Improved Search for $\bar{\nu}_\mu \to \bar{\nu}_e$ Oscillations in the MiniBooNE Experiment


(MiniBooNE Collaboration)

The MiniBooNE experiment at Fermilab reports results from an analysis of $\bar{\nu}_e$ appearance data from $11.27 \times 10^{20}$ protons on target in the antineutrino mode, an increase of approximately a factor of 2 over the previously reported results. An event excess of $78.4 \pm 28.5$ events $(2.8\sigma)$ is observed in the energy range $200 < E_{\nu} < 1250$ MeV. If interpreted in a two-neutrino oscillation model, $\bar{\nu}_\mu \to \bar{\nu}_e$, the best oscillation fit to the excess has a probability of 66% while the background-only fit has a $\chi^2$ probability of 0.5% relative to the best fit. The data are consistent with antineutrino oscillations in the $0.01 < \Delta m^2 < 1.0$ eV$^2$ range and have some overlap with the evidence for antineutrino oscillations from the Liquid Scintillator Neutrino Detector. All of the major backgrounds are constrained by in situ event measurements so nonoscillation explanations would need to invoke new anomalous background processes. The neutrino mode running also shows an excess at low energy of $78.0 \pm 47.8$ events $(3.4\sigma)$ but the energy distribution of the excess is marginally compatible with a simple two neutrino oscillation formalism. Expanded models with several sterile neutrinos can reduce the incompatibility by allowing for CP violating effects between neutrino and antineutrino oscillations.

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There is growing evidence for short-baseline neutrino anomalies occurring at an $L/E_{\nu} \sim 1$ m/MeV, where $E_{\nu}$ is the neutrino energy and $L$ is the distance that the neutrino traveled before detection. These anomalies include the excess of events observed by the Liquid Scintillator Neutrino Detector (LSND) [1] and MiniBooNE [2–4] experiments and the deficit of events observed by reactor [5] and radioactive-source experiments [6]. There have been several attempts to interpret these anomalies in terms of $3 + N$ neutrino oscillation models involving three active neutrinos and $N$ additional sterile neutrinos [7–12]. (Other explanations include, for example, Lorentz violation [13] and sterile neutrino decay [14].) A main goal of MiniBooNE was to confirm or refute the evidence for neutrino oscillations from LSND. Of particular importance is the MiniBooNE search for $\bar{\nu}_\mu \to \bar{\nu}_e$ oscillations since this was the channel where LSND observed an apparent signal. This Letter presents improved results and an oscillation analysis of the MiniBooNE $\bar{\nu}_e$ appearance data, corresponding to $11.27 \times 10^{20}$ protons on target in the antineutrino mode, which is approximately twice the anti-neutrino data reported previously [4].
Even though the first goal of this article is a presentation of the improved antineutrino results, a secondary goal is to contrast and compare these results with improved MiniBooNE neutrino measurements and, therefore, the details of both the neutrino and antineutrino analysis will be given. Since the original neutrino result publication [3], improvements to the analysis have been made that affect both the $\nu_e$ and $\bar{\nu}_e$ appearance search. These improvements are described and used in the analyses presented here.

The neutrino (antineutrino) flux is produced by 8 GeV protons from the Fermilab booster interacting on a beryllium target inside a magnetic focusing horn set at positive (negative) polarity. In the neutrino (antineutrino) mode, positively (negatively) charged mesons produced in $p$-$\text{Be}$ interactions are focused in the forward direction and subsequently decay primarily into $\nu_\mu$ ($\bar{\nu}_\mu$). The flux of neutrinos and antineutrinos of all flavors is simulated using the neutrino mode, the $/C_{23}e$ photomultiplier tubes charge and time information.

For neutrino interactions in the detector or interactions in the external surrounding material. The estimated size of the intrinsic $\nu_e$ and gamma backgrounds are tied to MiniBooNE event measurements and uncertainties due to these constraints are included in the analysis. The intrinsic $\nu_\mu/\bar{\nu}_\mu$ background from muon decay is directly related to the large sample of observed $\nu_\mu/\bar{\nu}_\mu$ events since these events constrain the muons that decay in the 50 m decay region. (The $\nu_\mu/\bar{\nu}_\mu$ CCQE data sample, in the 200 $< E_\nu^{\text{QE}} < 1900$ MeV energy range, includes 115,467 and 50,456 neutrino and antineutrino events, respectively.) This constraint is accomplished using a joint fit of the observed $\nu_\mu/\bar{\nu}_\mu$ events and the $\nu_e/\bar{\nu}_e$ events assuming that there are no substantial $\nu_\mu/\bar{\nu}_\mu$ disappearance oscillations. The other intrinsic background $\nu_e$ component from $K$ decay is

The signature of $\nu_\mu \rightarrow \nu_e$ and $\bar{\nu}_\mu \rightarrow \bar{\nu}_e$ oscillations is an excess of $\nu_e$ and $\bar{\nu}_e$-induced CCQE events. Reconstruction [17] and selection requirements of these events are almost identical to those from previous analyses [3,4] with an average reconstruction efficiency of $\sim 10$–$15\%$ for events generated over the entire volume of the detector. Recent improvements to the analysis include a better determination of the intrinsic $\nu_e$ background from $K^+$ decay through the measurement of high-energy neutrino events in the SciBooNE experiment [18], a better determination of NC $\pi^0$ and external event backgrounds in the antineutrino mode due to the increase in statistics of the antineutrino mode data sample, and the use of a likelihood fit with frequentist corrections from fake data studies for both the neutrino-mode and antineutrino-mode analyses. The detector cannot distinguish between neutrino and antineutrino interactions on an event-by-event basis. However, the fraction of CCQE events in the antineutrino (neutrino) mode that are due to wrong-sign neutrino (antineutrino) events was determined from the angular distributions of muons created in CCQE interactions and by measuring CC single $\pi^+$ events [19].

The predicted $\nu_e$ and $\bar{\nu}_e$ CCQE background events for the neutrino oscillation energy range $200 < E_\nu^{\text{QE}} < 1250$ MeV are shown in Table I for both the neutrino mode and antineutrino mode. MiniBooNE does not have the electron versus gamma particle identification capabilities to determine whether observed events are due to charged-current (CC) electron events, as expected for an oscillation signal or intrinsic beam $\nu_\mu/\bar{\nu}_\mu$ background, or to background gamma events from neutral-current (NC) interactions in the detector or interactions in the external surrounding material. The Table also shows the diagonal-element systematic uncertainties due to these constraints are included in the analysis. The intrinsic $\nu_e/\bar{\nu}_e$ background from muon decay is directly related to the large sample of observed $\nu_\mu/\bar{\nu}_\mu$ events since these events constrain the muons that decay in the 50 m decay region. (The $\nu_\mu/\bar{\nu}_\mu$ CCQE data sample, in the 200 $< E_\nu^{\text{QE}} < 1900$ MeV energy range, includes 115,467 and 50,456 neutrino and antineutrino events, respectively.) This constraint is accomplished using a joint fit of the observed $\nu_\mu/\bar{\nu}_\mu$ events and the $\nu_e/\bar{\nu}_e$ events assuming that there are no substantial $\nu_\mu/\bar{\nu}_\mu$ disappearance oscillations. The other intrinsic background $\nu_e$ component from $K$ decay is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Neutrino mode</th>
<th>Antineutrino mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\nu_\mu$ &amp; $\bar{\nu}_\mu$ CCQE</td>
<td>$37.1 \pm 9.7$</td>
<td>$12.9 \pm 4.3$</td>
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<tr>
<td>NC $\pi^0$</td>
<td>$252.3 \pm 32.9$</td>
<td>$112.3 \pm 11.5$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC $\Delta \rightarrow N\gamma$</td>
<td>$86.8 \pm 12.1$</td>
<td>$34.7 \pm 5.4$</td>
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<tr>
<td>External events</td>
<td>$35.3 \pm 5.5$</td>
<td>$15.3 \pm 2.8$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other $\nu_\mu$ &amp; $\bar{\nu}_\mu$</td>
<td>$45.1 \pm 11.5$</td>
<td>$22.3 \pm 3.5$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\nu_e$ &amp; $\bar{\nu}_e$ from $\mu^-$ decay</td>
<td>$214.0 \pm 50.4$</td>
<td>$91.4 \pm 27.6$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\nu_e$ &amp; $\bar{\nu}_e$ from $K^+$ decay</td>
<td>$96.7 \pm 21.1$</td>
<td>$51.2 \pm 11.0$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\nu_e$ &amp; $\bar{\nu}_e$ from $K_L^0$ decay</td>
<td>$27.4 \pm 10.3$</td>
<td>$51.4 \pm 18.0$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other $\nu_e$ &amp; $\bar{\nu}_e$</td>
<td>$3.0 \pm 1.6$</td>
<td>$6.7 \pm 6.0$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total background</td>
<td>$797.7$</td>
<td>$398.2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.26% $\nu_e \rightarrow \bar{\nu}_e$</td>
<td>$233.0$</td>
<td>$100.0$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE I. The expected (unconstrained) number of events for the $200 < E_\nu^{\text{QE}} < 1250$ MeV neutrino oscillation energy range from all of the backgrounds in the $\nu_e$ and $\nu_e$ appearance analysis and for an example 0.26% oscillation probability averaged over neutrino energy for both the neutrino and antineutrino modes. The table also shows the diagonal-element systematic uncertainties whose effects become substantially reduced in the oscillation fits when correlations between energy bins and between the electron and muon neutrino events are included.
Antineutrino

The gamma background in situ determined by in situ π0 production mainly from Δ decay or Δ → Nγ radiative decay [22] is constrained by the associated large two-gamma data sample (mainly from Δ production) observed in the MiniBooNE data [23]. In effect, an in situ NC π0 rate is measured and applied to the analysis. Single-gamma backgrounds from external neutrino interactions (“dirt” backgrounds) are estimated using topological and spatial cuts to isolate these events whose vertex is near the edge of the detector and points toward the detector center [3].

Systematic uncertainties are determined by considering the predicted effects on the νμ, ν̅μ, νe, and ν̅e CCQE rate from variations of parameters. These include uncertainties in the neutrino and antineutrino flux estimates, uncertainties in neutrino cross sections, most of which are determined by in situ cross-section measurements at MiniBooNE [20,23], uncertainties due to nuclear effects, and uncertainties in detector modeling and reconstruction.

A covariance matrix in bins of EQE is constructed by considering the variation from each source of systematic uncertainty on the νe, and ν̅e CCQE signal, background, and νμ and ν̅μ CCQE prediction as a function of EQE. This matrix includes correlations between any of the νe and ν̅e CCQE signal and background and νμ and ν̅μ CCQE samples, and is used in the χ2 calculation of the oscillation fits.

Figure 1 (top) shows the EQE distribution for ν̅e CCQE data and background in the antineutrino mode over the full available energy range. Each bin of reconstructed EQE corresponds to a distribution of “true” generated neutrino energies, which can overlap adjacent bins. In the antineutrino mode, a total of 478 data events pass the ν̅e event selection requirements with 200 < EQE < 1250 MeV, compared to a background expectation of 399.6 ± 20.0(stat) ± 20.3(syst) events. For assessing the probability that the expectation fluctuates up to this 478 observed value, the excess is then 78.4 ± 28.5 events or a 2.8σ effect. Figure 2 (top) shows the event excess as a function of EQE in the antineutrino mode.

Many checks have been performed on the data, including beam and detector stability checks that show that the neutrino event rates are stable to <2% and that the detector energy response is stable to <1% over the entire run. In addition, the fractions of neutrino and antineutrino events are stable over energy and time, and the inferred external event rate corrections are similar in both the neutrino and antineutrino modes.

The MiniBooNE antineutrino data can be fit to a two-neutrino oscillation model, where the probability, P, of ν̅μ → ν̅e oscillations is given by P = sin22θ sin2((1.27Δm2L/Eν)), sin22θ = 4|Ueμ|2|Ueμ|2, and

FIG. 1 (color online). The antineutrino mode (top) and neutrino mode (bottom) EQE distributions for ν̅e CCQE data (points with statistical errors) and background (histogram with systematic errors).

Δm2 = Δm2 = m2 − m2. The oscillation parameters are extracted from a combined fit of the observed EQE event distributions for muonlike and electronlike events. The fit assumes the same oscillation probability for both the
right-sign $\bar{\nu}_e$ and wrong-sign $\nu_e$, and no significant $\nu_\mu$, $\bar{\nu}_\mu$, $\nu_e$, or $\bar{\nu}_e$ disappearance. Using a likelihood-ratio technique [4], the confidence level values for the fitting statistic, $\Delta \chi^2 = \chi^2(\text{point}) - \chi^2(\text{best})$, as a function of oscillation parameters, $\Delta m^2$ and $\sin^2 2\theta$, is determined from frequentist, fake data studies. The critical values over the oscillation parameter space are typically 2.0, the number of fit parameters, but can be as low as 1.0 at small $\sin^2 2\theta$ or large $\Delta m^2$. With this technique, the best antineutrino oscillation fit for $200 < E^{\text{QE}}_v < 3000$ MeV occurs at $(\Delta m^2, \sin^2 2\theta) = (0.043 \text{ eV}^2, 0.88)$ but there is little change in probability in a broad region up to $(\Delta m^2, \sin^2 2\theta) = (0.8 \text{ eV}^2, 0.004)$ as shown in Fig. 3 (top). In the neutrino oscillation energy range of $200 < E^{\text{QE}}_v < 1250$ MeV, the $\chi^2/\text{ndf}$ for the above antineutrino-mode best-fit point is 5.0/7.0 with a probability of 66%. The background-only fit has a $\chi^2$ probability of 0.5% relative to the best oscillation fit and a $\chi^2/\text{ndf} = 16.6/8.9$ with a probability of 5.4%. Figure 3 (top) shows the MiniBooNE closed confidence level (C.L.) contours for $\nu_e$ and $\bar{\nu}_e$ appearance oscillations in the antineutrino mode in the $200 < E^{\text{QE}}_v < 3000$ MeV energy range. The data indicate an oscillation signal region at the greater than 99% C.L. with respect to a no oscillation hypothesis, which is consistent with some parts of the LSND 99% C.L. allowed region and consistent with the limits from the KARMEN experiment [24].

Multinucleon processes and $\nu_e$ and $\nu_\mu$ disappearance can affect the results of the MiniBooNE oscillation analysis. Specifically, nuclear effects associated with neutrino interactions on carbon affect the reconstruction of the neutrino energy, $E^{\text{QE}}_v$, and the determination of the neutrino oscillation parameters [25–27]. These effects can change the visible energy in the detector and the relative energy distribution for the signal and gamma backgrounds. These effects are partially removed in this analysis since the gamma background is determined from direct measurements of NC $\pi^0$ and dirt backgrounds.

In order to estimate the possible effects of a multinucleon-type model, an oscillation fit was performed using event predictions based on the Martini et al. [25] model. The prediction was implemented by smearing the input neutrino energies as a function of reconstructed energy to mimic the behavior of the model. For an estimate of the effects of disappearance oscillations, a $(3 + 1)$ type model was used. Fits were performed where the appearance $\Delta m^2$ and $\sin^2 2\theta_{\text{app}}$ parameters were varied as usual but disappearance oscillations were also included with $|U_{\alpha d}| = |U_{\mu d}| = |U|^2 = \sqrt{\sin^2 2\theta_{\text{app}}/4}$ and with the same $\Delta m^2$. This is a disappearance model where all four types of neutrinos ($\nu_e/\bar{\nu}_e/\nu_\mu/\bar{\nu}_\mu$) disappear with the same effective $\sin^2 2\theta_{\text{disapp}} = 4(1 - U^2)U^2$. A comparison of the results for these models versus the nominal MiniBooNE analysis is given in Table II. Results are presented for the best fit with the given prediction model and for a test point with $\Delta m^2 = 0.5 \text{ eV}^2$ and $\sin^2 2\theta = 0.01$. The difference in $\chi^2$ values for the different prediction models is <0.5 units, suggesting that multinucleon or disappearance effects do not significantly change the oscillation fit and null exclusion probabilities.

Even though the MiniBooNE antineutrino data are a direct test of the LSND oscillation hypothesis, the MiniBooNE neutrino-mode data can add additional information, especially for comparisons to various sterile neutrino models. The previous MiniBooNE oscillation analysis [2] found no evidence for neutrino oscillations in the neutrino mode by fitting over the neutrino energy range $475 < E^{\text{QE}}_v < 3000$ MeV, excluding the low-energy

![Image](image_url)
range, $200 < E_{\nu}^{\text{QE}} < 475$ MeV. The reason for excluding the low-energy region in the original analysis was based on uncertainties for the large gamma background in that region. The subsequent work on constraining the low energy background and making a more accurate assessment of the uncertainties now allow the data below 475 MeV to be used [3]. The neutrino-mode event and excess distributions for $6.46 \times 10^{20}$ protons on target are shown in the bottom plots of Figs. 1 and 2, respectively. In the neutrino mode, a total of 952 events are in the region with $200 < E_{\nu}^{\text{QE}} < 1250$ MeV, compared to a background expectation of $790.1 \pm 28.1_{\text{(stat)}} \pm 38.7_{\text{(syst)}}$ events. This corresponds to a neutrino-mode excess of $162.0 \pm 47.8$ events with respect to expectation or a $3.4\sigma$ excess.

Two-neutrino oscillation model fits to the MiniBooNE neutrino-mode data do show indications of oscillations as shown in Fig. 3 (bottom). In contrast to the antineutrino-mode results, the MiniBooNE favored neutrino-mode region has only small overlap with the LSND region and may indicate that the compatibility between the two is low in a simple two-neutrino model. The best neutrino oscillation fit occurs at $(\Delta m^2, \sin^2 2\theta) = (3.14 \text{ eV}^2, 0.002)$. In the neutrino oscillation energy range of $200 < E_{\nu}^{\text{QE}} < 1250$ MeV, the $\chi^2/\text{ndf}$ for the best-fit point is $13.2/6.8$ with a fairly small probability of 6.1%, and the background-only fit has a $\chi^2$-probability of 2% relative to the best oscillation fit and a $\chi^2/\text{ndf} = 22.8/8.8$ with a probability of 0.5%. As shown in Fig. 2 (bottom), the poor $\chi^2/\text{ndf}$ for the neutrino-mode best fit is due to the data being higher than the expectation at low energy and lower at high energy. This may be due to the limitation of the simple two-neutrino model if the excess is due to oscillations or to some anomalous background at low energy if the excess is related to backgrounds.

In summary, the MiniBooNE experiment observes a total event excess in the antineutrino mode running of $78.4 \pm 28.5$ events ($2.8\sigma$) in the energy range $200 < E_{\bar{\nu}}^{\text{QE}} < 1250$ MeV. The allowed regions from a two-neutrino fit to the data, shown in Fig. 3 (top), are consistent with $\bar{\nu}_\mu \rightarrow \bar{\nu}_e$ oscillations in the $0.01$ to $1$ eV$^2 \Delta m^2$ range and have some overlap with the allowed region reported by the LSND experiment [1]. All of the major backgrounds are constrained by in situ event measurements so non-oscillation explanations would need to invoke new anomalous background processes. The neutrino mode running also shows an excess of $162.0 \pm 47.8$ events ($3.4\sigma$), but the energy distribution of the excess is marginally compatible with a simple two neutrino oscillation formalism. While this incompatibility might be explained by unexpected systematic uncertainties and backgrounds, expanded oscillation models with several sterile neutrinos can reduce the discrepancy by allowing for $CP$ violating effects. On the other hand, global fits [12] with these expanded models show some incompatibility with the current upper limits on electron and muon neutrino disappearance that will need new data and studies to resolve.

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**Table II.** $\chi^2$ values from oscillation fits to the antineutrino-mode data for different prediction models. The best fit ($\Delta m^2$, sin$^2 2\theta$) values are (0.043 eV$^2$, 0.88), (0.059 eV$^2$, 0.64), and (0.177 eV$^2$, 0.070) for the nominal, Martini, and disappearance models, respectively. The test point $\chi^2$ values in the third column are for $\Delta m^2 = 0.5$ eV$^2$ and $\sin^2 2\theta = 0.01$. The effective dof values are approximately 6.9 for best fits and 8.9 for the test points.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Prediction model</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ values</th>
<th>Test point</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominal $\bar{\nu}$-mode result</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martini et al. [25] model</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model with disappearance (see text)</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
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