

**Effective Family Ministry**

by

Eric W. Ziel

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in Education

Graduate Studies

Martin Luther College

New Ulm, MN

May 2019

**Signature Page**

Date:

This thesis paper has been examined and approved.

Review Committee:

---

Dr. John Meyer, Chair

---

Dr. Jeffery Wiechman

---

Dr. John Kolander

Approved:

---

John Meyer  
Director of Graduate Studies

### **Abstract**

Ministry to school families that extends beyond the classroom walls has always been a part of our WELS school system, particularly with elementary school families. Over the years, educators have seen an increasing need to provide Christian parenting help to families and an increasing awareness that the WELS Lutheran Elementary School (LES) is not able to keep up with those needs. This study seeks to review what our WELS LES's are currently doing to meet the needs of their families and what strategies they are using to connect resources and programs to those who need them. The results of this study will provide a picture of the challenges and opportunities our schools have for family ministry, what resources are being utilized, and what strategies are being employed to connect those resources to families. The results will also be used to suggest possible recommendations for carrying out effective family ministry in the years to come.

### **Acknowledgments**

I am grateful to God for providing me this opportunity to grow and learn so much at this time in my life. May all I've learned be used for his glory!

I am extremely thankful to my home congregation of St. Matthew's, Oconomowoc, for allowing and enabling me to take on the coursework and time commitment that goes along with pursuing a Master's degree. St. Matthew's not only funded the lion's share of the cost, but its leadership was encouraging throughout the process. The extent to which St. Matthew's members support educational endeavors is truly something that I cherish and thank God for. In particular, the men who have served on our St. Matthew's Board of Education these last five years, as well as the staff of our school, have been encouraging and understanding every step of the way.

I would also like to thank the many early childhood directors and LES principals who took time to complete my online survey. I am sincerely grateful to these men and women who gave of their time to share insights and ideas. Likewise, I am grateful to the members of St. Matthew's who were part of the focus groups that provided valuable insight to the topic of family ministry.

I thank God for the many learned men who taught the courses that were part of my program. Every course I took was worthwhile and applicable to my ministry. This was truly a blessing for me! I would also like to thank my advisor, Dr. John Meyer, for his guidance and advice as I navigated the path that has led me to this point.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife Beth, who was more patient with me than I deserve. Although, it caused more work for her, she graciously provided me with time to do what I had to do in order to fulfill the requirements of the courses I took.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>List of Tables .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter I: Introduction.....</b>	<b>9</b>
Problem Statement .....	9
Purpose of the Study .....	10
Research Questions .....	11
Definition of Terms.....	11
Assumptions and Limitations of the Study .....	12
Overview .....	12
<b>Chapter II: Literature Review.....</b>	<b>13</b>
Introduction.....	13
Government-Sponsored Parenting Programs.....	14
Commercial Parenting Programs .....	14
Getting Parents to Attend Parenting Classes .....	15
Mandatory Parenting Classes.....	16
Family Ministry in the WELS.....	16
Summary .....	17
<b>Chapter III: Methodology.....</b>	<b>18</b>
Introduction.....	18
Research Questions .....	18
Research Design and Procedures .....	19
Population and Sample .....	20
Instrumentation .....	21
Data Analysis Procedures .....	22
Limitations .....	22
Summary .....	23
<b>Chapter IV: Results .....</b>	<b>24</b>
Introduction.....	24
Changing Landscape.....	24
Growth Opportunities Offered .....	26
What’s Being Done to Encourage.....	27
Needs of the LES and ECM Today.....	29
Leaders.....	30
Follow Up Phone Conversations .....	31
Focus Group Survey Results.....	32
Focus Group Discussion Results .....	34
Data Analysis .....	36
Summary .....	37
<b>Chapter V: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....</b>	<b>38</b>
Introduction.....	38

Summary of the Results .....	38
Conclusions.....	39
Recommendations for WELS Congregations.....	42
Recommendations for Synodical leadership.....	44
<b>Appendix A: Family Ministry Survey.....</b>	<b>47</b>
"Family Ministry" .....	47
1. Your Landscape .....	47
2. Growth Opportunities Offered.....	48
3. Encouraging Growth.....	48
4. Resources .....	49
5. Leaders .....	49
6. Final Questions .....	50
<b>Appendix B: Survey Emails .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Appendix C: Email to Potential Interviewees .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Appendix D: Personal Interview Questions .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Appendix E: St. Matthew's Focus Groups (3).....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Appendix F: Focus Group Survey.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Appendix G: Summary of Follow Up Phone Interviews.....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Appendix H: Summary of Focus Group Discussion.....</b>	<b>61</b>

**List of Tables**

Table 1: How have you seen the need for family ministry change? .....	24
Table 2: How has your approach to family ministry changed? .....	25
Table 3: Focus Group Survey Results .....	33

**List of Figures**

Figure 1: Growth Opportunities.....	27
Figure 2: How Do You Encourage?.....	28
Figure 3: The Need for More Bible Studies.....	29
Figure 4: The Need for More Christian Parenting Programs.....	29
Figure 5: The Need for a Comprehensive Family Ministry Program.....	30
Figure 6: The Need for a Called Family Minister.....	30
Figure 7: Does Your Ministry Have a Person in Charge of Family Ministry?.....	31



## Chapter I: Introduction

### Problem Statement

You might be somewhat surprised, but probably not shocked, to learn that only 17% of practicing Christians have a biblical worldview (Barna, 2015). That means that only 17% believe that absolute moral truth exists; the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches; Satan is a real being or force, not merely symbolic; a person cannot earn their way into heaven by trying to be good or do good works; Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; and God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today. The reason you are not shocked is that you, too, are well aware of the increasingly godless society in which we live, a society where most regard truth as relative (something felt) rather than something absolute.

Families are the core of our society, so it shouldn't surprise us if we see the family unit taking a hit, too. If more families align with a non-biblical worldview, it also shouldn't surprise us if there are more families struggling with all of the issues that seem to come with a non-biblical worldview: divorce, abuse, materialism, disrespect, etc.

Of course, societal decay is nothing new—the increase of wickedness in these last times (Matthew 24:12) has had a profound influence on families, including our “member” families that have traditionally been the backbone, if not the entire makeup, of the WELS Lutheran Elementary School (LES). At this particular time in our history, however, that influence seems to be magnified. As churches are increasingly more aggressive in using their schools as outreach arms, schools are enrolling a higher number of children from unchurched or de-churched families than ever before (WELS Growth-

Decline Statistics, 2018). In other words, our WELS elementary schools are enrolling more children from families with non-biblical worldviews. The WELS LES is no longer “preaching to the choir” as it were.

Make no mistake—having the opportunity to share God’s Word with children and families who are unfamiliar with the message of salvation in Christ alone, or with those who have neglected that message, is a true blessing and an awesome opportunity. While our schools rejoice over the chance to share Christ with more and more who don’t know him, we are faced with a daunting mass of family-related issues that the school and church are often unprepared to address. The WELS LES is in a unique position to have a proactive influence on the family, the “mini-church,” at its most basic level because it’s at this time (a child’s early school years) that parents show the most interest in being part of their child’s school experience (Eccles & Harold, 1996). While this is true, the LES is typically unable to effectively reach today’s families with any amount of consistency. Instead, our called workers spend enormous energy and time putting out fires, wishing there was a better plan for providing young families with Christian parenting materials early in their parenting experience, before fires burn out of control.

If parents aren’t connected with resources that can benefit them, those resources aren’t effective. This study will attempt to discover ways that make this connection happen so that family ministry efforts in our schools are more proactive and more effective.

### **Purpose of the Study**

At the same time that our Lutheran Elementary Schools are enrolling a higher number of children from unchurched or de-churched families than ever before (WELS

Growth-Divide Statistics, 2018), we have also seen a marked increase in the number of WEL Early Childhood Ministries opening their doors to communities that are hungry for quality care. While ministry to young families is certainly receiving a large slice of our time and effort, there seems to be limited information about how to best connect these families with God’s Word, as well as practical and scriptural parenting programs. It is my prayer that this descriptive research study will be valuable to our WELS schools as they use the resulting data to inform future planning.

### **Research Questions**

1. As WELS schools strive to meet the spiritual and practical parenting needs of its school families, what resources are currently being used?
2. Which strategies are being used to connect school families to the resources they need?
3. What obstacles are cited by LES administrators and ECE Directors for delivering these resources to families?
4. What are the main obstacles cited by parents for not making use of these resources?

### **Definition of Terms**

**Family Ministry.** For the purposes of this project, “family ministry” is defined as all programming that is done to meet the spiritual and practical needs of parents.

**WELS LES.** These acronyms refer to a Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Lutheran Elementary School

**ECM.** This acronym refers to a WELS Early Childhood Ministry.

**BIC.** This acronym refers to a traditional Bible information class, typically led by a pastor, that is used to instruct individuals in the basic Bible truths.

**Growth offering/opportunity.** This term refers to a class or workshop offered by the school or church to assist parents in their Christian parenting responsibility.

**Parenting offering/program.** This term refers to a class or workshop offered by the school or church to assist parents in their Christian parenting responsibility.

### **Assumptions and Limitations of the Study**

I will be asking busy school leaders to participate in this study, so I will have no control over how many responses I receive. Every WELS ministry is unique to its particular location and circumstances, and that might lead to responses that can't be generalized for the WELS as a whole. The design of this study is also intended to focus on responses from a narrow subject group: WELS elementary principals and early childhood directors. Therefore, the study may not be able to be generalized for other groups, such as public schools or WELS high schools. Finally, while many LES's and ECM's work closely together, there may be some differences in how the LES and ECM approach ministry to families. This study did not attempt to divide conclusions and recommendations into two categories.

### **Overview**

The remainder of the paper will describe the design of my research, the methods and procedures I used to obtain and analyze my data, and the conclusions and recommendations that the data suggests. Immediately preceding that, however, is a review of relevant literature on the subject of family ministry.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### Introduction

There is much evidence that parent involvement in the educational process has a direct effect on student achievement and success. Although this literature review will refer to this research only briefly, it is included because it may indirectly relate to more targeted research. It will suffice at this point to briefly reference some of that research. In one publication, which serves as a good summary of what the research tells us about parent involvement in general, Davis (2000, page iii) notes, “Research regarding the effects of family involvement on educational outcomes has shown that parent involvement makes a difference in children’s academic achievement. Other studies, such as “The effects of school-based parental involvement on academic achievement at the child and elementary school level” (Park, & Holloway, 2017) and “Effects of parental involvement on academic achievement: a meta-synthesis” (Wilder, 2014), echo the same conclusions.

Getting the parents involved in the educational process is certainly important for a student’s success. Although there is ample research to support parent involvement in general, the research that supports the effectiveness of parent involvement in *parenting classes* is somewhat thin. Since the focus of this project is on how our WELS schools can improve the involvement of parents in parenting courses and growth opportunities, as opposed to just general involvement in the educational process, the bulk of this literature review is directed at the relatively small amount of research on the effects of parenting programs.

### **Government-Sponsored Parenting Programs**

Studies that examine government-sponsored programs such as Head Start have generally concluded that parenting classes are beneficial. For example, Chang, Park, and Kim (2009) researched the effectiveness of Early Head Start parenting classes taken by parents from low socio-economic backgrounds. Although they were cautious not to declare rock solid cause-effect results, the researchers nevertheless noted that their study showed a correlation because parents that attended parenting classes (1) increased their children's cognitive and language stimulation over the years; (2) engaged in more parent-child activities such as parent-child play, reading bedtime routines, reading daily, and reading frequency; and (3) had children with higher scores in the Bayley assessment (an assessment for measuring developmental delays in the young children).

### **Commercial Parenting Programs**

For-purchase parenting programs such as *Love and Logic* often tout research on which they are based. For example, in his paper that explores how the Love and Logic program affects parenting competence, Charles Fay (2012) shares data that shows evidence that Love and Logic training helps parents develop their parenting skills.

Similarly, Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP), which boasts that it provides skills training for parents who deal with frequent challenges from their children, also cites many studies that show its effectiveness. An example of one such study that was done in 2006 by Anne E. Damrad concluded that parents in the STEP program were more likely than those in the control group to perceive improvement in their parenting behavior.

Finally, a study of the Behavioral Parent Training Program (BPTP) concluded that “The results of this study support the notion that parent training programs can benefit for families in a number of ways” (Jaafar and Momtaz, 2011, page 266).

Despite the research surrounding the effectiveness of parenting programs, as well the logical assumption that quality parenting materials would be beneficial, there is a difference between a parenting course being “beneficial” and one being “effective.” To be truly effective, parents actually need to attend the classes!

### **Getting Parents to Attend Parenting Classes**

Although there doesn’t appear to be any kind of research or best practices that speak to *how* to get parents to attend the parenting classes so they can benefit from them, there may be something to be gained from studying the bountiful research on the general topic of parent involvement, especially the studies that cite reasons for *low* parental involvement. If one can identify the obstacles that prevent parents from becoming involved in their children’s education in a general sense, it’s possible that further research could show that those same obstacles prevent parents from enrolling in parenting classes.

For example, in his study of the factors that affect parental involvement in education, Javid Jafarov (2015) shares that the top reason given by parents for not participating in school activities was the “lack of time” (page 38). Based on that, we might hypothesize that a major reason parents don’t attend parenting classes is also due to a lack of time. In fact, there is at least one such study that corroborates this hypothesis. In a study of the barriers that parents faced in completing a community-run parenting program, Duppong-Hurley, Hoffman, Barnes, and Oats (2015) noted that when parents were asked about the barriers they faced to attend and complete the program, the most

common responses were difficulties surrounding the parent's schedule. Might we use the abundant research on low parent involvement in school activities *in general* to design a research study that seeks to pinpoint reasons for low parent attendance in *parenting studies*?

### **Mandatory Parenting Classes**

While there is certainly a lack of research about best practices for getting parents to attend parenting classes, there has been some recent debate about whether parenting classes should be mandatory. To view the basic arguments of each side of the debate, one could visit [debatewise.com](http://debatewise.com) ("Parenting Classes Should Be Made Compulsory") or [debate.org](http://debate.org) ("Should all parents be required to attend parenting classes?"). Apart from that, there are very few empirical studies about the effectiveness of mandatory parenting classes. One of the studies that we do have was conducted in the United Kingdom (Holt, 2010). The study examined compulsory, court-ordered parenting classes for a select group of parents that had children who were juvenile offenders. The study concluded that "the new knowledge and behaviors were not practiced at home to improve parent-child relationships" (page 421). Another study by Schaefer (2010) wound up in the same place saying, "Despite recurrent efforts, so far no study has been able to convincingly show that [mandatory] parent education programs have any effect on children's well-being."

Again, there is not much relevant research about what *does* work when it comes to getting parenting resources into the hands of those that really need it.

### **Family Ministry in the WELS**

If we turn our attention to what has been studied and written about this topic in the WELS, we also see a scant amount of information about *how* to connect families with



Christian parenting materials. That doesn't mean, however, that our church body has nothing to say about family ministry. In fact, when it comes to advocating for and increase in ministry to families, the WELS has a lot to say.

Pastor Wayne Mueller presented a family ministry paper to delegates at the South Central District Convention (1994), describing the need "to provide a positive, well-defined model for pastors and congregations who are anxious to help families" (page 2). That same year, Nelson (1994) wrote that "family ministry is nothing new. Bringing family members closer to Christ, each other, and the church is what WELS churches have been doing for many years" (Page 20).

Those two examples illustrate that the need to minister to families is nothing new in the WELS. The need, however, is becoming more acute. Numerous WELS publications, such as Christ-Light religion curriculum, along with a variety of parenting books available through Northwestern Publishing House and the monthly Forward in Christ articles aimed at parenting, give evidence that equipping parents with Christian parenting materials is more crucial now than ever before. Still the question remains, "*How* do we connect them to these materials?"

### **Summary**

While one can find literature that supports the benefits of parenting classes for parents of young children, this is not true when it comes to finding literature that describes how to best connect parenting resources those who would benefit from them. Clearly the need for parenting materials is growing greater, and the urgency of finding ways to connect parents with materials and programs that could help them is more acute now than ever before.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The WELS LES is in a unique position to have a proactive influence on the family and to be able to connect school families with helpful Christian parenting resources. This study was designed to investigate what our WELS LES's are currently doing to make those connections happen and to identify strategies to increase the likelihood that parents will take advantage of both spiritual and practical growth opportunities.

This chapter will include a description of the subjects I surveyed and interviewed, as well as how I selected the subjects. I'll share my research questions and the survey that I used to seek answers to those questions. I'll describe how I went about administering the survey and how the data was collected. I will also describe the subjects that were part of my three focus groups, how they were selected, and how the data was collected from those meetings. This chapter will include the process I used to analyze the data I collected and how I arrived at the conclusions and recommendations contained in this project. Finally, I'll share some limitations and weaknesses that are inherent with the type of methodology I employed.

#### **Research Questions**

1. As WELS schools strive to meet the spiritual and practical parenting needs of its school families, what resources are currently being used?
2. Which strategies are being used to connect school families to the resources they need?

3. What obstacles are cited by LES administrators and ECE Directors for delivering these resources to families?
4. What are the main obstacles cited by parents for not making use of these resources?

### **Research Design and Procedures**

The research design was to be a descriptive study of the resources and strategies currently being employed by WELS LES's as they strive to meet the spiritual and practical parenting needs of their school families. I also wanted to gauge the perceived need for additional resources and strategies as schools across the WELS enroll more and more children from families with non-biblical worldviews. Finally, my research had the goal of identifying the greatest obstacles that keep schools from connecting parenting resources to the parents that need them.

With the help of the WELS Commission on Lutheran School (CLS), I was able to secure the email addresses for all WELS elementary school principals and early childhood ministry directors (630 emails). I sent two separate email messages to these individuals (Appendix B). The first email introduced the participants to me and to the research study, and it included a link to the survey with a deadline for completion. The second email served as a reminder to those who had not yet participated and a thank you to all participants for their efforts.

As part of the survey, principals were asked whether they would be willing to be interviewed as a follow up to the survey. The principals and directors who agreed to a follow up interview were contacted by email (Appendix C) to arrange a time to talk on the phone. The follow up interviews were done via a phone call. The purpose of asking

followup questions (Appendix D) was to dig further to uncover potential new approaches to connecting parents with Christian parenting resources. The interview notes were documented, and written summaries of each phone call are included in this project.

Three focus group meetings were planned in order to collect additional information. The focus groups were made up of six to eight parents each. The focus group parents completed a brief survey (Appendix F) of potential obstacles for attending school-sponsored growth offerings. The survey results were used to guide large group brainstorming discussions on possible ways to remove the obstacles for parents. Comments were recorded by a group secretary (Appendix H). The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain specific feedback about obstacles that might interfere with parents taking advantage of spiritual and practical growth opportunities.

### **Population and Sample**

With the assistance of the CLS office, I sent an email to all WELS LES principals and ECM directors (630 emails) and asked them to participate in this study. A total of 181 responses were recorded. Of the responses, 106 were WELS principals, 53 were early childhood directors, 11 were pastors, 4 were teachers, 4 were office staff, and 3 were volunteer members. Responses were anonymous unless the participant agreed to a follow up interview and provided contact information. There were 57 of the 181 responders who indicated that they would be willing to have a follow up interview. Of the 57, I identified 29 to contact (via email) to set up a time to talk on the phone. I chose to contact the responders who showed evidence of possibly having new insights or new approaches to family ministry. For example, if the responder connected attendance at growth offerings to school tuition, I wanted to follow up to see how that was structured

and whether it was successful. I also wanted to speak with those who made some of their growth opportunities mandatory, or who showed evidence of having a more comprehensive plan for family ministry in place (a repeated cycle of offerings for example). Of the 29 principals and directors I contacted, I was able to set up phone conversations with 11.

In addition, parents from St. Matthew's Lutheran School (my current school) were randomly selected to participate in three focus groups of six to eight parents each to discuss possible ways to remove obstacles that prevent parents from participating in school-sponsored growth opportunities. Two parents with children in each of the following grade groupings were randomly chosen using a stratified random selection: primary (3K-4K), lower (K-2), middle (3-5), and upper (6-8). Parents who were selected were emailed about the opportunity and then contacted by phone to secure a commitment to attend. In all, 38 parents were part of the focus groups.

### **Instrumentation**

Survey data was collected using an electronic Google Forms survey. The survey contained mostly check boxes or multiple-choice questions. I chose this approach so that I could quantify the data easily and analyze it more objectively.

I personally transcribed the data from the follow up phone interviews as I listened to the responses.

Data from the focus group meetings consisted of a brief paper and pencil survey from each attendee, and hand-written notes transcribed by volunteer recorders who were at the meetings. The brief survey results (Table 3) and the comments (Appendix H) were summarized and are listed by category according to the order on the brief survey.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The Google Forms survey automatically compiled the responses and produced a spreadsheet as well as useful charts and graphs of the data. Part of my analysis of the survey results involved simply looking at the quantitative data to see how our WELS LES and ECM's are currently doing family ministry, and part of the analysis was a search for possible trends or new approaches that might help connect parents to the resources they need. As I analyzed the data, I looked for responses that suggested something other than offering a one-time program to parents.

I also analyzed the survey responses that had to do with removing obstacles for parents to attend growth offerings in order to see if any schools were trying new ideas or methods. In the focus group meetings, I asked specific questions about how schools might remove such obstacles. I analyzed the responses by looking for common themes shared by the different focus groups.

Finally, part of the data I analyzed came from notes taken during phone conversations with principals and early childhood ministry directors whose electronic surveys hinted at potential new approaches or programs for carrying out family ministry.

I used the results of my analyses to draw conclusions supported by the data, and from those conclusions I suggested recommendations for enhancing what our LES's do to serve today's families.

### **Limitations**

In trying to keep the online survey brief, I limited the amount of specific questions that may have given me more insight into new ideas and trends related to connecting Christian parenting materials to school families. The information that I was

able to gather from the follow up phone conversations and the focus group meetings was extremely insightful, and I feel a greater number of phone conversations and more focus group meetings would have yielded even more worthwhile information.

### **Summary**

This research project is intended to accurately portray the current state of family ministry in our schools and to suggest alternative approaches that might more successfully connect parents to the resources they need. To gather data, I sent an electronic survey to WELS principals and early childhood ministry directors. I augmented that data through face-to-face focus group meetings of parents from the school that I serve in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. I analyzed the quantitative data and looked for trends in the verbal feedback I received. From those trends I drew conclusions and developed recommendations for family ministry in our WELS LES's.

## Chapter IV: Results

### Introduction

An online survey was given (Appendix A), and focus group meetings were held to investigate what our WELS LES's are currently doing to connect today's school families with the Christian parenting resources they need and to identify strategies that increase the likelihood that parents will take advantage of both spiritual and practical growth opportunities.

### Changing Landscape

630 emails were sent to principals and early childhood directors. There were a total of 181 responders (29%). The first part of the survey asked responders how they've seen the need for family ministry change over their years in the ministry (Table 1).

Table 1	
Over your years of service, how have you seen the need for family ministry change?	
<u>Response Choice</u>	<u>Response Tally (Percentage)</u>
There is a greater need now than in the past.	148 (81.8%)
The need has not changed significantly.	33 (18.2%)
There is less of a need now than in the past.	0 (0%)

In their opinion, is there a greater need now than in the past, has the need stayed relatively the same, or is the need less now than in the past? A large majority of the responders (the 81.8%) said that there is a greater need now than when they first began their ministries. This seems to accurately reflect the Barna data that shows there is a shrinking number of practicing Christians (only 17%) who identify with a biblical worldview (Barna, 2015), and it also aligns with the enrollment trends we're seeing in our WELS schools (WELS Growth-Drop Statistics, 2018). Clearly, our WELS LES



and ECM leaders agree that they see a greater need for family ministry today than when they first began their ministries. As one responder put it, “This is a very timely subject, as more and more the family dynamics are changing. The nuclear family is under attack and has so many more pressures. I wish that we had a greater focus on this.”

The 181 responders were also asked to assess *how* their approach to family ministry has changed over the years (Table 2).

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Response Choice</u>	<u>Response Tally (Percentage)</u>
1	We've increased the number of growth opportunities for our families.	96 (53%)
2	Our approach hasn't changed over the years.	58 (32%)
3	We have decreased the number of growth opportunities offered to our parents.	14 (7.7%)
4	We've designated one or more growth opportunities as mandatory for our parents.	13 (7.2%)
5	We have increased our spending on family ministry programs.	47 (26%)
6	Other	8 (4.4%)

Those surveyed were given six choices, including an “other” choice, and they were asked to check all items that applied to them in their settings. A large majority of responders indicated that they have strengthened their approach to family ministry in at least one way. There were 114 responders who checked at least one of the following items (1, 4, 5, 6). The most common item checked showed that schools and child care centers have increased the number of growth opportunities for families (96 responders, or 53%).

Interestingly, 32% said that their approach to family ministry hasn't changed over the years. Concerning is the fact that 35 of the responders (19.3%) who said that the need is greater now than in the past in the first question also indicated that they have not changed their approach to family ministry over the years. The question is "Why not?"

Although this data does not provide a definitive answer to that question, there are a few clues. Of the 19.3% (35 responders) listed above, almost all of them also agreed or strongly agreed (in section 4 of the survey) that they have a need for more Christian parenting materials, a comprehensive family program, or a called Family Minister to help meet the needs of their families. In other words, it could be that these leaders need help in order to change their approach and adequately meet the needs of their school families.

Eight responders offered "other" ways that their approach to family ministry has changed. Two of them indicated that they've called a pastor to specifically work in this area. Two others said that they increased their efforts at intentionally making personal invitations to parents.

### **Growth Opportunities Offered**

The next part of the survey asked responders to indicate which of the following were offered to parents who enrolled their children in their LES or ECM: Bible Information Classes (BIC), Abbreviated BIC, Topical Bible Studies geared toward parents, Parenting Classes / Workshops, and an Introduction to Lutheran Education (Chart 1). Most WELS LES's and ECM's surveyed offered a BIC to parents, with a majority of those ministries making it available as an option. Only 11 of the 181 surveyed did not offer a BIC at all. More than half (60.2%) offered an abbreviated BIC, with 90 (49.7%) offering both.

More than half of those surveyed did not offer Topical Bible Studies, Parenting Classes, or some sort of Introduction to Lutheran Education to the families they served (59.7%, 59.1%, 69.6%).

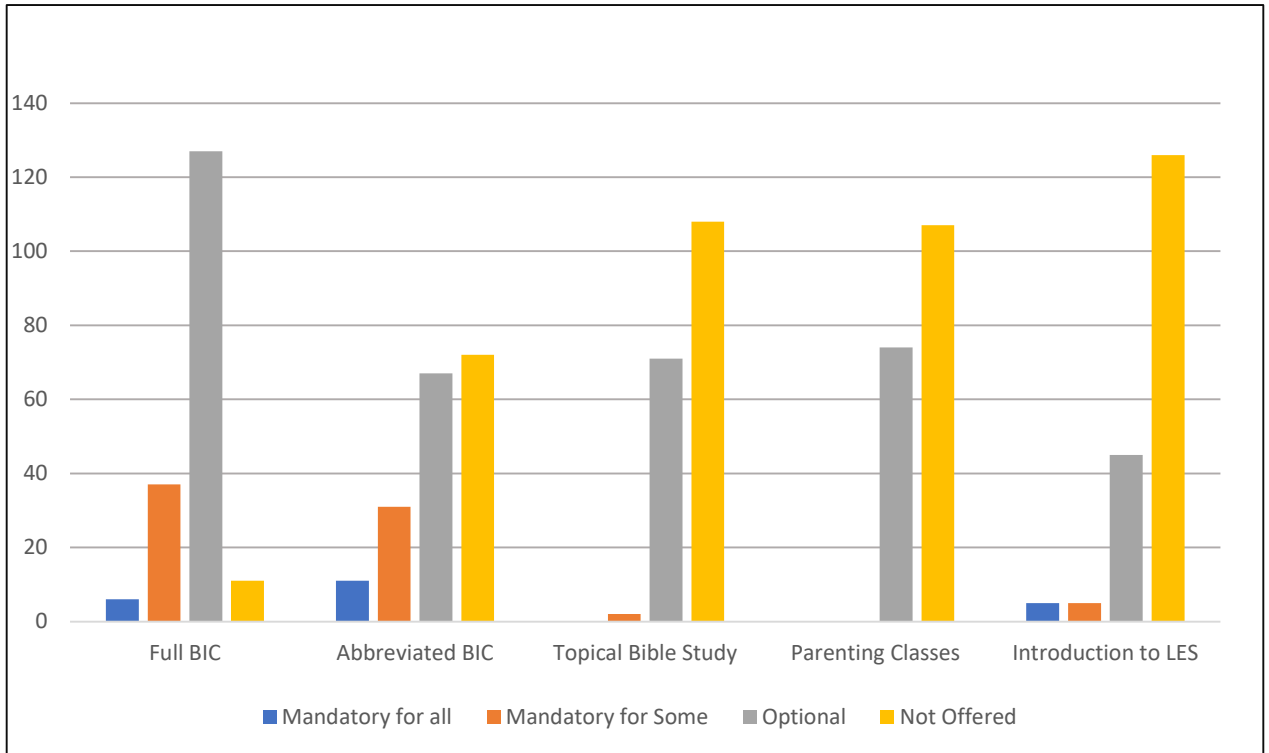


Figure 1: Growth Opportunities

**What’s Being Done to Encourage**

Participants were provided a list of possible ways that parents might be encouraged to attend LES-sponsored or ECM-sponsored growth opportunities (BIC, Bible Study, Parenting Class, etc.). Each responder was to check all of the strategies employed in his or her setting. As one might guess, “Free Child Care” (60.2%) and “Food is Provided” (67.4%) were the most often checked ways to encourage attendance. The next three significant responses had to do with clearing the school calendar of conflicting

events (48%), offering the growth opportunities more than once (47.5%), and giving personal, one-on-one encouragements (45.3%).

Many of the LES's and ECM's took multiple steps to promote attendance.

Although relatively small in comparison to the other responses, it's perhaps significant to note that 17 responders (9.4%) indicated that they connected attending growth opportunities with school tuition. This could potentially point to an emerging trend that may underscore the importance that schools are placing on parent involvement in growth opportunities.

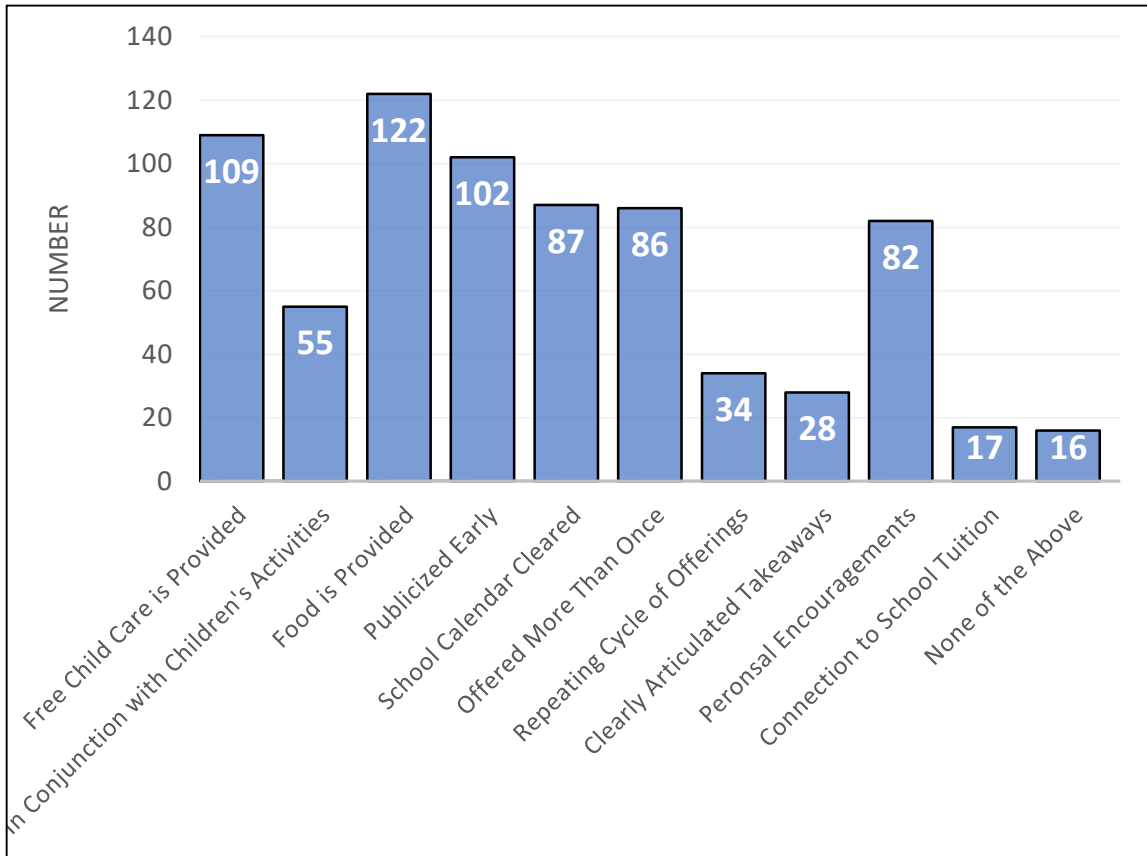
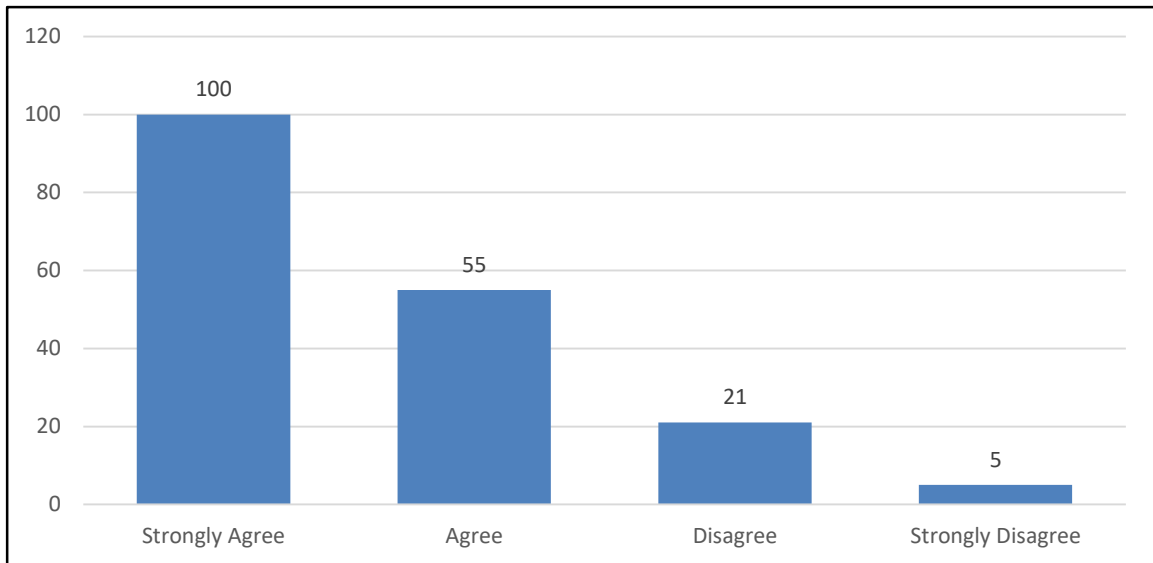


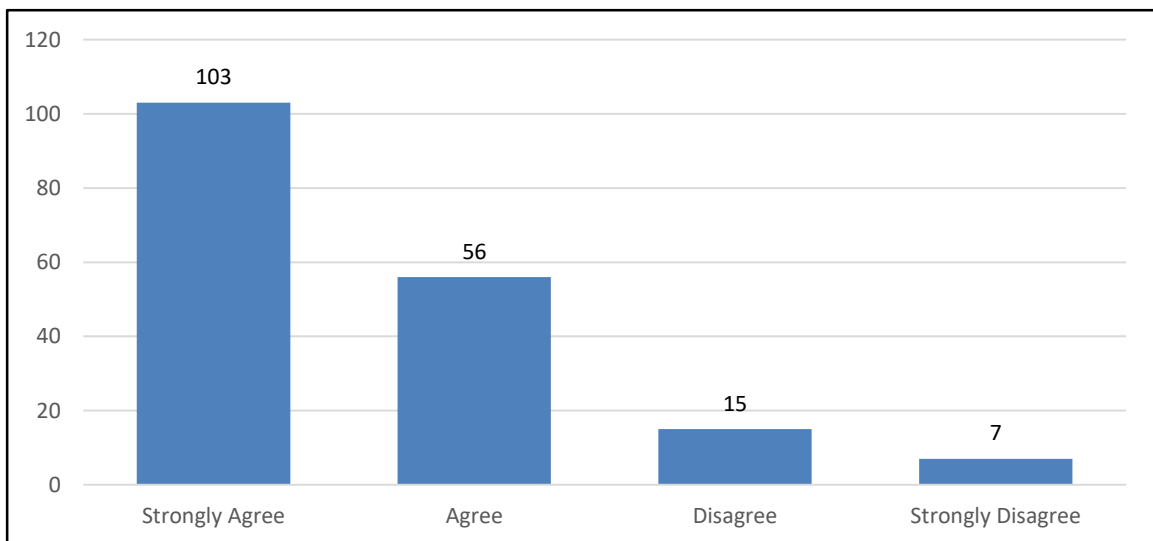
Figure 2: How Do You Encourage?

### Needs of the LES and ECM Today

In the next section of the survey, responders were asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree on four statements about family ministry resources. A brief summary of the results of this portion of the survey is that our LES's and ECM's agree that more resources are needed at their settings to meet the needs of the families under their care. Results are below.



*Figure 3: There is a need for more Bible studies aimed at parents with young families (181 responses)*



*Figure 4: There is a need in my setting for more Christian parenting programs (181 responses)*

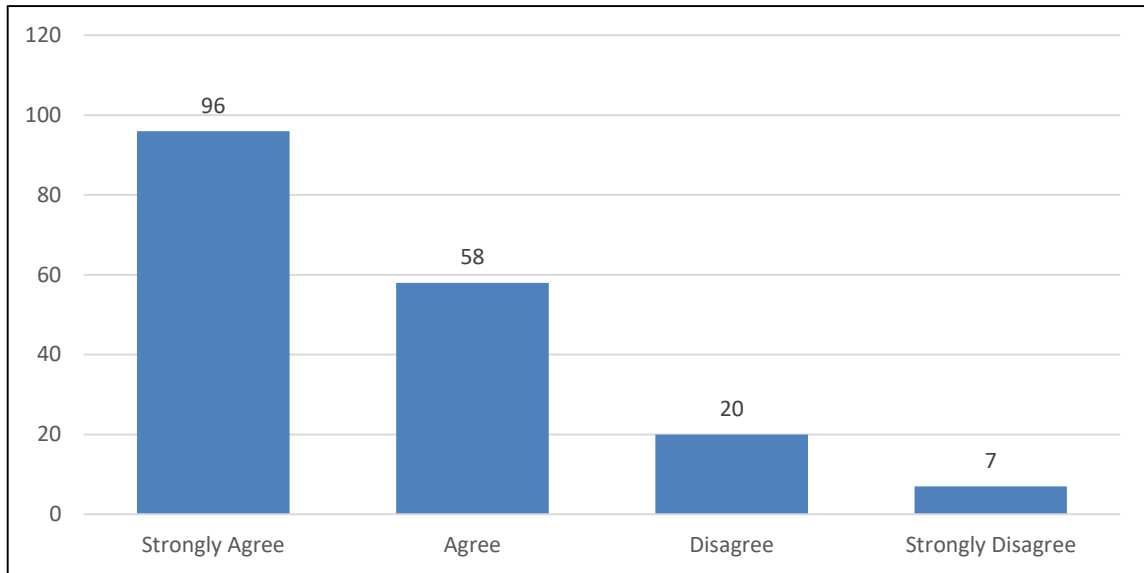


Figure 5: There is a need in my setting for a comprehensive family ministry program (181 responses)

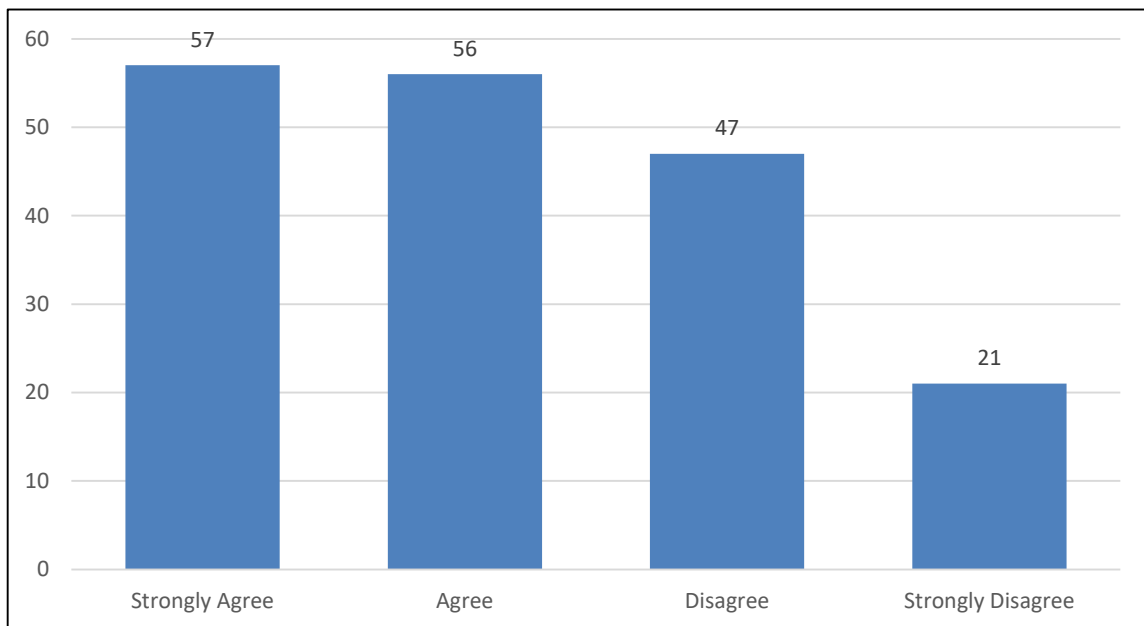


Figure 6: There is a need in my setting for a called Family Minister to help meet the spiritual and practical needs of today's families (181 responses)

## Leaders

Those surveyed were asked whether or not their ministry setting has a person or group whose call or duty it is to organize and encourage family ministry. Most (58.6%) did not have a called person designated to carry out family ministry. The remaining

41.4% of responders indicated that there was a person or group in charge of family ministry, with the largest response being pastors (20%), followed by volunteer groups (8%), and teachers or hired workers (7%).

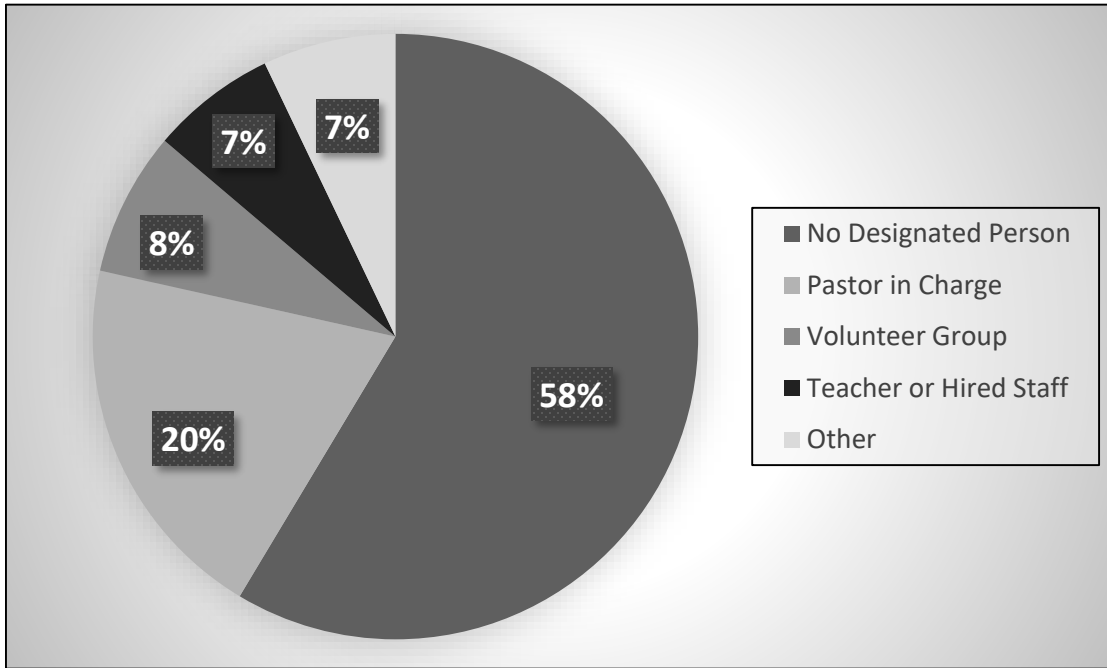


Figure 7: Does your ministry have a person or group whose call or duty it is to organize and encourage family ministry?

### Follow Up Phone Conversations

One of the questions that was part of the online survey was whether the responder would be willing to have a follow up phone conversation on the phone with me. 57 of the 181 responders indicated that they would be willing. Of the 57, I identified 29 that I wanted to contact (via email) to set up a time to talk. I chose to contact the responders who showed evidence of possibly having new insights or new approaches to family ministry.

Of the 29 principals and directors I contacted, I was able to set up phone conversations with 11 (Appendix G). Of the eleven, six were principals, one was a pastor, and three were early childhood directors. I asked all of the people I called what they did

for family ministry that was “intentional.” I also asked each of them to share what was the most important thing they did for encouraging parents to take advantage of growth opportunities. I had many good conversations and was encouraged by many gifted and passionate men and women who are working so hard to minister to the families that God has placed in their midst.

Although the sample size was limited and there wasn’t a lot of quantitative data from the phone calls, the follow up conversations did bear some fruit. First, the answers I received substantiated the data from the surveys. Each of the people I talked to saw a great need for family ministry in their setting. Second, I learned that our ministry leaders place a premium on building relationships with the parents they serve. A majority listed this as the most important activity they do to connect families with the Christian parenting resources they need.

### **Focus Group Survey Results**

Part of my research involved randomly selecting parents from different grade levels to be part of three focus groups that would provide feedback to me about what they felt were the greatest obstacles to parents attending growth opportunities, and what were possible ways to eliminate those obstacles.

At the focus group meetings, the parents were welcomed, and the purpose of the meeting was shared. After that, each participant was given a short survey to complete. The survey (Appendix F) listed six potential obstacles to parents attending growth opportunities and an “Other” category. Parents were asked to rank each one on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being a small obstacle and 5 a large obstacle. The results totaled from all three focus group sessions are shown in Table 3.



<u>Item</u>	<u>Obstacle</u>	<u>Average Rank</u>
a.	Time/Schedule	4.0
b.	Need for Child Care	2.1
c.	A feeling that there is a need for what will be learned	4.1
d.	Interest in the Topic	4.3
e.	Cost	2.4
f.	Who the Presenter Is	2.7
g.	Other	4.0

It should be noted the one of the three focus groups did not meet in person. There was a snow storm on the night of the first focus group meeting. Those who were scheduled to meet were given the option to provide the feedback via email or attend one of the remaining two focus group sessions. In all, between the email responders and focus group meetings, there were 38 participants who took part.

According to the focus group written survey, there was a strong consensus that an interest in the topic and an awareness that the topic could provide for a need were key factors in deciding to attend a growth opportunity. While these were key factors for the focus group attendees, it's interesting to note that only 15.5% of the responders to the online survey put effort into clearly articulating to parents how a growth opportunity could strengthen the family. Perhaps it's not enough to simply provide food and child care.

In addition to wanting to know about how the topic could benefit them, the focus group members felt that time constraints and busy schedules were key obstacles to attending growth opportunities. The data seems to suggest that busy parents want to know

what they will gain from what's being offered. If we don't communicate that to them, they likely won't attend because they have other things to do.

Cost, who the presenter was, and the need for child care were deemed less important in a parent's decision to attend a growth opportunity. At the focus group meetings, I asked the parents why child care was ranked so low, when it seemed to me to be one of the most critical factors in being able to attend. According to the participants in both focus groups, they didn't rank free child care as very important because it is offered at virtually any event we host for parents. For our setting at least, free child care is an expected norm.

The most noteworthy "Other" obstacle was the parent's learning style. It was important to parents that they were comfortable with how the event would be structured. Would the group be large or small? Would information be simply shared by a presenter or would it be a small group workshop? It was important to the attendees to know this information before deciding to attend.

### **Focus Group Discussion Results**

Following the brief written survey, the large group was separated into small groups of three-five people, and each smaller group was asked to brainstorm possible ways to overcome each of the obstacles on the survey (plus any of the "other" obstacles that were listed by their group members. After allowing ample time to thoroughly discuss each item, we convened again as a large group and discussed each obstacle separately. Many ideas were shared. Two of the parents at each meeting served as secretaries and recorded all of the comments.

There were several repeated themes that addressed the top obstacles (Time/Schedule, Having a Need for the Learning, and Interest in the Topic). In the discussion on the Time/Schedules obstacle, a large majority of the input that was repeated in each group meeting related to technology. Parents wondered if the school could create a virtual “Google Hangout” where parents could access online parenting resources and also discuss common issues with other parents. One suggested dividing parents in small online discussion groups or “pods” based on interest or common need. It was clear from this input that these parents saw a need for an alternative to traditional face-to-face meetings.

As far as communicating to parents how a growth opportunity could fill need or benefit the family, several participants suggest that it would be wise to market the value of the offering by sharing what others have said about it (testimonials) and by communicating the expected take-aways and benefits many times prior to the event. The participants encouraged using Facebook and short email blasts to communicate the benefits instead of simply sending out the times and dates. It was also suggested that the school survey parents about their needs before planning growth opportunities.

One group suggested attaching a nominal charge to each offering, even if it wasn’t necessary, in order to convey value and secure commitment to attend.

Other ideas that were mentioned included providing take-home materials for parents and/or providing the resources online so they might be accessed from home whether or not the parent would be in attendance at the event.

One main theme of note came out of the discussion of “Other” obstacles. There was a consensus at each focus group meeting that the learning preferences or styles of the

attendees is extremely important. Some people would rather attend offerings if there are a lot of other people present because they might not have to speak and could simply listen and learn. Others don't like large groups because they are intimidated by them and would prefer to be part of an intimate smaller group where they might feel safer in sharing their thoughts. Additionally, some people are visual learners, and some learn better by listening or talking or doing. To meet these many needs, the attendees suggested planning a variety of formats for the growth opportunities that are offered.

### **Data Analysis**

There were several types of data that I analyzed. The most quantitative data was gleaned from the online survey. This data was tabulated and organized automatically for me by the Google Forms application. Most of the data was very straightforward and allowed for ease in summarizing. For example, the data clearly shows that the need for family ministry is increasing (Table 1), and there is a need for more Bible study and parenting materials (Figures 3-5)

Some of the data from the Google Forms survey required more interpretation and further digging to draw conclusions. An example of that can be seen in Figure 2, where "Personal Encouragements" ranked high among methods that responders used to encourage attendance at growth offerings. Did that element get marked often because responders felt it was something everyone just does in a general sort of way, or is there more to it? As it turned out, the follow up phone conversations that I had drove home the point that "Personal Encouragements" is part of a growing emphasis on building relationships with the families that are being served. Most of the phone conversations I had cemented that fact for me.

Other data was more difficult to quantify, but in many ways more insightful. Examples of this type of data analysis came from the follow up phone conversations and the focus group meetings. Hearing people talk about what is needed and what is important is much more meaningful than reading responses from a survey. The drawback, of course is that there is subjectivity involved on the part of the analyst. In order to avoid some of the subjectivity, the comments I have chosen to highlight in this project were ones that garnered consensus from others. I chose to underline those comments in the phone conversation summaries (Appendix G) as well as in the focus group summaries (Appendix H).

### **Summary**

I collected and analyzed data from an online survey returned by 181 principals and early childhood directors, and I documented 3 input from 3 focus group meetings and eleven follow up phone conversations. I shared the research questions I asked, how I selected my subjects, and how I analyzed the data was collected. Although there were some limitations and weaknesses inherent in the type of methodology I employed, I was able to gather enough useful data to draw meaningful conclusions and develop appropriate recommendations.

## **Chapter V: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this project was to carry out a descriptive study of the family ministry that is currently being carried out in our WELS LES's and ECM's. I sought to discover the types of resources that are currently being used to meet the spiritual and practical parenting needs of young families. I also wanted to find out what strategies are being used to connect families to the resources they need and what obstacles might be keeping those connections from happening. Finally, I wanted to identify some trends in the data, which might be useful as we strive to identify ways to better serve our school and early childhood families. Through this research, my hope was to be able to draw some conclusions and recommendations for the future as our WELS ministries continue to provide for the Christian parenting needs of the families they serve.

### **Summary of the Results**

The results of the online survey showed that our principals and early childhood ministry directors feel strongly that we have a growing need for family ministry in our schools and centers and a shortage of applicable resources with which to conduct that ministry. Today's parents will attend growth opportunity events if the benefits are clearly articulated to them and if the meetings are structured in ways that meet their learning styles. They are more likely to make use of Christian parenting resources if they are available online. There is a pronounced emphasis in our schools and early childhood ministries on building relationships with families so we can better serve them.

## Conclusions

Several conclusions were derived from this descriptive research project, and the recommendations that follow reflect those conclusions.

**WELS LESs aren't keeping up with the growing need to provide spiritual and practical help to the families they serve.** Based on the large majority of responders (81%) who felt that there is a greater need for family ministry now than in the past, and the fact that over half of those surveyed don't offer parenting courses beyond a BIC class, we conclude that our WELS LES's aren't keeping up with the spiritual and practical needs that their families have. Responders clearly supported this conclusion by agreeing that more Bible studies, Christian parenting programs, comprehensive parenting plans, and manpower is an urgent need in their settings.

**Schools and child care centers need to put more effort into conveying to parents the value of the growth opportunities that are offered.** Some conclusions can also be drawn about *how* our LES and ECM ministries are connecting parents to growth opportunities. The most common strategies (provide free food and child care) are no longer the only strategies we should employ. With family schedules more hectic than ever, parents don't just attend an event because it's being offered, even if there is food and free child care. Today's parents weigh the value of the event against other commitments and programs they or their children are involved in. Schools and child care centers need to put more effort into conveying to parents the value of the growth opportunities that are offered.

**More than ever, today's called workers need to intentionally strive to make personal connections with the families they serve.** An important conclusion can be

made about the need for developing personal relationships with the families being served. Nearly every LES or ECM leader that was interviewed cited “developing personal relationships” as the most important aspect of ministering to families. Again, as mentioned previously, this is not a new concept. Ministry has always been about people. However, the data is showing us that there is a need to re-emphasize this fundamental concept. Whose task is it to carry out family ministry? Is family ministry one person’s responsibility or everyone’s? In one very important sense, family ministry is everybody’s responsibility. Ministry is, and always has been, all about people. Clearly, my conversations with school and center leaders, although anecdotal, reaffirmed the importance of building personal relationships. With busy schedules and technology that often makes face-to-face conversation seem unnecessary, it’s easy for school and center leaders to focus more on their voluminous to-do lists than on building relationships with the people they serve. More than ever, today’s called workers need to intentionally strive to make personal connections.

**There is clearly a need for one person to be in a family ministry leadership position.** Even as my research reaffirmed the importance of building these personal relationships, it also drove home the importance of having one person in a leadership position to organize programs and events, promote the value of the growth opportunities, and encourage staff to make personal connections. The survey respondents indicated a need for a called Family Minister to meet the spiritual and practical parenting needs of today’s parents (62.4%). The growing importance of family ministry suggests that it can’t be an add-on “duty” for already harried called workers, but a specific and key part



of a called position. So, is family ministry one person's responsibility or everyone's? The answer is "Yes."

**The need to minister to families is more urgent than ever.** At this juncture, one could argue that family ministry has always been, and will continue to be, a great need and focus of ministry; and therefore, re-evaluating our approaches is a waste of time and energy. However, that would be ignoring some significant changes that have occurred in the last 25 years. Consider how our WELS focus on young families has ballooned with the explosion of early childhood ministries and how an increased emphasis on using our schools for outreach has changed the makeup of families enrolling their children in our LES's (WELS Growth-Decline Statistics, 2018). Couple that with plummeting percentage of families in our country that claim to have a Christian worldview (Barna, 2015), and it's easy to conclude that the need to minister to families is more urgent than ever.

**Still another conclusion that might be emerging is that the LES and ECM are beginning to view family ministry as an integral part of what they do.** This is evidenced by the call for more study resources and more comprehensive family ministry programs. Another trend that shows the importance being placed on family ministry is that LES ministries are choosing to make growth opportunities mandatory for parents, and some are even tying participation in growth opportunities to tuition or service hours. While the sample size is small, it's not a stretch to forecast that more LES and ECM ministries will consider making family ministry an even greater part of their overall ministries.

**We can't continue to carry out ministry to school families as we have in the past.** Taken together, the points above lead to the conclusion that a status quo approach to family ministry will not do. There aren't enough hours in the day to be reactive and put out the fires as they happen to spring up. That has been the default approach for our WELS ministries in the past, and we can't continue to operate this way and meet the needs of today's families. And maybe more importantly, we *shouldn't* continue to operate this way. Rather, we should see the opportunities God is placing in our path for what they are: opportunities! We can either continue to shake our heads at societal decay, bemoan the crumbling family structure, and put all our energy into putting out family fires; or we can begin looking for ways to be proactive and intentional with our ministry to families. Following is list of recommendations drawn from this research.

### **Recommendations for WELS Congregations**

- Raise awareness – The plight of families that are raising children in households where Jesus is absent and practical parenting skills are woefully lacking, is real. As one survey responder put it, “I believe this topic will be the number issue facing our synod schools in the next decade.” This would be a good time for principals and directors to re-examine how they are intentionally meeting the Christian parenting needs of their families. As principals and directors focus on reaching out to their communities, they need to also be making proactive plans to minister to the families they enroll.
- Continue to offer BIC or Abbreviate BIC – The survey results were clear that the BIC is the most important spiritual growth opportunity we offer to parents.

- Cultivate a family ministry mindset – Intentionally building relationships, listening, and following up on “red flags” are purposeful actions that classroom teachers, who are on the front lines of ministry, can, and should, take. As we build relationships with families, we earn the “right” to counsel them or encourage them to seek help. Principals and Directors need to plan opportunities for pastors and teachers to meet and talk with families.
- Consider revising the WELS Teaching Standards to include this key component of a teacher’s service? Considering the importance of our ministry to families and how family strength can either help or hinder the learning that takes place in the classroom, would it make not make sense to revise Standard Ten of the WELS Teaching Standards (Christian teachers are connected with colleagues and the community), to include the element, “Takes an interest in the families being served, builds positive relationships with parents, is sensitive and responsive to signs of distress, and encourages scripturally sound growth opportunities and appropriate professional services.”
- Promote the benefits of the classes and workshops you offer – Tell parents what they will get out of the growth offering. Be specific. Share what others say about the offering. Tell why an event is important and repeat that message often. Don’t just share the date and time.
- Consider developing a repeating cycle of growth opportunities – If something works, consider offering it again on a regular basis.
- Consider offering growth opportunities more than once in a variety of ways to address different learning styles and comfort levels of parents.

- Explore the wisdom and implications of connecting parent participation in growth opportunities to school tuition or service hours. Is there enough “meat” in your parent offerings to support a claim that participation in the offerings will strengthen your school families and therefore your school, too? Could this approach eliminate the embarrassment that might be keeping those who desperately need help from attending parenting workshops?
- Don’t make more meetings for families if that can be helped. Use Sunday mornings or be creative with the timing of the class that’s being offered. For example, offer a meal to parents so they don’t have to cook and clean up at home; or ask your teens to wrap Christmas presents and take care of children while the parents attend a growth offering.
- Use technology to meet the needs of today’s tech saavy parents. Consider making materials and presentations available online. If experts aren’t available to give presentations in your area, consider live-streaming them to your facility.

### **Recommendations for Synodical leadership**

- Continue to produce Christian parenting materials – It would be best if a variety of audiences could be considered. For example, materials specific to young families with no children, families with children 0-4, families with multiple households, families with teens and pre-teens, or single parent/caregiver families.
- Consider developing a comprehensive Christian parenting “curriculum” – An intentional plan for ministry means going beyond the “What should we offer this year?” strategy and organizing a well-laid out cycle of growth offerings that parents can count on.

- Train “Family Ministers” to serve our various WELS ministries – Whether this is a redesign of the Staff Minister position or an area of concentration in a teacher’s training, there is a need for leadership in this crucial area.
- Investigate methods of using technology to connect parents to the resources and courses of study that they need. For example, create podcasts of parenting workshops, consider an expanded use of counseling resources like WLCFS’s Member Assistance Program, or consider the possibility of developing a future Christian parenting series that is video-based, ala the popular Grace Talks videos.

### References

- Barna Group. (2017). Competing World Views.  
<https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/>.
- Chang, M., Park, B., and Kim, S. (2009). Parenting classes, parenting behavior, and child cognitive development in Early Head Start: a longitudinal model. *The School Community Journal*, 2009, Vol. 19, No. 1.
- Damrad, A.E. (2006). Evaluating a parent training program: scale analysis and the effects of systematic training for effective parenting (STEP) on child and parent behavior. ProQuest Information and Learning Company, Ann Arbor, MI.
- Davis, Deborah. (2000). Supporting parent, family, and community involvement in your school. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Portland, OR.
- Duppong-Hurley, K., Hoffman, S., Barnes, B., & Oats, R. (2016). Perspectives on engagement barriers and alternative delivery formats from non-completers of a community-run parenting program. *Journal of child and family studies*, 25(2), 545-552.
- Eccles, J. S., & Harold, R. D. (1996). Family involvement in children's and adolescents' schooling. In A. Booth & J. F. Dunn (Eds.), *Family–school links: How do they*

affect educational outcomes? (pp. 3-34). Hillsdale, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

- Fay, Charles. (2012). Effects of the Becoming a Love and Logic Parent training program on parents' perceptions of their children's behavior and their own parental competence: a preliminary investigation. *Golden, CO: The Love and Logic People*.
- Growth-Divide 95-2017 (2018). [Graph illustration of the number of WELS elementary students compared with the number of other Christian and unchurch students from 1995-2017]. *Growth-divide 95-2017*. Retrieved from Commission on Lutheran Schools, Pewaukee, WI.
- Holt, Amanda. (2010). "Managing 'spoiled identities': parents' experiences of compulsory parenting support programmes." *Children & Society* 24, no. 5 (September 2010): 413-423.
- Jaafar, W. M. B. W. and Momtaz, Y. A. (2011). The effects of Behavioural Parent Training Program on families of children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Life Science Journal*. 8. 263-268.
- Jafarov, J. (2015). Factors affecting parental involvement in education: the analysis of literature. *Khazar Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 18(4).
- Mueller, W. (1994). Family ministry. Presented at the South-Central District Convention, Oklahoma City, OK.
- Nelsen, J. A. (1994). Profiles of ministry: family minister. *The Lutheran Educator*, Volume 35, Number 1, October 1994.
- Park, S., & Holloway, S. D. (2017). The effects of school-based parental involvement on academic achievement at the child and elementary school level: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Educational Research*, 110(1), 1-16. <https://doi-org.emil.mlc-wels.edu/10.1080/00220671.2015.1016600>
- Schaefer, T. (2010). Saving children or blaming parents? Lessons from mandated parenting classes. *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, (2), 491.
- Wilder, S. (2014). Effects of parental involvement on academic achievement: a meta-synthesis. *Educational Review*, 66(3), 377-397. <https://doi-org.emil.mlc-wels.edu/10.1080/00131911.2013.780009>

### **Appendix A: Family Ministry Survey**

Thank you for taking the time out of your schedule to complete this survey!

\* Required

#### **"Family Ministry"**

For the purposes of this survey, we will define "family ministry" as all programming that is done to meet the spiritual and practical needs of parents.

#### **1. Your Landscape**

Over your years of service, how have you seen the need for family ministry change? \*

Mark only one oval.

- There is a greater need now than in the past.
- The need for family ministry has not changed significantly.
- There is less of a need now than in the past.

Over your years of service, how has the approach to family ministry changed in your setting? (check all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- We've increased the number of growth opportunities for our families.
- Our approach hasn't changed over the years.
- We have decreased the number of growth opportunities offered to our parents.

- We've designated one or more growth opportunities as mandatory for our parents.
- We have increased our spending on family ministry programs.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Growth Opportunities Offered

For each growth opportunity available to the parents of your LES or ECM, please mark whether it is mandatory for all, mandatory for some, optional, or not offered. \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Mandatory for All	Mandatory for Some	Optional	Not Offered
Full Bible Information Class that teaches fundamental Biblical truths.				
Abbreviated Bible Information Class or Introduction to Lutheranism				
Topical Bible studies geared for parents with young children.				
Parenting Classes or Workshops				
Introduction to Lutheran Education				
Grade Level Orientation Meetings - Offered to parents as children enter various grade levels.				

## 3. Encouraging Growth

How do you encourage school parents to attend school-sponsored growth opportunities? \*

Check all that apply.

- Free child care is provided.
- Children's activities are held in conjunction with the growth opportunity.
- Food is provided.
- Growth opportunities are publicized at least 1 month in advance.



- The school calendar is cleared of conflicting events.
- Growth opportunities are offered more than once during the year.
- There is a repeating cycle of growth offerings.
- How the growth opportunity will strengthen the family is clearly articulated.
- Personal, one on one encouragements are given.
- Participation is connected to school tuition.
- None of the above.

#### 4. Resources

There is a need in my setting for more topical Bible studies aimed at parents with young families. \*

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

There is a need in my setting for more Christian parenting programs. \*

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

There is a need in my setting for a comprehensive family ministry program. \*

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

There is a need in my setting for a called Family Minister to help meet the spiritual and practical parenting needs of today's families. \*

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

#### 5. Leaders

Does your ministry have a person or group whose call or duty it is to organize and encourage family ministry? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, family ministry is specified in a pastor's call.
- Yes, family ministry is specified in a teacher's call.
- Yes, this is a specific duty assigned to one of our called or hired workers.
- No, we do not have a person specifically designated to carry out family ministry.
- Yes, a volunteer group has this responsibility.
- Other:

## 6. Final Questions

Would you like to receive a copy of the results and recommendations from this study? If so, provide email address below. \*  
Check all that apply.

- Yes
- No

Please share any other pertinent comments about family ministry in the space below.

Would you be willing to have a phone conversation to elaborate on parts of the survey if I would desire some additional information? If so, provide email address below. \*  
Check all that apply.

- Yes
- No

Are you a \*  
Check all that apply.

- Principal?
- Early Childhood Ministry Director?
- Other:

Email Address (optional)

## The Survey Link

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Evo\\_GwE5T1n\\_6EtFdVbLsq7-BL4mHzhU16cKkt3akNE/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Evo_GwE5T1n_6EtFdVbLsq7-BL4mHzhU16cKkt3akNE/edit?usp=sharing)



## **Appendix B: Survey Emails**

### **First Email**

Hi. I'm WELS principal Eric Ziel.

I'm trying to help my school families grow in faith and get more involved in my school, St. Matthew's, Oconomowoc, WI. Can you take about 10 minutes to help me learn what you have found works or what doesn't? Even if you don't have any formal programs in place, I want to hear from you. Your responses are anonymous unless you wish to share your email with me at the end of the survey. Please click [THIS LINK](#) to get started.

Thanks so much!

Eric Ziel

### **Second Email**

Hi. I'm WELS principal Eric Ziel.

You may recall receiving an email from me last week. If you have not already done so, I would love to have you take part in the research that I'm conducting. If you have already taken this survey, thank you! God's blessings on your ministry in 2019!

Please click [THIS LINK](#) to get started. Thanks so much!

Eric Ziel

**Appendix C: Email to Potential Interviewees**

Greetings!

Back in January I sent out a survey to all WELS principals and ECM directors as part of my Master's Capstone Project. The survey asked questions about Family Ministry. Your responses were very helpful and I'm hoping you can provide further insight into the topic I'm researching. You indicated a willingness to have a follow up conversation, and I would like to schedule a time to talk with you on the phone in the next week if possible. Here are some time slots that would work on my end. Would you be able to select one of those and reply with your phone number? The time frames are wide, so feel suggest a specific time that works for you. The call should take no more than 5-10 minutes).

Thank you for considering this request! If you aren't able to help, I understand!  
May God bless your ministry to Him this spring!

Please select one of the times frames below. If you want a specific time, please indicate the time. Otherwise I will email you a time (All times are CENTRAL TIME ZONE).

## **Appendix D: Personal Interview Questions**

### Introduction

1. Thank the interviewee for being his/her willingness to be interviewed.
2. Explain that the purpose of the interview is to dig further to uncover new approaches to connecting parents with Christian parenting resources.

### Interview Questions

1. What “intentional” activities specifically related to family ministry do you carry out?
2. Of all that you do to encourage families to take advantage of growth opportunities, what is the single most important thing you do?

### Closing

1. Thank the person for taking time for the interview.
2. Wish him/her God’s blessings in their ministry efforts!

### **Appendix E: St. Matthew's Focus Groups (3)**

#### Introduction

1. Thank the participants for being part of the focus group.
2. Explain the purpose of the focus group: to provide feedback insight into the prevailing obstacles that hinder school parents from taking advantage of biblically-based parenting offerings and suggest possible strategies for overcoming those obstacles.

#### Questions for the St. Matthew's Focus Groups

1. Ask the focus group participants to fill out a brief rating survey on paper that asks which of the listed factors are the most important in deciding whether to take advantage of growth opportunities. The following categories will be listed, and parents will be asked to rate each on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being low importance and 5 being high importance.
  - a. Time / Schedule
  - b. Need for child care / babysitter
  - c. A feeling that there is a need for what will be learned
  - d. Interest in the topic
  - e. Cost
  - f. Other
2. Discuss the rating survey.
3. Taking each of the factors on the list, as well as any "other" factors that were added, brainstorm possible ways to keep the factors from becoming obstacles.
4. Thank the participants for attending.

**Appendix F: Focus Group Survey**

When it comes to deciding whether or not to take advantage of spiritual or practical growth opportunities when they are offered by the school or church, which factors are most important to you?

Please rate each of the following on a 1-5 scale, with 1 being a very low importance and 5 being a very high importance.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Time / Schedule
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Need for child care / babysitter
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ A feeling that there is a need for what will be learned
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Interest in the topic
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Cost
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ Who the presenter is
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ Other



## Appendix G: Summary of Follow Up Phone Interviews

### School A - Principal

**What family ministry activities do you carry out that are “intentional” activities?**

We offer a BIC, an Introduction to Lutheran Education class, and we hold grade level orientation meetings. Those who take a BIC class get a sizeable tuition break. Family ministry is part of the principal’s call this year.

**Of all that you do to encourage families to take advantage of parenting offerings, what is the single most important thing you do?**

Building relationships with families is the most important thing we do.

### School B - Principal

**What family ministry activities do you carry out that are “intentional” activities?**

We currently hold two levels of mandatory classes for school parents. The first level is for parents of Kindergartners or parents new to the school and serves as an introduction to Lutheran education. The second level is meant for parents of children in the middle to upper grades and addresses, among other things, positive peer relationships, preparing for high school, and developing personal spiritual growth habits. We have a BIC that is mandatory for all families. We are part of the WLCFS Member Assistance Program. We also make the Parents Crosslink periodical available to our families.

**Of all that you do to encourage families to take advantage of parenting offerings, what is the single most important thing you do?**

Offer growth opportunities on Sunday mornings during our Bible class time.

### School C - Pastor

**What family ministry activities do you carry out that are “intentional” activities?**

The pastor greets parents at the school doors every morning and has opportunities to talk and invite to growth opportunities. We hold BIC classes on the same night throughout the year. For parents that attend, the BIC classes count toward mandatory service hours that each parent has. We are part of the WLCFS Member Assistance Program. We hold “Morning with Mom” and “Morning with Dad” events to all us to get to know the parents and moms and dads to get know each other. As part of those events we have a chapel service, donuts and coffee afterward, and then about 30 minutes of games for the kids when the moms and dads can get to rub shoulders and get to know each other. We offer parenting presentations by expert guests that either come personally or present over from distance using technology.

**Of all that you do to encourage families to take advantage of parenting offerings, what is the single most important thing you do?**

By far the most important thing is building connections with the families we serve so we can personally invite them to different growth opportunities.

**School D - Principal****What family ministry activities do you carry out that are “intentional” activities?**

Our child care leaders use the Cradle Roll materials with parents. We hold a Kindergarten Night as well as a First and Second Grade Night in the spring. We also hold a Registration Night for all parents with classroom breakout sessions in the fall. We offer links to daily devotions and online sermons. We also offer a BIC to all parents.

**Of all that you do to encourage families to take advantage of parenting offerings, what is the single most important thing you do?**

Offer free childcare for parents.

**School E - Principal****What family ministry activities do you carry out that are “intentional” activities?**

We offered a course on the Luther’s Small Catechism and encouraged parents to bring a friend that was familiar with Lutheranism. We put the presentations on dvd and made them available to those who weren’t able to attend.

**Of all that you do to encourage families to take advantage of parenting offerings, what is the single most important thing you do?**

Get to know the parents and their needs.

**School F - Principal****What family ministry activities do you carry out that are “intentional” activities?**

We called a pastor to help formalize opportunities for families to connect with each other. We have a big school/family get together each year. For example, this year we rented the local city pool just for our families and used the time we had to help families make connections. Individual classroom teachers do similar team building activities with their classroom parents each year. We started a mentor program, but that needs work yet. We have our teachers all make positive phone calls a couple of times each year to each of their families.

**Of all that you do to encourage families to take advantage of parenting offerings, what is the single most important thing you do?**

Get to know the parents and their needs. Ministry is people.

**School G - Principal****What family ministry activities do you carry out that are “intentional” activities?**

We have held grade-level orientation meetings for parents at the 3K/4K, Kindergarten, First Grade, Third Grade, Fifth Grade, and Seventh Grade levels. Each meeting would be comprised of both scriptural and practical applications for parents. For example, at the Kindergarten meeting the topics might be, “Why are family devotions important at this age level?” and “Why should you be reading with your child?” For Third Grade and up,

we met with the students first and shared information with them, and then we met with the parents to tell them, “Here’s what we shared with your children.” Topics might cover “Building Christian Relationships,” or “The Importance of Church Attendance.”

**Of all that you do to encourage families to take advantage of parenting offerings, what is the single most important thing you do?**

[Didn’t ask]

#### **Center A - Director**

**What family ministry activities do you carry out that are “intentional” activities?**

We hold events to connect people to our church and to God’s Word. We try to earn the right to invite them to worship. We don’t do much more than that. We are in an outlying area, so getting speakers to come and present to our parents is difficult.

**Of all that you do to encourage families to take advantage of parenting offerings, what is the single most important thing you do?**

Get to know the parents and their needs.

#### **Center B - Director**

**What family ministry activities do you carry out that are “intentional” activities?**

At enrollment we ask about church home and whether their children are baptized. We put together a pictorial directory of families so that everyone can get to know each other and so our pastor can connect names to faces as he greets them in the mornings. We hold a weekly chapel service and an adult Bible class afterwards. We host parenting programs such as Love and Logic and the Dave Ramsey money management course.

**Of all that you do to encourage families to take advantage of parenting offerings, what is the single most important thing you do?**

We offer personal encouragements to attend the adult Bible class that is offered every week after chapel.

#### **Center C - Director**

**What family ministry activities do you carry out that are “intentional” activities?**

We hold special events for parents during the year in order to get to know them better and build relationships with them. We hold a Christmas service each year that we invite the parents to. We hold the Christmas service between our 8:00 and 10:30 worship services. We have a summary of the week’s religion lesson in the parent newsletter and include links in the newsletter for more information or videos on the Bible story.

**Of all that you do to encourage families to take advantage of parenting offerings, what is the single most important thing you do?**

The most important thing we do is to connect the families we serve with God’s Word.

#### **Center D - Director**

**What family ministry activities do you carry out that are “intentional” activities?**

Our pastor is at our center every day at arrival or pick up time to meet and talk with parents. We host events throughout the year to bring families to our site and build relationships with each other and with us.

**Of all that you do to encourage families to take advantage of parenting offerings, what is the single most important thing you do?**  
Build people relationships.

## Appendix H: Summary of Focus Group Discussion

### Time / Schedule

- ⇒ “Hold events between sports seasons.”
- ⇒ “Poll parents about the time of day that works.”
- ⇒ “Archive events so parents can watch them later.”
- ⇒ “Provide multiple time/date options.”
- ⇒ “Create a Google Hangout for parents with similar needs.”
- ⇒ “Use technology to provide parents the ability to participate from anywhere.”
- ⇒ “Consider tech-based participation for parents who have trouble attending.”
- ⇒ “Make the resources available online even if people can’t attend the event.”

### Need for Child Care

- ⇒ “Have teens serve and assist adults when you offer free childcare.”

### A feeling that there is a need for what will be learned

- ⇒ “Use email blasts to send parent notes on the topics they’re interested in or concerned about. Make the notes practical!”
- ⇒ “Provide take-home materials when possible.”
- ⇒ “Getting something out of it (a growth opportunity) is important. Offering take-home stuff or setting up an event so that it saves time for parents...like [providing] supper for parents so they don’t have to cook and clean up.”
- ⇒ “Try using word of mouth encouragement to tell about how beneficial a topic is.”
- ⇒ “Be smart with marketing your event. Say why it is important.”
- ⇒ “Share testimonials from past attendees.”
- ⇒ “Develop a ‘feeling’ that there is a need for the topic... is it highly rated by others?”
- ⇒ “Families don’t know what is ‘normal’ so they need to be taught.”
- ⇒ “Have family get-togethers to address what the issues are before they grow.”
- ⇒ “Explain: Here is what the benefits are.”
- ⇒ “Share testimonials.”
- ⇒ “Give people examples of how they might align to the topic. Share positive outcomes and statements.”
- ⇒ Focus on Christian offerings and other benefits to bring families in and see if they will join the church.”

### Interest in the Topic

- ⇒ “Communicate often! Have daily or weekly communication.”
- ⇒ “To see if there is interest in the topic, do a ‘pre-survey.’ Ask, ‘What do you struggle with?’”

⇒ Share teasers through Facebook sharing.”

### Cost

⇒ “It shows a value if there is a charge attached.”

⇒ “Do a mix of charge vs. not charged to get a variety of people.”

⇒ “We already pay tuition”

⇒ “Pay a nominal fee for a commitment or tell attendees that the fees are being covered.”

⇒ “Mix cost vs. free events.”

### Who the Presenter Is

⇒ “Credentials of speakers matter.”

### Other

⇒ “Set up family “pods” of 3-4 families who can gather together for parenting support.”

⇒ “Provide food.”

⇒ The size of group is important. Some [people] are intimidated by small groups, some by large groups.”

⇒ “Location makes a difference.”

⇒ “Create a culture of learning and growth in church /sermons.”

⇒ “Provide alternative approaches to impact different learning styles.”