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Janilyn Bartlett
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**A STUDY TO DETERMINE FACTORS USED BY
TEACHERS AND PARENTS IN CLASSROOM
PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN IN GRADES 1-4**

MASTER'S PROJECT

**Submitted to the School of Education,
University of Dayton, in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education**

By

**Janilyn Bartlett
Donna T. Smith**

School of Education

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Dayton, Ohio

April, 1997

APPROVED BY:



Official Advisor

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my children, Molly Parker and Dick, IV,
for allowing me the time away from them to complete
my Master's degree. Thanks, Dick, III, for the
money to pay for it.

D.T.S.

This study is dedicated to my family, Jim, Brianne, and Blair,
for your love and support while completing
my Master's degree.

J.M.B.

A special dedication goes to Blocks Bagels for allowing
us to work endless hours in their deli.

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Special thanks to Lori Smith, for early morning wake-ups and for deciphering our handwriting.

VITA

BARTLETT, J.

July 4, 1958.....	Born: Columbus Ohio
1976.....	Graduated, Coshocton High School Coshocton, Ohio
1981.....	Bachelor of Science Butler University Indianapolis, Indiana
1981-82.....	Elementary Teacher, Sacred Heart School Coshocton, Ohio
1986-90.....	Elementary Teacher, Coshocton City Schools Coshocton, Ohio
1991-97.....	Elementary Teacher, Lancaster City Schools Lancaster, Ohio

VITA
SMITH, D.

July 3, 1952.....	Born: Greensboro, North Carolina
1970.....	Graduated, Northwest Guilford High School Greensboro, North Carolina
1973.....	Bachelor of Arts University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, North Carolina
1974-82.....	Elementary Teacher, Guilford County Schools Greensboro, North Carolina
1982-86.....	Elementary Teacher, Whitehall City Schools Columbus, Ohio
1993-94.....	Curriculum Director, Stonybrook Early Learning Center Gahanna, Ohio
1996-97.....	Reading Teacher, Saint Matthew Catholic School Gahanna, Ohio

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Purpose of the Study

The assignment of children to particular teachers' classrooms each year is a time-consuming task and one that employs no one set method of procedure. Principal involvement seems to be the most common procedure schools use to assign students to teachers (Monk, 1987). Another method Monk (1987) states is accepting recommendations from teachers regarding placement of particular students with specific teachers.

According to a study conducted by Monk, 1987, some teachers believe that the individual who knows most about a child, their learning characteristics, their learning levels, and their instructional levels, is the classroom teacher that presently teaches the child. Yet, another method is to include parents in the decision-making process. Whatever the process, everyone agrees that the correct match between student and teacher is critical to a successful year for both (Barth, 1979). "We know that it matters

whom a child has for a teacher; we also know that it matters whom a particular child has for classmates" (Monk, 1987).

The assignment of students is frequently problematic. According to Monk, (1987), when a student is assigned to a class, four parties are affected...the student being placed, the teacher receiving the student, the other students assigned to the class, and parents who take an interest in the welfare of their children. The questions of who should do the placement of students and what criteria should be used has received little research to provide answers.

Principals who assign students to classes do so at varying degrees. Some principals use a random method numbering alphabetically arranged students into the number of classes being formed so that one teacher received all the 1's, another the 2's, and so forth. Other principals ask the teachers to rank the students according to "who takes the most of the teacher's effort and energy," "who takes the least energy and time," and "who falls in the 'middle group' between the other two" (Monk, 1987). Other principals grouped students so that a teacher would have no more than three reading levels per class. Some use scores from a single standardized test to make student placement decisions (Lytle, 1988). Some principals assign teachers according to how well they believe the teacher could handle a difficult student. The method of "sending teachers" making up class lists for the next year's "receiving teachers" not knowing which teacher would get which list, emphasized balanced classes and discounts the notion that one teacher may work better with certain types of students. Yet another method is to let the sending teachers make up lists assigning particular teachers to those lists. It is believed that these sending teachers

are the most knowledgeable regarding both the students and the strengths and weaknesses of the receiving teachers (Monk, 1987). Still another method uses parents to help make placement decisions. Parents are asked to offer, in writing, the environment under which they believe their child would perform best in school. These letters tell the school much about the children that they would not otherwise know, but would be used in making final decisions on class placements (Barth, 1979). Efforts to balance important characteristics such as behavior, emotional needs, students with special needs, high achievers, students who have high demand of teacher time, specific learning or health problems, and parental requests go into making classroom placement.

However, each year, the announcement of new class assignment brings fallout from children, teachers, and parents. "Problems arise when parents and staff look at the same data about a child and arrive at different conclusions" (Barth, 1979). The issue of what criteria should be used to determine classroom placement varies according to whom you ask. There is very little research available which addresses this issue.

Need for the Study

There was very little research available which addresses this issue. The research that was available gives various methods for placement with different persons doing the placing.

In doing the research, the researchers found many levels of attention toward the placement procedure. Some persons set forth to the task of class placement with detailed

plans using set procedures. Yet, others seemed to tackle the task haphazardly without regard to procedure.

The number of people involved in the class placement procedure varied, also. Sometimes the principal had the sole task of determining placement while other principals involved their teachers and support teams. Parent involvement may be allowed and even encouraged in some schools.

The researcher found class placement to be a vital and timely issue and agreed with Barth's (1979) opinion that the correct match between student and teacher is critical for a successful year. It seemed necessary to research the current trends in class placement and determine the implications there might be for all the people affected by these critical decisions.

Problem Statement

Assigning students to a classroom for the upcoming school year is a difficult and time-consuming task. No one method for classroom placement is used. The overall quality of teachers varies (Monk, 1987) thus making the placement process more difficult. When placing children, the ideal situation is to match the child with a teacher who best meets the child's need. Yet, teachers vary in their ability to achieve success with particular types of pupils (Monk, 1987).

There is no question of the importance of the pupil assignment process and the many problems associated with it. Monk (1987) summarizes:

It is surprising to find that little research has been done to the topic. We do not know, for example, what methods are used in schools to assign pupils to teachers. We do not know who does the assigning, whether it is principals who view it as an administrative task or teachers who view it as part of their responsibility for providing instruction. We do not have systematic knowledge about the role parents play in the process. (Page #)

This study focused on the ideals teachers and parents hold as significant in the pupil assignment process. The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that are used for classroom placement as perceived by teachers and parents of children in grades one through four. This study investigated the following questions:

1. What is the perceived levels of importance to teachers regarding the factors for determining classroom placement of children in grades one through four?
2. What is the perceived levels of importance of parents regarding the factors for determining classroom placement of children in grades one through four?
3. What is the difference between the parents' and the teachers' perceived levels of importance for determining classroom placement?

Limitations

The study was limited to two elementary schools; one public and one parochial with approximate enrollments of 465 and 580 students, respectively. The parents of these students had differing degrees of opportunity to participate in and the knowledge of the classroom placement process. In addition, this study was limited by the fact that little

research had been done previously on this topic. Due to the limited amount of research, the instrument for conducting this study was developed by researchers who are teachers and parents, with a R.C. of .83.

Definition of Terms

Classroom Placement: The assignment of students to particular teachers' classes (Bartlett & Smith, 1996).

Typically Developing Children: Children who are not identified with an exceptionality and thus do not require special services (Bartlett & Smith, 1996).

Exceptional Children: Children that are identified with an exceptionality (Bartlett & Smith, 1996).

Sending Teacher: The classroom teacher that presently teaches the student (Barth, 1979).

Receiving Teacher: The classroom teacher that will teach the student the following year (Barth, 1979).

Child Placement Team: The group of educators and/or specialists that decide classroom placement (Bartlett & Smith, 1996).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There is a need for further research in the area of class placement of students. The extent of variation in the methods used to assign students to classroom needs to be documented. There is a need to ascertain why the methods vary from school to school (Monk, 1987). More importantly, research is needed to know what effects the different methods have on the outcome of schooling (Monk, 1987). Barth (1979, p. 70) summarizes:

“Placement is the means by which we can reconcile the different educational values and needs of parent, the diverse practices of teachers, and the best interests of children. With a successful match between teacher, child, and parent, the teacher can employ an authentic style, the parents can see their children in a learning environment compatible with their values, and the children can learn unimpeded by adult conflicts.”

This research was divided into four sections each describing one of the four grade placement procedures. The first section examined the literature and research in regards to principals making the classroom assignment. Section two reviewed the role of teachers in

the grade placement procedure. The third section examines the literature regarding parental input. Section four addressed the role of placement teams as found in the literature and research.

Principals Assigning Pupils to Teachers

Many principals have a high involvement assigning pupils to classes. In fact, high principal involvement was found to be the most common method (Monk, 1987). There was much variation in the methods principals used to assign students to classes. This variation concerned the degree to which the principals employed random assignments (Monk, 1987). One principal described his random method as "the best" because he takes "no real look at any criteria for the simple reason that sometimes at the elementary level, that's the best kind of grouping" (Monk, 1987, p. 170). One random method was to assign students who had been ranked and categorized according to the amount of energy, time, and effort required from the teacher to deal with the students. This random assignment makes the assumption that "a child will 'take' the same energy, time, and effort irrespective of the teacher" (Monk, 1987, p. 170).

Another random method employs more refined categories. Students were ranked and categorized according to their reading achievement levels then randomly distributed to teachers. Categorizing students by more than one dimension - for example, math achievement and reading achievement - was claimed to provide identical ranking results (Monk, 1987). "Hence, [the principals] focused on a single dimension, usually reading achievement, and assumed that this was adequate to generate appropriate ranking in

mathematics" (Monk, 1987, p. 171). No mention was given to how these achievement levels were determined. Using standardized testing scores as a basis for determining achievement ranking could pose a problem. According to a study by Lytle, (1988, p. 10), these test results have "many limitations that restrict interpretation and decision-making. 'High stakes' decisions based on a single test score are inappropriate for student placement and student performance."

Another problem cited by Farr & Caicy, 1986, states that standardized tests were never intended for placement purposes but rather to compare students' score with the norm. Yet another problem with the use of standardized tests involve minority differences. It was stated in a study by Entwisle & Alexander (1988) that the use of numerous standardized tests resulted in minority differences in assessing the potential of a minority student as well as his or her academic achievement. IQ tests may not predict academic achievement for males and females with equal accuracy (Stone & Jeffrey, Unknown).

Other problems posed special challenges for principals who used achievement levels from random placement. Students with Chapter I status needed to be distributed randomly among the classes (Monk, 1987).

Other special classifications such as Learning Disabled, Speech/Language disorders, Gifted, Developmentally Handicapped, and so forth, all become a challenge when randomly assigning students to a class. These exceptional children classifications require a close look. The exceptional status can be identified as a relevant attribute and thus should be considered when randomly distributed. Principals viewed this as a fair

method since "the goal was to reduce the disruption occasioned by the periodic comings and goings of these pupils from regular classrooms" (Monk, 1987, p. 171).

However, "the individualization principle, that each child's placement be appropriate for his or her unique educational needs" (Singer, Butler, Palfrey & Walker, 1986, p. 335), seems to be ignored with the use of randomized assignments as used by some principals. The issue of gender and specific gender needs causes special attention. Many principals seek "equal numbers of children with overtly different characteristics" (Monk, 1987, p. 177). Many "balanced classes in terms of the number of boys, girls, whites, blacks, Hispanics, and so forth" (Monk, 1987, p. 177).

Other classes randomly assembled by principals was done based on his or her perceptions of individual characteristics of teachers and students (Monk, 1987). According to Monk (1987), the principals claimed to be knowledgeable about the students. These principals claimed to "form an impression of which child worked best with which teacher and made minor adjustments to the classes on this basis" (Monk, 1987, p. 171). Difficult-to-handle children were specially assigned to specific teachers because it was felt that those specific teachers could handle the difficult children. This willingness to distribute difficult children unevenly contrasts with the practice of random assignment. Most principals emphasized random assignment and "stresses the importance of each teacher's receiving a fair share of difficult students" (Monk, 1987, p. 172). DelForge (1992, p. 2), states that administrators "seems to always assign the least experienced teachers with the most demanding teaching assignments."

Another type of placement procedures involved accepting recommendation from teachers about the placement of students. The procedure involved the principal meeting with the teachers near the end of the school year with the objective of assembling trial lists. The meeting included the principal, the "sending teachers" and the "receiving teacher" (Monk, 1987). The sending teachers would prepare proposed lists and the receiving teachers would review these proposed lists. The principal would then view the list and only then, would assign a teacher name to the classes. The method "limited the teachers' ability to tailor a class that complemented the strengths (and weaknesses) of particular teachers; it also limited the ability of teachers to play favorites and assign 'easy' students to themselves or their friends" (Monk, 1987, p. 172).

The last method had contrasting views, however. Some principals stressed the importance of balance and discounted the notion that some teachers work better with certain students, and vice versa. This view, according to Monk (1987), expresses the idea that teachers are interchangeable. On the contrary, other principals feel teachers are not interchangeable. These principals feel that this method build classes on the basis of teachers' strengths yet still guarded against unfair distributions (Monk, 1987).

The Role of Teachers Preparing Lists

Teachers also could play a leading role in classroom placement. Most principals are willing to accept recommendations from teachers about the placement of pupils to certain teachers (Monk, 1987). As stated previously, meetings were held at the end of the year with the sending and receiving teachers. They collectively assigned pupils to classes

and also indicated which class was to be taught by certain teachers (Monk, 1987). Some principals feel that "teachers are the most knowledgeable about both the students and the strengths and weaknesses of receiving teachers" (Monk, 1987, p. 172). However, research shows that some principals allow the teachers to make class assignments in order to avoid responsibility for unpopular decisions (Monk, 1987). A big disadvantage, according to Monk (1987), is that teachers could load-up a first-year teacher with a high number of difficult students.

Teachers can possess great skills in their perceptions of students in need (Wilson, Schendel & Ulman, 1992). In a study by Wilson et al. (1992), research found that the validity of teachers' judgements of their students' academic levels is high. Lytle (1988), states that teachers' judgements are as accurate as the standardized test in assessing student ability. According to Coleman & Dover (1992), teacher judgements are based on an extended period of time spent with the child. The judgements are based on "cumulative evidence" and this is seen as a more stable indicator of a child's strengths and weaknesses (Coleman & Dover, 1993). However, to the contrary, Wood (1988) states that "merely relying on the judgement of previous teachers is inadequate since students' abilities fluctuate given changes in teachers and materials."

However, research shows that close observation of teaching colleagues is not part of the teachers' natural routine. Barth (1979) states that sending teachers are often asked to sit in colleagues' rooms to observe the possible receiving teachers in action. These teachers then are able to "update their stereotypes of one another and make good reasons for making placement recommendations" (Barth, 1979, p. 68).

Another problem is that teachers also need to make other judgements about children other than achievement. Boutte (1992) states that teachers need to build on each child's strengths and not to rely on stereotypes and misconceptions. "Instead of comparing children's abilities, teachers must learn to identify each child's strengths and build on them (Boutte, 1992, p. 788). In this case, race was an issue. Teachers must use the same standards for all children regardless of their race.

Parental Input on Pupil Assignments

Parents are sometimes invited to enter the placement process. Near the end of the year, parents may be asked to put in writing the conditions under which their child will perform best in school (Barth, 1979). According to Barth (1979), these parent letters express the diversity of educational philosophies within the school community.

Special education saw a change in practices with the enactment of Public Law 94-142 some twenty years ago. Parents of handicapped students established that they have a right to be involved in the evaluation, programming, and placement of their child (Mlynek, Hannah, & Hamlin, 1982). The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) provision of the law mandated parental participation in educational decision-making (Lowenbraun, Madge, Affleck, 1990). Public Law 94-142 allowed parents to become partners with the educational system in program planning for their child (Kirk & Gallagher, 1979). However, P.L. 94-142 does not apply to typically developing children, and parents of those children, therefore, do not have the same mandated rights as the parents of handicapped children. Parents of typically developing children must rely on the schools to

invite them into the placement process. Parents of these students may have the opportunity to write a request.

Parents' requests had three overlapping characteristics according to Monk (1987). Prior experience with a teacher was generally considered legitimate by principals. Also, parents who could focus on specific teacher characteristics and how these might affect a particular child were considered legitimate, also. "Principals recognized that parents have unique knowledge about their children and attended seriously to requests wherein the parent could point to a specific teacher's behavior that, in the parents' judgement, would be detrimental to the child" (Monk, 1987, p. 178). A third type of legitimate requests concerned a teacher's competence and not his or her professional commitment. For example, a parent could question whether or not the teacher was a good disciplinarian. The problem with this is that a parent would not know firsthand about a teacher prior to their child having the teacher. Some parents get their information from other parents or by their own observation of the teacher interacting with other children.

One principal stated that he was bothered by requests for particular teachers by some parents, "particularly those connected to the school as staff members, volunteers, or PTO officers" (Brackbill, 1995, p. 36). All requests were honored, however.

The results of the school giving opportunity for parental input is more parental acceptance of the school's placement decisions because the school has included them in on the process (Barth, 1979). Monk (1987) states that satisfied parents provide more support and this in turn helps the child. Singer, et al. (1986) states that more affluent, better educated parents tend to be stronger, are more vocal advocates of education, and

are better equipped to ensure proper placement for their child. When parents are given the opportunity to provide input on their child's placement, they are also given another good reason to be involved with their children's education (Brackbill, 1995). Parents are given a degree of choice in the class placements according to a study by Brackbill, 1995, and an opportunity to exercise more control over their child's education.

The school can reveal the class placements to the parents at the end of the school year, Monk (1987) states, so disgruntled parents have the entire summer to brood. Some principals delay the class placement announcement until the day before school starts leaving parents to guess until the last minute. Disgruntled parents then have less time to be upset and may be more willing to work cooperatively with the assigned teacher.

According to Barth's (1979) research, the greater the difference among teachers, the more parents care. Monk (1987) states that it is important to have different types of teachers at each grade level. "A relatively homogeneous staff at a grade level appears to pose problems for the assignment of pupils" (Monk, 1987, p. 183).

Placement Teams

Some schools use a group of educators or specialists to decide classroom placement. This group might include the principal, sending teachers, receiving teachers, the psychologist, learning disabilities specialist as well as other staff members. These placement teams meet at the end of the year and make placement decisions. If parents are invited to write requests or comments, their views are addressed. In a study by Villa (1992), the school placement team came up with a novel idea in student placement.

“Students would enter their next-grade classes in May rather than September, thus allowing students and teachers to adjust to one another and to the new curriculum and routines before summer break” (Villa, 1992, p. 8).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

The subjects in this study consisted of approximately 307 parents and 17 teachers of students in grades one through four. These students attend a public or a parochial school in suburban areas of Columbus, Ohio.

Design

The design for this study was a descriptive study.

Data/Instrumentation

The instrument for collecting data from the teachers and parents was a Likert-type questionnaire with a summated rating that included five positions: Very Important, Important, No Opinion, Unimportant, and Very Unimportant. A cover letter was constructed to inform parents and teachers of the purpose of the study, assure their

anonymity, and request their participation. The instrument was developed by the researchers drawn from experience as teachers and parents.

The content validity of the Parent/Teacher questionnaire was addressed by a panel of experts from the University of Dayton.

Analysis

The data was transferred from the questionnaires to a computer disk and analyzed in the School of Education at the University of Dayton. The computer program used was the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Using descriptive statistics of mean, medium, mode, and T-test, the analysis was made.

A pilot test was run on a group of 25 graduate education students from the University of Dayton in order to determine the reliability coefficient using Chrome Bach Alpha. The reliability coefficient was established at .83.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

TABLE 1
GENDER OF TEACHERS AND PARENTS

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Teachers</u>		<u>Parents</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Male	1	7	22	9	23	9
Female	14	93	224	91	238	91
Total =	15	100	246	100	261	100

Table 1 shows the gender of the teachers participating in the study. Ninety-three percent were females with one (7%) being male.

TABLE 2
LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED BY TEACHERS

<u>Level</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Bachelors	3	20
Bachelors + 15	8	53
Masters	3	20
Masters + 15	0	0
Masters + 30	1	7
Masters + 45	0	0
Ph.D.	0	0
Total =	15	100

Table 2 indicates the level of education completed by teachers. Of the 15 respondents, 53% completed 15 hours past their Bachelors degree. Twenty percent completed their Masters and seven percent had 30 hours past their Masters.

TABLE 3
LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED BY PARENTS

<u>Level</u>	<u>Respondent</u>		<u>Spouse</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Less than High School	2	1	1	1	3	1
High School	47	19	46	19	93	20
Some College	65	27	56	24	121	25
College Graduate	94	38	83	36	177	37
Post College Degree	38	15	45	20	83	17
Total =	246	100	231	100	477	100

Table 3 illustrates the level of education completed by parents. Thirty-seven percent are college graduates, and 17 percent have a post college degree. Twenty percent have completed high school.

TABLE 4

CHILDREN CURRENTLY IN GRADES ONE THROUGH FOUR

<u>Children</u>	<u>Parents</u>		<u>Teachers</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
0	0	0	13	87	13	5
1-2	241	98	2	13	243	93
3-4	3	1	0	0	3	1
5-6	2	1	0	0	2	1
More Than 6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total =	246	100	15	100	261	100

Table 4 shows the number of children parents and teachers currently have in grades one through four. As a group of parents and teachers 93 percent have one to two children in grades one through four. Between the two groups of parents and teachers, more parents at 98 percent had one to two children in grades one through four, whereas only 13 percent of teachers had children in grades one through four.

TABLE 5

ATTENDANCE OF TEACHERS' CHILDREN AT WORKPLACE

<u>Response</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	11	73
No	4	27
Total =	15	100

Table 5 shows whether or not teachers' children were attending school at their place of employment. Nearly three-fourths (73%) indicated "yes," their children were attending the school at which they were teaching. The remaining 27 percent said "no," their child/children were attending another school.

TABLE 6
PARENTS WITH CHILDREN CURRENTLY
IN FIFTH GRADE AND ABOVE

<u>Children</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
0	146	60
1-2	95	39
3-4	4	1
More Than 6	0	0
Total =	245	100

Table 6 indicates parents with children currently in fifth grade and above. More than half (60 percent) had no children in fifth grade or above, while thirty-nine percent had one to two children in fifth grade or above.

TABLE 7

LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT IN CLASSROOM PLACEMENT

<u>Level</u>	<u>Parents</u>		<u>Teachers</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Extremely Involved	115	47	2	13	117	45
Very Involved	84	35	3	20	87	34
Involved	32	13	4	27	36	14
Uninvolved	12	5	6	40	18	7
Total =	243	100	15	100	258	100

Table 7 represents the level of involvement in classroom placement. As a group of parents and teachers, slightly less than half (forty-five percent) were extremely involved. Forty-eight percent of parents and teachers felt other degree of involvement. Forty percent of the teachers were uninvolved in classroom placement. Almost half (forty-seven percent) of parents were extremely involved in classroom placement

TABLE 8
SUMMATIVE SCORES: PERCEIVED LEVEL OF
IMPORTANCE BY TEACHERS

<u>Scores</u>		<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
210-176	Very Important	0	0
175.99-141	Important	5	33
140.99-106	No Opinion	7	47
105.99-71	Unimportant	1	7
71.99-42	Very Unimportant	2	13
Total =		15	100

Means = 123.60

Median = 129

Mode = 129

SD = 32.63

Table 8 illustrates the summative scores dealing with the perceived level of importance by teachers. Almost half (forty-seven percent) had no opinion. Thirty-three percent perceived the level of importance as important with none perceiving it as very important.

TABLE 9
TEACHERS' TEACHING EXPERIENCE

<u>Years</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
1-5	4	27
6-10	3	20
11-15	2	13
16-20	2	13
More than 20	4	27
Total =	15	100

Table 9 indicates the number of years of teaching experience of the participants. Slightly over one-fourth (27%) had one to five years of teaching experience; one-fifth (20%) had six to ten years of teaching experience; equal proportions of the teachers (13%) had 11 to 15 years and 16 to 20 years. The remaining twenty-seven percent of the teachers had more than 20 years of experience teaching children.

TABLE 10
TEACHERS' MOST RECENT GRADUATE COURSE

<u>Years</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
None Completed	1	7
Before 1980	0	0
1980 - 1985	1	7
1986 - 1990	1	7
1991 - 1996	12	79
Total =	15	100

Table 10 shows teachers' most recent graduate course. Seventy-nine percent had completed a graduate course during the years 1991 to 1996. Equal proportions of the teachers (seven percent) had completed a graduate course during the years 1980-1985, 1986-1990, and never.

TABLE 11
SUMMATIVE SCORES: PERCEIVED LEVEL OF
IMPORTANCE BY PARENTS

<u>Scores</u>		<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
210 - 176	Very Important	3	1
175.99 - 141	Important	137	55
140.99 - 106	No Opinion	104	42
105.99 - 71	Unimportant	5	2
71.99 - 42	Very Unimportant	0	0
Total =		249	100

Mean = 143.09

Median = 143

Mode = 133

SD = 14.45

Table 11 illustrates the summative scores dealing with the perceived level of importance by parents. Over half (fifty-five percent) perceived the level of important as important. Forty-two percent had no opinion.

TABLE 12
HOURS PER WEEK SPENT AT SCHOOL BY PARENTS

<u>Hours</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
None	93	38
1-2	86	35
3-4	36	15
5-6	9	4
7-8	1	1
9-10	4	2
More than 10	13	5
Total =	242	100

Table 12 represents the hours per week spent by parents at their child's/childrens' school. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents spend no time at school. Slightly more than a third (thirty-five percent) spent one to two hours per week at school. Five percent of the parents spent more time than 10 hours per week at school.

TABLE 13
AGE OF PARENTS

<u>Age</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Less than 25	1	1
25 - 35	100	41
36 - 45	133	54
46 - 55	11	4
Over 55	0	0
Total =	245	100

Table 13 illustrates the age ranges of the parents who participated in the survey. Over half of the parents (fifty-four percent) fell into the 36 to 45 age bracket, while less than half (forty-one percent) were ages 25 to 36.

TABLE 14
PARENTAL RACE

<u>Race</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Caucasian	236	98
African-American	0	0
Asian	1	1
Other	3	1
Total =	240	100

Table 14 indicates the race of the parents who participated in the survey.

Ninety-eight percent were Caucasian. One percent was Asian and Other, respectively.

TABLE 15
PARENTS' MARITAL STATUS

<u>Status</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Married	215	87
Divorced	19	8
Separated	5	2
Single	7	3
Widowed/Widower	0	0
Total =	246	100

Table 15 represents the parents' marital status. Eighty-seven percent of the parents were married. Ten percent were either divorced or separated. Three percent were single parents.

TABLE 16
PARENTS' INCOME LEVEL

<u>Income</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Under \$14,000	5	2
\$15,000 - \$25,000	14	6
\$26,000 - \$40,000	26	11
\$41,000 - \$60,000	50	22
\$61,000 - \$100,000	88	38
More than \$100,000	48	21
Total =	231	100

Table 16 shows the parents' level of income. More than one-third (thirty-eight percent) had income ranges of \$61,000 to \$100,000, while twenty-two percent had an income range of \$41,000 to \$60,000. Twenty-one percent had a range of more than \$100,000. Nineteen percent fell under the \$40,000 income range.

TABLE 17
PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' UNSOLICITED COMMENTS

<u>Comments</u>	<u>Parents</u>		<u>Teachers</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Positive	30	67	0	0	30	63
Negative	15	33	3	100	18	37
Total =	45	100	3	100	48	100

Table 17 represents the unsolicited comments by parents and teachers. As a group of parents and teachers, sixty-three percent made positive unsolicited comments, while thirty-seven percent of the comments were negative. Between the two groups, sixty-seven percent of the parents made positive comments where no positive comments were made by teachers. All the comments (one hundred percent) made by the teachers were negative. Thirty-three percent of the parents' comments were negative.

TABLE 18
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS

<u>t</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>Significance</u>
2.30	14.3	.04*

Parent mean = 143.09

Teacher mean = 123.60

Table 18 shows whether there was a significant difference between parents' and teachers' perceived level of importance in classroom placement. Parents had a significantly higher mean score (143.09) than teachers (123.60).

CHAPTER V

Problem Statement

Assigning students to a classroom for the upcoming school year is a difficult and time-consuming task. No one method for classroom placement is used. The overall quality of teachers varies (Monk, 1987) thus making the placement process more difficult. When placing children, the ideal situation is to match the child with a teacher who best meets the child's need. Yet, teachers vary in their ability to achieve success with particular types of pupils (Monk, 1987).

There is no question of the importance of the pupil assignment process and the many problems associated with it. Monk (1987) summarizes:

It is surprising to find that little research has been done to the topic. We do not know, for example, what methods are used in schools to assign pupils to teachers. We do not know who does the assigning, whether it is principals who view it as an administrative task or teachers who view it as part of their responsibility for providing instruction. We do not have systematic knowledge about the role parents play in the process.

Research Questions

1. What is the perceived levels of importance to teachers regarding the factors for determining classroom placement of children in grades 1-4?
2. What is the perceived levels of importance of parents regarding the factors for determining classroom placement of children in grades 1-4?
3. What is the difference between the parents' and the teachers' perceived levels of importance for determining classroom placement?

Summary

This study focused on the ideals teachers and parents hold as significant in the pupil assignment process. The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that are used for classroom placement as perceived by teachers and parents of children in grades one through four.

The researchers distributed three hundred and seven parent questionnaires and seventeen teacher questionnaires. A total of eighty-one percent of the parent questionnaires and eighty-eight percent of the teacher questionnaires were returned.

The 249 parent respondents were surveyed as to their age, race, marital status and total income level. More than half of the parents fell into the 36-45 age bracket while less than half were ages 25-35. Almost all of the parents who participated in the survey were Caucasian. Four of the total respondents were Asian or Other. More than three-fourths of the respondents were married, and less than one tenth were divorced. Respondents who were separated or single totaled five parents. More than one-third of the parent

respondents had income ranges of \$61,000-\$100,000, while slightly less than one-fourth had a range of \$41,000-\$60,000. Less than one-fourth had a range of more than \$100,000. Less than a fifth were below the \$40,000 income range.

The survey gathered information on the hours per week spent at school by parents. More than a third of the respondents spent no time at school. Slightly more than a third spent one to two hours per week at school. Less than one-fourth of the parents spent more than ten hours per week at school.

The 15 teacher respondents were surveyed as to their years of teaching experience, the year their most recent graduate course was completed, and if their children attend the school where they are employed. Slightly more than one-fourth of the teachers had one to five years experience and one-fifth had six to ten years of teaching experience. Equal proportions of the teachers had from 11-15 years and 16-20 years teaching experience. Slightly more than one-fourth had more than twenty years experience teaching children. More than three-fourths had completed a graduate course during the years 1991-1996. Equal proportions of the teachers (less than one-tenth) had completed a graduate course during the years 1980-1990, and never. Nearly three-fourths of the teachers indicated that their children attended the school at which they were teaching.

The respondents in this study consisted of parents and teachers of children in grades one through four. Of the 246 parents who responded, 224 were female and 22 were male. The 15 responding teachers consisted of 14 females and one male.

Levels of education completed by both parents and teachers were compiled by the researchers. The results showed that of the 477 parents who responded, slightly over a

third were college graduates, a fourth had some college experience, and less than a fourth had a high school diploma. Of the 477 respondents, 83 had obtained a post-college degree. The results indicated that of the 15 teachers who responded, slightly over half of the teachers had completed 15 hours past their Bachelors degree. Less than one-fourth had obtained a Masters degree. The highest level of education was a Masters +30 by one teacher respondent.

The number of children parents and teachers had in grades one through four was gathered. Of the 246 parents, almost all had one to two children in grades one through four and only a few had children in grades three through six. The results showed that of the 15 teacher respondents, only two had children in grades one through four. The number of parents who had children in grades five and above was less than half of the total 245 respondents.

The results of the level of involvement in the classroom placement process by parents and teachers were varied between the two groups. Slightly less than half of the parents perceived themselves to be "extremely involved" in the process, while just over a tenth of the teachers perceived themselves as "extremely involved." Slightly less than half of the total number of teachers responded they were "uninvolved" in the classroom placement process.

Unsolicited comments by parents and teachers were received by the researchers. Between the two groups, over half of the unsolicited comments made by parents were positive. All of the unsolicited comments made by the teachers were negative. One-third of the unsolicited comments made by parents were negative.

The overall results of this survey indicated that over half of the parents perceived the level of importance as "important" in the classroom placement of their child. However, only an extremely small portion of the parents perceived the level of importance of classroom placement as "very important." The teacher results indicated only a third perceived classroom placement as "important" and none perceived it as "very important." The findings illustrated that less than half of the parents and teachers had "no opinion" about the level of importance of classroom placement.

Implications

We, the researchers, feel this study has many implications. We learned from the unsolicited comments that many parents were unaware that they could have input in the classroom placement process. We also learned that in some instances schools do not invite parental participation. Some parents take it upon themselves to make a special placement request for their child while other parents are unaware of this option. We question why the parents are not fully informed of the placement policy of their school, and why the parents are not cognizant of all of the options.

Because of the overwhelmingly negative, unsolicited comments made by some of the teachers, we feel that those teachers found the survey threatening. Possibly, the teachers feel a lack of control over the process if parents are given more input. Also, it is hard to change the way classroom placement has always been done. It appears that staying with the status quo is easier and more comfortable. We do not understand why the majority of teachers responding had no opinion as to the level of importance of

classroom placement. The fact that they had no opinion does not seem to correspond to the strong, negative, unsolicited comments received by some teachers. There appears to be more issues at hand causing this discrepancy. The researchers are unsure as to the cause of this discrepancy, but would like to explore this aspect further.

The fact that there is no one method for the classroom placement procedure within the schools poses many problems for teachers and parents. The teachers seem to want to avoid the final responsibility for the outcomes of the placements. However, some teachers commented that they thought they have a more complete picture of the child and therefore, should logically be the ones who make the placement for the child rather than the parents. As researchers, we question who has the most complete picture of the total child - the teacher or the parent? It seems to us that both views of the child are needed to provide the best overall picture of the child. It would seem logical for the parents to have input on the placement process in order to make the best possible placement decision. Without parental input, the picture is incomplete.

We also question how well a parent or a fellow worker knows the type of teaching style and methods used by another teacher. We question how a person could know how the teacher teaches without directly observing the prospective teacher within the classroom. Parents may rely on hearsay, and teachers may assume that a fellow teacher is okay just because he or she is on staff. The researchers feel that there are many levels of competency within the teaching profession and many variations of teaching styles and methods. Just because a teacher remains on staff does not mean any and every child would benefit from having that teacher as their assigned teacher for the year.

We question what would happen if one teacher dislikes a fellow teacher and retaliates by assigning difficult children to his or her class. Could the reverse also occur? Could a teacher stack the deck by assigning a fellow teacher an extremely workable group of children? What happens when the teacher is new to the school? How would fellow teachers know who should be in the new teacher's class? Would there be an attempt to make the best possible placement for each child in question?

Some parents and teachers commented that a child needs to be exposed to many different types of teachers, personalities, and methods since he will be in a world where these choices are not available as an adult. The researchers feel that this reasoning is faulty when dealing with children. We feel it is imperative that a child have a good placement - one that will correspond to the child's learning style and individual personality. We feel a child needs to be nurtured in as perfect an environment as possible and not forced to learn how to cope with a teacher who does not accommodate his or her learning style. We feel the child's needs must be met in all cases.

Another issue resulting from this study is one of time and logistics. How long would it take to assess each child's needs and make a thoughtful placement? How would the parents offer their input? Would face to face discussion be necessary between the parents and teachers? Should the sending teachers, as well as the receiving teachers, meet with the parents in this discussion? The question of when and how this exchange would take place seems overwhelming to the researchers. Yet, we feel somehow the exchange needs to occur. And, of course, who would be the one to make the final decision if there are conflicting views?

Recommendations

The researchers would recommend that further research be done in the area of classroom placement. Several aspects need to be explored. We are cognizant of the fact that there are many differing methods of classroom placement. These methods need to be identified further and the implications explored. In higher education the differing methods need to be examined and studied. Hopefully, after an in-depth investigation of this issue at this level, an improved system could be discovered and implemented within pilot schools. Results could then be studied. Introducing the new system could then be offered to the public schools.

Once implemented within the public schools, much discussion of this issue could ensue. Parent groups such as the PTO or PTA need to get involved and offer their point of view. Teacher issues need to be openly discussed and explored. The administrators' views also need to be analyzed.

Let us start talking about this issue. All parties involved - administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and children - need to openly communicate. Our recommendation would be to begin this research process immediately and have the involved parties share their views. We feel confident that these efforts could bring about a better education for our children.

APPENDICES



The University of Dayton

February 18, 1997

Dear Parents:

We are presently enrolled in a Master's Degree in Teacher Education at the University of Dayton. We are conducting a study on parental and teachers' attitudes toward the classroom placement procedures of children grades 1 - 4. Since your child/children are presently enrolled in grades 1 - 4, we would appreciate your input to assist us in our research.

The assignment of students to particular teachers' classrooms each year is a time consuming task and one that employs no one set method of procedure. We have a combined 24+ years of experience teaching elementary children. This experience has resulted in a strong desire to make the process of classroom placement one that results in a correct match between student and teacher. We believe this is critical to ensure a successful year for both. Through this research, we hope to further strengthen our classroom placement procedure to better meet the needs of our students and teachers.

This study is strictly voluntary and participants will remain anonymous. Therefore, please be perfectly candid. Please complete and return the form in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope by Friday, February, 28, 1997.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to assist us in this endeavor. Please contact us at our home if you have any questions. Your point of view will be greatly appreciated.

Respectfully yours,

Janilyn Bartlett
868-1231

Donna Smith
855-2909

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is completely voluntary and anonymous. Your time is valuable and we appreciate your effort to complete the survey.

Directions: Please place a checkmark in the most appropriate box. It is imperative that you answer every question in the study.

Very Important
 Important
 No Opinion
 Unimportant
 Very Unimportant

1.	Being familiar with the classroom placement procedure at my child's/children's school is necessary.					
2.	Being pleased with my child's/children's classroom placement is needed.					
3.	It's necessary for parents to have information on the criteria of how their child is placed.					
4.	The teachers' teaching style should be considered as a factor in placement. (i.e., use of whole language, cooperative learning, traditional, hands on)					
5.	Teachers' classroom management style should be considered before placement. (i.e., discipline)					
6.	Teachers' perceived organizational skills should be considered before placement.					
7.	Teachers' personal characteristics should be considered before classroom placement. (i.e. friendly, stern)					
8.	Your child's choice of teacher should not be considered in classroom placement.					
9.	Class placement should be balanced in terms of the number of boys and girls.					
10.	Class placement should be balanced in terms of race.					

		Very Important	Important	No Opinion	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
11.	Classes should be heterogeneously grouped with high, average and low abilities.					
12.	Classes should be homogeneously grouped keeping all high ability, all average ability, and all low ability students together respectively.					
13.	Your child's learning style should be considered in classroom placement procedures.					
14.	A family's prior experience with a teacher should be a factor in classroom placement.					
15.	The teachers' years of experience should be a factor in classroom placement.					
16.	The quality of instruction should be a factor in classroom placement.					
17.	The teachers' attendance record should be a factor in classroom placement.					
18.	A child's emotional needs should be considered in classroom placement.					
19.	A child's leadership ability should be considered in classroom placement.					
20.	A child's special needs should be considered in classroom placement.					
21.	A child having a friend should be considered in classroom placement.					
22.	Not wanting your child to be placed with another child should be considered in classroom placement.					

		Very Important	Important	No Opinion	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
23.	Parental observations of teachers' interaction with children should be considered before classroom placement.					
24.	Classroom placement should be posted at the end of the school year.					
25.	Classroom placement should be posted just prior to the opening day of school.					
26.	Hearsay or popularity of a teacher should be a factor in parental request of a teacher.					
27.	Parents should have an opportunity to select their child's classroom placement.					
28.	Parents should have an opportunity to inform the school of the environment their child would best develop and learn.					
29.	A child's socioeconomic level should be a factor in their classroom placement.					
30.	Your child's/children's teacher should use his/her expertise to select classroom placement for your child.					
31.	Changes in the class rosters should not be made after assignments are made public.					
32.	Parents should have an opportunity to observe classrooms prior to classroom placement.					
33.	A child's achievement level should be used in classroom placement procedures.					
34.	A principal should use random selection in assigning children to classes.					
35.	Exceptional children should have priority in classroom placement. (i.e. children with disabilities and gifted or talented children)					

		Very Important	Important	No Opinion	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
36.	Children with behavior problems should be assigned to a specific classroom structured to meet their needs.					
37.	Students with high demand of teacher time should be specially assigned to a specific teacher. (i.e. shyness, reading difficulties, insecurities)					
38.	Teachers should work collaboratively to select classroom placement for children without including parental input.					
39.	Teachers should observe other teacher's classrooms before making placement recommendation.					
40.	Teachers should share with the parents their classroom placement recommendation for their child.					
41.	Students should enter their next-grade classes in May rather than September, allowing students and teachers an adjustment period.					
42.	A classroom placement team consisting of the principal, teachers, and parents should make the classroom placement assignment for your child.					

Please return the questionnaire in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided.

PARENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Directions: Please circle the appropriate answer.

1. What is your gender? Male Female

2. What is your highest level of education completed?

Less than High School	Some College	Post College Degree
High School	College Graduate	

3. What is your spouse's highest level of education completed? (if applicable)

Less than High School	Some College	Post College Degree
High School	College Graduate	

4. Your age is... Less than 25 25 - 35 36 - 45 46 - 55 Over 55

5. How many of your children are currently in grades 1 - 4?

1 - 2	5 - 6	
3 - 4	More than 6	

6. How many of your children are currently in grades 5 and above?

1 - 2	5 - 6	
3 - 4	More than 6	

7. Your family's total yearly income is...

Under \$14,000	\$26,000 - \$40,000	\$61,000 - \$100,000
\$15,000 - \$25,000	\$41,000 - \$60,000	More than \$100,000

8. What is your marital status?

Married	Divorced	Separated	Single	Widowed/Widower
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9. Your nationality is... Caucasian African American Asian Other _____

10. On the average, how many hours per week do you spend at your child's school.

None	3 - 4	7 - 8	More than 10
1 - 2	5 - 6	9 - 10	

11. What is your level of involvement in the classroom placement process of your child?

Extremely Involved	Very Involved	Involved	Uninvolved
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The University of Dayton

February 18, 1997

Dear Teachers:

We are presently enrolled in a Master's Degree in Teacher Education at the University of Dayton. We are conducting a study on parental and teachers' attitudes toward the classroom placement procedures of children grades 1 - 4. Since you are presently teaching in grades 1 - 4, we would appreciate your input to assist us in our research.

The assignment of students to particular teachers' classrooms each year is a time consuming task and one that employs no one set method of procedure. We have a combined 24+ years of experience teaching elementary children. This experience has resulted in a strong desire to make the process of classroom placement one that results in a correct match between student and teacher. We believe this is critical to ensure a successful year for both. Through this research, we hope to further strengthen our classroom placement procedure to better meet the needs of our students and teachers.

This study is strictly voluntary and participants will remain anonymous. Therefore, please be perfectly candid. Please complete and return the form in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope by Friday, February 28, 1997.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to assist us in this endeavor. Please contact us at our home if you have any questions. Your point of view will be greatly appreciated.

Respectfully yours,

Janilyn Bartlett
868-1231

Donna Smith
855-2909

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is completely voluntary and anonymous. Your time is valuable and we appreciate your effort to complete the survey.

Directions: Please place a checkmark in the most appropriate box. It is imperative that you answer every question in the study.

	Very Important	Important	No Opinion	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
1. Being familiar with the classroom placement procedure at my child's/children's school is necessary.					
2. Being pleased with my child's/children's classroom placement is needed.					
3. It's necessary for parents to have information on the criteria of how their child is placed.					
4. The teachers' teaching style should be considered as a factor in placement. (i.e., use of whole language, cooperative learning, traditional, hands on)					
5. Teachers' classroom management style should be considered before placement. (i.e., discipline)					
6. Teachers' perceived organizational skills should be considered before placement.					
7. Teachers' personal characteristics should be considered before classroom placement. (i.e. friendly, stern)					
8. Your child's choice of teacher should not be considered in classroom placement.					
9. Class placement should be balanced in terms of the number of boys and girls.					
10. Class placement should be balanced in terms of race.					

		Very Important	Important	No Opinion	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
11.	Classes should be heterogeneously grouped with high, average and low abilities.					
12.	Classes should be homogeneously grouped keeping all high ability, all average ability, and all low ability students together respectively.					
13.	Your child's learning style should be considered in classroom placement procedures.					
14.	A family's prior experience with a teacher should be a factor in classroom placement.					
15.	The teachers' years of experience should be a factor in classroom placement.					
16.	The quality of instruction should be a factor in classroom placement.					
17.	The teachers' attendance record should be a factor in classroom placement.					
18.	A child's emotional needs should be considered in classroom placement.					
19.	A child's leadership ability should be considered in classroom placement.					
20.	A child's special needs should be considered in classroom placement.					
21.	A child having a friend should be considered in classroom placement.					
22.	Not wanting your child to be placed with another child should be considered in classroom placement.					

		Very Important	Important	No Opinion	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
23.	Parental observations of teachers' interaction with children should be considered before classroom placement.					
24.	Classroom placement should be posted at the end of the school year.					
25.	Classroom placement should be posted just prior to the opening day of school.					
26.	Hearsay or popularity of a teacher should be a factor in parental request of a teacher.					
27.	Parents should have an opportunity to select their child's classroom placement.					
28.	Parents should have an opportunity to inform the school of the environment their child would best develop and learn.					
29.	A child's socioeconomic level should be a factor in their classroom placement.					
30.	Your child's/children's teacher should use his/her expertise to select classroom placement for your child.					
31.	Changes in the class rosters should not be made after assignments are made public.					
32.	Parents should have an opportunity to observe classrooms prior to classroom placement.					
33.	A child's achievement level should be used in classroom placement procedures.					
34.	A principal should use random selection in assigning children to classes.					
35.	Exceptional children should have priority in classroom placement. (i.e. children with disabilities and gifted or talented children)					

		Very Important	Important	No Opinion	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
36.	Children with behavior problems should be assigned to a specific classroom structured to meet their needs.					
37.	Students with high demand of teacher time should be specially assigned to a specific teacher. (i.e. shyness, reading difficulties, insecurities)					
38.	Teachers should work collaboratively to select classroom placement for children without including parental input.					
39.	Teachers should observe other teacher's classrooms before making placement recommendation.					
40.	Teachers should share with the parents their classroom placement recommendation for their child.					
41.	Students should enter their next-grade classes in May rather than September, allowing students and teachers an adjustment period.					
42.	A classroom placement team consisting of the principal, teachers, and parents should make the classroom placement assignment for your child.					

Please return the questionnaire in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided.

TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS

Directions: Please circle the appropriate answer.

1. My gender is...

Male Female

2. My years of teaching experience is...

1 - 5 6-10 11-15 16-20 More than 20

3. My highest level of education completed is...

Bachelors Masters Masters + 30 Ph.D.

Bachelors + 15 Masters + 15 Masters + 45

4. When did you complete your last graduate course?

1991- Present 1990 - 86 1985 - 80 Before 1980 None Completed

5. How many of your children are currently in grades 1 - 4?

1 - 2 5 - 6

3 - 4 More than 6

6. Did /Does your child attend the school where you are currently teaching?

No Yes

7. What is your level of involvement in the classroom placement process at your school?

Extremely Involved Involved

Very Involved Uninvolved

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