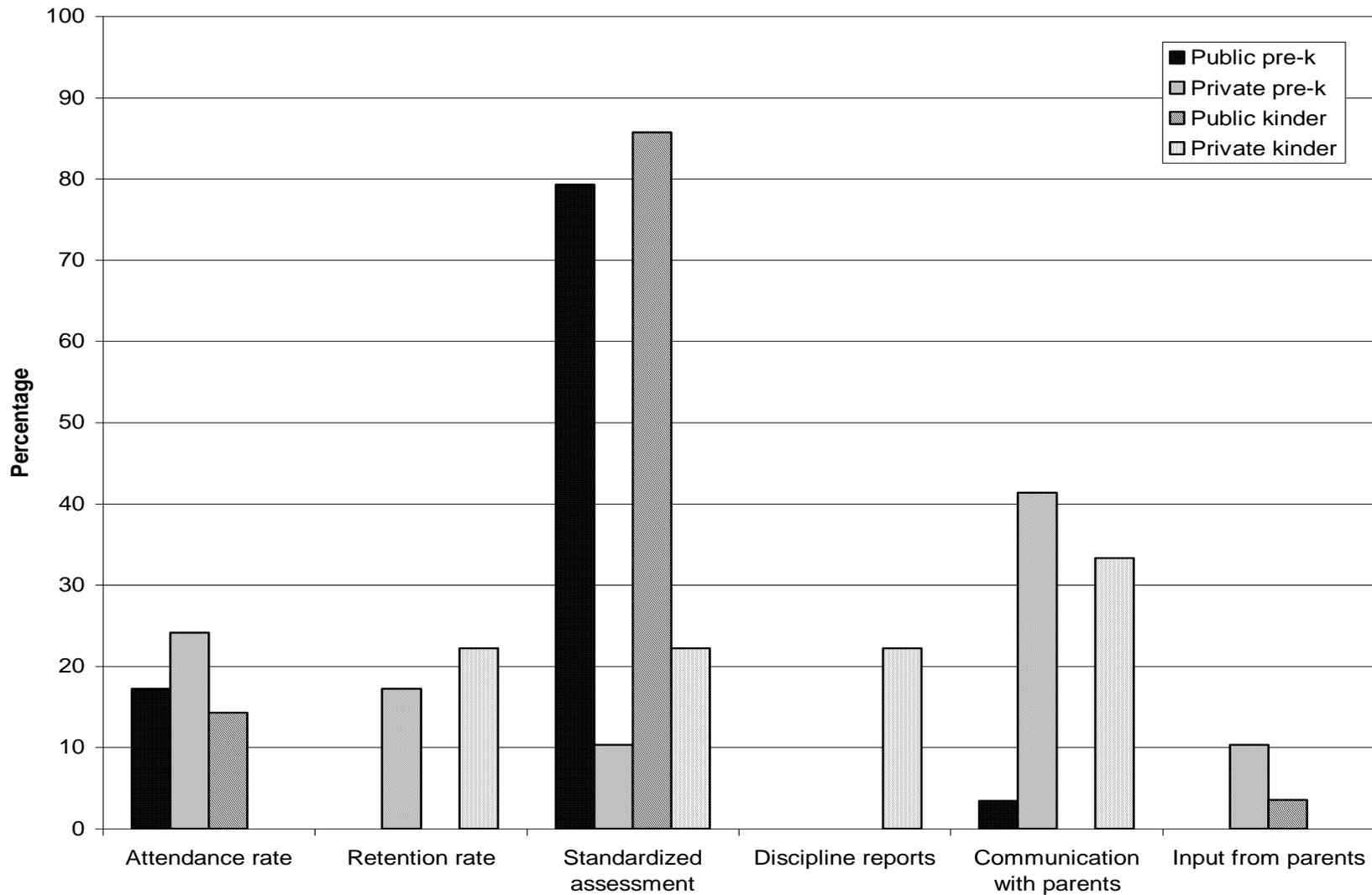


Figure 3-14. School's View school-wide evaluation criteria ranked first

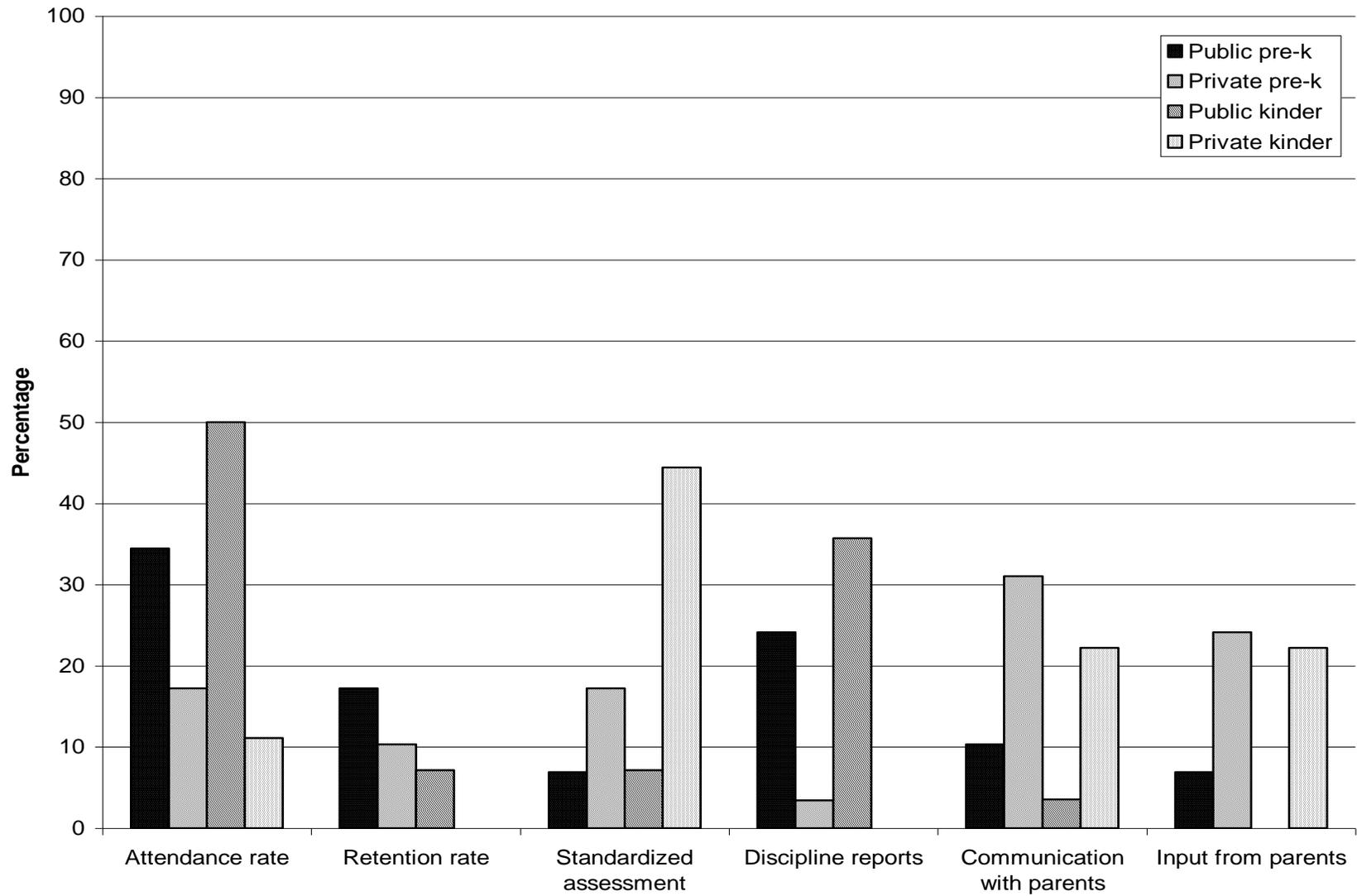


Figure 3-15. School's View school-wide evaluation criteria ranked second

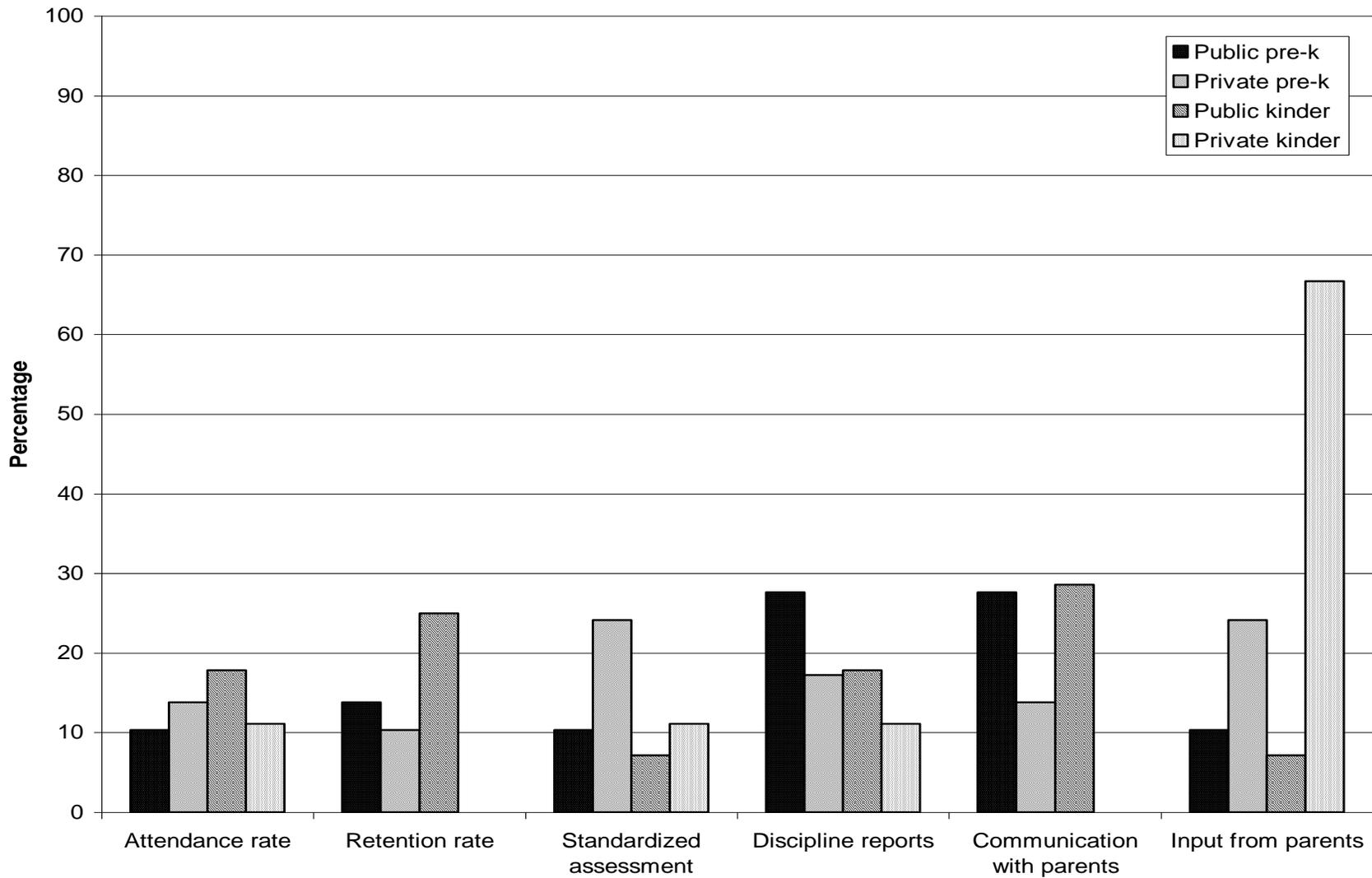


Figure 3-16. School's View school-wide evaluation criteria ranked third

## CHAPTER 4 DISCUSSION

The field of early education has been evolving, and will likely continue to change. In particular, there has been an increase in enrollment and governmental funding for early childhood programs, including pre-k classes incorporated into public school systems in many states. Additionally, kindergarten teachers have begun to report a shift in focus to more academic focus within the curriculums (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). While it is important for early childhood curriculums to remain developmentally appropriate (NAECS, 2000), it appears many standards set forth for early childhood education are relying more heavily on language and cognition than social-emotional functioning (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Freelow, 2006). In addition, school districts have begun to align their pre-k programs with k-12 curriculum in order to insure that children are more academically prepared for kindergarten, with the hopes that they will then be better prepared for the high stakes testing in third grade (Brown & Gasko, 2012). This alignment of curriculum tends to not take into consideration the fact that young children tend to learn differently than older students, and can reduce the opportunities for social and emotional development including the skills needed to build self-regulation which can later impact a student's ability to learn the needed academic skills (Bodrova & Leong, 2005; NAEYC, 2009)

As the focus on academic achievement has increased, so has the reliance on high-stakes testing for accountability. While early childhood education has not been directly impacted by the students taking high stakes accountability tests, the teachers and schools are still being evaluated and held accountable for students' performances. For instance, recently in Texas pre-k programs, both public and private, have been

provided the opportunity to voluntarily have their programs evaluated for effectiveness which relies heavily on students' performances on a reading assessment at the beginning of their kindergarten year (TEA, 2012). However, in most cases accountability as measured by test performance begins with assessments students start taking the middle of their elementary school education. Nonetheless, while the early educators and children in Texas are not taking part in these later assessments, the academic pressures "trickle down" to them in that pre-k and kindergarten classes are more often included in the larger public education systems. While one rationale for state-supported pre-kindergarten education is to improve student outcomes later, there continues to be a need to improve the communication and assessment development between the two systems (Brown, 2011).

The current study examines early childhood teachers' beliefs about developmentally appropriate practice and current evaluation criteria. In addition, the teachers' beliefs are evaluated for how they perceive priorities within their school systems. Further examination included how teachers' beliefs about accountability criteria aligned with those of their school system. Participants were asked to prioritize characteristics of their teaching as well as their beliefs about discipline and behavior management. In addition they were asked their opinions regarding various criteria used to evaluate teachers and school wide performance as well as how they felt these criteria were viewed within their school system. To evaluate the impact of different of accountability systems, teachers from both private and public schools were asked to participate. This chapter describes the results of the study, the implications of findings,

and limitations of the current study. The chapter concludes with suggestions for areas of future research.

### **Accountability as Related to Classroom Strategies**

The first question addressed the impact of teachers' perceptions of their accountability system on their beliefs regarding developmentally appropriate practice. It was hypothesized that participants who rated the criteria of accountability as more important would place less importance on developmentally appropriate practices. Results of the study were mixed, and are described in the following section.

### **Self-regulation**

As described by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and multiple authors, helping children develop the ability to regulate their own behavior is an important part of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Results of this study suggest that when teachers perceive that their school prioritizes teacher evaluations, they are less likely to endorse strategies designed to encourage self-regulation. Strategies within the TBQ Behavior subscale Self-regulation included the belief that self-monitoring is an important skill, respecting student's autonomy and expect them to act in a responsible manner, verbal punishment is unacceptable, extrinsic rewards undermine motivation, while the following were reverse coded within the scale establishing and maintaining control, children have to be kept busy or they get in trouble, and monitoring students prevents problematic situations. The criteria used to evaluate teachers include items such as the students actively participating in learning, management of student discipline, management of instructional strategies, and complying with school policies, procedure and requirements. (For the complete list please refer to first section of the questionnaire in

Appendix E). Thus, the more participants felt their school systems valued the criteria used to evaluate teachers, the less likely they were to prioritize focusing on students' self regulation for maintaining behaviors within the classroom. This provides partial support for the hypothesis that prioritizing the accountability criteria discourages the use of DAP.

Further analysis suggests that two criteria related to teacher evaluation (management of instructional strategies and complying with policies, procedures, and requirements) were found to be negatively related to Self-regulation. This suggests that, when teachers believe that those responsible for evaluating them view complying with policies and managing the instructional strategies as important, they may feel compelled to “control” children’s behavior in that they are less likely to prioritize relying on student’s self-regulation to maintain discipline and behavior management.

### **Teacher Direction**

The other Behavior Q-sort subscale was for Teacher Direction. Not unlike self-regulation, this subscale relates to providing a student-centered versus teacher-centered classroom. Also consistent with initial hypotheses, greater emphasis on teacher evaluation was associated with less emphasis on student-centered practices.

The school evaluation criteria of “student performance on standardized assessment” and “discipline reports conducted throughout the year” as reported by both the Participant’s and School’s View were also related to Teacher Direction. The more importance participants and their school systems placed on those two school wide evaluation criteria, the more highly they prioritized behavior management strategies that emphasized the teacher maintaining control of the classroom while student interactions and noisiness were viewed as lower priorities within the classroom setting. Similarly, the

teacher evaluation criteria of “providing feedback” and “evaluating student progress” also were found to be related to Teacher Direction. Once again, the more important the evaluation criteria was rated the more participants prioritized teacher directed strategies regarding discipline and behavior management.

Based on the School’s View there were two other teacher evaluation criteria related to the Teacher Direction, “compliance with policies, procedure and requirements” and “students actively participating in learning.” Results from this study suggest that when teachers believed their school systems put a high priority on complying with procedures, they were more likely to rely on more teacher directed strategies to maintain discipline within their classroom which is further support for the hypothesis. However, when teachers believed that their schools system highly prioritized student’s actively participating in the learning, they were less likely to rely on the teacher directed strategies for discipline and behavior management. Previous research has shown that teachers’ beliefs about their roles, alignment with developmental appropriate practices, and beliefs about students were related to teachers’ expectations of students and the teachers’ classroom practices (Fang, 1996; McMullen, et al., 2006; Pajares, 1992). The findings from the current study provide some support for the understanding that what a teacher believes may impact her priorities within the classroom. In this study however, the teacher’s belief about what her school system valued was related to a difference in priorities more often than simply her own beliefs.

### **Priorities of Strategies to Manage Classrooms**

The second research question addressed whether pre-k and kindergarten teachers from public and private schools differ with respect to their beliefs about the

characteristics of their teaching and discipline and management strategies. It was hypothesized that teachers in private school settings would differ from teachers in the public school settings, and pre-k teachers would differ from kindergarten teachers when asked to prioritize discipline and behavior management strategies and the characteristics of their teaching. In particular, it was expected that participants in private schools would have priorities that aligned more with developmentally appropriate practices due to less pressures from the increase in academically focused accountability systems. However, no differences were found between the groups. Regardless of the grade or the setting in which they taught, all participants had relatively similar beliefs about discipline and behavior management strategies to use and priorities regarding the characteristics of their teaching. There was quite a bit of variability in responses within each group; however, the overall averages were similar. The teachers did prioritize Social Experiences and choices for students more so than they did Spontaneity, Self-regulation or Teacher Direction (prioritized in that order).

### **Views of Accountability**

When looking at the importance placed on the criteria used to evaluate teachers and school performance, participants, regardless of the grade they taught or the setting in which they taught, rated the accountability scales similarly in importance. The teachers also reported having similar beliefs about the School's View of the criteria to evaluate teachers. A difference was found between kindergarten and pre-k teachers in School's View of school evaluation. Kindergarten teachers reported that their school systems placed more importance on the school wide evaluation criteria than did pre-k teachers. This belief aligns with Stipek and Byler's (1997) study that hypothesized kindergarten teachers felt more pressure from administration and principals as

compared to that of preschool teachers. Although a review of the literature revealed no direct evidence of kindergarten teachers reporting more administrative pressure than pre-k teachers, it logically follows that current educational policy emphasizing teacher accountability in the public schools would exacerbate this difference. Perhaps, despite the fact that in the current study the teachers are in the same setting, they continue to get different messages from administration regarding what skills are important to focus on with their students. Furthermore, teachers from public schools felt that their schools systems viewed those school wide evaluation criteria as being more important than did the participants from private schools.

When looking at which specific criteria teachers feel are the most important for the evaluation of their performance, most teachers reported that students actively participating in the learning process was the most important; this was true across grades taught and school setting. Even though teachers held similar beliefs, differences were found regarding which criteria they saw their school systems viewing as most important. Children being actively involved in instruction was the most common response among private school teachers for the School's View of teacher evaluation. Public school pre-k teachers were split between the active involvement of children and improved academic performance as the School's View of teacher evaluation. The majority of public school kindergarten teachers believed the School's View improved academic performance as the most important criteria when evaluating teachers' performances. This trend of public school teachers believing that their school's stance of improved academic performance of students as the most important criteria when

evaluating teachers aligns with the increasing importance placed on academic focus in accountability.

Regarding school evaluation, the private school teachers beliefs were more closely aligned with what they viewed as most important to their school system, with “communication with parents” being the most important in both instances. However, public school pre-k and kindergarten teachers had different views regarding what is most important as compared to what they believed the school system saw as most important. Public school pre-k teachers viewed regular attendance for school evaluation, while public school kindergarten teachers were split between regular attendance and communication with parents as the most important criteria when evaluating school wide performance. However, the vast majority of public school teachers believe their school systems view performance on standardized assessment as most important. It is not surprising this is the view of public school teachers, as performance on standardized tests is the main criteria that has been used to evaluate schools recently. Even so, there was a large discrepancy between public school teachers and private school teachers about the performance on standardized assessment criteria as well as a difference between Participant’s View and School’s View.

### **Implications of the Current Research**

Results of the current study support concerns identified by NAEYC and other authors that increased attention to academic achievement in early childhood may lead to decreased opportunities for social and emotional learning (NAEYC, 2009; Scott-Little, Kagan & Freelow, 2006). While kindergarten classrooms have already been part of the larger public school system for many years, the inclusion of pre-k within these settings

in relatively new and steadily increasing. Many of the public pre-k programs are focused on only a few of the students, and they typically are the students in the most need of assistance. Therefore, it is important to maintain the integrity of early education within these larger settings as opposed to simply aligning teaching practices with those of the older students. Others have found that kindergarten teachers' beliefs have already begun to align more with the academic focus similar to those teaching older students (Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). However, the current study has shown that when asked about their priorities regarding discipline and behavior management, and the characteristics of their teaching, kindergarten and pre-k teachers continue to have similar priorities, and this was true regardless of which kind of accountability setting they worked in. However, when looking at views of accountability criteria, while the teachers' beliefs may not have been more aligned with academic accountability, they did see those criteria as more important to their school systems.

Teachers' beliefs have been shown to impact their classroom practices, expectation of student performance, interactions with the students, and the level of emergent literacy and child directed choice or play available within the classroom (Fang, 1996; McMullen, et al. 2006, Pajares, 1992; Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002). Therefore, knowing what beliefs teachers have that are related to their priorities or practices is of great importance. The findings from the current study indicate that what a teacher views as important to her school system is more often related to what she prioritizes within the classroom than are her own beliefs about similar topics. If teachers are going to align their priorities within the classroom with what they perceive to be important to their school systems, then the importance of the differences between early education and

older students needs to be made aware to those administrators. In addition making administrators aware of recommendations by NAEYC of developmentally appropriate practices that emphasizes high-quality play as an effective method that addresses skills of linguistics and cognition in addition to social skills and self-regulation (2009). The current study furthers the research on the impact teachers' beliefs can have on their practice in that it demonstrated not only is the teachers' personal beliefs important, but those that she views as important to her employers as well.

Due to the influence that teachers' beliefs can have, understanding them is important especially because of the long term impact that a student's behavior and learning in early education can have on future behaviors, social relationships and academic success (Arnold, 1997; Arnold, et al., 1999; Campbell, 1995; Campbell & Ewing, 1990; Egeland, Kalkoste, Gottesman & Erikson, 1990; Keane & Calkins, 2004; Wilson, 2006). However, if school systems continue to focus on results of high stakes testing, and teachers' priorities are impacted by what they view as important to the school system, the teachers' priorities may shift more away from those developmentally appropriate practices. While experienced kindergarten teachers can take the changing expectations and fit them with developmentally appropriate practices, there continues to be a need for research that identifies effective ways to combine the changing expectations with known effective strategies for working with young children (Goldstein, 2007). The ability to make this transition becomes of greater concern as more and more of the pre-k students are being educated within the larger public school setting.

The current study also underscored that the criteria used to evaluate schools is not what the educators involved with the day to day education of our children view as

important. While most educators would agree with the importance of accountability within a school system, the current method of high stakes testing as the primary focus to evaluate schools is not viewed by the teachers as important as other criteria. There have been other recommendations of additional ways to measure success for accountability such as standardized observations and curriculum based assessments that allow for a team of educators to evaluate a student's performance on a number of items as opposed to one test (Greenwood, Walker, Hornbeck, Hebbeler & Spiker, 2007; Pianta, 2003), and these options, along with others, would likely align more with the priorities of educators in the classroom.

### **Limitations**

Internal validity addresses the limit to which effects of the study are actually a result of the independent variable as opposed to influence from extraneous variables (Whitley, 1996). In other words, were the current findings a result of the variables studied or were the findings impacted by some unaccounted for confounding variables. There are several factors which could have had an impact the results of a study. The following is discussion of possible threats to the internal validity within the current study.

Participants for the study were recruited from schools where the principals agreed to allow their teachers to participate. Then pre-k and kindergarten teachers were asked to volunteer to take part in the study. Both of the factors speak to the nonrandom assignment of participants of the current study which is one specific threat to internal validity. There could be vast differences between the schools of the principals who did not agree to allow their teachers to participate and those who did ultimately participate. Furthermore, the teachers that did volunteer to participate could differ in a variety of ways from the teachers that did not agree to participate. For example, principals who

agreed to allow their teachers to participate may feel more comfortable in the skills and knowledge of their staff than did those who did not. If there truly is a difference in the knowledge and skills these extraneous factors could have influenced the outcome of the study.

Additionally, the participants were grouped based on their current work setting. However, many of the teachers had worked in different settings and their responses were likely impacted by their variety of past experiences as opposed to strictly which setting they currently work in. Attempts were made to evaluate the training and education of the teachers to determine how that was related to their responses. However, the inconsistency of responses from the participants about their training and certification resulted in an inability to evaluate this data. Also, there could be extraneous factors which led a person to choose to be a pre-k or kindergarten teacher, or to work within private or public settings. The factors that lead to these occupational choices could have also influenced the responses of the participants.

Also, the definition of a private school for this current study was very broad. Therefore, there were likely broad differences between the different private schools that did choose to participate. For example, some private schools were small privately owned centers focused primarily on young children, while others were large pre-k – 12 systems affiliated with local churches. Any differences between the schools could have influenced the results of the study.

Assessment, particularly of something as nebulous as beliefs, is never entirely accurate. Content and face validities as well as reliabilities had been established previously for the Q-sort measure (Rimm-Kaufman, et al. 2006). However, the ways in

which the current teachers interpreted some of the statements may have influenced their prioritizing of the statements. For example, the statement that a noisy and productive room were okay, could have easily been influenced by the setting in which the teacher works. Regardless of what priorities a teacher may have theoretically, many of the public school teachers in the current study work within open-concept schools. Therefore, regardless of their beliefs about allowing children to be noisy while working, their belief could be overruled by the fact that there is a strong need for respecting the learning environment of the other classrooms in their area, which may or may not be for the same age children. While a purpose of the study, was to determine how working in different settings is related to different priorities for teachers, concepts such as specific classroom setups (i.e. open concept) was not something that was taken into account or measured for yet may have influenced how statements were prioritized by teachers.

In addition to the Q-sort, the participants also completed the questionnaires. While the information was gathered from other sources and the questionnaire was reviewed by others in the field before it was implemented, no additional studies of the validity or reliability of the scales were computed. Therefore, there could be limits to the interpretation of the findings from the questionnaires.

External validity addresses the ability of the findings of the current research to be able to apply to other settings, times, people and procedures (Whitley, 1996). As discussed earlier, participants in the study had to volunteer to take part after principals at their school agreed. The extent to which the factors about the nonvolunteers interact with the independent variable leads to the lack of generalizability of the findings to nonvolunteers which specifically speaks to external validity. Furthermore, there was no

data collected as part of the current study that would allow for determining in what ways volunteers differed from the nonvolunteers or how the schools that did not participant differed from those that did.

Furthermore, the participants were restricted to those employed as teachers. However, within most early education classrooms, there are other adults that work within the rooms and influence the students. The findings of the current study may not generalize to the other educators besides early education teachers.

Another threat to the external validity of the current study is the number of participants that were able to be recruited. While a total of 99 participants took place in the study, they were split into three groups of 30 and a group of nine participants based on their work setting. Although statistically significance was found in some instances, a larger sample size, especially of the small number of kindergarten teachers from private schools, may have resulted in additional differences found between the groups.

Participants from the current study were recruited from one school district in Texas and from surrounding private schools. Therefore, the ability to generalize the findings beyond the geographical region is limited. The criteria used in the questionnaire for evaluating teachers, is a Texas wide system, but it may be interpreted differently within different schools systems. Additionally, the criteria may be viewed differently outside of Texas.

### **Future Directions**

The findings of the current study did provide some insights into the beliefs of early childhood teachers. However, additional research is needed. While the current study inquired about teachers' beliefs and priorities within the classroom and regarding accountability, the actual behavior of the teachers was not observed. As Stuhlman and

Pianta (2002) noted, what teachers report as important does not always translate into different practices within the classroom. Therefore, future research could actual behavioral differences of the teachers that can be observed within their classrooms. In addition, likely more important than the behavior of the teacher, is how those behaviors are translated into student performance. The most important factor within early education is how the children are performing on multiple levels (social, behavioral, and academically) and how that translates into future success. Therefore, future research could focus on the question of how the increased focus on accountability has impacted the performance of students, academically, socially and behaviorally, during pre-k and kindergarten years. In other words, how are the beliefs that teachers hold about accountability or priorities within the classroom related to the outcome of their students. Along those same lines, an interesting question to ask would be how the teachers' beliefs about discipline and behavior managements or characteristics of their teaching relates to differences in how they work with the children. Future research could focus on whether or not any differences with the priorities result in working with the children differently, and then does that lead to different outcomes for the students.

One area that has been found to be related to teacher performance is the training that they receive (Barnett, 2004; Brown, Molfese, & Molfese, 2008; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Heilig, 2005). The current study did attempt to examine that question as well. However, the participants either did not choose to answer questions regarding their training or did so in ways that did not lend to analysis. Therefore, future studies could more accurately obtain information about the training of teachers and examine

how that is related to their beliefs regarding accountability or strategies to use within the classroom.

Regarding beliefs of the school systems, the current study focused on evaluation criteria of teachers and school wide performance. Some relationships were found between the perceptions teachers had of their school systems' priorities and the teachers' beliefs about practices within their classrooms. It would be interesting to determine what other priorities within a school system also influence teachers' beliefs. Future studies could focus on the perception of administrations' beliefs regarding discipline, positive supports, curriculum, and use of technology among other criteria often used within the schools to determine if any of those beliefs have an impact on teacher beliefs or practices within the classroom.

Although it could be argued, that the teachers' perceptions about their school is actually more important than the actual differences between the schools, future research could examine if this is the case. The current study focused on teachers' perceptions of their school system and how that related to teachers' priorities. However, future research could acquire data about the systems of evaluation within the various school systems and the attitudes and beliefs of the administration.

The current study focused on teachers in just one area of Texas. Future research could look at whether or not teachers in other areas of Texas hold similar beliefs, or if teachers outside of Texas, particularly in states with more broad public pre-k had similar beliefs and practices. In addition, while the current study focused on private schools as an example of different accountability system from public schools, there was likely a wide variety of views and priorities within those private schools. Future research could

attempt to more closely analyze how the private schools vary regarding the types of accountability and beliefs that are part of the of the schools' environment. With the update of the voluntary Texas Kindergarten Readiness System (TEA, 2012), preschools that choose to take part in this evaluation could be compared to those that do not take part. In addition, research could look at what the differences are between the beliefs of the teachers and practices within the classrooms for the preschools that are awarded as a Pre-K Center of Excellence and those that apply but are not identified as a center of excellence.

APPENDIX A  
PRINCIPAL CONTACT LETTER

Dear Mrs.[LastName]:

Currently I am a doctoral student at the University of Florida (UF) and an employee of a school district here in the Houston area [for principals in my district will state that I am an employee of Cypress-Fairbanks ISD]. As part of graduation requirements for UF, I am completing a research study of teachers' perceptions and classroom procedures, and your help is needed. We would like to invite prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers at your school to participate in this study. If you are interested in allowing your teachers to participate, I would ask to spend 45 minutes with the teachers, in one or two groups, in order for them to complete a questionnaire and sort statements based on their priorities. There are no anticipated risks involved, and the benefit of participating is to assist in increasing our understanding of how teachers' perceptions are related to their classroom procedures. A better understanding of teachers' perceptions can assist in developing recommendations for procedures and policies. No compensation will be provided for participation in this study, but you may chose to provide your teachers an incentive that is a typical part of your school wide behavior program. Be assured that all results from this study are confidential; you, the teachers and your school's identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Upon completion of the questionnaire and sorts, a code number will be used instead of names. The only people who will know who participants' and schools' names are project staff.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Lacy Skinner ([REDACTED]) or Dr. Tina Smith ([REDACTED]). If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the UF Institutional Review Board office, PO Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, Fl 32611-2250 (phone: 352-392-0433).

I will be calling within a couple of weeks to follow up with this request. Thank you so much in advance for your assistance in this project!

Sincerely,

Lacy Skinner, M.A., LSSP  
Doctoral Student, School Psychology  
University of Florida

APPENDIX B  
TEACHER INVITATION LETTER AND INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Kindergarten or Prekindergarten teacher:

Currently I am a doctoral student at the University of Florida (UF) and an employee of Cypress-Fairbanks ISD. As part of graduation requirements for UF, I am completing a research study of teachers' perceptions and classroom procedures, and your help is needed. We would like to invite prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers to participate in this study as permission to conduct this study at your school has already been approved by your principal. The study is examining teachers' perceptions and classroom procedures. To assist in this study, we ask that you complete a questionnaire and two Q-sorts (sorting 20 statements into 5 categories). Completion of these measures should take no more than 45 minutes.

***At this time a session is set up at your school to complete these measures on DATE, at TIME in PLACE.***

If you change your mind about participation in the study, you may withdraw at any time without penalty. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. There are no risks involved, and the benefit of participating is to assist us in increasing our understanding of teachers' perceptions and classroom procedures. Your principal may choose to provide you with an incentive as part of your school-wide behavior program, but no compensation is provided by the examiner. Be assured that all results from this study are confidential; your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Upon completion of the questionnaire and sortings, a code number will be used instead of names. Your identity and that of your school will not be revealed to anyone or appear in any written work. The only people who will know participants' names are project staff.

Please complete the signature form below, indicating your consent to participate, and return it in the provided envelope. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Lacy Skinner ( [REDACTED] ) or Dr. Tina Smith ( [REDACTED] ). If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the UF Institutional Review Board office, PO Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250 (phone: 352-392-0433).

Thank you so much in advance for your assistance in this project!

Sincerely,

Lacy Skinner, M.A., LSSP  
UF Doctoral Student, School Psychology

Please read the description on the previous page, sign below, and *return this page only* in the provided envelope (retain the first page for your records).

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read the procedure described in the attached letter and voluntarily agree to participate in Lacy Skinner's study, *Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers' Perspectives within the Environment of Increased Educational Accountability* **on DATE, at TIME in SCHOOL's AREA.** I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the above description and am free to withdraw at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I am a \_\_\_\_\_ Kindergarten teacher      \_\_\_\_\_ Prekindergarten teacher (*please check one*)

\_\_\_\_\_ I am interested in participating, but the proposed day or time does not work for me. Please contact me at \_\_\_\_\_ to schedule a different time to participate.  
(your e-mail address)

APPENDIX C  
DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPATING PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Ages served	Accreditations	Mission/philosophy (summarized from public information available from the school)
pre-k through 5th grade	Texas Alliance of Accredited Private Schools	Use traditional methods, guidance and firm/consistent discipline while providing broad experiences to new concepts. Encourage students to develop while instilling social skills for life and to be law-abiding citizens. Stress taking responsibility, thinking independently, being able to work with others.
Infants through 1st grade	None listed on website	Everything done by a young child is learning. The teacher's responsibility is to fill classroom with best possible stimuli for all senses. The children are not required to demonstrate their knowledge. Social skills are as important as academics.
pre-k through 12th grade	Southwestern Association of Episcopal School	Prepare students for later in life with a focus on academics, spirituality, and social responsibility
Pre-k – 12th grade	The Independent Schools Association of the Southwest	Engaging students through active participation with education focused on intellectual, emotional, social, physical, and ethical education.
Infants – kindergarten (2 campuses)	AdvancED Accreditation	Whole child approach focusing on emotional, intellectual, social, and physical being. Close connection between school and family.
Infants - kindergarten	National Early Childhood Program Association	Providing children with education and tools to be successful in life. Develop critical thinking and intellectual skills. Engage in active learning focused on character building, physical activity and social and emotional development.
Infants – 8th grade	National Lutheran School Accreditation and NAEYC	Goal to provide early childhood education that focuses on planned purposeful that to enhance pre-academic skills and different culture while providing a safe, nurturing, structured and predictable environment.
Toddler – pre-k	NAEYC	Learn, work, play and learn in a safe, nurturing in an environment for learning and creativity with stimulating activities. Allow students to have fun and focus on total development (physical, intellectual, social, emotional).

Ages served	Accreditations	Mission/philosophy (summarized from public information available from the school)
pre-k through 12th grade	Southern Association of Colleges and Schools & National Christian Schools Association	Educational program focused on the development of academic, social, emotional, physical and spiritual growth.
infant - kindergarten (2 campuses)	AdvancED	The education of students is focused on emotional, social, cognitive and physical skills focused on individual abilities while providing open communication with the families.
toddler – 12th grade	Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Texas Alliance of Accredited Private Schools	Teach students while respecting their uniqueness and needs. The teacher acts as a guide for student with hands-on activities.

APPENDIX D  
DESCRIPTION OF Q-SORT ANCHORS AND ITEMS

**Discipline and Behavior Management (Behavior)**

**Anchors:**

- A) Least characteristic of my approach or beliefs about discipline and behavior management.
- B) Hardly characteristic of my approach or beliefs about discipline and behavior management.
- C) Somewhat characteristic of my approach or beliefs about discipline and behavior management.
- D) Characteristic of my approach or beliefs about discipline and behavior management.
- E) Very characteristic of my approach or beliefs about discipline and behavior management.

**Item sorts:**

- 1) The primary goal in dealing with students' behavior is to establish and maintain control.
- 2) A noisy classroom is okay as long as all the students are being productive.
- 3) Students must be kept busy doing activities or they soon get into trouble.
- 4) When students are engaged in interesting problems and challenging activities, they tend to have very few discipline problems.
- 5) Proper control of a class is apparent when the students work productively while I am out of the room (either briefly or when a substitute is present).
- 6) Monitoring students can prevent problematic situations.
- 7) Peer interactions are best left to recess and snack time.

- 8) The curriculum and class schedule need to be prioritized over students' specific interests.
- 9) A classroom runs smoothly when there are clear expectations for behavior.
- 10) Classroom rules should be discussed and posted.
- 11) Self-monitoring behaviors (or self-regulation) are important skills for students to develop.
- 12) It is important to respect students' autonomy and expect them to act in a responsible manner.
- 13) Students should try to solve conflicts on their own before going to the teacher.
- 14) Rules for the students' classroom behavior need to be reinforced consistently.
- 15) Praise from me is an effective way to change students' behavior.
- 16) Students learn best in primarily teacher-directed classrooms.
- 17) If I treat students with respect, kindness, and concern, there are less behavior problems.
- 18) Verbal punishment is an unacceptable means of controlling students' behavior; I believe it is more important to use only positive management techniques.
- 19) If I anticipate problems before they happen and discuss them with students, I have fewer discipline problems.
- 20) Extrinsic rewards for desirable behaviors (e.g. stickers, candy bars, etc.) undermine students' motivation; it is better not to give such rewards at all.

### **Characteristics of Teaching (Teaching)**

#### **Anchors:**

- A) Those practices that are least essential and/or characteristic of my teacher.

- B) Those practices that are less essential and/or characteristic of my teacher. THOSE
- C) Those practices that are somewhat essential and/or characteristic of my teacher.
- D) Those practices that are essential and/or characteristic of my teacher.
- E) Those practices that are most essential and/or characteristic of my teacher.

**Item sorts:**

- 1) Having a morning routine.
- 2) Talking about our plan or schedule for the day.
- 3) Welcoming each student by name to class.
- 4) Doing an activity to create a sense of community.
- 5) Talking about current events.
- 6) Using hand signals
- 7) Having at least a few students share something that has happened to them.
- 8) Discussing a written announcement or message created by the teacher.
- 9) Conducting the business of the classroom (e.g. collecting lunch or milk money) following a set routine.
- 10) Reflecting and talking about something, such as a social interaction, that "worked" or "didn't work" in our class.
- 11) Reflecting on the content of an academic lesson and talking about what we learned.
- 12) Using drill and recitation for factual information (math facts, etc.).
- 13) Modeling behaviors for students.
- 14) Introducing new objects or new activities in the room through demonstration.
- 15) Using work sheets.
- 16) Permitting students to choose from a variety of activities.

17) Encouraging students and giving feedback that focuses on the processes of students' creations or thinking, not the outcomes or the solution.

18) Using whole group instruction.

19) Using a theme-based approach to instruction.

20) Working on group projects.

Rimm-Kaufman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta, & LaParo (2006) Teacher Belief's Q-sort materials and instructions were obtained by author's website cited in the article. Please see original article for contact information should you desire to use this measure.

## APPENDIX E

### ACCOUNTABILITY AND DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions ask you to rate and rank order various specific criteria. It is important to answer the questions based on your opinions using the answer choices available. Remember, your choices will not be related back to you personally.

The following criteria have been used to evaluate teachers' performance in various settings. Below please indicate how important **you feel** each criteria are on the top row and how important each criteria is to **your school system** on the second row. Circle one number for each row.

		1 = Not at all important		3		5 = Very important
<b>A.</b> Students actively participating in the learning process ( <i>students challenged and make connections to life application</i> )	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>B.</b> Using learning-centered instruction ( <i>learning through critical thinking and problem solving; appropriate motivational and instructional strategies</i> )	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>C.</b> Providing feedback and evaluating student progress ( <i>use of variety of evaluation and feedback; assessment aligned with goals and objectives</i> )	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>D.</b> Management of student discipline ( <i>effectively uses approved discipline management strategies; promote self-discipline</i> )	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>E.</b> Management of instructional strategies ( <i>select materials that are equitable and for varied characteristics of students</i> )	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>F.</b> Management of time and materials ( <i>effectively managed time and materials</i> )	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>G.</b> Professional communication ( <i>communication with other professionals and parents are accurate; communication with students is supportive and encouraging</i> )	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>H.</b> Participating in professional development ( <i>prof. development related to previous performance appraisal, and personal and campus goals, willing to collaborate with others</i> )	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>I.</b> Complying with policies, procedures and requirements ( <i>respects rights of others; contributes to making whole school safe and stimulating learning environment</i> )	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>J.</b> Improved academic performance of the students ( <i>determines student needs; aligns instruction to objectives; collaborates with other faculty; monitors attendance</i> )	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5

In considering the criteria listed previously, please list which **three you feel** are the most important when evaluating teachers' performances with one (1) being the most important. Use the letters listed in front of the criteria when listing.

(1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_

Please list which **three your school system** believes are the most important when evaluating teachers' performances with one (1) being the most important. Use the letters listed in front of the criteria when listing.

(1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to evaluating teacher performance, schools are also assessed for their school wide performance. Below is a list of criteria used to evaluate schools. Please indicate how important **you feel** each criteria are on the top row and how important each criteria is to **your school system** on the second row. Circle one number for each row.

		<b>1 = Not at all important</b>			<b>5 = Very important</b>	
<b>A. Attendance rate of students</b>	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>B. Retention rate of students</b>	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>C. Student performance on standardized assessment</b>	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>D. Discipline reports conducted throughout the year</b>	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>E. Communication with parents</b>	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5
<b>F. Input from parents or other community members</b>	You:	1	2	3	4	5
	School:	1	2	3	4	5

In considering the criteria listed above, please list which **three you feel are the most important** when evaluating schools' performances with one (1) being the most important. Use the letters listed in front of the criteria when listing.

(1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_

In considering the criteria listed above, please list which **three your school system believes are the most important** when evaluating schools' performances with one (1) being the most important. Use the letters listed in front of the criteria when listing.

(1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_

*Sometimes, what teachers actually do in their classroom is not what they would really like to do, or think they should do:*

With regards to <b>preparing students for future academic school performance</b> , how close a match do you think there is between your <i>real</i> practice (what you really do) and your <i>ideal</i> practice (what you would like to do)?	1	2	3	4	5
	Very little match	Match a little	Moderate match	Strong Match	Very strong match
With regards to <b>preparing students for working with and interacting with peers</b> , how close a match do you think there is between your <i>real</i> practice (what you really do) and your <i>ideal</i> practice (what you would like to do)?	1	2	3	4	5
	Very little match	Match a little	Moderate match	Strong Match	Very strong match

In general, how often to you retain students?	1 Never	2 Rarely	3 Sometimes	4 Often	5 Very often
In the past, how many students in total have you retained? _____ (write #)					
Last school year (2010-2011), how many students in your class were retained (completing same grade this year 2011-2012)? _____ (write #)					

*The following questions will provide information regarding the type of class that you teach, experience that you have, and systems in place within your school.*

In what setting do you currently work? (check all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> public pre-k	<input type="checkbox"/> private pre-k	<input type="checkbox"/> public kindergarten	<input type="checkbox"/> private kindergarten	other: _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> public pre-k	<input type="checkbox"/> private pre-k	<input type="checkbox"/> public kindergarten	<input type="checkbox"/> private kindergarten	<input type="checkbox"/> PPCD
What <u>other</u> education setting(s) have you previously worked in? (check all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Grades 1-2	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Grades 3-5	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Grades 6-8	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Grades 9-12	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b> other education settings
	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Grades 1-2	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Grades 3-5	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Grades 6-8	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Grades 9-12	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
What classes are you responsible for teaching? (check all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Math	<input type="checkbox"/> Reading	<input type="checkbox"/> Language Arts	<input type="checkbox"/> Science	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Studies
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____				

How many years have you been working at your current job? \_\_\_\_\_

How many years have you been working with children of the age you currently work with? \_\_\_\_\_

How many students are currently enrolled in your class(es)? \_\_\_\_\_

How many adults, including you, are assigned to work in your classroom at the same time? \_\_\_\_\_

Is your program considered a full day or partial day educational program? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your gender? (check one)  Male  Female

What is your ethnicity? (check all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> African American	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian	<input type="checkbox"/> Native American	<input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander
<input type="checkbox"/> Latino:	<input type="checkbox"/> Cuban	<input type="checkbox"/> Mexican	<input type="checkbox"/> Puerto Rican	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Latino:
<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____				

Please list your **all your degrees** (e.g. high school diploma, GED, AA, BS, MA, PhD, etc) along with the year they were completed.

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Please list any professional **licenses** and/or **certifications** you have along with year they were obtained.

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*Please place your completed survey and q-sort answer sheets in the provided envelope and return the envelope to the survey administrator.*

*Thank you very much for your participation!*

APPENDIX F  
PARTICIPANT INSTRUCTIONS

**Q-SORT EXERCISE & SURVEY**

This is your Participation kit. Enclosed you will find:

❖ Q-Sort

- Two sets of colored anchor cards (larger cards)
- Two sets of colored statement cards (smaller cards) color coded to match anchor cards
- Two recording sheets color coded to match anchor and statement cards for your answers

❖ Survey

Some teachers have expressed frustration in completing the Q-sort exercise. We understand the difficulty in completing the Q-sorts. Our advice is not to spend more than 30 minutes with this task (do not spend additional time second guessing your answers). *Please try to keep your sense of humor about this!*

Start with Q-sort 1 and set out your anchor cards in order from A-E. Then read and sort your statement cards underneath the appropriate anchor card in accordance with your opinion.

**Be sure you have only FOUR cards beneath each anchor, even if the ordering is not a perfect representation of your opinion.**

To make this task easier, you may want to start by sorting the cards underneath anchor cards A, C, and E. Then look through the piles to further divide them into the 5 groups. Record your answers on the recording sheet following those instructions. Then repeat this same procedure for Q-sort Exercise 2.

When you have completed both Q-sort exercises, please place the recording sheet in the large envelope. The anchor and statement cards should be returned to the color coordinated envelopes.

Once the Q-sort exercises are completed, please complete the included two page survey, which should take no more than 15 minutes. When the survey is completed, please return it to the large envelope as well. Then return the large envelope and two colored envelopes to the test administrator.

APPENDIX G  
Q-SORT ANSWER SHEETS

Q-SORT 1 (FOUR STATEMENT CARDS PER ANCHOR)

<b>Q-SORT ANCHOR</b>	<b>Q-SORT ANSWER CARDS</b>			
<b>A:</b> Least characteristic of my approach or beliefs about discipline and behavior management.				
<b>B:</b> Less characteristic of my approach or beliefs about discipline and behavior management.				
<b>C:</b> Somewhat characteristic of my approach or beliefs about discipline and behavior management.				
<b>D:</b> Characteristic of my approach or beliefs about discipline and behavior management.				
<b>E:</b> Very characteristic of my approach or beliefs about discipline and behavior management.				

Q-SORT 2 (FOUR STATEMENT CARDS PER ANCHOR)

Q-SORT ANCHOR	Q-SORT ANSWER CARDS			
<b>A:</b> Those practices that are least essential and/or characteristic of my teaching.				
<b>B:</b> Those practices that are less essential and/or characteristic of my teaching.				
<b>C:</b> Those practices that are somewhat essential and/or characteristic of my teaching.				
<b>D:</b> Those practices that are essential and/or characteristic of my teaching.				
<b>E:</b> Those practices that are most essential and/or characteristic of my teaching.				

## APPENDIX H TBQ SUBSCALES

### **Teacher Direction:**

- A noisy classroom is okay as long as all the students are being productive. (r)
- Peer interactions are best left to recess and snack time.
- Rules for the students' classroom behavior need to be reinforced consistently.
- Students learn best in primarily teacher-directed classrooms.
- If I treat students with respect, kindness, and concern, there are less behavior problems. (r)

### **Self-regulation:**

- The primary goal in dealing with students' behavior is to establish and maintain control. (r)
- Students must be kept busy doing activities or they soon get into trouble. (r)
- Monitoring students can prevent problematic situations. (r)
- Self-monitoring behaviors (or self-regulation) are important skills for students to develop.
- It is important to respect students' autonomy and expect them to act in a responsible manner.
- Verbal punishment is an unacceptable means of controlling students' behavior; I believe it is more important to use only positive management techniques.
- Extrinsic rewards for desirable behaviors (e.g. stickers, candy bars, etc.) undermine students' motivation; it is better not to give such rewards at all.

### **Spontaneity:**

- Having a morning routine. (r)
- Doing an activity to create a sense of community.
- Talking about current events.
- Using hand signals. (r)
- Discussing a written announcement or message created by the teacher. (r)

- Conducting the business of the classroom (e.g. collecting lunch or milk money) following a set routine. (r)
- Reflecting on the content of an academic lesson and talking about what we learned.
- Encouraging students and giving feedback that focuses on the processes of students' creations or thinking, not the outcomes or the solution.
- Working on group projects.

**Social Experience:**

- Welcoming each student by name to class.
- Doing an activity to create a sense of community.
- Having at least a few students share something that has happened to them.
- Conducting the business of the classroom (e.g. collecting lunch or milk money) following a set routine. (r)
- Reflecting and talking about something, such as a social interaction, that "worked" or "didn't work" in our class.
- Using drill and recitation for factual information (math facts, etc.). (r)
- Using work sheets. (r)
- Permitting students to choose from a variety of activities.
- Using whole group instruction. (r)

(r) = items that were reverse coded

Rimm-Kaufman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta, & LaParo (2006)

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lacy Skinner was born in Dallas, Texas. Her family consists of parents Jim and Karen, younger brother Kit, sister-in-law Channon, and her nieces Anna Lang and Kacy. She graduated Magna cum Laude in 1998 with a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. In 1998, Lacy received the Dedman Fellowship and enrolled in the master's program at Southern Methodist University (SMU). In 2000, Lacy received a Master of Arts degree in psychology from SMU in Dallas, Texas after completion of her thesis *Self-Presentation Responses to an Attractive Relationship Alternative*. Then in 2000, she received the University of Florida Alumni Fellowship and enrolled in the school psychology doctoral program. During the 2004-2005 school year, Lacy completed her school psychology doctoral internship at the Department of Psychological Services in the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District (CFISD), Houston, Texas. She has worked as a Licensed Specialist in School Psychology in CFISD since completion of her internship, with the exception of a few months in the 2006-2007 school year during which time she lived in Le Landeron, Neuchatel, Switzerland. In December 2012, Lacy received her Doctorate of Philosophy degree in school psychology from the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida.