

PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:
A CASE STUDY

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A Case Study

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Abstract

Cynthia Crites. PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: A CASE STUDY.

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This dissertation is a description of a case study of parent and community involvement and the impact of that involvement on education. The study is based upon the observations, interviews, and reflections of the writer in one elementary school as a plan was implemented to increase parent and community involvement in that school. The primary methods of data collection were structured, open-ended interviews, transcribed minutes from various school-based committees, attendance logs, and event participant logs. The writer interviewed the school's principal, four parents whose children attend the study school, five individual teachers, a focus group of five teachers, the school's guidance counselor, two business partners, and members of the School Council. Findings from the study identified effective research-based, best practices implemented at the study school. Study results indicate that to increase parent and community involvement, schools need supportive administrators, who are willing to involve parents and community members in the decision-making process and who are willing to welcome parents and community members into the school. Additionally, schools need to provide professional training for staff in how to effectively use volunteers in the classroom, in two-way communication with parents, and in the skills needed by teachers to assist parents and community members in moving to the next level of parent and community

involvement. Training programs and initiatives need to be provided by schools to help parents and community members assume a more direct and sustained role in reinforcing and promoting students' academic achievement. Finally, schools desiring to increase parent and community involvement must possess patience and a willingness to change. Suggestions for further research on this topic are also included in this paper.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my husband, Tom, and my children, Kaylynn and Brice, for their unwavering support, their steadfast selflessness, and their enduring love, which encouraged me throughout this journey.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the Study

This dissertation is a report of a case study of parent and community involvement in schools. The study is based upon the observations and reflections of the writer in one elementary school as a plan was implemented to increase parent and community involvement in that school. The first chapter of this dissertation presents the background of the study, specifies the questions of the study, and discusses the professional significance of the study. The conclusion to the first chapter includes a discussion of the definitions of a few key terms.

Background of the Study

The benefits of parent involvement in the schooling of children are well-documented (Epstein & Connors, 1994; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Indeed, there is compelling evidence that parents' interest and support are the primary factors for students' success or failure in school (Berger, 1995). An analysis of 51 studies conducted by Henderson and Mapp (2002) revealed that students with above-median parental involvement had academic achievement rates that were 30 percent higher than were those students with below-median parental involvement. Horn and West (1992) found that levels of parent and community involvement have a strong influence on the drop-out rate among students. Other areas that have been demonstrated to be positively affected by increased parent involvement include students' attendance, attitudes, behavior and higher aspirations (Henderson, 1988; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Heath and McLaughlin

(Epstein, et al., 2002) argued that community involvement is important because the “problems of educational achievement and academic success demand resources beyond the scope of the school and of most families” (Epstein, et al., 2002, p. 30). They identified changing family demographics, demands of the professional workplace, and growing diversity among students as some of the reasons that schools and families alone cannot provide sufficient resources to ensure that all children receive the experiences and support needed to succeed in the larger society (Epstein, et al., 2002). Shore (as cited in Epstein, et al., 2002) stated that “too many schools and school systems are failing to carry out their basic educational mission and are overwhelmed by the social and emotional needs of children who are growing up in poverty” (Epstein, et al., 2002, p. 30). She contended that schools need additional resources to successfully educate all students and that these resources, both human and material, are housed in students’ communities. Despite the consensus among researchers, educators, legislators, and parents regarding the potentially positive effects of parent involvement in schools, there are significant impediments to the full participation of each group of stakeholders (i.e. parents, educators, and community members), who must sometimes be urged, coaxed, legislated, and mandated to get involved (Kerbow & Bernhardt, 1993).

The Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Pub L 103-227), signed into law on March 31, 1994, extended the call for increased involvement in schools to families and the community (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The National Education Goal addressing parental participation indicates that “by the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children” (U.S. Department of

Education, 1998, p. 28). Another goal is the need for partnerships among educational agencies, parents, local labor, business, and professional organizations (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) helps to ensure that all children receive a high-quality education and holds schools responsible for making sure that all children are learning. NCLB requires that parents receive certain information about their child's education—for example, the child's progress in reading, math, and science as well as overall performance of the child's school on state tests in these subjects. In addition to focusing on school performance, NCLB ensures options for students who attend schools that need improvement as shown by those state tests. These schools must let parents know what the parents' choices are for selecting another school for their child (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). But NCLB does more than offer a passing nod to the importance of parent involvement. It mandates it. Every school receiving Title 1 monies must have a parent involvement policy that parents help to create. The parent and community involvement policy should address the following three elements:

- (1) *Collaborative Development*: Parents need to be fully included in the process to develop policy, not just expected to okay the school's proposed policy. The policy should include ways for parent to help decide how Title 1 money is spent.
- (2) *Ability to Work Together*: Parents and educators need opportunities to better understand how to work together across the dividing lines of class and culture. They need support as they learn to work as equal partners with different responsibilities in establishing educational policies.

(3) *Shared Responsibility*: Policies should reflect the shared responsibility for meeting the school's goals, including how school-parent compacts will be developed (Parents for Public Schools, 2003).

In addition, schools which collect more than \$500,000 in Title 1 funds are required to set aside a portion of the funds to pay for programs to reach out to parents and help teach skills parents need to become partners in their child's education (Furger, 2005). Arnold Fege, director of public engagement and advocacy for the Public Education Network (PEN) believes that the parent involvement portion of these funds gets the least attention, money, and personnel (Furger, 2005).

Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was created to bridge the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged children and other children. Title 1 is the largest federal program supporting elementary and secondary education. Because increasing family involvement in children's education is an important goal of Title 1, programs and practices are specified in order for schools to qualify for or maintain funding (Epstein, et al., 2002). Sections of the Title 1 regulations ask schools to communicate with families in various ways; help parents understand the national goals, state standards, and Title 1 programs; offer family literacy programs; integrate Title 1 activities with Head Start and other programs; train teachers to work with families; develop a comprehensive school improvement plan, and involve community groups and agencies (Epstein & Hollifield, 1996).

Because family involvement has been demonstrated to have significant effects upon students' performance, the factors that influence family involvement have become a matter of great interest to educational decision-makers (Feuerstein, 2000). Although the

factors may not be easily influenced, bridges can be and are being built over these barriers. It has become clear that “great schools have strong partnerships with parents” (Million, 2003, p. 6).

Statement of the Problem

Schools can and do influence the level of parent and community participation in students’ education, but school administration must determine the most effective means of overcoming barriers to involvement and to help parents and community members become more engaged with their schools and community. The writer’s school sought to influence the level of parent and community involvement as necessitated by the Georgia School Standard for Student, Family, and Community Involvement and Support, taken from the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement. The setting of this study was designated as a Title 1 school before the start of the 2006-2007 school year. According to the Title 1 Elementary and Secondary Act, Title 1 schools must adopt specific strategies for developing parent and community involvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Guiding Questions

Several questions were posed to facilitate the research for solving the problem of parent and community involvement in schools for this study. The questions formulated to use in this research are as follows.

1. What strategies, based on current research into best practices, increase parent and community involvement in elementary schools?
2. Which of the strategies should be implemented at the study school?
3. What barriers to parent and community involvement must be removed prior

to implementation of these research-based strategies?

4. What can the staff, parents, and community members specifically do to remove the identified barriers to increased parent and community involvement?
5. Which of the strategies implemented by the staff, parents, students, and community members increased parent and community involvement at the study school for the 2006-2007 school year?

Professional Significance of the Study

There are many reasons for increasing parent and community involvement in educational institutions. The most important reason is to help all students succeed in school and in later life. Partnerships between parents, community members, and the school can improve school programs and school climate, provide support and services to families, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and community, and help teachers with their work (Epstein, et al., 2002). The authors of *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*, state that studies indicate that student participation is also crucial for the success of school, family, and community partnerships. In many instances, students are their parents' main source of information about school. In strong partnerships, teachers help students understand and conduct both traditional communications with families (e.g., delivering newsletters or report cards) and new communications (e.g., interacting with family members about homework or participating in parent-teacher-student conferences) (Epstein, et al., 2002).

Through this study, practices and policies that encourage parent and community involvement in the process of schooling were identified and implemented at the writer's school in a real-life setting. The writer hopes to provide guidance for other schools with similar demographics and student body make-up that are working to increase parent and community involvement. Findings may be useful for making informed decisions in growing schools.

The staff in the setting of this study identified, through staff surveys and the *Georgia School Standards Professional Learning Needs Assessment*, a personal and professional need to not only identify research-based best practices for removing barriers to parent and community involvement, but to implement those practices to increase involvement of families and the community in their school. Qualitative research also allowed for openness and flexibility as the study unfolded and emphasized the process of the study rather than the outcomes.

The writer believed it was critical to explore and implement parent and community involvement strategies which are research-based and considered best practice in order to increase parent and community involvement, and most importantly, enrich the educational experience for students, parents, staff, and community members.

Key Terms

Parent and community involvement: If one hopes to improve parent and community involvement in the school, one must first clearly understand the meaning of related terms. For this study, *parent involvement* is defined as Joyce Epstein (1987) broadly defines it. *Parent involvement* is multi-dimensional and includes:

- (1) parents providing a home environment that supports learning;

- (2) communication between parents and teachers on classroom performance;
- (3) parent's active attendance at school activities such as PTO;
- (4) parent's engagement and monitoring of home learning activities;
- (5) and parent's participation in school-based decision-making such as school committees.

Some researchers have made adaptations to Epstein's typology. For example, Mattingly and others (2002) added another category: "parent academic education," such as school-sponsored English as Second Language or Graduate Equivalency Diploma classes (Boethel, 2003, p. 28).

Community involvement is comprehensive and could incorporate:

- (1) local restaurants holding school spirit nights;
- (2) employees of local businesses volunteering at the school, attending school events, or acting as guest speakers in classrooms;
- (3) local businesses recognizing the accomplishments of the students;
- (4) students and their families giving back to the community by displaying student work in the businesses, participating in service projects, and patronizing the businesses;
- (5) and community members acting as student mentors, tutors, or reading buddies.

Joyce Epstein (1995, p. 701) defines *parent and community partnerships* as "the connections between schools, parents, and community individuals, organizations, and

businesses that are forged to directly or indirectly promote students' social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development.”

Parent: The writer must add that many children have adults in their lives, other than mothers and/or fathers, fulfilling or assisting in the parents' role. Within the scope of this study, the use of the term *parent* is not intended to exclude other family members or caring adults who are fulfilling the parental role.

Staff: For the purpose of this study, *staff* will include administrators and all members of the school faculty.

Community Members: Members of the community are individuals or groups of people who live and/or work in the area surrounding the study site. Examples of community members are restaurant owners and employees, employees of the local chicken processing plant, members of a local church's senior citizen group, and high school students who tutor the students at the study site.

The writer feels it is necessary to note at this point in this study several of the authors cited suggest there is a need to explore expanded definitions in the field of parent-community-school involvement. Parent involvement that occurs within various culture and ethnic groups needs to be clarified and defined more succinctly. Recent research studies have found that families often practice forms of parental involvement that mainstream school personnel may not always recognize. For example, a study of marginalized migrant families of highly academically successful students in South Texas found that parents were not involved in the traditional parent involvement activities, such as volunteering at the school or attending school functions. However, they were very involved in that they instilled a strong work ethic in their children and shared their own

experiences to emphasize a good education. Researchers need to build understanding about how involvement varies among different cultural groups and capture those experiences in new definitions of family-community-school involvement (Jordan, et al., 2002). Although there are various terms to describe the participation of parents and community members in students' lives, the writer will be primarily using the term *parent and community involvement* throughout this study.

Summary

Calls for parent and community involvement in schools are not new. The level of parent and community interest is often affected by school-level characteristics. According to Kerbow and Bernhardt (1993), some schools seem to have the ability to promote parent and community involvement, while other schools do not. In order to attempt to understand what accounts for the differences among schools, one should examine both theoretical explanations and empirical evidence (Feuerstein, 2000), which the writer will do in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

This review of literature summarizes theoretical and empirical research discussing barriers to parent and community involvement in elementary schools, ways to overcome barriers, teacher and parent perceptions of parent and community involvement, and methodologies employed in parent involvement literature. Peshkin (1988) suggests that it is important to be aware of our subjective selves and the role that this subjective self plays in research since being aware is better than assuming we can get rid of subjectivity.

Theoretical Implications

One theory that helps to explain the differences in the level of parent and community involvement and barriers to parent and community involvement in schools is social capital. Social capital refers to the norms and networks that enable collective action. Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion — social capital — is critical for poverty alleviation and sustainable human and economic development (The World Bank Group, 2007). Social capital can be used by the poor as a substitute for human and physical capital. It can have a positive impact on the well-being and prosperity of an entire community, not only on the households with a lot of social capital (The World Bank Group, 2007). Social capital increases with use, making it a particularly worthwhile investment. Communities do not exist in a vacuum. A country's political environment, cultural factors and, increasingly, the global economic environment can make it easier for social capital to flourish or fade at the community level. Historical context plays a role in

social capital. In his study of Italy, Robert Putnam (1993) found that many of the economically and socially healthy regions of Italy had a long history of civic engagement strikingly absent from weaker regions (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993).

Francis Fukuyama, in a paper entitled, *Social Capital and Civil Society*, defined social capital as:

“[A]n instantiated informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals. The norms that constitute social capital can range from a norm of reciprocity between two friends, all the way up to complex and elaborately articulated doctrines like Christianity or Confucianism. They must be instantiated in an actual human relationship: the norm of reciprocity exists *in potentia* in my dealings with all people, but is actualized only in my dealings with *my* friends. By this definition, trust, networks, civil society, and the like which have been associated with social capital are all epiphenomenal, arising as a result of social capital but not constituting social capital itself” (Fukuyama, 1999, p. 3).

Learning the meaning of social capital, one may question its origination; where does social capital come from? Social capital is frequently a byproduct of religion, tradition, shared historical experience, and other factors that lie outside the control of government. Public policy can be aware of already existing forms of social capital—for example, the social networks used to develop information for micro lending—but it cannot duplicate the effect of religion as a source of shared values. Policymakers need to be aware that social capital, particularly when associated with groups that have a narrow

radius of trust, can produce negative externalities and be detrimental to the larger society. The area where governments probably have the greatest direct ability to generate social capital is education.

Social capital is produced through education in three fundamental ways. First, social capital is produced as students practice social capital skills, such as participation and reciprocity. Second, social capital is produced as schools provide forums for community activity. Finally, social capital is produced through civic education as students learn how to participate responsibly in society. Education can also promote societal cohesion and strengthen citizenship where children of all socio-economic backgrounds are enrolled in the public education system (The World Bank Group, 2007). Educational institutions do not simply transmit human capital; they also pass on social capital in the form of social rules and norms. This is true not just in primary and secondary education, but in higher and professional education as well. Doctors learn not just medicine but the Hippocratic Oath; one of the greatest safeguards against corruption is to give senior bureaucrats high-quality professional training and to create an *esprit de corps* among this elite (Fukuyama, 1999).

The first known reference to social capital in its contemporary sense was made in the context of its importance for education by L. Judson Hanifan in 1916 (The World Bank Group, 2007). In 1988, James Coleman contributed the first empirical evidence of a relationship between social capital and school drop-out rates. Coleman stated that social capital refers to social networks available to parents that enhance a student's ability to benefit from educational opportunities. Social capital in the family and/or community can help children compensate for a lack of other resources. Family social capital, such as

parents or siblings, helping children with homework regularly, can be an effective buffer against the negative impact of low socio-economic status and low parental education attainment on children's academic outcomes (Coleman, 1988). According to Coleman, all schools have social structures that influence student achievement. However, some schools have stronger relationships with families than other schools do (i.e., possess more social capital); and are therefore able to promote higher levels of achievement. Other factors that influence social capital include the school's understanding of its obligation to students, parents' knowledge of the school system, and the existence of norms that support high student achievement (Feuerstein, 2000).

A second perspective and one of the most widely recognized theories for understanding varying levels of parent involvement in schools, cultural capital, draws on the work of Bourdieu. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that schools draw unevenly on the social and cultural resources of members of society. According to this theory, schools represent and reproduce middle or upper class values, because teachers come from predominantly middle or upper class backgrounds. That bias toward middle or upper class values puts working-class students and parents at a disadvantage because they must attempt to adapt to the dominant culture of the school to meet teacher expectations. That process promotes the involvement of middle and upper class parents and limits the involvement of those with lower socio-economic statuses. This perspective points to the structure of schooling and to family life and the dispositions of individuals to understand different levels of parental participation in schools (Lareau, 1987).

Annette Lareau (1987) borrowed Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital but focused more directly on parent involvement. Lareau stated that indicators of cultural capital

include: (a) amount of interaction a parent has with other parents; (b) parents' understanding of school processes; (c) amount of contact parents have with school personnel; and (d) parents' communication skills. In a qualitative study, Lareau used those indicators to determine that upper middle class parents were more likely to become involved in school activities, whereas working-class parents were more likely to embrace a supportive but less involved role. Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (as cited in Feuerstein, 2000) use the cultural difference theory to discuss the conflict between students' home language and communication styles, and language and communication styles valued in schools. They also found that teachers gave better evaluations of students if their parents were involved in the school (Feuerstein, 2000).

Another theory that helps to explain differences in levels of parent and community involvement was reported by Bowles and Gintis (1976). Those researchers suggested that there are major governance differences among schools in relation to the social class they serve. Schools in working-class neighborhoods tend to be controlled by the school administration, whereas those in wealthy areas support more participatory forms of governance and pedagogy (Feuerstein, 2000). On the basis of that theory, parents from poor communities, in general, are less involved in their schools than are parents from wealthier communities.

The model of overlapping spheres of influence recognizes that there are three major contexts in which students grow and learn: the family, the school, and the community. These three contexts may be drawn together or pushed apart. The external model of overlapping spheres of influence recognizes there are some practices that schools, families, and communities conduct separately and some that they conduct jointly

in order to influence children's learning and development (Epstein, 1995). The internal model of the interaction of the three spheres of influence shows where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individuals at home, at school, and in the community (Epstein, 1995). A framework of six major types of involvement has evolved from many studies and from many years of work by educators and families in elementary, middle, and high schools. The six types of involvement are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community, and can guide the development of a balanced, comprehensive program of partnerships, including opportunities for family involvement at school and at home (Epstein, 1995).

As the writer searched for theoretical models specifically for community involvement with schools, the searches produced no models. In a review by Jordan, Orozco, and Averett (2002), the authors stated that no theoretical model for community connections with schools could be found. These authors state that some models have been developed that focus solely on parent involvement or that integrate family and community connections with schools.

While the strengths and weaknesses of several of these current models in the literature have been examined, Epstein's model is the only one that has undergone extensive research by the research community (Jordan, et al., 2002).

Empirical Review of Literature

There is a growing body of empirical research related to barriers to parent involvement in schools. Societal changes, specifically family compositions have created many demands that serve as barriers to parents' ability and willingness to become

involved in schools. The number of unmarried heads-of-household grew by 71 percent in the 1990s (Boyd, 2005, p. 24). The number of immigrants to the United States has ballooned. Many parents have not had positive school experiences themselves and are reluctant to become involved. Many community members do not know how to become involved in schools.

Many families and community members may not become involved in schools if they do not feel that the school climate, the social and educational atmosphere of the school, is one that makes them feel welcomed, respected, trusted, heard, and needed. Research suggests a connection between the school climate and the extent to which parents, community members, and families are involved in student's education. When schools create a positive climate by reaching out to families and community members, and providing structures for them to become involved, the result is effective school-family-community partnerships (Communtzis-Page, 1996). Research has also shown that the age, experience, racial composition, and disposition toward parents of teachers may affect teachers' ability to work with parents as well as their interest in doing so. For example, according to Kerbow and Bernhardt (as cited in Feuerstein, 2000) schools with large percentages of African-American teachers have higher levels of parent involvement than do similarly situated schools with primarily Caucasian teachers. Shouse (1997) found that issues associated with the school, like the setting (rural, suburban or urban), size, academic focus, and sense of community may serve as barriers to parent and community involvement, or at a minimum, influence levels of parent and community participation. Some teachers might even feel their teaching methods or classroom management style will be questioned by parents involved on school campuses. Other

counterproductive measures to parental involvement include contacting parents only when there's a problem with their child, labeling family structures (i.e. "single-parent"), and judging the family as "deficient" (Christenson, 2004, p. 83). According to Williams and Chavkin (1986), it is the school administrator who serves as the catalyst in the school/home/community partnership. St. John (as cited in Boyd, 2005) made the case that principals must realize that it is their attitude that, to a large degree, determines whether parents and community members see themselves as unwelcome guests, instruments of school initiatives, or real partners in school restructuring. Overcoming time and resource constraints are also barriers to parent and community involvement for teachers and parents. School level factors that influence parent involvement are factors that may be more alterable than factors which involve parents, the community, and students.

There is clear evidence that expanding the school's outreach beyond families into the community also has measurable positive impact in at least four important areas: student learning, family engagement, school effectiveness, and community vitality (National School Public Relations Association, 2006). In order to involve the community outside of the school building, schools must communicate the message that regardless of what heritage or culture any individual brings to school, that heritage or culture is honored and respected. When community members know their diverse cultures are respected and supported, they are likely to respond in kind. Families of varied cultures or heritage may experience their own set of barriers to parent and community involvement. Barriers specific to culturally diverse parents and community members include: (a) the language barrier and/or the inability to function effectively in English; (b) discomfort

levels with an unfamiliar and intimidating education system; and (c) a perception that they are not wanted (Chavkin, 1989, p. 122). Additionally, parents may have difficulty in helping their children with homework if they do not know the mainstream language, curriculum, and/or expectations of the school system. Parents may also struggle when trying to communicate with school personnel. A parent liaison can create a communication pathway between the school and parents and provides a safe avenue for parents to pursue issues of concern. The parent liaison often comes from the predominant cultural group among the students of the school, so she or he can be an asset in dealing with cultural and language barriers (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999).

Many members of the community are unaware of opportunities in their local school, are unsure of what their role/responsibilities would be in the school setting, and have an overall lack of knowledge concerning school-community partnerships. Corporate Voices for Working Families is an example of an alliance of 50 top corporations that assembles bipartisan support for policies that support working families. For example, Corporate Voices develops policy statements that convey the importance of investments in children from a business perspective and shares best practices on creative solutions, to the needs of working families, with policymakers and the greater business community (Klein, 2001).

The literature provides ample evidence of the need for parent and community participation in schools and illustrates the multitude of obstacles faced by schools, families, and communities in increasing parent and community involvement. One must seek strategies that can be implemented to overcome many of these obstacles facing schools as parent and community involvement is encouraged. The idea that learning

involves an intensifying process of involvement in a community of practice has gained considerable ground of late. As early as the late 1980s and early 1990s, two researchers, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, (as cited in Smith, 2003) from two very different disciplines, developed a model of learning. Their model of situated learning proposed that learning involves a process of engagement in a “community of practice.” Jean Lave is a social anthropologist with a strong interest in social theory with much of her work focusing on the ‘re-conceiving’ of learning, learners, and educational institutions in terms of social practice. Etienne Wenger was a teacher who joined the Institute for Research on Learning and is now an independent consultant specializing in developing “communities of practice” within organization (Smith, 2003). According to Wenger (1998), a “community of practice” defines itself along three dimensions: What it is about, how it functions, and what capability it has produced. Wenger and Lave (1991, 1998) propose that members of a community of practice are involved in a set of relationships over time and communities develop around things that matter to people (Smith, 2003). Members feel a sense of identity because the group is organizing around a particular area of knowledge and activity. Although there has been hesitation on the part of many educators to embrace this business-oriented theory, there have been some who were intrigued with the possible relationship between “communities of practice” and schooling. One of the most interested groups of educators into this relationship is Barbara Rogoff and a group of her colleagues, who examined the work of an innovative school in Salt Lake City. The group looked at how teachers, students, and parents were able to work together to develop an approach to schooling based around the principle that learning “occurs through interested participation with other learners” (Smith, 2003, para. 4). Rogoff and

her team realized that educators must prioritize “instruction that builds on children’s interests in a collaborative way.” Such schools need also be places where “learning activities are planned by children as well as adults, and where parents and teachers not only foster children’s learning but also learn from their own involvement with children” (Smith, 2003, p. 6). The standard for Student, Family, and Community Involvement and Support, which the study school chose to focus on reads, “The school as a community of learning involves parent and community members as active participants. There is consistent and growing evidence of parent involvement and volunteerism, participation in workshops and enrichment activities, and a process of two-way communication. Everyone collaborates to help the school achieve its continuous improvement targets and short-and long-range goals” (Georgia Department of Education, 2007, para. 2). With this statement as their goal, the entire faculty met at the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year to collaboratively discuss and discover the school’s current reality and objective that will lead to achieving the goal. The next steps include exploring research based best practices to be considered for implementation by the school staff.

Research suggests that the most effective forms of parent involvement are those which engage parents in working directly with their children in learning activities at home (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). Schools striving to increase parent involvement might consider allowing parents to check out learning activities from the classroom or a Parent Resource Center housed in the school or simply send suggestions home to parents to assist them in using everyday, fun activities to teach. Cotton and Wikelund (1989) note that parents generally want and need direction to participate with maximum effectiveness, but caution that a little training is better than a lot.

Epstein (1988) found that it is teachers' practices, not the education, marital status, or work place of parents that makes the difference in whether parents are productive partners in children's education. Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, and Lopez (1997) found that teacher training is an essential component of developing and supporting effective parent-involvement. The Harvard Family Research Project (1995) identifies key areas on which teacher training efforts should focus: (a) bridging gaps between home and school culture; (b) helping families with limited financial resources and support networks to meet their basic needs; (c) assuming the best intentions on the part of parents; (d) empowering families by providing them with encouragement, respect and a voice in decision-making; and (e) providing opportunities to build social capital by engaging individuals in the life of the school, building trust among teachers and parents, and agreeing on mutual values and expectations for children.

Summary

This chapter summarized the current theoretical explanations of barriers involving parents and community members in student's lives and ways to overcome these barriers. Cultural capital, social capital, governance differences, and overlapping spheres of influence are some of the explanations which were discussed. Empirical research, discussed in this chapter, demonstrates that societal changes, school climate, and the principal's attitude are barriers to parent and community involvement.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The preceding chapter presented the theoretical and empirical literature relating to increasing parent and community involvement in schools. This study was created to provide additional data on effective, research-based strategies to increase parent and community involvement in schools. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methods and procedures used in the investigation of barriers to parent and community involvement and effective, research-based practices implemented in the study setting. Specifically, the chapter will provide a description of the design and context of the study, the research participants, the collection and treatment of data, the data analysis and measures taken to ensure validity. The writer will begin the narrative by revisiting the study's guiding questions and identifying and defining the study's subtype.

Guiding Questions

1. What strategies, based on current research into best practices, increase parent and community involvement in elementary schools?
2. Which of the strategies should be implemented at the study school?
3. What barriers to parent and community involvement must be removed prior to implementation of these research-based strategies?
4. What specifically can the staff, parents, and community members do to remove the identified barriers to increased parent and community involvement?

5. Which of the strategies implemented by the staff, parents, students, and community members increased parent and community involvement at the study school for the 2006-2007 school year?

This qualitative study's subtype was case study and is defined by Yin (as cited in Glatthorn and Joyner) as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when the boundaries between context and phenomenon are not clearly evident; and in which multiple source of evidence are used (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). Case studies can be of an individual, group, site, program, or policy and permit an in-depth examination of factors that explain present status and influence change over time (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). The writer believes that in this particular setting case study was the more suitable type of research as the researcher and school staff are seeking an answer to a problem, which is anchored in real life and because case studies allow for the possibility of depth in the study.

Purpose of the Study

Research has shown that parents' interest and support are the primary factors for students' success or failure in school (Berger, 1995). The researcher and school leadership team of the study school chose to focus on increasing parent and community involvement in the school. The present study investigates research-based, best practices and their effectiveness in one elementary school as the practices were implemented in the school setting. The effectiveness of the practices were measured by responses to open-ended, structured interviews, field notes from the writer's observations, and analysis of school documents, such as attendance logs, meeting minutes, and the School's Action Plan. The purpose of this qualitative study is to determine the most effective means of increasing

parent and community involvement in schools. The setting of the study as well as the participants of the study are described in the next section, allowing schools to generalize the results of this study to their similar student body and/or staff, demographics, community make-up, goals, and/or geographic location.

Research Context and Participants

The benefits of parent and community involvement are important to the staff, families, and surrounding community of the study school. The school, located in a suburb north of Atlanta, was built in 1979 with additions and renovations in 1980, 1981, 1984, 1997, and 2007. It is one of twenty elementary schools in the county school system. The county's population is 165,771, according to a 2005 Census Bureau estimate (United States Census Bureau, 2007). The county experienced a growth rate of nearly 19 percent from April 1, 2000, to July 1, 2005. This county has a diverse mix of industry; however the poultry industry makes up a majority of the production jobs held by the population. This agribusiness has a strong economic impact on the community. Of the more than 165,000 citizens, 60.1 percent report being White, Non-Hispanic; 25 percent report being Hispanic; 7 percent report being African American; the remaining 6.9 percent report being Asian, Native American, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. 20.7 percent of people report speaking a language other than English in their homes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

The population of the study school has undergone significant changes in the past five years. The 2006-2007 student enrollment is 542, with 56 percent of the children qualifying for free and reduced lunches under federal guidelines, and therefore was designated a Title 1 school at the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year. Like Joyce

Epstein and Steven Sheldon (2006), the writer believes that it is imperative for researchers to design studies that go beyond documenting inequities to identifying programs and practices that promote greater equity in the involvement of diverse families and greater equality of effects for students. With a student population comprised of 33 percent Hispanic, 1.5 percent Asian, 5.8 percent African-American, 54 percent White, 5.3 percent Inter-racial, 13 percent with disabilities, 22 percent Language Education Program students, and 56 percent economically disadvantaged, the writer has designed this study to identify programs and practices that seek to involve families and community members with diverse backgrounds and interests.

For the 2006-2007 school year, the school staff consists of 44 certified personnel and 19 non-certified personnel. There are 27 homeroom teachers, one Early Intervention Program Teacher, one Title I Reading Intervention Teacher, four and a half special education teachers, one gifted teacher, one and a half English as Second Language Teachers, one physical education teacher, one music teacher, one art teacher, one media specialist, one half-time speech teacher, one counselor, one six-hour nurse, one half-time parent liaison, one computer lab manager, six food service staffers, three and a half custodians, one media clerk, one half-time data entry clerk, thirteen paraprofessionals, one secretary/bookkeeper, one instructional coach, one assistant principal, and one principal.

Table 1 shows the number of years of experience and the highest degree held by each certified staff member.

Table 1: *Years of Experience and Degree Level*

Years experience	Number of certified staff	Bachelors degree	Masters degree	Specialist degree	Doctorate
0-5	12	10	2	0	0
6-10	3	0	3	0	0
11-15	12	1	4	7	0
16-20	7	0	4	3	0
20+	10	0	9	1	0
Totals	44	11	22	11	0

The vision of the study school is: “We will strive to equip our students with the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful in school and in society. We envision our school to have the following components: a curriculum which is standards and needs-based, rigorous, and vertically aligned; instruction which is differentiated, integrated, collaborative, research-based, data driven, and innovative; assessment which is aligned to the state standards, ongoing, rigorous, varied, and analyzed; and an environment which is orderly, safe, and welcoming, supports family and community involvement, communication among all stakeholders, and recognition of success.”

The mission of the study school is to provide a safe, child-centered environment with emphasis on strong academics and social skills.

Pre-Study Environment

In addition to the parent involvement requirement for Title 1 schools, the School Leadership Team included a parent and community involvement goal in the school’s School Action Plan for 2006-2007.

Parent and Community Involvement is the key to student achievement at our school. As our student population changes, we want to be sure that ALL parents and community members

feel welcome and desire to be involved in children's education. We believe that our school is working toward providing opportunities for student learning by active recruitment of student, family and community talents. A wide variety of opportunities exists for parents and community members to volunteer and assist in many areas of the education program. We will continue to evaluate existing programs and actively seek new opportunities to increase involvement of student, family, and community members. The opportunities that exist to increase parent and community involvement include volunteers in the classroom, field trips, Field Days, Parent Teacher Organization, Book Week, Book Fairs and mentors. The English as a Second Language department leads parent days and nights for our Hispanic parents. The individual grade levels provide curriculum days for parents to learn about the expectations for their students. Parent, staff, and community member interviews will reflect an improvement in the overall culture of parent involvement in our school.

Leadership

During the 2006-2007 school year, a new principal was named to the study school. The school year has been spent developing a structure for leadership that reflects the principal's and assistant principal's desire to be servant-leaders that foster an environment of shared decision-making.

The school's Leadership Team (SLT) is comprised of the principal, the assistant principal, the instructional coach, and a representative from each grade level and department. However, prior to the 2006-2007 school year, the team had met infrequently and had provided little input into decisions. The focus of the SLT for the 2006-2007 school year was to create and implement policies and procedures that had a positive impact on the daily operations of the school. For example, a school-wide discipline policy was created for the first time. Additionally, as other administrative tasks or decisions arose, the team members facilitated input and discussion among all staff members. As is reflected in the state standards portion of the plan, the entire faculty wants the role of the team to be more focused on school improvement rather than managerial tasks.

Partnership Development

Partners in Education (PIE), which are businesses that support the school, are a vital part of the study school. These businesses support the school with monetary gifts and by provide specific items when needed. For example, one of the partners provided the students with motivational items during a week of standardized testing. Another partner provided funds to purchase monthly treats for the staff. This school is dedicated to making sure that the relationship has reciprocal benefits for PIE by displaying student work in the businesses of the partners. Partners receive advertising on the school website, on a large banner at the school entrance, on the Partners in Education bulletin board, and in parent newsletters. Parents of the students baked and delivered cookies to the employees of the partners, and the school administration and staff recognized the partners at the conclusion of the school year with a small gesture of appreciation.

Currently, the following businesses are PIE for the study school:

Wayne Farms

Milton's Institutional Foods

Wal-mart

Chick-Fil-A

Sportsman's Lodge

Cici's Pizza

Arby's

Re/Max Realty

Food Lion

Barberito's

Bruster's

Publix

Mentors

The school employs a full-time counselor whose guidance department uses individual, small group and large group models to deliver counseling services. The county has established a mentoring program in the school system. Volunteers are screened and then instructed in positive mentoring activities. Area churches as well as some of our business partners have been contacted to offer members and employees the opportunity to mentor students. The study school is also exploring the idea of teachers mentoring a student from a different classroom.

Additional Staff

The staff of the study school is sensitive to the changes brought on by the diverse world we live in. This diversity is fostered by having a Spanish-speaking Parent Liaison who works in the school three days a week. The long-term goal is to have this position funded into a full-time position. Funding this full-time position would send a clear and consistent message that the school embraces and reinforces positive relationships among all stakeholders. A full-time nurse serves the physical health and well-being of the students, helping to establish and maintain relationships that are positive and productive.

Qualifications as a Researcher

The writer is the school's Assistant Principal, co-author of the school's improvement plan for the 2006-2007 school year, Parent and Community Involvement Administrative Liaison to school staff, parents, and school business partners, and Chair of the Parent and Community Involvement Committee for the development of the school's Title I Plan.

As a researcher, the writer has a vast array of experience in informal research studies and is able to reason inductively. The writer as researcher has been instructed in methods of selecting a consequential problem to investigate, reviewing the literature, designing the research process, and collecting and analyzing research data. The writer is able to confidently interpret research and report data without bias. Because of the writer's experiences as a school administrator, the writer has developed the ability to disallow personal attitudes, preferences, and feelings to affect the interpretation of data.

The writer's interest in this field, in addition administrative responsibilities in the school, put the writer in an ideal situation to guide the faculty, parents, students, and community groups in increasing parent and community involvement at the study school.

Prior Approval and Planning

Prior to the study, the writer communicated with the school's principal, seeking and receiving permission to conduct the study with the school's faculty, parents, and school community. Next, the writer, along with the School's Leadership Team, created a timeline for interviews, document gathering, professional learning, and parent and community involvement events for the study school, prioritizing for the 2006-2007 school year.

Data Collection

Because of the importance of using multiple sources of data and avoiding reliance on a single source in research, the writer/researcher employed triangulation. Data was gathered as the researcher observed and made notes during parent and community involvement events and activities. The primary method of data collection was structured, open-ended interviews that were recorded digitally and transcribed (See Appendices A-D). Interviewing participants allowed the researcher to investigate emotions, experiences, and feelings rather than simply recording straight-forward factual matters and allowed for topics to be explored in depth. The interviews were conducted at the school site or local eateries at times convenient to the participants. The writer played the part of the learner in the interviews as described by Creswell (1998, p.18), as he stated that the role of the researcher should be an "active learner... rather than an expert who passes judgment on participants." The writer described the research project to each participant prior to their individual interview, the purpose of the interview, the use of data, and an overview of the

subjects to be covered in the interview. All participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity and were reminded that they could decline to answer any of the questions asked by the writer during the interview or end the interview at any time. The writer attempted to remove any obstacles between the writer and interviewees to establish a level of trust where interviewees felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings, whether positive or negative. The writer reminded the interviewees, as with earlier and frequent conversations with school administrators, that it was critical for each person interviewed to be open and honest for the feedback from the interviews to be meaningful and useful. The writer believes that she has established a positive rapport, as one of the school's administrators for the last two years, giving her credibility with the interviewees, releasing each interviewee to share honestly and deeply during the interviews. The writer also invited the interviewee to ask for clarity on question meaning. The interviewees were chosen based on the number of years of experience with students and/or schools, the interviewees' willingness to share thoughts and feelings. The interviewees consisted of an equal representation from among parents, staff members, and community members. The writer interviewed the school's first-year principal, tenured teachers, community members and parents of various ethnicities, races, and income levels and gave each interviewee a copy of the transcript from their interview to check for correctness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress that this use of member checking ensures credibility of the study.

Transcribed minutes, or field notes, from PTO Executive Council meetings, Partners in Education Committee meetings, Title 1 Parent and Community Involvement Core Team meetings, School Leadership Team meetings, and other parent involvement

activities served as additional sources of data. The notes contain a record of the activity, its location, time and duration, participants, and any materials used. The writer served as participant-observer.

The researcher studied available written data pertinent to the program, collected between April 2006 and May 2007, as well as participant logs, attendance records, school-family-community correspondences, newsletters, and minutes of meetings and conferences. The writer-researcher recorded personal reactions, memories, self-reflection, and impressions of incidents which reflect the emphasis on parent and community involvement in a journal.

Data Analysis

The procedures described in the following paragraphs were used to show the significance of specific, research-based strategies on increasing parent and community involvement in schools. As the researcher began to simultaneously collect and analyze data, the researcher began to make reasonable, yet wide-ranging inferences from the research (Ary, et al., 2006). Specifically, the writer read interview transcripts, observational notes, and documents, which were later analyzed, taking notes on what the writer saw or heard and developed tentative ideas about relationships (Maxwell, 2005). In order to get a clear picture of the phenomenon being studied, the writer worked back and forth between the data being collected and the purpose of the study. Initially, the writer read through the transcribed data, making very general notes. The writer felt she was getting acquainted with the notes, transcripts, and observations. Because there was so much to absorb, the writer often felt she was trudging through thick mire. Although the writer as researcher did not adopt a formal organizational program, such as a software

program, the researcher did employ organizational techniques which, after modifications, proved to help the researcher manage the data effectively. The researcher's organizational techniques will be described in detail in subsequent paragraphs.

As well as narrative analysis, the researcher employed categorizing strategies, such as coding and thematic analysis. According to Schatzman and Strauss (1973), the analysis of qualitative data primarily involved the categorization of things, persons, and/or events and the properties that characterized them. As data was collected, the researcher began to analyze the data, by reading and rereading notes and transcripts and repeatedly listening to audiotapes, familiarizing herself even more closely with the data (Ary et al., 2006). The researcher began making notes of similarities and differences within "family themes," forcing the researcher to notice details of the data.

Transcriptions, typed and stored on the researcher's computer, of audio-taped interviews, and handwritten field notes, were made with notes added for nonverbal information (e.g., gestures, laughter) that may have given added meaning. Any identifiable information was removed during transcription and pseudonyms were given (Ary, et al., 2006). The researcher chose to do the drone work of transcribing, believing it added discipline, integrity and validity to the study as well as allowing the researcher to become more intimately acquainted with the data. As the writer became bogged down in the data, excising its meaning, and relating it to the study phenomenon, the writer was forced back to the guiding questions and the initial chapters of the study. The researcher often had to overlook comments made by the researcher, heard during transcription, and attempts to complete interviewee's thoughts, focusing on the thoughts, inflections, and emotions of the interviewee. The researcher found herself highlighting passages or statements in the

transcribed notes and interviews, forcing the researcher to focus on themes. Once the transcriptions were complete, the writer continued rereading the data, writing notes in the margins of the transcripts, recording thoughts as they came to the researcher; thus compiling a reflective log (Ary, et al., 2006). Once the writer made notes in the margins and reviewed them, the writer made a list of the different types of information extracted from the data. Following the advice of Maykut and Morehouse (1994), the writer marked each page of data and color coded the passages in the transcripts and notes to indicate the kind and source of the data, date, times, and the page number of the data set. The data was marked and color coded to correspond to the research questions, and a back-up copy of all data pages was made. The writer constructed a wall-sized matrix chart to display the raw data. Initially, the categories posted on the wall-sized chart were the study's guiding questions. The data was cut from the back-up copies of the data pages and attached to the chart. The writer recorded data from school documents on sticky note cards and displayed them alongside applicable data to further validate and support data from interviews and observations.

As the researcher became more familiar with the data from interview transcriptions, document analysis, observation notes, and meeting minutes, some information began to emerge as significant. The writer merged data pieces into categories, as the researcher explored patterns across categories, and identified major themes (Ary, et al., 2006). Some of the organizational categories, which served as bins for further sorting of the data that initially emerged were: barriers caused by the school and parents, ways that the schools, parents, and community members can overcome those barriers, and the most effective practices by school staff and parents to increase parent

and community involvement. In analyzing categories and themes and connecting them, the researcher began to look for data that provided a different perspective on a category or theme providing a counterbalance to a tendency to hold on to first impressions. The researcher often had to move past initial impressions to find additional meaning in the data from the interviews and document analysis. As the researcher read and reread the data, the categories had to be further combined because the vastness of the categories served as a barrier to analysis of the data. Further combining categories and the notes taken earlier in the analysis process allowed the writer to identify substantive categories: the effect of a welcoming climate or lack of, language as a barrier, the importance of supportive administrators, parent and teacher work schedules as a barrier, and perceptions of parents and teachers.

Validity Issues

The writer reduced the avoidable risks of compromised study validity by implementing a variety of strategies, such as reflecting on the biases or limitations of a particular method or source in the study's conclusions by utilizing triangulation. The writer increased the credibility of this research study through repeated observations and interviews as well as prolonged engagement of the writer in the study setting. Because the researcher has been a staff member in the study setting for two years, the writer has invested sufficient time to learn the setting's culture, to test for misinformation, and to build trust among the staff, students, and parents. Lengthy observations and detailed, descriptive field notes as well as the solicitation of feedback on data and conclusions from the participants of the study aided in producing a valid research study. The writer employed internal generalizability to this study, as it is the writer's belief that the many

of the conclusions reached in this study will be generalizable within the study's setting and among the study's participant (Maxwell, 2005). The writer is hopeful that external generalizability will aid in validating this research study, as the writer is convinced that the lack of parent and community involvement in schools is an area of concern for many schools. To allow for transferability, the researcher provides a base of information as well as demographic information for anyone interested in transferring the findings of this study to their own setting. The information will be in the form of thick descriptive data, permitting comparison of the writer's school to other similar contexts (Geertz, 1973). In order to ensure validity in this qualitative research study, the researcher gave participants the opportunity to read transcripts of their interviews. The researcher involved others in inspecting and verifying the details of this research study and acknowledged those who contributed to or collaborated in this research study (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). A second round of member checking was employed as the school's principal read and approved the content of the completed study. To account for dependability, an extensive audit trail was made available to the committee, which described the processes by which data was collected and analyzed and interpretations were made. This included field and interview notes, the writer's journal, artifacts, and observation notes.

Ethical Issues

The writer served as an active participant in this case study research project, yet was aware that becoming too emotionally involved would allow the writer's biases to affect the interpretation of the findings. With a vast array of professional experience as a teacher and administrator in various elementary schools, the writer has observed and experienced the positive effects of effective parent and community involvement in

schools on students, parents, staff, and community members. The writer respected the rights, dignity, privacy, and sensitivities of participants in this research study, avoided any harm to the participants arising from their involvement in the research, and operated with honesty and integrity. Specifically, the writer maintained in strict confidence the names, characteristics, incidental comments, and/or other information on all subjects and/or subjects' data encountered so as not to conflict with state and/or federal laws and regulations (Institutional Review Board, 2007). The writer assured confidentiality by following these practices: substituted codes for names and information that could reveal a participant's identity, separated consent forms from data, and limited access to identified data (IRB, 2007). The subjects were assured that their identity would only be released with the subject's expressed permission. The writer obtained written consent from participants, assuring that the participants understood that the study involved research, understood its purposes, understood the procedures to be followed in the study, and understood the need for maintenance of confidentiality of subject's identity. The writer created a written consent form according to the requirements of Liberty University and the International Review Board for each participant to sign. The writer gained prior approval from the Human Subject Committee of Liberty University or a group representing Liberty University School of Graduate Education, who was able to grant approval to the writer to conduct this research study. The writer referred to The American Educational Research Association's (AERA) code of ethics to guide the writer's work as recommended by Ary, et al.

As an obligation to the profession, the writer reported precisely and honestly what the findings are, so as not to offer misleading information. The goals of this study, if

achieved, include formulation of effective research-based, best practice solutions to the lack of parental and community involvement in the writer's school, contribution of new knowledge to the knowledge base on the subject of parental involvement in schools, tying the research to professional learning, and most importantly, helping all students achieve academically and success in school.

Summary

By means of the previously documented data analysis, the purpose of this anonymous qualitative case study was to determine the most effective means of overcoming barriers to involvement of various groups and individuals in schools and helping parents and community members become more engaged with the schools and students in their community. The participants were parents, school staff, and community members in a school north of Atlanta. The effectiveness of the practices were measured by responses to open-ended, structured interviews, field notes from the writer's observations, and analysis of school documents, such as attendance logs, meeting minutes, and the School's Action Plan. After data was collected and analyzed, conclusions were drawn and discussed, and suggestions were made for further study to add to the existing research base.

CHAPTER 4

The Findings

One of the distinguishing features of southern culture is an “oratorical aesthetic.” Speech artistry, expressed through delivery as well as content, can still be heard in this state’s political and legal oratory, preaching, and conversation. Central to the region’s love affair with the spoken word is a strong narrative impulse, channeled in the telling of elaborately embroidered personal experiences as well as traditional tales. Traditional storytelling took—and still takes—place wherever small groups have gathered to work and socialize. In rural parts of this state such physical settings included general stores (with their “liars’ bench” out front), hunting camps, and the shaded porch and fireside of homes; social occasions involving storytelling included community “workings” such as corn shucking and syrup making; and for those living in the state’s southwestern parts, annual family treks by covered wagon to the Florida coast to buy salted fish (Burrison, 2005). It is in the spirit of the age-old custom of storytelling that a vibrant picture of the study school is portrayed through the observations, conversations, and documents collected. This chapter is organized around the five guiding research questions for this study.

1. What strategies, based on current research in best practices, increase parent and community involvement in elementary schools?
2. Which of the strategies should be implemented at the study school?
3. What barriers to parent and community involvement must be removed prior to implementation of these research-based strategies?

4. What can staff, parents, and community members specifically do to remove the identified barriers in order to increase parent and community involvement?
5. Which strategies increased parent and community involvement at the study school?

The Story of the Study School

The School before Increased Involvement

Prior to the 2006-2007 school year, parents and community members were minimally involved at the study school. One parent of a fourth grade student interviewed said, “I remember that about four years ago, only three or four parents attended the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) Executive Committee meetings, that no one knew what was going on, nor knew how to help at the school.” A few teachers had a room parent that coordinated a winter holiday and end of year party, but in most instances, the classroom teacher took on that responsibility. On occasion, a parent volunteered in their child’s classroom and, many parents attended fieldtrips with their children. On Dr. Seuss’ birthday, the Media Specialist scheduled parents and community members to read to students throughout the day. Some parents came to the school, throughout the year, to eat lunch with their children. One teacher of Kindergarten students shared, “Parent and community involvement for my classroom has remained about the same in the last number of years because parents of younger children, especially Kindergarten age children, have been fairly active each school year.” A parent of a 1st grader and a 4th grader stated, “Parent involvement for me has remained about the same from year to year because my full-time work status has remained the same.” The parent also remarked, “The opportunities are about the same for me prior to the 2006-2007 school year.” The

current principal was asked about her perception of what parent and community involvement was like at the study school prior to her becoming the principal there. “On the one hand, parents were in the school a lot, a certain group of parents who attempted to exert their influence in ways that were not entirely appropriate; but beyond that, there was not a true partnership between the schools and the parents.”

In a survey, created by the school system’s Board of Education and given to parents in February 2004, parents were asked to rate the school in various categories including parent and community involvement. Table 2 illustrates the results of the parent survey.

Table 2 *The Study School: Parent Responses*

I support my child’s learning at home.	4.7
My child’s teacher helps me to help my child learn at home.	4.2
I know how well my child is progressing in school.	4.2
I know what my child’s teacher expects of my child.	4.2
I am informed about my child’s progress.	4.2
I feel welcome at my child’s school.	4.5

(strongly agree =5, agree =4, neutral =3, disagree =2, strongly disagree = 1)

In the spring of 2005, staff members completed a National Staff Development Committee survey. When asked if teachers were provided opportunities to learn how to involve families in their children’s education, 17 percent of the staff responded *seldom*, 60 percent *sometimes*, and 23 percent *frequently*. The writer believes that many school administrators assume that teachers know how to effectively involve families in students’ education, when in fact, many teachers interviewed in this study felt unprepared. When

asked if communicating the school mission and goals to families and community members is a priority, 25 percent responded *seldom*, 18 percent *sometimes*, 36 percent *frequently*, and 21 percent *always*. Whereas, the school's mission statement and goals are printed in the student and staff handbook, schools do not often communicate the mission and goals to families and community members under the assumption that it will either be misunderstood or ignored. The final family and community involvement question asked respondents if school leaders work with community members to help students achieve academic goals. *Seldom* was chosen by 18 percent of the respondents, 36 percent chose *sometimes*, 36 percent *frequently*, and 11 percent *always*.

The responses from the February 2004 parent survey and the 2005 staff survey demonstrated the need for increased and effective parent and community involvement at this school.

*Research-Based Best Practices to Increase Parent
and Community Involvement*

Effective Administrative Leadership

According to Williams and Chavkin (1986), it is the school administrator who serves as the catalyst in the school/home/community partnership. St. John (as cited in Boyd, 2005) made the case that principals must realize that it is their attitude that, to a large degree, determines whether parents and community members see themselves as unwelcome guests, instruments of school initiatives, or real partners in school restructuring. The principal plays a crucial role in taking the vision for increased parent and community involvement and developing the vision to be a wide-reaching reality.

The study school has a reputation in the community of strength, a commitment to students, and a *whatever it takes* attitude. The school has been led by many different principals, but it is the current principal who seems to be making the most noticeable and effective changes, according to teachers who have taught at the study school their entire careers. During a grade level focus group interview, a second grade teacher commented, “I believe the increase in parent and community involvement is due in part to the current principal overseeing the parent and community involvement initiative and planting the idea of having an annual Math Night and Reading Night.” Another teacher remarked, “I love the attitude of the principal, whose son attends the study school. She needs to be involved in the school, participating in fundraisers or spreading mulch in the flower beds, for no other reason than that she is a parent of a child at the study school.” A Partner in Education shared that her business’ involvement in the school is due in part to the flexibility and consideration of schedules by the school’s principal in planning meetings to involve Partners in Education.

The 2006-2007 school was the inaugural year for this rookie, new not only to the principalship, but also to the elementary school. The principal and assistant principals’ goal was to develop a structure for leadership that reflected their desire to be servant-leaders who would foster an environment of shared decision-making. The principal stated that it is also the commitment of the school administration to make sure the staff and parents are aware of just how important parent and community involvement is and then provide them with the tips and tools to help make that an actuality. The principal shared that she was leading the staff to increase parent and community involvement

because she knows from research that involving parents and the community in the lives of students raises student achievement and helps students reach their potential.

During the summer of 2006, the school's new Principal shared her desire with the Assistant Principal to take the School Leadership Team on a retreat, away from the school campus, to plan for the year. The Principal hoped that the retreat would help the team get to know her and each other on a more personal level, relax, have fun, and plan for the new school year. The study school's Leadership Team is made up of the principal, the assistant principal, the instructional coach, and a representative from each grade level and department. However, prior to the 2006-2007 school year, the team had met infrequently and had little input into decisions. The focus of the School Leadership Team for the 2006-2007 was to create and implement policies and procedures that have a positive impact on the daily operations of the school. Twelve staff members attended the retreat and prioritized the greatest areas of need, discussed the next steps to take to meet those needs, and identified staff members capable of helping the school take those next steps. The School Leadership Team saw a major need for professional learning in the area of parent and community involvement and mapped out a plan on which the leadership would focus. Because of the success of the School Leadership Team Retreat, the administration at the school organized a retreat, a little closer to home, and invited the entire staff.

Teacher Practices & Professional Learning

Epstein (1988) found that it is teachers' practices, not the education, marital status, or workplace of parents that makes the difference in whether parents are productive partners in education. Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, and Lopez (1997) found that

teacher training is an essential component for developing and supporting effective parent involvement. The Harvard Family Research Project (1995) identifies key areas on which teacher training efforts should focus: bridging gaps between home and school culture, helping families meet their basic needs, assuming the best intentions of parents, empowering families by providing them with encouragement, respect and a voice in decision-making, and providing opportunities to build social capital.

When the Principal was asked about effective teacher practices for increasing parent and community involvement in schools, she said, “I just received an e-mail from the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) President, in which the President shared she had received twenty-three phone calls in one day from room parents and other parents asking how they could get involved in the school’s Fall Festival.” The Principal went on to say, “I feel the parent response was, in large part, due to the fact that teachers identified a Room Parent and contacted the parent to get him/her involved in planning a game and booth for their class for the Fall Festival.” The Principal excitedly added, “The school couldn’t get twenty-three parents to contact the PTO President in a year at our school prior to the 2006-2007 school year.”

As the study school’s Professional Learning Committee began to work through the process of evaluating the school’s preparedness for increasing parent and community involvement, the committee determined that the staff would benefit from training on effective parent communication, involving volunteers in the school and classroom, conducting successful parent conferences, and building ties between home and school.

The Assistant Principal, Instructional Coach, Cluster Social Worker, and Guidance Counselor provided training and handouts for all staff on each of the topics.

Resources for staff were purchased and housed in the school's professional library during the 2006-07 school year. Some of those titles include:

**Dealing with Difficult Parents*

**Motivating Students Who Don't Care*

**Getting Parents Involved: A Teacher and Staff Handbook*

**Understanding and Relating to Parents*

Like many administrators, the writer and the school's principal believed that teachers instinctively know how to involve and welcome parents into the school and into their classrooms. What the writer had a difficult time digesting was that there were many teachers in the school who didn't want the parents and community members in their classrooms; they see parents and community members as distractions, a license for the parent's child to misbehave, and more work for the teacher. In dealing with resistance from staff members, the administration at the study school had to be encouraging, supportive, understanding, patient, and at times, persistent. The administrators realized that teachers must have an opportunity to reflect on their attitudes and beliefs in working with families and community members as well as the skills to engage these groups. Teachers must recognize parents as the primary educator of their children and be both flexible and innovative in reaching out to them. For example, such practices as early morning or evening conferences, bilingual communication, personal contact with families, and learning activities for families to use at home are effective strategies which enable families to become involved in their child's education.

School Practices Which Increase Parent and Community Involvement

Two-way Communication

One-way communication is linear and limited because it occurs in a straight line from sender to receiver and serves to inform, persuade, or command. Conversely, two-way communication always includes feedback from the receiver to the sender that lets the sender know the message has been received accurately. In two-way communication both sender and receiver listen to each other and work toward a clear understanding (Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations, 2006). Examples of one-way communication include newsletters, school handbooks, progress notes, and report cards. Surveys, focus groups, informal conversations, and problem solving are all examples of two-way communication.

Research shows that, far too often, teachers use an authority-based form of communicating with parents. Highly formal, authoritative communications lack the two major components vital to involving parents in meaningful partnerships: closeness and mutuality (Swick & Graves, 1991). Swick found that parents under heavy stress need the closeness that exists in responsive and supportive communication. They also need a feeling of mutuality and a sense of togetherness with significant others as they attempt to resolve problems and stressors. Tone of voice, body language, facial expressions, and word choice all communicate respect or a lack of it (Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations, 2006). Two-way communication requires the teacher to listen. Ask parents and community members what they want or need from their relationship with the school.

A parent with two children at the study school stated, “I believe phone calls and e-mails are important communication tools; parents need to know it’s important to help their children socially and academically.” Another parent, with two children, stated that she understands that it’s hard to get information out, but felt that an updated calendar of events, perhaps posted on the school’s website or distributed through e-mail, would be helpful to some parents. A PTO officer stated, “Personal communication is key to letting parents know that without their help, activities will not be successful for their children.” The school’s Guidance Counselor suggested the school use the sign at the front entrance of the school more effectively by advertising events there weeks in advance of the event and consider having banners made to hang in the car line area to serve as reminders to parents and community members of upcoming events.

One piece of the communication puzzle is the type of communication parents receive. Instead of always receiving phone calls and notes concerning a child’s negative behaviors, perhaps teachers could contact parents by phone and send notes with good news. The faculty at the study school was encouraged to communicate with parents for positive reasons more often, or at least as often, than negative ones. Each teacher was encouraged to call one parent each week to share some good news about what his or her child is doing or send home one “2-minute note” per day highlighting one student’s positive accomplishments. Each student would receive at least one positive note each month!

Principals can invite two-way communication by involving parents in the evaluation of the school. A principal can distribute a parent survey (translated if

applicable) to find out how parents feel the school is doing in meeting the school's priorities.

The staff has been provided training in effective communication with parents and community members and the level of engagement between staff and families has increased and improved. Communication was also increased with the unveiling of the school's website as well as the establishing of monthly grade level newsletters, parent newsletters from school administration in English and Spanish, and reminders to parents of upcoming events through the use of stickers placed on students clothing on the day of the school/community event. The school's new website offers parents school news and information as well as grade level news complete with photos of students, community members, and parents' participation. Though the website offers a parent newsletter in Spanish, all of the others resources on the site are in English.

A Welcoming Climate

Research suggests a connection between a school's climate and the extent to which parents, community members, and families are involved in student's education. When schools create a positive climate by reaching out to families and community members, and provide structures for them to become involved, the result is effective school-family-community partnerships (Communtzis-Page, 1996). Riggins-Newby (2004) states that when families feel they are genuinely welcome at school, they are more likely to participate. It is critical for parents to receive the royal treatment when they are in the school building. Schools must show respect to parents at all times. If parents feel welcome and respected, they will respond.

Concerning a welcoming climate, the principal stated, in her interview, “The administration must increase the number of times parents and community members are in the building, offering events like Doughnuts for Dad, Muffins for Mom, and Grandparents Day Celebrations; these are the types of things that help with the misperception that the school doesn’t want parents and community members in the building. The administration must work to keep the momentum of involvement going, being careful not to add too much to the point of overwhelming the staff.”

A parent of a 5th grader, a kindergartner, and a teacher in the study school believes, “Parent and community involvement will continue to increase and I sense more interest from parents and community members.” She added that it will be important for the school administration and staff to get parents of kindergartners to buy in early to parent involvement, and then hopefully stay involved. This teacher, and parent, equates the increase of parent and community involvement to the welcoming environment that visitors are experiencing in the school.

Teachers, especially in the upper grades, feel they have the additional task of thinking of creative ways to involve parents and community members in the school. One third grade teacher shared, “I had a parent volunteer to come in every Monday to help in the classroom, but because the older students are so independent and the curriculum often doesn’t allow for art activities or projects, I had to alter my thinking in order to effectively and efficiently use the parent volunteer.”

The writer believes that a welcoming atmosphere begins with greetings by the front office staff, recognition by staff members as the volunteers are seen throughout the school as well as an organized and extensive volunteer program. Volunteers should be

recognized throughout the school year. Although the staff and administration at the study school held an open-door policy for parents, parents often did not feel welcome or useful when volunteering at the school. The staff began to make concerted efforts to involve families in several ways and one teacher recently remarked, “I feel like more parents are coming into the school because they sense a welcoming environment in the school.”

Some of the efforts made by the study school included the development of an extensive volunteer program, creation of special family and community events throughout the year, increased awareness of the Parent/Teacher Organization (PTO), workshops provided by our Parent Liaison, and a concentrated effort to involve of at least one room parent in each homeroom class. The administration and many staff members quickly realized that one-on-one contact is the key to getting families and community members involved, and keeping them involved. The staff found that getting to know individuals instilled in each person a sense of belonging.

The writer, as Assistant Principal, coordinates the Volunteer Program, recruits and trains participants, and matches school needs with volunteer talents by sending home a Volunteer Checklist (Appendix F), which parents complete identifying areas they are willing and able to serve in. The Assistant Principal created a Volunteer Handbook (Appendix G) and provided Volunteer Training sessions (Appendix H) in September and March. During the training sessions, the Assistant Principal and Parent Liaison, who interpreted the sessions, shared with participants the importance of building a strong volunteer community, confidentiality, volunteer opportunities at the study school, and a section for parents interested in tutoring or reading with students. There was an extension

to the training sessions for parents and guardians who wanted to chaperone students on fieldtrips (Appendix I).

Involve Parents and Community Members in Decision Making

The National Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) (2004) reports that studies have shown that schools with parents who are involved in decision-making and advocacy have higher levels of student achievement and greater public support. Effective partnerships develop when each partner is respected and empowered to fully participate in the decision-making process. Joyce Epstein's and others' (2002) research documents that parent involvement in decision-making benefits: (1) students as they become more aware of their families' representation in school decisions and understand that their rights are protected, (2) families as they gain a voice in school decisions and policies that affect children and feel a sense of ownership in their children's school, and (3) teachers and administrators as they become aware of the contributions parents can make to school policy development and educational reform (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez-Jansorn, & Van Vorris, 2002).

Another aspect of parent and community involvement in decision-making is the idea of communities of practice. A recent report published by the National Research Council, as cited in Shavelson & Towne (2002), concluded that "the sharp divide between education research and scholarship and the practice of education in schools and other settings" is one of the fundamental reasons for the lack of public support for education (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003, p. 263). One strategy that has been recommended to close the gap between research and practice is to involve teachers more in educational research. The writer led the school staff as they dialogued and reflected on

research-based best practices to increase parent and community involvement. Rather than allowing the community of practice to collect and analyze transcribed interviews, observation field notes, and other school document to develop recommendations to enhance parent and community involvement in the study school, the writer as researcher, collected and analyzed the data. The school staff, if truly acting as a community of practice, could consider presenting their findings at a state or national conference, extending the learning for the participants as well as the community at large (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003). The writer, the study school's principal, and the School Leadership Team are hopeful that the school's experience in this case study research project will ignite a spark in staff, parents, community members, and local practitioners to involve themselves in educational research through communities of practice. The standard for Student, Family, and Community Involvement and Support, which the study school chose to focus on, reads: "The school as a community of learning involves parent and community members as active participants. There is consistent and growing evidence of parent involvement and volunteerism, participation in workshops and enrichment activities, and a process of two-way communication. Everyone collaborates to help the school achieve its continuous improvement targets and short-and long-range goals" (Georgia Department of Education, 2007). With this statement as their goal, the entire faculty met at the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year to collaboratively discuss and discover the school's current reality and objective that will lead to achieving the goal. The next steps include exploring research based best practices to be considered for implementation by the school staff. The school staff must also consider ways to promote sustained relationships with community members.

Smith, in his book, *Communities of Practice: The Encyclopedia of Informal Education*, states that schools need to be places where “learning activities are planned by children as well as adults, and where parents and teachers not only foster children’s learning but also learn from their own involvement with children” (Smith, 2003, p. 6).

The writer believes the study school implemented aspects of communities of practice as they involved parents, staff, and community members in systematic reflection; reflecting on gaps between theory on increasing parent and community involvement and the school’s practices to increase involvement. The study school also provided regular opportunities for collaborative reflection and inquiry through dialogue. The School Council is made up of staff members, parents, and community members, but is the only group in the school community represented by all stakeholders. Many groups of teachers in the study school get together to discuss research-based best practices, as in this study of parent and community involvement, but parents and community members are rarely included in these types of discussions. It may be the belief of many of the staff members that parents and community members do not have knowledge of or interest in education research and best practices. The writer along with some of the school’s parents realize the need to create communities of parents, staff members, and community members that meet to reflect, dialogue, and develop shared practices in an ongoing way to refine those practices when necessary. However, the study school must examine the work with children and families through many lenses, with an awareness of how each participant’s experiences shapes their knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, and skills (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Wesley and Buysse (2003) state that the transition to a community of practice is much smoother if the community of practice framework is introduced to a

group of practitioners who are already meeting, provide written material on communities of practice in advance of meetings, and organize the meeting in the spirit of collaborative learning and inquiry. One parent, who was interviewed concerning involving parents and community members in school decision making, stated, “I believe more parents, beyond the PTO members, should involve themselves in decision-making committees at our school.”

Parents and community members of the study school participate on committees to plan and carry through special events and activities at the school, such as the Fall Festival, Western Day, and Fire Prevention Week. Three business owners, three parents, two teachers, and the school’s principal make up the School Council and serve two-year terms. The School Council serves as a leadership group that represents the community, the parents, and the school staff. The School Council serves as a liaison, brings concerns and school improvement ideas to the table four times a year, and was instrumental in selecting the school’s present principal.

One School Council member thought that a suggestion box in the school’s front office would provide an avenue for parents, students, and community members to share school improvement suggestions in an anonymous manner. The member suggested that the School Council address the suggestions at their quarterly meetings. The writer believes that the creation of a separate Community Outreach Team and a Business Partnership Team among the faculty and parents would allow each of these teams to focus more specifically, as opposed to the current Partners in Education Committee, which oversees both areas, community outreach and business partnerships.

The PTO Executive Committee of the study school is made up of parent members and two teacher members. The committee meets with school administration and community members and guides the PTO. The writer believes that parents should also serve on school committees, such as the Language Arts Committee, the School Improvement Committee, and the Math Committee.

Plan Events & Activities

Research has found that school events that feature some interaction with the students' teachers appear to attract more parents than those that exhibit student performances or demonstrations alone (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Attendance at an open house or back-to-school night is usually very high, with about 49 percent of the schools that hold such events reporting that most or all parents attend. In contrast, about one-third of all schools indicate that most or all parents attend arts events in which their children participate, and only 19 percent of parents attend academic events such as science fairs and 12 percent attend sports events when their children participate in these events (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). One teacher shared during her interview, "Any activity which involves the entire family goes over best at our school; entire families came to the school's Fall Festival to be a part of something that THEY helped put together. Follow-up with parents is the key: written communication, phone calls, and e-mails." The parent of a 4th grade student and a kindergarten student believes, "Events like Reading Night and Math Night are a really good idea, especially for parents who work." Another parent shared that events which allow parents to get to know the teachers are good. The school's principal stated, "The school's Curriculum Night, Reading Night, and Math Night brought a large number of parents into the school

building and were definite highlights of the 2006-2007 school year.” One third grade teacher, who was interviewed, shared she believes the make-up of her 2006-2007 class (77 percent Hispanic) could serve as one explanation for the lack of parent involvement; yet, the non-Hispanic parents volunteered very little in her classroom. The teacher stated that she found it very interesting that in the year of our focus on increasing parent and community involvement, every parent in her classroom attended the school’s Open House and added that this was the first year in her four-year career that all of the parents, in her classroom, came to Open House. The school’s Guidance Counselor shared, “From my perspective, my first year at the study school, parent and community involvement has just begun. It has a really good start!” The Guidance Counselor remarked, in her interview, “I really liked the training for volunteers, Math Night, and Reading Night!” A list of all the events and activities planned to involve parents and community members, for the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years, can be found in Appendices J and K, respectively.

Recognition of Volunteers

Recognizing the commitment of volunteers is an essential part of any successful volunteer program. Recognition can be as simple as thanking volunteers for their efforts, or as elaborate as planning a reception for volunteers so they feel valued. Research shows that recognition programs that work celebrate longevity, have consistent reward policies and are based on individual tasks (Ilg, Massucci, & Russo, 2003).

One fifth grade teacher was asked what our staff, parents, and community members could do to remove barriers to involvement. She stated that she felt recognizing the volunteers at a reception in their honor at the end of the school year was very

effective. She added, “A majority of our volunteers attended, and staff members were able to personally share their gratitude to the parent and community members.” The school recognized the Partners in Education by delivering holiday-related treats and decorations created by students throughout the school year. In the spring of the 2006-2007 school year, the school invited all of the Partners in Education to a school event in their honor where each partner was presented with a plaque commemorating their involvement with the school and students. At the conclusion of the school year, every volunteer was invited to a reception, in their honor, and presented with a small token of the school’s appreciation.

Involve the Community

Research during the past 12 years supports what many parents and teachers know: Community-based programs and organizations make significant contributions to young people’s learning and development (McLaughlin, 2000). Researchers suggest there might be a need to re-conceptualize roles that various people play in the life of students. Avenues need to be provided for the involvement of the community, such as school Spirit Nights, mentor programs, donations of awards and incentives for student achievement, and school-community partnerships. All parties benefit when school, communities, and families’ partner. Communities, organizations, and businesses gain a greater sense of purpose by sharing strengths and wisdom with students and gain improved access to school resources. Families gain an awareness of the community’s contributions to the school and develop a sense of connection with other families in the community. Students increase skills and talents from enriched curricular and extracurricular activities, develop

a sense of value and belonging to the community, and develop positive relationships with adults (Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations, 2006).

When asked about involving the community in the life of the school, one teacher remarked, “In years past, the school staff didn’t even know who the businesses and community members were who were involved in our school.” Another interviewee, a parent, believes we should open up events at school, like PTO events and the Fall Festival, to the community. She suggested that the study school advertise more in the community through the use of local radio stations, newspapers, and websites. One of the school’s Partners in Education shared, “I feel the partnership between my business and the study school is very effective and has increased business. A business has services that a school often needs, resulting in a relationship which benefits everyone.” The business owner concluded by saying, “I just feel better as a business person being a part of the school!”

The school community is involved in the day-to-day life of the study school as members attend school events, mentor at-risk students, provide incentives and rewards for student accomplishments, and participate in special projects. Once a week, during the school year, a local restaurant holds a Spirit Night for the study school, inviting families from the school to eat dinner together at their restaurant. Each restaurant that hosts a Spirit Night gives a percentage (10 to 15 percent) of the night’s proceeds back to the school.

Partners in Education (PIE) are local businesses who have agreed to form a reciprocal relationship, in which the business supports the school by supplying employees, meeting space, expertise, and/or funds. The school, in turn, advertises for

each PIE on the school's welcome sign, website, PIE bulletin board at the school's main entrance, and in school newsletters. Partners in Education are sent invitations to events at the study school throughout the school year and visited periodically by the school's Assistant Principal to gauge the program's effectiveness for the school and the businesses.

The number of Partners in Education has grown from six inactive partners to twelve highly active partners, who give of their time and resources for the study school's students and staff. Each of our partners donates either coupons, certificates, or funds for prizes to award students for their achievements each nine-week period. Six local businesses came and set up booths at the Fall Festival, giving away freebies and offering information to festival visitors.

Each Room Parent sought donations from local businesses, in the study school's community, to fill theme-related baskets. There were over 50 baskets auctioned at the Fall Festival, with proceeds going to the school. One local business sold the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) a plasma screen television set at cost, which was raffled, with proceeds benefiting the PTO and consequently, the school. Parents continue to help raise funds for the school and the number of parents and community members attending events at the study school has grown in the past year.

Local colleges, an educational arm of the community, send education students to the study school's classrooms for lab hours, shadowing, and student teaching. One college sponsors a day in the fall when students create booths on themes in Science and Math. Kindergarten students take a fieldtrip to the college each year to travel from booth to booth to experience Science and Math in unique ways.

The study school held a community-wide Blood Drive, on the school campus, which was advertised throughout the community. A local florist organized a school-wide Writing Contest to commemorate Mother's Day and to reward students and their mothers for exemplary writing ability; and an employee from a community bank spoke with students on National Savings Day. During Fire Prevention Week, local firefighters visited each classroom to discuss fire safety with the students and took them outside for a tour of their fire trucks. One Partner in Education sponsored a Fire Prevention Week Poster Contest, awarding 300 dollars in prize money to student winners of the contest. The business invited local firemen to judge the posters at the business and served lunch.

The community is also involved in study school through a drug and violence prevention program. The local Sheriff's Department provides a deputy to deliver the ADVANCE program to all fifth grade students at the study school. The program focuses on resisting gangs, alcohol, violence, and negative influences. The methods by which the program is delivered and the graduation that serves as its finale are meaningful to students.

The county 4-H provides an opportunity for the county Extension Service to come into the school to guide students through its program to teach leadership through service. Many students prepare demonstrations for district competition and have been successful in winning prizes for their work. In partnership with county schools, Avita Community Partners provides mental health services at the study school for students and families in need of their services. The social worker is on the school's campus three days a week and receives referrals from the school's guidance counselor, teachers, case workers, and school administrators.

Junior Achievement helps students understand the economics of life, opening their minds to their full potential and brings their program to some of our classrooms. Founded locally, Junior Achievement, Inc. is a non-profit economic education organization. Volunteers from businesses and the community come into the classrooms to share their experiences with the students. The volunteer becomes a classroom leader, giving students a real world perspective on topics, including personal financial literacy, entrepreneurial thinking, and global business perspectives. Junior Achievement programs goals include the desire to benefit the business community by ensuring that the next generation of business leaders is well prepared to enter the workforce (Junior Achievement, 2008).

The Volunteer Program has grown rapidly this past year and now involves parents, community members, and senior citizens from a local church. Many of the volunteers will be participating in formal mentor training through a local agency, Center Point, on the study school's campus. In addition the study school has partnered with students taking an Early Childhood Education course at its feeder high school. The students work with at-risk students twice a week in reading and math skills. High school students, from the feeder school, assist the school's certified teachers with childcare during events at the study school. A Parent and Community bulletin board that highlights home to school to community projects and volunteer opportunities is to be erected in a front hallway of the school. A bulletin board with photos of families in attendance at weekly school Spirit Nights is hung in the school's front hallway.

*Parent Practices Which Increase Parent and Community Involvement**Spending Time Together*

Parents are their child's first teachers, but in many schools they are failing in that responsibility. While there is much work to be done within the school walls, the family must face up to its responsibilities as well. Schools must do more to increase family and community involvement, but cannot do it alone. It seems to this writer that too often television or music is dominant in homes rather than reading, studying, or communicating. Families must begin having meals together at the table again, checking homework and reading together, spending time together as a family. In a study led by The Nemours Foundation, researchers found that television time had a significant impact on the amount of time a child spent interacting with other family members. The more time a child spent watching television without parents present in the room, the less time a child spent doing other activities with his or her parents. Also, children who watched television on weekdays spent less time doing homework. For example, six- to eight-year-olds who watched an hour of television on a weeknight spent about 14 percent less time doing homework. Nine- to twelve-year-olds who watched an hour of television during the week tended to spend about 18 percent less time doing homework (Vandewater, Bickham, & Lee, 2006, para. 6).

One of the study school's teachers, with four children of her own, believes "Parents just reading 10 to 15 minutes a night with their children is enough. Parents must show an interest in what their children are doing in school and reiterate the importance of school in order for children to see the value." With the goal of increasing the amount of time families spend together, the school offered a multitude of events and activities for

families to participate in together. Teachers provide homework helps for parents, homework projects in which the family participates, and campaigns for TV-less weeks in the home. The only homework that K-5 grade students have on a regular basis, at the study school, is reading 15 to 20 minutes each night.

Parents' Relationship with the School and Understanding of School Processes

Social capital refers to “networks accessible to parents that improve a student’s ability to benefit from educational opportunities.” Social capital in the family and/or community can help children compensate for a lack of other resources. Family social capital, such as parents or siblings helping other children with homework regularly, can be an effective buffer against the negative impact of low socio-economic status and low parental education attainment on children's academic outcomes (Coleman, 1988, p. 94). Coleman states that all schools have social structures that influence student achievement. However, some schools have stronger relationships with families than other schools do (i.e., possess more social capital); and are therefore able to promote higher levels of achievement. Other factors that influence social capital include the school’s understanding of its obligation to students, parents’ knowledge of the school system, and the existence of norms that support high student achievement (Feuerstein, 2000). When parents become more knowledgeable about their child’s learning, grade level requirements and expectations, they are more willing to become involved in their child’s education in the school building and at home.

Annette Lareau borrowed the concept of cultural capital but focused more directly on parent involvement. Lareau stated that indicators of cultural capital include: (a) amount of interaction a parent has with other parents, (b) parents’ understanding of

school processes, (c) amount of contact parents have with school personnel, and (d) parents' communication skills. In her research, Lareau used those indicators to determine that upper middle class parents were more likely to become involved in school activities, whereas working-class parents were more likely to embrace a supportive but less involved role (Lareau, 1987).

The study school provided a Curriculum Day and Curriculum Night at the beginning of each school year in order to communicate grade-level standards, expectations, curriculum, and assessment system. With changes happening almost daily, it seems, in education, the writer believes that the study school might need to consider offering a time for parents and community members to learn specifically about national, state, and local tests given to students as well as an explanation of how to read the results and what they mean. The teachers presently send a weekly newsletter to parents that outlines the state's Performance Standards the teacher will be teaching for the week and parents have a standing invitation to come into the classroom and observe how the students are being taught in order to have a better understanding of teaching methods in addition to curriculum.

Barriers to Parent and Community Involvement and Removal of Barriers

Schools can and do influence the level of parent and community involvement in education. The most effective means of overcoming barriers to involvement and helping parents and community members become more engaged with their schools and community have been determined through research of best practices. As research determines the best practices for overcoming these barriers, schools will begin to institute the practices in order to remove the barriers and increase the involvement of parents and

the community in schools. Barriers to parent and community involvement in elementary schools include changes in the composition of today's family, a school atmosphere that neither welcomes nor respects visitors to the school, parent and community member work schedule conflicts, and a lack of time, transportation, and/or childcare. A lack of knowledge of the need for volunteers in the schools, perceptions of teachers and parents, cultural and class differences between school staff and family and community members, a lack of knowledge on the parent's part of how to help their children learn, and negative school experiences of the parents also serve as barriers to the involvement of parents and community members in elementary schools.

Changes in Family Composition

Societal changes, specifically, family compositions, have created many demands that serve as barriers to parents' ability and willingness to become involved in schools. The number of unmarried heads-of-household grew by 71 percent in the 1990s (Boyd, 2005, p. 24). The nuclear family has become less common, while the single-parent and two-income households are typical. Because of this change in family composition, school staff must realize that parents or guardians may be absent from the school for a variety of reasons, but this does not lessen their care and concern for their children.

Families change and students change. To help all students succeed, schools and communities must pay attention to the multiple dimensions of young people's lives. It is crucial that we consider the needs of families and students and develop creative solutions to meet the diverse needs of all young people and their families. We must redefine parent involvement to include the perspectives of diverse families in strategic planning and implementing parent and community partnerships. The resources and gifts that come

from families and communities can enhance and support the education of each and every one of our children.

“The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about children’s families. If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children’s education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibility for children and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students” (Epstein, 1995, p. 701).

Perhaps, schools and communities need to rethink the school-centric focus and focus more on the creation of reciprocal connections among schools, parents, and community members. Several authors on the subject of parent and community involvement argue for the need to develop an “asset” model, in which parents and communities are considered equal contributors to the educational process and are viewed by school personnel as resources rather than obstacles (Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002).

Based on the changing family, the staff at the study school was trained on various family types, such as the single-parent home (a mom or a dad), absent parent home, blended family home, guardian-as-parent home, and how the make-up of the home can affect a student’s academic and social life. It was stressed to staff members that changes have occurred to the traditional family structure, and they must acknowledge the changes, especially when it means meeting the student’s needs or not meeting the student’s needs.

Community and school resources were shared with the staff in the hope that the resources will be used to meet the needs of the students and their families. The school staff have become accustomed to supporting and encouraging members of a student's family as they seek to raise the student in the best environment possible, whether that be in a traditional family structure or a not-so-traditional family structure. The study school faculty reaches out to families throughout the school year to provide assistance in the way of clothing, gas cards, food, and Christmas gifts.

An Unwelcoming School Climate

Many families and community members may not become involved in the school if they do not feel that the school climate, the social and educational atmosphere of the school, is one that makes them feel welcomed, respected, trusted, heard, and needed. School staff must provide non-threatening opportunities for families and community members to come into the school and convince them with their attitudes and actions that they are glad the volunteers are there. Administrators and teachers who effectively communicate with parents and community members, remembering to listen much more than they talk, demonstrate their respect to these parents and community members. Parents and community members will also realize they are valued and needed when they are asked to be involved in decision-making groups. Parents can use their available resources and ideas to work with educators to define and analyze issues and find solutions to problem.

Work Schedules, Lack of Transportation, Time, and Childcare

Many parents and community members work long hours, multiple jobs, and various shifts and aren't always able to come to the school for scheduled parent

conferences, workshops, or events. Lack of transportation and the responsibility of young children also serve as barriers for parents and community members who want to attend school events or volunteer but can not. To alleviate some of these barriers, county and school administration could provide time, during the school day, for teachers to meet with parents or go on home visits or compensatory time or stipends for teachers who make home visits or who meet with parents and community members beyond teachers' contracted hours. School leadership can create a master schedule to excuse teachers from routine duties to meet with students' family members or community members.

Time and resource constraints have also been identified as barriers to parent and community involvement. Principals of K-8 Title I schools report that time is a barrier to parent involvement more often than any other factor. Eighty-seven percent of Title I principals report that lack of time on the part of parents is a significant barrier to parent involvement, and fifty-six percent report that lack of time on the part of school staff is a barrier (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Schools can be sensitive to time pressures facing parents and community members by scheduling meetings at night or before work shifts to accommodate the schedules of working parents and community members. Schools can also help parents and community members by providing early notices of meetings and activities, allowing parents time to adjust their schedules; offering the same event more than once, and providing information to parents and community members who could not attend a meeting to keep them informed (Funkhouser & Gonzales, 1997). Schools can address parents' resource constraints by providing parents with childcare, meals prior to school events, and transportation services so they can attend school events. Conducting home visits would also help alleviate parent resource constraints.

Some of the staff members interviewed in a focus group shared that some teachers feel that they should not be required to work past contract hours, 7:15 AM -3:15 PM. Staff members identified stress and exhaustion as barriers to their willingness to work behind contracted hours. Time is most often mentioned as a reason for noninvolvement from staff members. One staff member believes “We, as a society, are just too busy sometimes with kids going here and there and an event at the school is just one more thing to do. Some parents are passive in their children’s lives for various reasons: working to survive and pay the bills or so career oriented that they unfortunately place their children on the backburner or brush them off.”

Staff members at the study school stated that many teachers must also overcome the barriers of a negative mindset; feeling that this is one more thing that is being asked of the staff beyond the school day; the obstacle of possible long commutes between home and school, and issues of childcare after hours. One teacher shared in her interview, “At the outset of the push to increase parent and community involvement, some staff members were ‘bothered’ that they had to plan and participate in events like Reading Night and Math Night, due in part to the lack of parent participation in past events. But, this year I observed the excitement of the parents and students racing from classroom to classroom on Reading Night, and then even returning to some of the classrooms again! I believe that the excitement of the students resulted in staff members getting enthused and the staff morale rose from the beginning of the year to the spring of the year.”

One parent, who was interviewed, shared that she knows a lot of parents that work during the day and would like to be much more involved. She added that at night parents are tired, have school, or other personal obligations. The Principal stated, “I believe

some of the success the school is experiencing in increasing parent and community involvement is because the administration is sensitive to parent schedules and are helping teachers to become more aware of parent and community member schedules.” Another interviewed staff member shared that in a school she worked in previously, the Parent Volunteer Coordinator served dinner at every event the school sponsored. This allowed families to have dinner together and attend the school event following dinner.

School staff at the study school are reminded that many parents and community members would like to help, but their schedules don't allow them to come to the school; sending materials home for parents and community members to complete could be beneficial to the teacher and volunteer.

To overcome the barrier of time constraints, the school tried to consistently remind parents of the importance of being involved in their child's life, attempted to schedule events at times most convenient for parents, and offered the same event at multiple times to accommodate parents with children in different grade levels. The school held events like the bi-annual Book Fair, Curriculum, Reading, and Math Nights in the evening when most of the parents were home from work and could attend. The school also used the students as bait! Student performances and displays of student work were helpful in drawing the parents to the building for events.

Perceptions of Parents and Teachers

Epstein and Dauber found a considerable disparity in what teachers believed about the parents of urban children and the attitudes of the parents themselves. While the teachers held that these parents did not wish to be involved at school, the parents felt that they were involved and wanted to know more about what they could do to help (Epstein

& Dauber, 1991). These negative perceptions embedded within communications between professionals and parents tend to subvert the empowerment of parents.

In discussing perception as a barrier to parent and community involvement, the Principal thinks that one reason some parents and community members might not be involved is perception. Even though the administration and faculty at the study school attempted to overcome many perceptions of parents, community members, and even some staff, the Principal stated that overcoming perceptions takes time: “Whenever I was in leadership training, I read books by scholars who would say it takes years to build trust between an administrator and a group of teachers in a school or community members, but it only takes an instant, one decision, to destroy that trust. I think the same thing is true between a school and its parents and community members.” She went on to say that some may still “believe the school is a government agency out to get illegal immigrants or is a group of ‘stand-offish’ educators not interested in their children. Another perception in the community is that if parents come to the school to talk to their child’s teacher, they will be blasted; that perception stems from the fact that some of our teachers don’t always know how to talk with parents and encourage parents in terms of their child’s academia. Those instances are isolated, but do add to the perceptions.”

The study school administrators felt one of the most effective ways of getting past the perceptions and communicating that school personnel do want parents and community members in their building was increasing the number of times parents are invited to visit. Events like Doughnuts for Dad, Muffins for Mom, and Grandparents Day were put into place during the school year and brought many parents, grandparents, and community members into the school.

Lack of Knowledge of Need

Another barrier to parent and community involvement in the school is a lack of knowledge of need and practical ways to be involved as community members and parents. In his 2003 book entitled, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement*, John U. Ogbu answered a question that must be asked in all homes, suburban or rural, rich or poor, black or white: What is going on? Ogbu found that “parents’ participation and involvement [with school] was dismal...involvement with their children’s education at home was equally dismal...there was the failure to supervise homework, failure to teach appropriate use of time, and inability to shield their children from negative peer pressure. They [parents] did not think they needed to be involved in the teaching process for their children to learn...parents did not attend school meetings, participate in school programs, to parent-teacher conferences...parents mistrusted the school (Ogbu, 2003, p. 261). The editors of *Educating At-Risk Students*, a yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, examined factors that hinder parent and community involvement in the schools and identified three school barriers: poor principal leadership, lack of parental and community knowledge and skills on the part of school personnel, and an unwelcoming school climate (Stringfield & Land, 2002).

One community member and member of the school’s School Council stated that he decided to become involved in his children’s school because his own parents were not involved, and he wanted to set a different example for his children. Another member of the School Council believes, “The lack of parent and community involvement is tied to a lack of knowledge and understanding: understanding that there is a need in the school for

parents and community members, understanding what is involved in volunteering in the school.” A community member reminded the writer that society is a volunteer society, with many people asking for your time, and if parents and community members don’t have a vested interest in the school, and aren’t enlightened concerning the need of volunteers, the time will be given to some other organization.

In considering these barriers in the light of the study school, the school sought to provide non-threatening opportunities for parents and community members to be involved on a regular basis. The Partners in Education Committee corresponded with community members, as partners, to make them aware of the needs of the school and students. The administration and Parent-Teacher Organization communicated the needs of the school and students via newsletters, the school’s website, and meetings. The partners, parents, and PTO prioritized the school’s needs and offered resources, when they were able to.

Cultural and Class Differences

Cultural competence refers to “the knowledge, skills, and attributes that enable people to work effectively across racial, ethnic, and cultural lines.” Many educators have not changed their own language and actions when dealing with the changing American family. Faculty members must continue to recognize, respect, and address families’ needs as well as any other differences. Diversity, or differences, in our schools could present themselves in ethnicity, language, religion, disabilities, family structure, income level, or level of parent education.

The writer, based on observations and interviews, believes that the study school faculty is oftentimes unsure of how to deal with parents and community members whose

class and culture are different from their own. School leaders, at the study school, encouraged faculty members, community members, and parents to talk openly and honestly about issues of race and class, instead of pretending they don't exist. The staff was encouraged to legitimize the concerns of families, students, and community members and helped staff learn how to address and approach these issues through professional learning and resources housed in the school. Because most of the faculty was unaware of the different beliefs of Hispanic parents and community members concerning involvement in the schools, the faculty was also provided training on class and cultural differences and their influence on parent and community involvement, specifically the Hispanic population.

A Parent Liaison

Based on the research, described below, concerning parent liaisons, the parent liaison is seen as a critical player in the effort to generate greater communications between parents and the school. Darder, Torres, and Guiterrez (1997) state that education is highly regarded as the social and economic equalizer, and as a prerequisite to improving the social and economic status of Latinos. The Parent Resource Person Group conducted a study in which parent liaisons supported school staff by serving as a link to the home and acting as a 'two-way cultural conduit between teachers and families' (Halford, 1996, p. 35). As these liaisons direct parents to appropriate resources, parents can develop specific parenting skills that can enhance their children's achievement in school. Parents also learn to decipher a new culture of schooling, in which learning approaches may differ fundamentally from those to which they are accustomed (Halford, 1996).

A staff member who was asked how the school dealt with some of these barriers to parent and community involvement shared, “I feel this year the parents were more informed, more notices were going home in Spanish, and the Hispanic population of the school was being communicated to and was communicating with the school more, presumably because of our Parent Liaison for the Hispanic population in the school.”

Another staff member shared that she believes the Parent Liaison is an asset to the school as she reaches out to the Hispanic parents and lets them know they are welcome and needed in the school. Members of a focus group recalled meetings, scheduled by the Parent Liaison and English as Second Language Learner teachers, in which Hispanic parents were invited into the school to interact with the staff and learn ways they could be involved with their children’s education. In turn, the Hispanic families cooked dishes representative of their native countries and served them at a Teacher Appreciation Night.

While in many schools and systems the parent liaison works with all groups, the parent liaison in the writer’s school works exclusively with a Hispanic population. The parent liaison leads workshops for families and community members, translates for parent meetings and communication with teachers, and makes home visits. While the study school has a parent liaison, the liaison position is a part-time one and is staffed solely for the purpose of helping parents of the English as Second Language learners feel comfortable in the school and establish positive relationships.

Lack of Knowledge

Many parents and community members do not know how to get involved, do not feel capable of contributing in a meaningful way, or simply do not feel welcome. What these parents and community members need is more information, support,

encouragement, or even, specific training (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). All parents and community members, [regardless of their cultural background], must receive important education-related information, such as relevant school and district data, parents' rights and responsibilities in their child's education, options available to families under NCLB or state or district programs, and how parents and community members can contribute to improved education outcomes for their own children and other students (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Some parents may even find the school work above their own abilities. Many parents never went beyond high school algebra, yet they find their children studying trigonometry. Kindergarten classrooms used to teach the basics of counting and letters of the alphabet. That same classroom may now contain children who are ready to read and add, along with students who still need the basics.

When one parent was asked if she felt the level of parent and community involvement at the study school was satisfactory, she responded, "I think it is satisfactory. The staff are better explaining what parents CAN do to help their children and also making it easier for the parents to help." One kindergarten teacher thinks that educating parents in volunteer opportunities at the school will help to increase involvement. She stated, "In the past, parents came into my classroom, but they didn't know what to do. Giving parents more information and ways that they can become more involved will help increase involvement." A third-grade teacher believes that parents of struggling students may not be as comfortable coming into the school or classroom, concerned about what they would hear about their child's academic performance. The school's Guidance Counselor feels that we need to offer training to help parents help their children at home.

“Staff could suggest ways to make difficult subjects like Math more fun, such as cooking activities,” she says.

Throughout the school year, families and community members were invited to special events at the school. Curriculum Night, Reading Night, and Math Night are times when teachers share curriculum with parents for their child’s grade level as well as explore ways they can help their child at home in Reading and Math. Many staff members identified these three nights as effective training opportunities to assist parents in helping their child(ren) at home as well as a morale booster for staff because of the incredible amount of parent participation and excitement. During the specialized curriculum nights, parents “make and take” games and activities that they can use with their children at home to help with various grade-level appropriate concepts. On Curriculum Night, parents receive curriculum packets they can use at home with their children.

Because the study school is a Title 1 school, a Parent Meeting was held in August 2006 to explain Section 1118 of the Title I Program Law, its requirements and benefits. In addition to the Parent Meeting, a section of the 2006-2007 Student Handbook (Appendix L) was devoted to aiding in the development of parent involvement, Title 1, and the Parent Teacher Organization at the study school.

The study school purchased *Daily Learning Planners*, in English and Spanish, from The Parent Institute, which contain three months of ideas parents can use to help their children do better in school. The school also purchased a subscription to a monthly parent newsletter, in English and Spanish, also from The Parent Institute, entitled, *Helping Children Learn*, filled with tips, articles, and quizzes parents can use to help

their children. The third monthly newsletter subscription from The Parent Institute, *Firm, Fair and Consistent*, is uploaded each month, in English and Spanish, to the school's website to assist parents in guiding their children for school success.

Parent Resource Center

Research suggests that the most effective forms of parent and community involvement are those which engage parents in working directly with their children in learning activities at home (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). Research by Joyce Epstein and others shows that the results of learning at home can be significant for parents, students, and teachers. Students have a more positive attitude about homework and school, have a better homework completion rate, and their self-confidence as a learner is improved. Parents improve their knowledge of how to support, encourage, and help their children at home, gain a deeper understanding of the instructional program and what the children are learning, and increase discussions at home about school, class work, and future plans. Teachers create more interactive homework, respect family time, and recognize the helpfulness of all families in motivating and reinforcing student learning (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez-Jansorn, & Van Vorris, 2002). Schools striving to increase parent and community involvement might consider allowing parents to check out learning activities, in English and Spanish, from the classroom or a Parent Resource Center housed in the school.

Based on this research, in the fall of 2006, the Instructional Coach, Guidance Counselor, Parent Liaison, and Assistant Principal of the study school developed a Parent Resource Library and stocked it with books, in English and Spanish, for parents to help their children learn, books to read with their children, and educational games to play with

their children. Title 1 funds were utilized to purchase parent resources, such as those listed below.

**My First Bilingual Readers*

**Spanish Flip-Flash Book of Common Words*

**You Can Handle Them All for Parents*

**Helping Your Child Learn to Read*

**Helping Your Child Learn Mathematics (in English & Spanish)*

**Buddy Reading Task Cards for Parents & Students (in English & Spanish)*

**How to Develop Your Child's Self-Esteem*

**Helping your Child Succeed in School*

**Growing Happy Kids*

**How to be Involved in Your Child's Education: A Parent's Handbook*

A flyer (like the one in Appendix M) was sent home periodically throughout the year to remind parents of the books, videotapes, flashcards, and tool kits available for check-out. Each month during the school year, the school's part-time Parent Liaison and teacher of English Language Learners (ELL) presented parent workshops to parents of English Language Learners. Parent Meetings for parents of ELL students were held in October, February, and April. The current principal stated that she considers the creation of the school's Parent Resource Library the most successful piece of the parent and community involvement puzzle at the study school in the 2006-2007 school year.

Parents' School Experiences

Many parents have not had positive school experiences themselves and are reluctant to become involved at their child's school. When their children come home from school with negative experiences, the parent agrees. When parents become part of the school, the parent's attitude as well as the children's becomes more positive. A staff member that was interviewed said, "Just being a positive person in the lives of the students can help connect them to the school; therefore, tying their parents in as well." The staff at the study school found that when they empathized with parents' personal school experiences and their reluctance to be involved, many parents felt emotionally safe to come into the school and/or help their children with learning at home.

Summary

Research-based best practices, which increase parent and community involvement in elementary schools and were implemented at the school in this research study, are effective administrative leadership, teacher practices and professional learning, two-way communication, a welcoming climate, involving parents and community members in decision making, planning events and activities, recognizing volunteers, and involving the community in the school. Parent practices, which increase parent and community involvement and were implemented by the study school are parents spending time with their children, developing an excellent relationship with the school, and gaining an understanding of school processes.

Full involvement of parent and community members in elementary schools cannot be accomplished because of barriers that stand in the way. Barriers that were experienced in the study school, and which the study school attempted to remove, include

changes in the composition of today's family, a school atmosphere that neither welcomes nor respects visitors to the school, parent and community member work schedule conflicts, and a lack of time, transportation, and/or childcare. A lack of knowledge of the need for volunteers in the schools, perceptions of teachers and parents, cultural and class differences between school staff and family and community members, a lack of knowledge on the parent's part of how to help their children learn, and negative school experiences of the parents also serve as barriers to the involvement of parents and community members in elementary schools.

The study school's journey toward increased parent and community involvement is moving into its second year. The number of active Partners in Education has increased from six to twelve. Room Parents, which were non-existent, now coordinate events in each classroom. Volunteers, including local high school students, church members, and parents, come into the school. On an average week, in school years prior to 2006-2007, one to two volunteers came in to the school. During the 2006-2007 school year, based on Volunteer Sign-in logs, an average of 8 to 10 volunteers came in to school. The changes that have been made are becoming part of the school culture, the way things are done at the school. The initial year was spent reorganizing the school leadership, focusing on professional learning, and adding opportunities for families and community members to come into the school. The staff is now involved in decision-making at the school through grade level teams, committees, and the School Leadership Team. The staff has been trained on topics such as, communicating with parents, involving volunteers in classrooms, and conducting effective parent conferences. The School Leadership Team, Parent-Teacher Organization, and School Council are now effectively leading the school

to involve and increase parents and community members in the school. A commitment has been made to involve parents and community members in programs, events, and activities resulting in new and renewed partnerships.

Although the school has come a long way in its quest to increase parent and community involvement, it still has a way to go to be considered a high involvement school. Because the faculty, parents, and community members are willing and determined to do whatever it takes for students to experience success at the school, the writer is sure this school will meet and exceed that goal.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions

The study school is an old school. The school retains an experienced faculty and staff, yet a new principal. The school is different after the changes incorporated during the 2006-2007 school year; it is more energized and committed to the students, families, and members of the local community. With a new principal, the community was hoping for change and change is exactly what the community of students, staff, families, and community members experienced. The school has experienced a change in how things are done, and a change in the culture of the school itself.

The Qualitative Design

This dissertation is a report of a qualitative, case study of parent and community involvement. The writer's school sought to identify research-based best practices and their barriers, remove the barriers, and implement the practices in the school to increase the level of parent and community involvement. The study is based upon the interviews and observations of the writer in one elementary school as the plan was implemented to increase parent and community involvement in the school. Because this was a study of people and a place and would produce a narrative of the school's process and outcomes, qualitative methods allowed the researcher to meet the goals of the study as opposed to quantitative methods. This study of increasing parents and community involvement should have an emphasis on words, rather than numbers; hence, qualitative, rather than quantitative. Using qualitative research methods allowed the writer to delve into the

meaning of participant's words and actions as they are involved in events and experiences. Another benefit to qualitative research, for this writer, was having the flexibility to modify the plan during the study in order to understand relationships without fear of tainting the results of statistical testing. In thinking of the participants of this study, employees of the writer's school, generating results that are understandable and applicable to the participants and readers of the study was important to the writer.

On the other hand, qualitative research does not lend itself to causal explanations: to what extent does a change in x cause a change in y? The writer admits to trepidation when considering the mysterious aspect of data analysis in a qualitative research study.

Also, the issue of validity in a qualitative study was an issue the writer had to reckon with. There are not prescribed procedures to validate the results of qualitative studies. Validity in qualitative studies depends on the relationship of the study's conclusions to reality (Maxwell, 2005). Two threats that affect a study's validity were of concern to the writer, prior to the study, namely the writer's bias (since the study school is the writer's place of employment) and the influence the writer might have on the participants and setting. The writer sought, throughout the study, to minimize personal bias and level of influence on participants and the setting. The school's principal, who completed her Doctoral dissertation during this research study, served as the thermometer to gauge the writer's bias and influence, and read and approved the contents of this study.

Because a qualitative research design evolves as the study is conducted, the writer had to learn that changes to a well-designed plan might actually improve the study, the applicability, and the personal nature of the results.

Schools can and do influence the level of parent and community participation in children's education, but they must determine the most effective means of overcoming barriers to involvement and helping parents and community members become more engaged with their schools and community.

In order to identify best practices, barriers, and means of overcoming the barriers, the writer collected data throughout the study. As the writer/researcher synthesized, and simultaneously, analyzed the collected data, the process cycled back to a reflective piece of research. As new understandings of the problem become apparent and new questions appeared, a new area of focus was identified and an adjusted plan was taken.

The primary method of data collection was structured, open-ended interviews that were recorded digitally and transcribed. During interviews, the writer found it quite difficult to refrain from having conversations with interviewees rather than asking questions and allowing the interviewee to respond, even though the interviewer was following a question guide. The interviewer had the opportunity to observe the participant and the total environment while he/she was responding. A disadvantage for this interviewer was the possibility of participants answering with responses they thought the interviewer wanted to hear. The writer attempted to control for this bias by assuring the participant that honest and forthright answers were being sought so as to make improvements to the parent and community involvement plan. The writer interviewed the school's principal, four parents whose children attend the study school, five individual teachers, a focus group of five teachers, the school's guidance counselor, two business partners, and members of the School Council. As data was collected, the researcher began to analyze the data, initially by reading and rereading notes and

transcripts and repeatedly listening to audiotapes. After the transcription of the interviews, the responses of the participants were studied in order to identify major themes. In analyzing categories and themes and connecting them, the discrepant data analysis approach was used to look for data that provided a different perspective on a category or pattern.

Some of the themes that emerged from the participant responses were events that were implemented at the study school and their success or lack of success, reasons for unsuccessful parent and community involvement initiatives, and actions that could be taken to assure success.

In addition to analyzing interview transcripts, the writer also analyzed transcribed minutes from School Council meetings (Appendix N), Partner in Education Committee meeting minutes (Appendix O), weekly School Leadership Team meeting minutes, field notes from PTO Executive Committee meetings, parent and community involvement attendance logs, and parent and community involvement event participant logs.

Discussion and Reflection on Findings

Increasing Parent and Community Involvement

As the researcher categorized and re-categorized relationships and themes found within interview transcripts, documents, and observations, the concept of respect seemed to interconnect many of the themes: a respect of parents (schedules, commitments, own experiences, lack of knowledge) by school staff and community members, a respect of teachers (profession, family lives, lack of time and knowledge) by administrators, parents and community members, and a respect of community members (work schedules, prior commitments, lack of knowledge of need) by parents and school staff.

Theoretical Implications

At this point it is worth reminding ourselves that qualitative research is not explicitly about the verification of existing theories and hypotheses, but rather with *discovery*. Each participant in this study believes they have discovered things about themselves (which may or may not be positive) and about others that will help bridge the gap that barriers cause in increasing and maintaining parent and community involvement.

Epstein identified changing family demographics, demands of the professional workplace, and growing diversity among students as some of the reasons that schools and families alone cannot provide sufficient resources to ensure that all children receive the experiences and support needed to succeed in larger society (Epstein, 2006). The staff at the study school experienced the effects of changing family demographics and demands of the workplace throughout the study as they attempted to have parents and community members come into the school for events and conferences. Teachers often had to write notes or make phone calls to communicate with single parents, guardians, and working parents, who could not come in to the school. Based on Epstein's research of family demographics, demands of the workplace, and student diversity and the results of this study showing the effects of a diverse faculty and staff, schools located in changing and diverse communities should employ faculty representative of the demographics and diversity of the community.

Despite the consensus among researchers, educators, legislators, and parents regarding the potentially positive effects of parent involvement in schools, there are significant impediments to the full participation of each group of stakeholders (i.e.

parents, educators, and community members), who must sometimes be urged, coaxed, legislated, and mandated to get involved (Kerbow & Bernhardt, 1993). The writer feels that many participants of the study were surprised that regardless of mandates and the knowledge of the benefits of parent and community involvement in schools, many parents and community members remain uninvolved in the education of students. Therefore, schools whose goal is to increase parent and community involvement must continue to educate parents and community members of the benefits to students, families, communities, and schools of their involvement as well as provide creative and efficient avenues for that involvement.

Research has shown that the disposition toward parents of teachers may affect a teacher's ability to work with parents as well as their interest in doing so. The administration and some of the staff were disappointed to find, through this study, that many of the school's teachers did not desire to have parents come into the school or their classrooms to volunteer. Schools must, therefore, seek to alter the belief system and philosophies of teachers towards parent's presence in the classroom and school, helping teachers see the heart of parents who simply want to support their child's education.

The writer and some of the teachers interviewed agree with the researchers who state it is the attitude of the school's principal that, to a large degree, determines whether parents and community members see themselves as unwelcome guests, instruments of school initiatives, or real partners in school restructuring (Boyd, 2005). The staff, parents, and community members, in the study school, experienced a marked difference when comparing the two years the new principal has lead the school to the years prior to her arrival, especially in the welcoming climate of the school. It is critical, therefore, for

administrators to be placed in schools, seeking to include parents and community members in the school, and assist the administrators in creating and sustaining a climate which welcomes all parents and community members as partners.

There is clear evidence that expanding the school's outreach beyond families into the community also has measurable positive impact in at least four important areas: student learning, family engagement, school effectiveness, and community vitality (National School Public Relations Association, 2006). Although this study did not measure the effect of community involvement on student learning and community vitality, the writer believes the study does demonstrate the positive effect that community involvement in the school has on family engagement and school effectiveness. School Spirit Nights, sponsored by businesses in the community, engage families in conversation and fellowship as they eat a meal together. The School Council, PTO Executive Committee, and Partners in Education all contain community members and undoubtedly influence the effectiveness of the study school through various school improvement initiatives. Therefore, schools seeking to increase the involvement of the community in the school must strategically plan opportunities for the community to come into the school and be involved with students and their families as well as plan opportunities for the school to involve its students in the life of the community through such initiatives as business partners, service learning projects, and fieldtrips to places within the community.

Cotton and Wikelund (1989) note that parents generally want and need direction to participate with maximum effectiveness, but caution that a little training is better than a lot. Although the administration at the study school agrees that most parents want and

need direction in order to participate in their child's educational experience effectively, the school must begin at a basic level, such as, "how to help children become better readers." Based on the research by Cotton and Wiklund, schools must offer parents direction and training in basic areas, such as teaching them to help their children with homework and comprehending what they read before moving on to areas, such as helping their child to prepare for standardized tests and how to understand standardized test results.

Although the factors that affect parent and community involvement in schools may not be easily influenced, bridges can be and are being built over these barriers. The study school has dedicated time, energy, and resources over the last two years to building bridges over barriers and increasing parent and community involvement and wholeheartedly agrees with Million when he states that it has become clear that "great schools have strong partnerships with parents" [and community members] (Million, 2003, p. 6). The study school is one of those great schools!

The unanticipated findings from this study are not related to problems with the research design, sampling errors, or mistakes in the control of variables, but instead, are findings of continued misperceptions of teachers and parents, a lack of desire to be involved in the lives of children, a lack of understanding by parents of the current grade level curriculum, and methods of instruction, and a lack of knowledge of need by community members.

One of the most widely recognized theories for understanding varying levels of parent involvement in schools, cultural capital, draws on the work of Bourdieu. According to this theory, schools represent and reproduce middle- or upper-class values

because teachers come from predominantly middle- or upper-class backgrounds. That bias toward middle- or upper-class values puts working-class students and parents at a disadvantage because they must attempt to adapt to the dominant culture of the school to meet teacher expectations. That process promotes the involvement of middle- and upper-class parents and limits the involvement of those with lower socio-economic statuses. This perspective points to the structure of schooling and to family life and the dispositions of individuals to understand different levels of parental participation in schools (Lareau, 1987). Through the process of this study, the writer observed a predominantly voiceless bias towards middle- and upper-class values. Teachers believed that working-class parents won't get involved, help their children learn at home, nor come in for meetings no matter how hard the teachers try, because these parents never have participated previously. The PTO Executive Committee was made up of middle- or upper-class women devoid of class or cultural diversity. It became obvious during cultural and class sensitivity training that many teachers did not know that the definition of parent and community involvement differed among people of various cultures, races, and classes, specifically the definition of parent involvement according to Hispanic parents in comparison to that of American parents.

Implications for Practice

While a single study cannot provide a sound basis for parent and community involvement, this study (and other studies with similar findings) would suggest that there are barriers to parent and community involvement that can be removed; removal of the barriers allows for the implementation of best practices, and the implementation of

research-based best practices can increase parent and community involvement in elementary schools.

Next Steps for the Study School and Similar Schools

The District

- * The development of very specific, clear explanations of district-wide parent and community involvement policies and procedures would be advantageous to schools and should be assessed annually at the district-level and school-level.
- * The district could prioritize Parent and Community Volunteer Coordinators for elementary schools, and then provide the funding to hire them.

The School

- * The creation of a volunteer database. All information that is collected from a volunteer survey is then entered into a database that can be used to track volunteers and activities, and build leadership by identifying the most involved parents and community members.
- * A more useful and effective website to encourage communication and awareness about our school and events where teachers will post homework assignments.

Also, there should be a Frequently Asked Questions & Answers sections to answer in advance questions that many parents might have about the school. Though the website offers a parent newsletter in Spanish, all of the others resources on the site are in English. Perhaps the school should consider adding a Spanish Language interface, which can be accessed by simply clicking an “Espanol” link. The website developers at the study school might also consider including a survey, in English and Spanish, which

would include satisfaction questions as well as prompts suggesting topics in which site surfers would like additional information.

* In research done by Halford, it was found that Parent Liaisons can help parents learn to maneuver a new culture of schooling, in which learning approaches may differ fundamentally from those to which they are accustomed (Halford, 1998).

The study school's Parent Liaison may need to make more home visits as a small percentage of our Hispanic parents won't respond to teacher notes or phone calls. The Parent Liaison will be used in the coming year to help the staff understand the cultural differences between American families and Hispanic families as well as help the Hispanic parents understand that educating their child is a team effort and that the school wants them, and expect them, to be involved in their child's education and don't take offense to the parent's presence in the school.

* One faculty member suggested that the school serve a meal prior to school events so that families can attend the events, eat dinner together, without having to worry about feeding the children after getting off work and attending the school's planned events.

* The administration and Parent-Teacher Organization is considering the purchase of a "coach's board"-type of communication system, an automated telephoning system which calls parents with pertinent messages from school staff.

Phones in teacher's classrooms would enable home-school communication throughout the school day. The school's guidance counselor suggested making better use of the school sign located at the entrance to the school and consider

having banners created and posted along the student pick-up line announcing dates and times of parent and community involvement events.

- *A parent suggested that the PTO elect a Publicity Chairperson whose sole responsibility would be to get the word out about events at the study school. The school could use its website, an updated Calendar of Events, mass e-mail, the local newspaper, and the school news channel broadcast through cable television. One teacher and parent of four children believes that dispersing an updated Calendar of Events throughout the school year allows parents to plan ahead and prioritize to be involved in the school.
- * The school could offer Brown Bag Workshops: A few times a year, teachers bring in projects that can be done outside the classroom and parents come in to pick up a project or work in groups in the school to complete it.
- * The principal is planning monthly “Coffee and Doughnuts with the Principal” sessions for parents to ask questions and share concerns.
- * In order for communities of practice to emerge, the school must seek ways to overcome the constraints on participant’s time as they make long-term commitments and must recognize opportunities to move existing groups close to a community of practice perspective.

Barab and Duffy (2000), as cited in Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley (2003), believe that members must be given legitimate roles by linking their ideas with those of the broader educational community and as knowledge is generated, new mechanisms must be created for the dissemination of the findings for widespread use.

Families and Students

- * While improvement within is important, it is only part of the solution. Parents are the other part. The institutions of the school and the family must be inextricably connected. A strong connection between educators and parents does not come automatically. Both parties may need to learn new roles and skills and develop the confidence to use them, especially as parents move beyond traditional activities, like helping children with homework, and toward shared responsibility for school improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).
- * Students could be recruiters to get their parents and local businesses they visit involved. One parent who was interviewed stated that part of her decision to come into the school and volunteer was her child's reaction to her presence in the school and in the classroom. An upper-grade teacher felt that parent involvement fell off as students got older, but was unsure it was caused by student or parent perception of parent involvement with students in upper grades. Students could also offer fresh ideas for getting parents and the community involved.
- * The PTA (2004) reports that studies have shown that schools with parents who are involved in decision making and are supported in a greater way by the public and have higher levels of student achievement. Parent representatives should participate on school committees. The study school has a Language Arts Committee, Math Committee, Social/Wellness, English Language Learners/Testing Participation Committee, Partners in Education, Media,

Attendance Committee, and the Professional Learning Committee. It is important for parents to work alongside staff members and to have a part in the decisions made on each of these committees. Parents realize their voices are important and their input is utilized to improve various aspects of the school.

The Community

- * The Assistant Principal or Instructional Coach can offer workshops to help community volunteers learn to work with students.
- * The school community and the local community, in general, could benefit from the school connecting with community organizations, such as local health and human services providers to provide services or enrichment opportunities for students and their families at or near the school. School-university partnerships, where colleges of education provide expertise, resources, and professional development to schools while schools provide classrooms-as-labs produces a win-win partnership.
- * The writer, as coordinator of the study school's Partners in Education program, would like to solicit additional support from community members (churches, businesses, individuals) to student's academically and overall well-being. The writer would also like to see communication programs bring community members into the school to discuss issues affecting schools and the community, as well as participate in decision-making.
- * The administration and staff of the study school feel it is important for students to learn to give back to their community and would like to institute various service learning projects for our students.

Limitations of the Study

This study may be limited by the degree to which the parents, staff members, community members, and the principal, when interviewed, express their views and beliefs truthfully. Of course, responses of the interviewees are open to interpretations other than the author's conclusions. The findings of this study may lack generalizability because families, schools, and communities vary; a strategy that is effective in one setting may not work in another. A final limitation is the researcher's ability to be detached and impartial in her approach to the research, as case study research is geared towards seeking an answer to a problem which confronts people in their everyday (work) activity. The researcher's identity, values and beliefs, however, cannot be entirely eliminated from the process; the researcher's self is inevitably an integral part of the analysis (Denscombe, 2003). The researcher has a vested interest in the findings of this case study.

Recommendations for Further Research

This is not the kind of research that can yield valid claims about what works. Readers should evaluate for themselves the virtues of these practices, based on their understanding of how they fit the local context and what happens when they actually try them in their setting. The reader must select, adjust, employ, and perhaps, re-adjust practices that meet their needs and settings. It is the hope of this writer that schools supporting and promoting parent-community involvement in schools may use the ideas and practices from this study as a catalyst for their own venture. In this way, a compilation of promising practices will grow, and schools promoting parent and

community involvement will support each other in learning. The categories, themes, and conclusions from this research, describing parent and community involvement in the setting studied are expected to contribute to the broad base of knowledge on parent and community involvement in elementary schools.

Increased participation among the school, parents, and community has occurred by regular communication regarding student achievement and student performance targets. Parental participation has been improved somewhat through parent training programs and initiatives in order to help the parents assume a more direct and sustained role in reinforcing and promoting their children's academic achievement. Our school also encourages parents and the community to feel welcomed in the school and at off-site school functions.

Based on the research of this study school, further research should be done to identify the effects of parent liaisons on the involvement of Hispanic families and community members as well as barriers and bridges to overcome the barriers specific to diverse populations, such as the Hispanic population. Further research could identify the most effective research-based practices to increase and sustain involvement of Hispanic parents in the elementary school as well as best practices to decrease the school's hesitancy to involve Hispanic families and community members in the school.

Research on the effectiveness of district-wide parent and community involvement policies and coordinators would assist school districts in determining the level of need for policies and financial allocation for staff when seeking to increase parent and community involvement district-wide.

Research studies to determine the roles and skills needed by teachers and parents to move both groups beyond traditional parent and community involvement activities would assist schools in helping the school and the family to connect and move them to the next level of parent and community involvement.

While there are various and sundry ways to communicate with parents and the community, the writer feels that studies which determine the most efficient and cost effective means of communicating with parents and the community would prove to be helpful to schools and districts of any size and composition. Is the school website more effective than the “Coach’s Board”? Or perhaps, phone calls and handwritten notes are a more personal, and therefore, effective means of communication. Many parents will state they prefer a piece of paper in their hand, such as a class and/or school newsletter or a sticker placed strategically on a child’s lapel.

While much research has been done in the area of increasing parent and community involvement, it is the opinion of this writer and school study staff that much more needs to be examined, studied, considered, implemented, and learned in the vast arena of parent and community involvement in elementary schools.

Epilogue

This study describes how involvement was increased and maintained in one southern school. If anything has been learned, it is that there is not one course of action or a specific plan that is perfect for every school. Just as there is more than one way to teach a child to add or to read, there is more than one way to effectively increase parent and community involvement in a school. There are, however, several essentials, which when combined, are believed to increase parental and community involvement in

schools. A supportive administration that is willing to share the decision-making and welcome parents and community members into the school; professional learning and training for staff, parents, and community members must be included; a willingness to change, try new things, and trust others is essential as well; patience will be critical as a school seeks to increase parent and community involvement, as this process takes time.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Staff

1. What was parent and community involvement like at the school prior to this school year? Discuss previously implemented strategies.
2. What is the current status of parent and community involvement at this school?
3. What do you see as barriers to parent and community involvement?
4. How did the school deal with some of these barriers this year?
5. What more could staff, parents and community members do to remove the barriers?
6. In your opinion, is the level of parent and community involvement at your school satisfactory? Why or why not?
7. Which strategies/events/activities do you consider effective in increasing parent and community involvement?

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Parents

1. What was parent and community involvement like at the school prior to this school year? Discuss previously implemented strategies.
2. What is the current status of parent and community involvement at the school?
3. What do you see as barriers to parent and community involvement?
4. How did the school deal with some of these barriers this year?
5. What more could staff, parents and community members do to remove the barriers?
6. In your opinion, is the level of parent and community involvement at the school satisfactory? Why or why not?
7. Which strategies/events/activities do you consider effective in increasing parent and community involvement at the school?

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Community Members

1. As a community member, what factors affect your involvement at the school?
2. What types of things do you think affect the involvement of other members of the community?
3. How can OES more effectively deal with barriers to community involvement?
4. How have you been involved specifically in the move towards increased parent and community involvement?

Interview Questions for Focus Group

1. How did you come to the decision to move towards increasing parent and community involvement at the school?
2. What has the status of parent and community involvement been like in 2006-2007 in comparison to other school years?
3. What are some of the forces involved in a move towards increased parent and community involvement?
4. What are the barriers for staff members in increasing parent and community involvement?
5. Barriers for parents?
6. Barrier for community members?
7. How has the school dealt with barriers to parent and community involvement?

Appendix D

Interview Questions for Principal

1. What is your perception of what parent and community involvement was like and how parents and community members perceived their involvement prior to you coming to the study school?
2. Lead up to the increased emphasis on parent and community involvement. What are some of the reasons that the school decided to try to increase parent and community involvement?
3. What do you consider the highlights or most successful pieces of the parent and community involvement puzzle that have been put in place during the 2006-2007 school year?
4. We tried to overcome some of the barriers of parent and community involvement last year. In your mind, what are some of the barriers that we still need to work on this coming school year?
5. As Principal, what would you hope to see take place this school year with parent and community involvement in addition to what you have already put into place?

Appendix E

Tips for Volunteers in the Classroom

1. Keep an ongoing “to do” list of tasks and jobs parent volunteers can do. When you lesson plan, make a note of what preparation and instructional duties can be delegated to parent volunteers.
2. Make up a master for a simple task sheet for parent volunteers that you can copy. Include the date, time, task, and instructions. Then fill them in for specific tasks.
3. Start a Parent Volunteer file with folders that are labeled according to tasks such as duplicating, laminating, papers to be filed, and instructional duties. It makes it much easier to put tasks in already delegated folders.
4. Keep a special folder of tasks for parents who work but have expressed interest in helping. These are tasks that can be worked on at home. The folder may include things to be cut out, papers to be collated and stapled, labeling, computer work and research.
5. You may want to make a schedule for volunteers, so you’ll know when to expect them, and can utilize them in the best ways possible.
6. Know what you want your volunteers to do.
7. Remember to thank the parents who volunteer in your classroom in your newsletter.

Appendix F

Volunteer Opportunities

Name _____ Child's Name _____
 Teacher's Name _____ Special skill/talent _____
 Days I am available _____ Times I am available _____

I would like to volunteer by:

- being a Room Parent
- tutoring a small group
- reading to students
- laminating
- die cutting
- assist in the lunchroom monitoring students
- assisting students with editing during Writing Workshop
- assist in planning special days in the classroom
- filing Monday folders
- assisting with art projects
- assisting with science experiments
- playing board games with small groups
- binding class books
- being a guest speaker
- volunteering in the Computer Lab
- volunteering in the library
- beautifying school grounds (weeding, pruning, raking, planting, etc.)

Opportunities at Home:

- recording books on tape
- creating learning materials for the classroom
- donating needed materials to a class
- organizing, recruiting, or collecting items for classroom functions
- scheduling parent volunteers to work in my child's classroom
- volunteering to handle orders for mail-order book clubs

One shots - *short time commitments; special one time events*

- help at a booth on the day of the Fall Festival
- help at the Book Fair

Appendix G

The Study School's

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



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Welcome from the Principal

Dear Parents,

You, our parent volunteers, are an integral part of our school. You add greatly to the educational and enrichment experiences that our children have at our school and we appreciate you greatly. We have created this handbook to give you some guidelines about your participation.

We hope that these guidelines build your confidence and give you direction so that you feel as if your time spent here is worthwhile.

Remember there are countless ways of contributing to your child(ren)'s education, whether it be making phone calls, attending meetings or coming into the school.

Whatever you do, please know how much you are appreciated.

Karla Swafford, Principal



Introduction

We want to welcome you and help you make the most of your volunteer experience. There are many different ways to participate at our school; we hope this handbook will help guide you.

As a parent and a volunteer, you are an important part of this school community. When you become a volunteer, your work takes on special significance—though you are not part of the staff, you share their responsibilities while working with students.

When you volunteer at our school, you help . . .

- * your child
- * other children
- * teachers
- * administrators
- * the community

We also encourage you to take advantage of our volunteer training. It is a great way to meet people and get started on the right foot.

Building a Strong Volunteer Community

Our school is a very busy place, with over 70 staff members and over 500 students. It is important for all volunteers to remember the following:

- * Be responsible and safe—always put children first.
- * Respect confidentiality. Students and staff have a right to privacy.
- * Be professional.
- * Communicate.
- * When things come up and you can't fulfill a promise, let someone know.
- * Ask for help -- don't suffer in silence!
- * Share your experience with others and encourage new volunteers.
- * Commitment - *Once you become a volunteer others depend on you.*
- * Try to pick what is manageable and interesting to you.
- * Be prepared. Communicate with teachers and coordinators ahead of time.
- * Be on time. If you can't make it, let someone know.

Getting Started

- *Always wear a "Visitor" badge.
- *As a courtesy to others, please turn off cell phones while in the school building.
- *Always follow the correct fire safety procedures:
 - there is no talking during fire drills;
 - when in a classroom, follow the teacher out of the building and stay with the class;
 - when not in a classroom, quietly exit the building and remain at a safe distance until notified that it is safe to return.
- *If you are taking food into school, please check with the class teacher or school nurse because some food may be inappropriate or children with food allergies.

Confidentiality

To make sure that students, staff and families feel comfortable, we need to respect each other's privacy. Volunteers must be especially careful to honor confidentiality. Breaching confidentiality can be hurtful to children, their families and the staff. It can also harm the good reputation our volunteer parents have earned over the years.

To clarify this issue, below are some sample issues that can arise.

"Wasn't it cute when John . . ." No matter how innocent, cute, funny or charming a classroom event may be, it is not okay to repeat stories about students. What happens in the classroom stays in the classroom.

When parents ask you questions . . . Many parents are tempted to ask you about how their children behave at school. This is especially likely if you are friends outside school. It is not okay to put volunteers in this awkward position. Don't ask! Don't tell!

If parents do have concerns, encourage them to talk to the class teacher.

When you see or overhear something . . . As a volunteer, you might see or hear things from staff or students which they would not want to have repeated outside the school. What happens in the classroom (or the hall, or the gym) stays at school.

If you have concerns about something you see or hear, please talk to the class teacher or Principal if appropriate.

When students tell you about their family, pet, vacation, etc. . . .

As students become comfortable working with you, they might decide to share something personal. You need to keep this information private, even if you know the child and their family outside of school.

When you have a concern . . . If a student tells you something that causes you concern, tell the classroom teacher. If you observe something that troubles you, tell the classroom teacher. The teacher is in the best position to deal with the issue appropriately.

Approach - Be professional and be positive!

- Strive to give each child the best you can and know that other school volunteers do the same when working with your child.
- Respect each child as an individual.
- Respect your coworkers and all school employees.
- If working in your child's classroom, try not to single them out for attention as this may make them uncomfortable.
- Don't distract teachers while they are teaching. If you have questions wait until there is an appropriate moment.
- Honor your commitments and be on time.
- Find ways to be positive and notice things that are working well
- Try to make any criticism constructive.

Remember your time and energy is helping to make our school a great place to learn!

Opportunities

Volunteer skills, interests and time commitments vary we hope you will be able to find something that you will enjoy doing.

Classroom opportunities: Room Parent, tutor a small group, read to students, laminate, die cut, assist students with editing during Writing Workshop, assist in planning special days in the classroom, fill Monday folders, art projects, science

experiments, play board games with small groups, bind class books, be a guest speaker, or eat lunch with your child.

Opportunities at Home: Record books on tape, create learning materials for the classroom, donate needed materials to a class (a great job for those parents who can't physically get to their child's school because of work responsibilities), organize, recruit, or collect items for classroom functions, schedule parent volunteers to work in your child's classroom, volunteer to handle orders for mail-order book clubs.

School-wide opportunities: The school has many programs geared at enriching student experience outside the classroom. Volunteers might help at recess, in the lunchroom, in the computer lab, or in the library. Be sure to check out the range of opportunities, so you can find the perfect match for you!

One shots - *short time commitments; special one time events*

Examples: help at a booth on the day of the Fall Festival or Book Fair. Help out at Recess one time. Put up a display of student art or a display for the library.

Projects - *larger commitments that may span several days or weeks.*

Beautification

Projects/One shot

Help improve and maintain the grounds around the school building. Volunteers help with weeding, pruning, raking, planting, and spreading pine straw.

Computer lab

Ongoing/Once-a-week

Assist teacher by working with students in the computer lab for 45 minutes one day a week. We especially need volunteers to help with kindergarten students from 1:15-2:00 daily.

Library

Ongoing/One Shot

Volunteers are trained to assist the librarian by shelving, repairing, checking books in or assisting students. Volunteers are also needed to assist during the Book Fair.

Room Parent(s)**Ongoing**

Support classroom activities and teacher. A full year commitment. Responsibilities can include organizing class events/projects and holiday events.

Sharing Knowledge, Tips and Ideas

Although our school has many special traditions, new ideas arise each year. To make the best of both, we encourage volunteers to share their insights with one another, with staff, and the PTA.

If you see a better way to do something, don't be shy to come forward. Similarly, if you have a great experience from another school, share with the PTA your ideas about a potentially great fundraiser or exciting school-wide project.

After you work as a volunteer, you might decide to take on the role of a project coordinator.

Miscellaneous**Clean up**

After you have finished any activity within the school, it is important to tidy up afterwards. For obvious reasons scissors, glue guns etc. should not be left lying around. Classrooms and other public areas should be left clean and tidy.

Parking

Unfortunately, the school does not much space for parking. If you park at the school, please park in a designated parking spot. Please do not park in the fire lane/car rider lane or in the semi-circle in back of the school as that is needed for school buses.

Dress Code

*Casual dress is allowed for volunteers. This includes slacks, jeans, and tee shirts.

Smoking Policy

*This school has a no-smoking policy on our campus, including inside of cars.

Reading with Children

One of the tasks that you will probably be involved in is reading with the children. This is an important but time-consuming task.

The exact approach depends on the reading level of the child.

Beginning readers

1. Children should be aware that you read from left to right, turning the pages that way and reading the lines left to right and top to bottom.
2. Read the book together to start with.
3. Discuss the pictures and the story.
4. Read the book again pointing to each word as you read.

Early readers

1. Ask the child to point to each word as he reads it.
2. Discuss the pictures and the story.
3. Read the story together.
4. Ask the child to find key words which are repeated several times in the book i.e... 'the', 'up', 'in', etc.
5. The children should be aware of full stops and that you need to pause at a full stop and not to run sentences together.

Extending reading

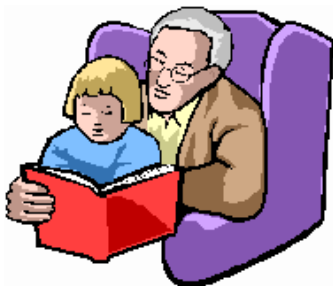
As the children can read more words, try to get them to work out new words by making a good logical guess. Maybe the picture will help. If the child has good knowledge of initial sounds, looking at the first letter strings or small words within words, sound out the whole word (e.g. "ing" in king).

Try to get the child to read to the end of the sentence, and then go back to work out an unknown word.

Even with competent readers, you should discuss the stories and pictures. Also you can try to encourage the child to use expression or put on suitable voices.

Discussion Questions

The following are examples of the types of questions to use when discussing a story.



What was the story about?

Who was the main character?

What sort of a person was he?

Was that a sensible thing to do?

What should he have done?

Which part did you like best?

What would have happened if...?

Try to relate some ideas to the child's own experiences (i.e. Can you....? Have you ever?).

In case we teachers forget to say so please be assured that we really do appreciate your help!!! If you have any worries or queries, or any good ideas on how we can improve something, please let us know—we are always willing to listen.

Once again! Thank You!

Appendix H

Field Trip Chaperone and Parent Volunteer Training

If you are interested in possibly chaperoning a fieldtrip or volunteering, please join us for our “Field Trip Chaperone and Parent Volunteer Training” session on September 6th at 10:00 AM, or September 12th at 6:30 PM in the Media Center.

The training will help to dispel any fears that you may have about chaperoning a fieldtrip, outline the duties and responsibilities of a chaperone, and give you an opportunity to ask questions. The training will also share with you ways that you can volunteer.

So that we are assured that our students are always in a safe environment, we are requiring that teachers only use chaperones who have attended the training.

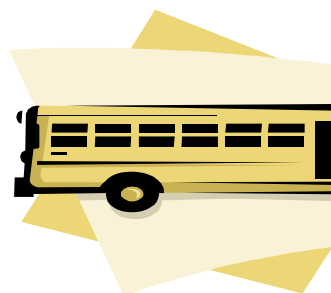
Please be sure that you sign the attendance log at the meeting so that teachers will know who will be available to chaperone.

Thank you for your willingness to assist us in providing a variety of learning opportunities for our students. We look forward to having you chaperone fieldtrips with our students, and thank you in advance for dedicating time towards this effort.

Appendix I

“O u r S c h o o l”

Field Trip
G u i d e l i n e s



How You Can Help Us Have A

“BEE-UTIFUL”

Field Trip



****Bee” A Model:**

Chaperones should model good behavior and support the teacher’s disciplinary plan.
Always use positive language in the presence of our students.



****Bee” In Charge:**

Enforce the rules consistently.
Let the students understand the consequences for any misbehavior.
Remain with your assigned students at all times.
Remember that all students must ride the bus to the field trip.



****Bee” Discreet:**

The teacher may need to divulge private information to you about one of the students (ex: medical information). Keep the information to yourself unless there is an emergency.



****Bee” Prompt**

Field trips are carefully planned to make the most of the experience for the students. There are set times for arrival, lunch, and events. It is important that all chaperones follow the schedule during the trip.



****Bee” Focused On the Children**

Keep your group of students together and on task.
Actively participate in the activities with the students.
In order for students to fully benefit from the educational experience, no siblings of any age will be allowed on the trip. Take this opportunity to give special attention to your child and play an important role in making this a learning activity for the students in the class.



****Bee Honest**

Don’t wait until the end of the field trip to “vent” serious behavior problems. Report to the teacher immediately and let him/her know your concerns.



****Bee” Complimentary**

Let the teacher know if you get compliments about your group’s behavior.
Praise the children when they earn it.

Thank you for volunteering to help Chaperone a Field Trip!

We appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to come!

Appendix J

*Parent and Community Involvement Opportunities
during the 2006-2007 year*

August Open House

Parent/Teacher Organization Meetings

Title 1 Parent Information Meeting

August Curriculum Night & Curriculum Day

English Language Learners/Test Participation Conferences

Parent Teacher Conferences

Fieldtrip Chaperone Training

Volunteer Training

Student Support Team Conferences

Individual Education Plan Conferences

Monthly Skate Nights

Scholastic Book Fairs (Fall & Spring)

Fall Festival

4th & 5th grade Drama Club Productions (3)

Winter Holiday Celebrations

School-wide Spelling Bee

Parent/Teacher Organization Executive Committee Meetings

Reading Night

Math Night

School Council Meetings (4)

Spirit Nights–Wendy’s, Barberitos, Chick-Fil-A, Arbys

Book Character Parade

Kindergarten Registration

Bust the Test Rally

Parent/Teacher Organization Luau & Dance

Student Art Show

Partners in Education Recognition

Parent Cookie Bake for our Partners in Education

ADVANCE Graduation

Parent Volunteer Appreciation Reception

Student Awards Celebrations

5th grade Graduation

Kindergarten Graduation

LifeSouth Blood Drive

English as Second Language Parent Meetings w/Parent Liaison

Creation of a Parent Resource Library on campus

Field Days

Field Day Awards Nights

Appendix K

Events at the Study School for 2007-2008

As a Partner in Education with the study school, you are invited to attend each of the events listed below:

August 20th -PTO Meeting & Curriculum Night - 6:30 pm

August 27th -School Council Meeting - 11:30 am

September 17th - PTO Meeting & Fieldtrip Chaperone Training - 6:30 pm

September 27th - Grandparents Day Celebration -8 am

October 12th - Wayne Farms/Study School Fire Safety Poster Contest -TBA

October 15th-19th -National School Lunch Week; come eat lunch with our students! ☺ (10:30-12:30)

October 27th - Fall Festival - 1-5 pm

November 30th -PTO Parent's Night Out/Movie Night - 6:30 pm

December 17th - PTO Meeting & Holiday Music Program - 6:30 pm

January 25th -PTO Student & Staff Talent Show - 6 pm

February 11th - PTO Meeting & Reading Night - 6:30 pm

March 3rd - Read Across America Day (we'd love you have our Partners read to our students!)

March 17th - PTO Meeting & Math Night - 6:30 pm

April 21st-25th - CRCT Week

April 22nd - Student Art Show - 5 pm

April 25th - PTO CRCT Celebration Dance - 6 pm

May 2nd-3rd - Staff Retreat

May 9th - Muffins for Moms - 8 am & PTO Outdoor Movie Night - 6 pm

May 16th - Doughnuts for Dad - 8 am

May 21st - 5th grade Dance & Cook-out - 11 am

May 22nd - Classroom Awards Day

May 23rd - Kindergarten Graduation - 8:30 am; 5th grade - 10:00 am

***Center Point Mentor Program, in collaboration with Rising Son Ministries, will be hosting "*Igniting Embers of Hope - A Back-to School Rally*" on **August 23 from 6:00 to 8:00 pm** at the Performing Arts Center. The Rally will be a celebration of mentoring and will highlight community agencies involved in supporting area students. Astronaut Colonel Guy Gardner, Superintendent of Riverside Military Academy, will be the guest speaker. Music and drawings for gift certificates will be included. The Rally is free to the public.

We will be teaming with Center Point to offer Mentor Training for our Partners in Education. We are in desperate need of men and women willing to give a little time to a student in our school who needs a role model and stable person in their life.

Appendix L

Parent Compact

The Parent Compact for the study school was first communicated to parents in our very first newsletter of the year published by the PTO. The compact appeared in the Principal's Corner of the newsletter. The excerpt pertaining to parent involvement is provided below:

We will have a more formalized Parent Involvement Plan. This is one area where we will need your help. Please try to attend PTO meetings, Curriculum Night or Curriculum Day, and other parent activities. You may also be aware that we are having our school website re-designed. We hope to have that up by the end of August. These are all ways that you can stay informed and will be an opportunity for you to share your ideas for keeping ALL parents involved. We would love to have you volunteer in our school, so please contact the PTO or your child's teacher to learn more about ways that you can be a part of our school.

Another area in which we will need your help is in supporting your child's learning. Attendance each day is crucial. Students do have legitimate reasons for being out of school, but it is important to have regular attendance at school. Students miss valuable academic and social learning when they are absent from school often. During the first few days of school, you received a letter outlining the state law regarding attendance. If you have not signed and returned the form that came with this letter, please do so as soon as possible.

You can also support student learning by monitoring your child's homework. Be sure that you provide a proper time and place for your child to complete homework. It's also nice to review that work with your student once he or she has finished. Of course, help with homework is great, too, as long as your student does not rely on you to do it for him or her.

Regular communication with your child's teacher is important as well. Please check your child's agenda daily and initial it, showing that you have seen assignments or notes from the teacher. If you should desire further contact from the teacher, please call the school or put a note in your child's agenda.

We want you to be a part, as appropriate, in the decision-making for your child's education. Good communication between school and

home is necessary for this to happen. The agenda is also a good way for parents to be informed about student progress. Conferences, progress reports, and the opportunity to visit your child's class are just a few of the ways that we hope to accomplish this goal. Should you have any questions about our school, Title I, or any of the information in this column, please feel free to call us (Study School Handbook).

Appendix M

PARENT RESOURCE LIBRARY

Parents,

We are proud to announce the opening of our new Parent Library. Here you will find books on helping your child to read, how to deal with homework, and a variety of other topics. The library is housed in the oak cabinet directly in front of the library. Take your selections into our media center, and you can check the materials out for use at home. If you would like to check out materials or books, and are unable to come into the school, just send a note in your child's agenda, requesting the materials, and your child's teacher will send it home in your child's book bag. This library is a work in progress and if you have suggestions on the type of materials you'd like to see included, see Ms. Monaghan and share your ideas. You may also contact her with book donations. So, the next time you are visiting our school, stop by, choose a book or two and look through them as you relax on the sofa.

Appendix N

**Study School
Local School Council Minutes
January 29, 2008**

Members in Attendance:

Members Absent:

Guests:

I. Call to Order and Inspiration

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Welcome to PTO Executive Board Members. This is the first joint meeting of the School Council and PTO Board in an effort to increase communication and show signs of solidarity between the two organizations in accomplishing goals for the school.

IV. Approval of Agenda and Minutes—The secretary, asked School Council members to review minutes from last meeting (sent by email) and to make any corrections that were deemed necessary.

V. Report of the Principal—Dr. S gave the group the dates for our GAPSS review (Feb. 12 and 13) and explained the process. There will be observers from the GAPSS Review Team in the building all day on the 12th. Then, the group will convene at Central Office to make commendations and recommendations that will then be delivered in a report to Dr. S within about a week or so. Dr. S also talked about the various charitable opportunities that students and families will have to donate to in the upcoming months. It was recommended that a list of those go out in our Feb. newsletter so that parents are aware and understand that they can choose which one(s) to support. Dr. S gave an overview of the World Languages Academy and the dual immersion language process. She also addressed rezoning to alleviate overcrowding at the study school and the effect that recent information about annexation by the city will have on some families who live in Copper Springs. Based on the group's discussion of the World Languages Academy, it was recommended by multiple members that our council send a letter to the BOE expressing our interest in having Spanish added as a Special at OES. ST, KS, and MM will work on drafting the letter and submitting it to the rest of the group for approval.

VI. New School Sign—there was discussion about whether we should ask the PIE to contribute to a new sign for PIE or if the PTO would cover the entire cost through a fundraiser. It was decided after lengthy discussion of both sides that the PTO would designate the school Idol (talent show on March 7) proceeds to cover the \$900 cost. Other fundraisers and the designation for those proceeds are listed below.

Cookie Dough—TBA—re-face the front office area to increase safety and security measures

Spring Dance—April 25—playground
 Movie Night—TBA—designation TBD
 Family Portraits (outside)—May 1 and 3—designation TBD

VII. Projects for upcoming year: the outdoor classroom and reconfiguring it to include a covered area for extra classroom space for teachers was designated as a project for next school year.

VIII. School Council Member Business: the Council asked that all guests be excused so that we could address the inactive status of one of the members, GG. While an active member of the Council for more than a year, G's move and the fact that she is now working from home make it impossible for her to be an active member. ET made a motion to declare her inactive and KL seconded the motion. There was a unanimous vote to declare GG inactive and to seek a replacement for her. Pursuant to state Law, the Council must elect representatives for its vacant positions from parents. The decision was made to send home ballots on Feb. 11 and have parents vote at Reading Night or at the front office through Feb. 15.

IX. It was determined that the Council has fulfilled its legal obligation to meet 4 times in a school year and that any additional meetings for this school year would be called as needed.

X. ET made a motion to adjourn. ST seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted by KS, Secretary

School Council Minutes July 23, 2007

Members Present:

Members Absent:

Guests Present:

- I. Welcome and introductions. All new members were introduced.
- II. School Council Training—Ms. S handed out School Council Handbooks and explained the role of the School Council and the new laws that went into effect on July 1.
- III. School Improvement/Curriculum Initiatives—we discussed literacy, and it was brought up that parents could really use tips and suggestions on how to work with their kids at home. We discussed that homework every night would be to read and to keep a grade appropriate reading log. We also discussed that we would use Everyday Counts Calendar Math as our math

curriculum and that our PIE were working with Ms. C to develop attendance incentives. Ms. C also discussed additions to our parent resource library and ways that the school would increase parent involvement.

IV. Selection of New Officers

A motion was made by ET to elect ST as Chair. The motion was seconded by AT and was unanimously agreed upon. A motion was made by ET to elect ST as Vice-Chair. The motion was seconded by RG and was unanimously agreed upon. A motion was made by ST to elect KS as Secretary. The motion was seconded by ST and was unanimously agreed upon.

V. The next meeting was set for August 27 at 11:30AM.

School Council Minutes
August 27, 2007

Members Present:

Members Absent:

Guests Present:

- I. ST(Chair) called the meeting to order by asking RG to lead the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and then provided a brief inspirational reading on the meaning of service and the values of our society and how they translate to the mission of our group.
- II. The Agenda and Minutes of the last meeting were presented by KS. ET made a motion to accept them and AT seconded that motion. The vote was a unanimous affirmative.
- III. KS gave a report that covered professional learning initiatives for the year as well as a brief summary of the math curriculum. She also commented about the smooth opening of the school year and gave a report about class sizes and the numbers of homerooms at each grade level. Mrs. S also spoke to the committee about her desire to see that the new façade for the school is completed. This school has been on the list to get a new front for a few years according to reports from Central Office personnel, and Mrs. S spoke about the safety and security measures that could be improved with such an addition. She also commented that the Council would need to be judicious in the timing of the request as the construction of 2 new schools in the system were financial priorities for the system.
- IV. Mrs. S also pointed out that one member of the council had been inactive. AC has only attended one meeting in the last year. The bylaws of the Council state that 5 members of the council may determine if a member is inactive and remove that member. After much discussion, the Chair, ST, made a motion

that Ms. C be removed from the council. ET seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous that Ms. C be removed. Additionally, Mrs. S gave the timeline for a new parent to be elected and reviewed the process for doing so. The voting will begin with an announcement in a flier to go home on September 4, 2007, and will culminate in a vote following our September 17, 2007, PTO meeting.

- V. The Character Education program from CFA was reviewed, and the group agreed that it was a worthwhile program for our students.
- VI. ET mentioned that another project for the year could be a competition of sorts between the grade levels that would spruce up the outdoor classroom with flower and vegetable gardens.
- VII. Ms. C asked the council members a few questions about parent involvement and the factors that influence parents to be involved in a school or not. She also asked what the school might do to get parents more involved.
- VIII. The next meeting was set for October 8, 2007 at 11:30 AM.
- IX. ST made a motion that the meeting adjourn. The motion was seconded by ET. Upon a unanimous vote, the meeting was adjourned.

Appendix O

Partners in Education Committee Meeting MinutesMeeting held on Feb. 13th

Members:

* We have two PIE who have joined our **School Council**: GG with OSL & RG with M.

*PIE Committee members will be making personal visits, with prospective PIE who we have sent informational packet to, to encourage them to participate and answer any questions they may have;

- ACEH
- UCB
- AM
- JZ
- NGR
- AA
- C

*****New Partners in Education**: WM, S, M, OSL

*we will have a PIE committee volunteer (unknown at this time) who would be willing to schedule grade levels to **provide students work/class books for display** in the businesses of our PIE. Checking on having student's name on work to be displayed; will be in full swing 2007-2008.

*PIE Committee members will be delivering the PIE 2006-2007 members booklets to our present PIE and suggesting "a few good projects" we would like to have them work with us to complete for the remainder of the school year;

Possible Projects:

*partners to recognize faculty/staff each month for exemplary teaching (next year)

*Staff Appreciation Week

*incentives for students who read a pre-determined numbers of books (next year)

*additional rewards/incentives (buttons, t-shirts, meal coupons, etc.) for student achievement (academic, character traits, & behavior); talked about each grade level having a "Day of Recognition" at the end of the school year.

*available: academic achievement passes to JZ!

- *incentive for every 4 (?) consecutive weeks students have perfect Attendance (next year)
- *Career Day for 5th graders with PIE: 5 speakers come during Specials times on a scheduled day.
- *Character Awards (next year): C shared ideas from article
- *purchase OES bracelets (around CRCT time)
- *Other ideas?

Our Present Partners in Ed.:

P
OMG
DQH
CC
FL
A

*We will seek to offer **mentor training** in July or August, for interested PIE, parents, staff, senior citizen groups at churches, etc. at our school, led by Center Point.

*JA, a parent, has agreed to **coordinate our Spirit Nights** (call businesses to remind them to send flyers, stickers, etc. early, have someone take pictures at Spirit Nights and share with businesses, recognize businesses in school newsletter, on website, etc., create and distribute a monthly calendar highlighting our Spirit Nights, PIE bulletin board), as well as work with our committee to contact restaurants to add Spirit Nights. Next year, attempt to schedule Spirit Nights on the same night of the week.

OES Spirit Night partners:

- *B-considering tweaking their end of things
- *B-2nd Tuesday of the month
- *CFA: didn't carry over from last year; manager contacted
- *W-Feb 22nd, March, April
- *L- contacted
- *A (new!)- the 1st Tuesday of each month, with the first one on March 6th from 5-8. The manager will provide flyers and stickers; we receive 10% of sales.
- *S(new!)- deciding on date
- *Z (prospective) - thinks it's a great idea; manager talking to owner and will return call.

Prospective businesses to contact for incentives, rewards, and/or Spirit Nights:

*PIE Committee members calling businesses from list from WHMS to see if they may be willing to offer our students and staff some of the same incentives

***P cards** are being mailed to our school to send home with students. It was suggested that we remind teachers every so often, to include a reminder in their newsletters about parents using the cards at P; perhaps, we can even include an update of the amount of money we are receiving from Publix.

***Possible PIE:**

*senior citizens groups, from local churches (K & C are scheduled to speak to Senior Citizens group at BPBC), or organization to serve as weekly or bi-weekly “**informal mentors**” to our students; without Center Point Mentor Training, mentors must be considered informal.

*banks-savings bonds, life skills classes, for upper grades, with training on check ledgers, application forms, speakers, etc., places our school on “corporate surplus equipment list”. Check on the possibility of the local Credit Union or other bank employee coming once a week to assist SEARCH students in running a Bank for student savings accounts. Only deposits, no withdrawals at school.

Prospective PIE:

*KD

*WA

*JZ

Upcoming school Events to Invite PIE to (PIE Committee member contacts PIE):

*PTO & Math Night on March 20th from 6:30-8:00

*Bust the Test Rally-TBA

*PTO Movie & Family Picnic on May 4th

*Kindergarten (8:30) and 5th grade (10:00) Graduations

*Readers for Read Across America Day/Dr. Seuss' Bday on March 2nd

For Future Meetings:

*consider assigning a PIE to each grade level next year

*consider contacting PIE about funding/donating for dinner at Math Night

*checking with a local company about getting a wooden sign made to display our PIE on the front lawn of the school.

*best resource for new PIE is employers of our parents-spread the word!

Minutes of the Partner in Education, Committee Meeting September 6, 2007

Present: Meeting time: 2:30 – 3:30

+ Please see two attached documents: Partners and Possible Activities

- The committee briefly looked through our handouts from C which included: a list of our business partners, a listing of some possible activities associated with our partners, and a prescheduled calendar of events at the school that our partners are invited to attend.
- Notice the bulletin board next to the office with PIE logos.
- Discussion of current PIE involvement and their amount of involvement.
- C contacted two new partners with possible help in purchasing storage boxes for leveled reader books.
- Sharing of PIE commitments already made for the year.
- New advertisement board planned for the future (possible location in the grass triangle area of our driveway).
- Discussion of the Center Point Mentoring Program. We need more mentors esp. male gender.
- Members signed up for taking pictures at Spirit Nights for the purpose of posting the pictures on the walls. We may need assistance from other staff members.

- Discussion/sharing of how PIE can display student work. This is a work in progress and will involve each grade level and other classes contributing their students' work. A schedule will be sent out in the near future.
- Some plaques/thank you letters were distributed among committee members to be delivered to PIE businesses.
- Service project ideas were discussed (how our students/school can give back to the PIE business). Ideas such as, baked cookies and thank you notes from students were mentioned for starters; more ideas?
- Only C or committee members should make contacts with PIE businesses so that there is clear communication – through one contact person. If you have any ideas, bring them to us first. We don't want any confused managers.

Matrices of Interview Responses

Position and Years at study school	What was parent and community involvement like at study school prior to the 06 07 school year?	What is the current status of parent and community involvement at study school?	What are some barriers for you or others you've spoken with to parent and community involvement? How did the school deal with some of these barriers?	What more could our staff parents and community members do to remove barriers to parent and community involvement?	In your opinion is the level of parent and community involvement in study school satisfactory? Why or why not?	What strategies/event/activities do you consider effective in increasing parent and community involvement at study school?	
Parent of a 4th grader and a 1st grader	"For me, it's been roughly the same I just try to come in when I can. I don't know about how other parents do it, but for me it's been about the same."	"Same types of opportunities and same amount of time."	"I really work during the day, but my husband's my boss so that's why I'm very flexible. But, I know a lot of parents, they work during the day and they would like to be much more involved. And then at night, they're tired, have school, or personal obligations. Also, parents don't know when things are happening [at school]."	"I know it's hard to get information our, but like, maybe on the website, if we could have a very updated calendar of events. And also, on the website, or somewhere else, which I know a lot of parents don't do the website; but, for me that would be the easiest or a mass e-mail sent o everyone to say we need volunteers this day, this day, and this day. E-mail and the website would be good for me."		"When we have these Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) events, the Fall Festival, and stuff like that, we should open it up more to the community, There's a lot of advertising that we don't do and I hardly ever see anything in the paper for this school, community events, and PTO activities. I would like to see more publicizing. In fact, PTO (I don't want to suggest it, because they'll make me do it) needs a publicity chairman. I think events should be in the paper, on the radio, and websites like access northga. We could be doing a lot more of that. And whatever that TV Channel 18 is- that's the government channel."	

Parent of a 4th grader and a Kindergartner and member of the PTO Executive Committee	"The last few years it has started being more. I can remember in years past, PTO was like three or four people; that was it. Nobody knew anything that was going on. Nobody knew to help. And then a few years ago, we had the first meeting and there were probably 12 people there. And everybody took a part and said; okay this is what I am going to do. And from then on, it's continued to grow and see more support."	I think this year (06-07) was a really good year. I didn't get to come to the Reading or Math Night or nothing like that, but those sort of things, especially for parents that work, those sorts of things are a really good idea."	"I think that when the parents can come into the school and be a part of those types of things (Reading and Math Night), get to know the teachers and all, I think that was probably a really good thing. Fieldtrips- we didn't get to do the class for fieldtrips."				
Parent of a 4th grader and Treasurer of the PTO	"We really needed a lot more parent involvement, aside from PTO members. There was virtually no other parent involvement on a regular basis."	"There seems to be more parents wanting to be involved this year (06-07)."	"Language barriers, personal communication with room parents. The school dealt with some of the barriers by finding out e-mail addresses of room parents, phone calls to room parents to speak with them regarding the Fall Festival planning."	"Personal communication is key to letting parents know that without their help, activities will not be successful for their children."	"Somewhat satisfactory- PTO members seem to do a lot of work."	"I think phone calls/e-mails to parents help a lot. Parents need to know it's important to help their children socially and academically."	
Parent of a 1st grader and 5th grader and PTO President	: Prior to this year it was weak. We tried just doing sign-ups at Open House and that failed due to the number of parents not at Open House."	"I think this year (06-07) has increased."	"Communication and follow-up; This year we are actually using room parents as our communication tool. Actually contacting each parent by the room parent has made a huge change."	"I think just follow up with the students on certain activities. For the Fall Festival, if the teacher announces that parents need to send in candy, etc. then the students are going to push the parents to send it in."	"Yes, it is getting better. I think we are explaining better what each parent CAN do to help and it is making easier for them to help."	"I think any activity that includes the entire family goes over best at our school. With the Fall Festival, the entire family can come out and be a part of something that THEY helped put together. I think this is a great event! We push it with letter communication, phone calls, and e-mails. Follow-up is the key!"	

<p>Special Area teacher; 5 years</p>		<p>"I think we're just too busy sometimes. Kids go here and there and this is one thing to do- we're exhausted. Also, I think that some parents are just passive in the lives of their children. Whether it be working to survive and pay bills, to career oriented people who unfortunately placed their kids on the backburners and brush off our kids. The school has been persistent and has communicated."</p>	<p>"Continue to have something that is bait- kid's concert, student work, activities, and the such. Pray!!!"</p>	<p>"Just being a positive person in the lives of the students can help connect them to the school, therefore, tying their parents here as well. I'm not sure of any new ideas right now, but I'll be thinking about it."</p>
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Position Years at study school	What is your perception of what parent and community involvement was like and how parents and community members perceived their involvement prior to you coming to study school?	Lead up to the increased emphasis on parent and community involvement. What are some of the reasons that study school decided to try to increase parent and community involvement?	What do you consider the highlights or most successful pieces of the parent and community involvement puzzle that have been put in place during the 06-07 school year?	We tried to overcome some of the barriers of parent and community involvement last year. In your mind, what are some of the barriers that we still need to work on this coming school year?	As Principal, what would you hope to see take place this school year with parent and community involvement in addition to what we've already put in place?		
Principal 2nd year at study school	"My perception of what parent and community involvement was like prior to my coming to the school is that on the one hand, parents were in the school a lot, it wasn't necessarily...Or a certain group of parents were in the school a lot and exerted influence that was not entirely appropriate, but that overall, parent and community involvement was very little. The PTO participation had declined greatly and they were down to like a core of maybe 6-7 parents who were trying to do everything. SO, it terms of them coming and inappropriately advocating for their children there was a presence, not beyond that in a way that was a true prelatship between the school and the parents."	"Well, number one, we were a Title 1 Targeted-Assistance school last year; we are whole school this year. Of course, there's a parent involvement requirement component mandated by Title 1. But, that's the least of our concerns really, because we all know and research tells us that parents, the community, and the schools being involved is the only way we can raise student achievement and get the most out of what potential they do have. So, it came from real commitment on the part of the administration and you, the Assistant Principal here, that we had a commitment to that and the actual result, I think, is in large part	"The creation of our Parent resource Library. I think that is phenomenal! Getting our Partners in Education Committee going so that more of our staff members felt ownership and getting our partners involved because many of our partners are parents in our school. In terms of just getting a wide number of parents involved, I think our Curriculum Nights, in particular, our spring Math and Reading Nights were phenomenal. The Book Fair has a parent night where parents would come in and be able to buy books later. That way you hold it open when they're off work. So, there were all kinds of things that we did last year that were more successful because they were sensitive to parent schedules and made teachers more aware that they needed to be more sensitive and increased awareness that parents and community	"Some of its perception still. Whenever I was in my leadership training, I would read book by scholars who would say it takes years to build trust between an administration and a group of teacher in a school, but it only takes an instant, one decision, that can destroy that trust. I think the same thing is true between our school and its parents and community members. There was this stand-offish tendency whenever parents came in the school to raise cain about or as I said earlier, to inappropriately advocate for their children, that it takes a while. There are some perceptions that we are still trying to overcome; lots of parents have overcome them and they know us. But, I think there are still some parents who don't perceive that. So, I think its community perception that when you have growth in immigrants in our community as we have had, there is going to be that concern that, "I'm not legal, the school is a	"I think increase the number of times parents are in the building. You know, we've talked about Doughnuts for Dad, Muffins for Mom. We initiated the Grandparents Day Celebrations this year, which I thought was a huge success. These are all the kinds of things you do to overcome those types of perceptions that eh school doesn't want you up there. SO, any little thing we can do like that I think is good. We need to maintain what we have; keep the momentum going. I think that if you said too much it becomes overwhelming to the staff. But, I think that if we keep what we put in place last year, add a few ore social things to build relationships, I think that increases volunteerism. I think one of our other steps in		

		<p>because you did work really hard to make sure our parents, our staff members were aware just how important it was then they gave them tips and tools on how to make that a reality and so I think that our knowledge of what benefited the kids and then your giving them the roles that they needed. I think that's why we have much better parent and community involvement. It's not optimal; we'd like for there to be more. But, much better than it was when I first came to the school."</p>	<p>members have all different kinds of schedules; just because they are not stay-at-home moms they think they can't volunteer in the school. So, these are some of the big highlights from the 2006-2007 school year."</p>	<p>government agency and they're going to turn me in". That absolutely is neither our function nor our desire. I think there's some concern about that that still exists from members in our community. I also think the language barrier; although, our parents who don't speak English are getting more and more involved in our school. I think we are overcoming that. I think there are barriers for parents but I also think there are barriers for teachers. Our teachers don't always know how to encourage parents the best way. In terms of the academic side of it, parents sometimes stay away because they are concerned that if they come to the school, they will get blasted by the staff. I think those instances are isolated, but I think it's enough that it creates a perception or adds to that perception in the community."</p>	<p>addition to Grandparents Day is getting our Room Parents involved in the Fall Festival. In fact, I just received an e-mail from our PTO President telling me that yesterday alone we got 23 phone calls from room parents or other parents asking about how they could get involved in the Fall Festival. I think that is in large part due to the fact that we had our Room Parent meeting last week, talked about it with staff in School Leadership Team Wednesday and about how they needed to be sure to get that list to their Room Parents and gave the expectations to the classroom. They rose to that expectation. Twenty-three calls in one day? You couldn't get that many parents to call our PTO President in a year in this school prior to 2006. I think that's wonderful! I just think we continue to layer the involvement. I think we're doing well. We can add too much. But, if you add 3-4 things a year, I think that all of a sudden people don't realize. You think, gosh, look at everything we are doing. You don't even realize it because you've done it slowly."</p>	
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Position Years at study school	What was parent and community involvement like at study school prior to the 06 07 school year?	What is the current status of parent and community involvement at study school?	How did the school deal with some of these barriers?	What more could our staff parents and community members do to remove barriers to parent- involvement?	In your opinion is the level of parent and community involvement in study school satisfactory? Why or why not?	What strategies/event /activities do you consider effective in increasing parent and community involvement in study school?	
Guidance Counselor First year at study school	Not applicable	"Well, from my perspective it appears that the parent involvement has just begun at study school. It really has a good start! I really liked the training for the volunteers for the parents, having several training sessions. I liked the Math Night and the Reading Night that we had. They were great!"	"That's a good question. As far as barriers, maybe the language barrier, as far as Hispanic parents, although I do think we had fair participation from all groups within the school. I think making the parents feel welcome is important. Letting them know about the events a little bit more, translating some of the notices into Spanish. I don't know if we did or didn't, that would probably be good."	"I think we could use our sign out front a little bit better and advertise things out there and for a longer period of time. We do have those pieces where we can put a banner outside by carline. If we put signs up there I think I do think we need to do better communication with the families and parents that this is not a PTO function that you can drop your kid off to, like the Skating Rink, but that this is a parent-child activity that the parent has to be with the child in order for everybody to participate. I think it loses something when he children are here without the parent."	"I'd like to start earlier in the school year. We got on the volunteers right away but those initiations, lessons, whatever you called it- the training. That started right away and I think we need to start right away with something with the parents in an ambitious program; have a program every month. I think that is very ambitious, but I think, you know, a fall, winter, and spring program is very doable. The type of thing to help parents help their children at home with math, with handwriting or with just teaching them to cook; something where you do recipes one night or they can make little things showing parents how they can do the fun of making little spider treats to eat, but reading a recipe at the same time. But, I think if we did three, I think that that would do it because you have to stay away from Thanksgiving and Christmas pretty much. Although, I bet one thing- I don't remember if the Kindergarten teachers did things	"I worked in a school where we had an excellent parent involvement coordinator and she went all out all the time. She fed people every single time. There was free food, always free and it was, "bring your family". It was prepared through the lunchroom staff and in the lunchroom and it was like a school lunch. You know, we would have hamburgers and hotdogs, things like this, things that were relatively easy. I think they do a good chicken potpie here; you know something that you could do simply with a potpie and a roll- something like that. But, we would have families. You know, you would have a kindergarten child and then you would have the high school brothers and sisters there, too. They would come out of the walls. Now one thing that Pat did, but she did not tie in as many educational activities with what she did. She did more fun activities and I think the whole	

				<p>with their parents or First grade around Thanksgiving or Christmas because that would be a really easy thing during the day. That's one thing, too. These were always in the evening, but it seems your volunteers came out during the day. I was very impressed and surprised at how many people were available during the day. It didn't seem it would always have to be at night. But, you could try them at different times and see. But, we do really well with getting the kids excited about things where they are bringing their families in. They really are!"</p>	<p>idea behind the parent involvement is to teach parent how to teach their children. And I think that more activities that teach are helpful. One program I really like it was like wear your pajamas to school, you know. So they would come at night, in the evening with their parent and in their pajamas and then we would have stories. Parents would read to their children and they would all group together and like bringing their pillow or stuffed animals or something like that and that always got a lot of parents involved. And the children used to be really, really excited about bringing their parents to the activities that Pat had. I know at the end of the year, she had more of a celebration, like a picnic or some thing like that. But, during the year, it was mostly crafts or reading to your children. But, I think we definitely need to keep the Math involvement up and the Reading. Not just crafts.</p>	
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<p>5th grade Teacher, Parent of a 5th grader and Kindergartner; 10 years at study school</p>	<p>"It seems like parent involvement falls off as the student proceed through the grades. It seems like parent involvement in the school is greater. There are more volunteers, more people, more participation in PTO-kind of activities, Skate Night, things like that."</p>	<p>"I think parent involvement will continue to increase. I don't know by how much. But, I see more parent interest in being involved this year. It will be important to get the Kindergarten parents to buy in early, and then hopefully stay there. I think more parents are coming around because they feel welcome. I think that that makes a big difference- they know that they can come and feel welcome. It just seems we have a more welcoming environment."</p>	<p>"I think they [parents] have too many other commitments. I think it's not a priority- it's something where at the school we get signed up last, because they already have other commitments. And then they just can't do it all. There are too many commitments for sports or music or whatever. I know my problem was when I had a daughter in high school and then I had other kids that were younger. It was hard for me to get to everything that she was involved in and be here too. I think that might be something, especially if you are spread across more than one school."</p>	<p>"I think it is helpful when you can have parents sign-up for a time period, certain activities. I like that you guys [school administrators] have given us the whole schedule ahead of time. And for somebody like me with four kids that's really helpful, because we have a master calendar at home and I know a lot of big families do, too. It's real helpful for me to know when the Skate Nights are and when the Fall Festival is and PTO meetings. Sometimes it's hard for me to make those-so we can plan around them. The planning really helps me. I tell you one thing I really liked and I don't know why they went for it, was the Volunteer Reception. Tons of people came to that m, so I just think the thing that is really drawing people in here- the whole staff wants people here. I even think doing things in our classroom that promote the families being here- you know, like poetry reading or we read the first book we store- people come in. Just get people in here, and then they're here. If it we could just get them to come to lunch. In the 90's, there was tons of parent participation. It [the school] was just loaded like that all the time. You could not get a parking spot. You couldn't find a place to sit in the PTO meetings. At PTO meetings, I think you need some kind of food to draw them in; I have a friend of mine. I taught her son and now we're just good friends."</p>	<p>"I like the evening Movie Night you were trying. One thing I've seen work at another school is an ice cream social. Everybody came for that. I can't remember if we had an Art Show, too, but the ice cream was a draw instead of free or cheap pizza. This was a real community school. I think ours could be. It doesn't look like one. This was a very big community school. It was three blocks from the University of Arkansas campus and it was downtown. It was technically in the historic district. It was old, but neat. People walked to school. There were older houses and younger houses. It was an eclectic kind of population. Parents were involved- they would walk to the school to come and eat. That's something you don't see here, because parents don't come as much. But, if we give them reason to come and go to the trouble of planning ahead of time, it would really help. Or, if we could tell parents, "Hey listen, 2nd grade is having a presentation in November", it would help parents to know ahead of time if they could fit in. I really think that's the problem. Parents say they have ball practice, this, that. Lat minute things- we send home last</p>
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			<p>She was the PTO President. Every month when they had their meeting, they served pizza. A dollar a slice and people would come because it was cheap-even big families would come and it was cheap and every month every grade level had some little presentation-something that they did. But, it got people in there, because the kids were doing something, you know, even if it was the upper grades having a Science Fair. The little ones could do that, too. Parents were going from work to pick up their kids and if they knew there was food, that their kids were going to get fed at the meeting, they would come. My friend said it made a big difference. They had the meeting in the lunchroom, so that people could eat while they had the PTO meeting. Then they would dismiss them to wherever the program was or to the classrooms. I think one mistake that this county made was getting rid of parent conferences. All of a sudden parents were like, "I'm never here. I'm only here for problems." If we can get them in here more for good reasons than problems, then maybe they'll want to be here more. We used to have parent conference days. I'm thinking twice a year, but it may have been just once. That was when I first started teaching. I can't remember which superintendent did that. I think it was Dr. F. People began to complain of us using instructional time [for</p>		<p>minute things, notices. I think it's a waste of paper, because parents are already overloaded, so stressed out because there's so much to do. I don't about the upper grades, but not having as much homework in the lower grades is really helping. Now parents are reading with their kids.</p>	
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				conferences], which I understand, but I think parents needed to be in here. I worked at a school in Arkansas and we had three mandated parent conferences. I mean those parents came! They got their appointment. We sent reminder notes out. Those parents were there all the time. I had 100% participation all three-conference times. Everybody came.			
Kindergarten teacher; 15 years	"In my classroom, it has always been pretty much the same- equal balance throughout the years. About a handful of parents come in and are involved, seeing what their children are doing in the classroom. I think last year (06-07) it was better. There was more involvement and I think that was due to use having Curriculum Night, Reading Night, and Math Night." It seems like parent involvement falls off as the student proceed through the grades. It seems like parent involvement in the school is greater. There are more volunteers, more people, more participation in PTO-kind of activities, Skate Night, things like that."	"I think just educating the parents on what they can actually do. I know in the past with some of my parents, they come in but they don't know what to do or what to read and just by giving them more information of ways that they can become more involved will help."	The parents are more informed. More things are going home in Spanish. The Hispanic population is communicated to more. They are also communicating better. Having parents sell the ice cream [at lunch] is great!"	"Education for one. Some parents just don't realize the importance. They may not have the education to work with their child. If we just had a night where we told the parents what to do to help their children at home. Sometimes, they are so busy with their time. Also, educating teachers. Some teachers are hesitant about having parents come into the classroom. The time issue as far as parents is concerned- that's out of our control. But again, just let the parents see the importance of what school is all about. Some parents, especially at the elementary level, think that if they just read 10-15 minutes, it's enough. Really, parents have to go over and over the importance of school with their child. If the parents value school, the kids will value school. The parents need to show an interest in what their children are doing in school."	"I think just educating the parents on what they can actually do. I know in the past some of my parents came in, but they didn't know what to do or what it is to read to the class and just by giving them more information of ways they can become more involved."	"The community, business partners, could donate money or buy some of the things to help the school educate the parents. If the community fed the parents, coming to the school might be more inviting." We're doing a lot. I think the parents want to be involved; they want to help.	

<p>Third grade teacher; 3 years</p>	<p>"Thinking back, because of the make-up of my class last year, 11/14 of the students were Hispanic, I had very little involvement. Not just from those parents, but also from the other- very little parent involvement. This year I found it interesting that every one of my parents came to Open House. I thought that was amazing! This is the beginning of my fourth year teaching. The previous three years, I've never had everybody."</p>		<p>Last year in my class, I had an Early Intervention class: struggling students, smaller class size. The parents of struggling students may not be as comfortable coming in; maybe they were concerned about what they would hear about their children's performance or maybe with 11/14 being Hispanic, maybe it was the language barrier. I think the Hispanic language barrier does play a big part. Not just that, but I've heard it's a cultural thing, too. Parents may just be letting the teacher handle everything and not really getting involved. My other students-parent schedules. It could be that if a student had struggled throughout their school career, parent conferences may not necessarily be a positive thing. So that could be some hesitancy that would keep them from getting</p>	<p>"Having our Parent Liaison here is a big help. Having the volunteer training was a big help. I'm trying to think about how reaching out to the Hispanic parents. I don't know if anyone has ever actually set down with them, had a meeting, and said this is the way we do things. We welcome parents to come. I don't know if we have ever done anything like that and that it is a team effort and we encourage and expect parents to be involved. Having that communicated to them would be helpful. You know as far as the kids that have always struggled, we as teachers just have to make sure we have those conferences that are good and notes going home that are good. That basically has to come from the classroom teacher."</p>		<p>"I actually read an article of an idea that I thought would be easy to do. This particular school actually had grade level picnics before the school year started, which I thought would be a neat idea. As hot as it has been though, it would be a tough time to do that. On one of our fields, everybody would bring their own picnic and it's just a time to get to know each other- teacher and kids. Other than that, I can't think of anything else. The Math and Reading Nights were awesome! I think the dinner thing worked and was a great idea."</p>
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			<p>involved. Also, there are not as many opportunities to help out in the classroom in 3rd grade and higher as in Kindergarten First, and 2nd grade. I know I've already had a parent this year to volunteer to come in every Monday to do whatever I need, but normally I have everything done, so I have to re-gear my thinking- okay what can I have set aside for this person to do? And we're constantly doing something in the classroom that I Can't put a parent with. It gets harder as the grades go higher to get parents to come in to do stuff in the classroom. We don't really do any kind of artsy projects like in Kindergarten, where extra hands are needed. The kids are older and more independent. As far as having a volunteer come and read, that's wonderful! I actually had a parent two years ago that volunteered</p>			
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			to do that and the kids loved it.			
Fourth grade teacher; 16 years			"I believe the image of the volunteer needs to be enhanced and the importance stressed. Some parents do not have the time, but if we could emphasize the benefit it would have on their child, maybe they could find the time. I love our principal's attitude that she needs to do something as a parent of a child at study school, like participating in fundraiser sales, spreading mulch in flower beds prior to the new school year."	"We need to find a way to rally prints to have the same idea of involvement as our principal. What if we had a Parent Volunteer Party? Invite parents to come to the school, English and Spanish, get one of our Partners in Education to help with food, and try to get some of the parents that don't normally volunteer pumped up about it. I just believe there is a lack of caring that has been coming on slowly over the past several years."		

Position	As a community member, what factors affect your involvement at study school?	What types of things do you think affect the involvement of other members of the community?	How can study school more effectively deal with barriers to community involvement?	How have you been involved specifically in the move towards increased parent and community involvement?			
School Council	Female member: "Probably as a mother, having small children in the home. I don't want to bring them- they would be disruptive in the class. Also, the feeling I get when I come in to the classroom from the teacher- if I am wanted; if I see there's something I would be able to help with. And also my child's reaction in the classroom- whether they are all huggy and all over me; that's a distraction."	Male member 1: "knowledge that there's a need in the mentor program or reading. How can I delicately say it? There are safety concerns. People are concerned about being accused of things. As far as a parent, I think you are above that, you know the people you are working with. Just the community coming in- they may have issues in that kind of a situation."	Male member 1: "educating them as to what the needs are, how it would be set up for a safe environment for everyone involved."	Member 2: "Obviously, the Math and Reading Nights, the teachers were directly involved in- what would take place and then implementing it. The School Leadership Team came up with some of those things and we all participated in parent conferencing training and the Retreat."			

	<p>Male member 1: "time"</p>	<p>Male member 2: "I was going to say the same thing- probably understanding. Whether they knew there was a need, understood what was involved as a volunteer. We are a volunteer society and tons and tons of people ask for your time. If you don't have a vested interest, as a parent would, they why should I? Not necessarily what's in it for me, but just why should I? An understanding of why it's important."</p>	<p>Male member 2: "I think communicating like on Parent Night, letting the parents know that we need volunteers to help us with certain items. I mean there's a small group of volunteers that do the same things over. I think maybe we need to broaden our horizon a little bit and let some of these, even our other community members, come in and help us out. We've got lots of ideas, but we need help more than 10, 12, 14 people that helps now. We need... Maybe we need to have more members on our council."</p>	<p>Member 1: "For those of us on SLT, the representative brings everything back to discuss with the grade level, so everybody has input as far as decision-making."</p>			
	<p>Male member 2: "I like to lead by example. I like my kids to see that I'm helping with the school. So, one day when they get older they can say, well, my parents do a lot with the school and they'll do the same. My own parents didn't do a lot with the school. I think that's important to me. That's why I'm here today."</p>			<p>Member 6: "I think we are beginning to see more from the PIE and the Mentoring Program that has begun, but I think we still need to reach out, as teachers, beyond just our parents."</p>			

				<p>Member 1: "I think at the beginning, a lot of people were bothered that they had to go and do things, but then once they got involved, like Math and Reading Night, it was good. Things we had done in the past a lot of times failed and you didn't have anybody show up like for the Reading Night. This time, it went just great and they were so excited to get to the next room. And then you saw parents going back to the first room they went to just see it again. So, that was great! And even for the staff members that weren't excited about; you get there and the kids are so excited. I think by the end of the year, the whole morale of the staff had really risen compared to what it was at the beginning when everybody was complaining about things we had to do."</p>		
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			<p>Member 2: "I will say that I heard some people, because of the number of nights by the time you have Reading Night, Curriculum Night, Spirit Nights, PTO Meetings, Art Night, etc., they felt like it was too many nights to come back. But then you get docked if you left like fifteen minutes early. Being asked to give a lot of extra time, but weren't being compensated. You know if we had the whole calendar with things like this at the beginning of the year that would be good. I know certain things are required like the first PTO meeting that everybody would have to come to, but like maybe if there was a way to divvy that stuff up more-people with small children would enjoy going to Skate Night and things like that where coming back and trying to teach at Math Night would be harder for them because of the small children. If we could divvy that out a little bit more where everybody has to be at this, this, and this, and have to be at least two of these others. More choice."</p>		
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Focus Group of 2nd grade teachers	How did we come to the decision to move towards increasing parent and community involvement at study school?	What has the status of parent and community involvement been like in 2006-2007 comparisons to other school years?	What are some of the forces involved in our move towards increased parent and community involvement?	Barriers for staff members in increasing parent and community involvement?	Barriers for parents?	Barrier for community members?	How has study school dealt with barriers to parent and community involvement?
	Member 1: "I think we came to the realization that in order for students to be successful in school, we had to get their parents involved on a daily basis in their lives, in school; come into our classroom and help us, seeing them being more active in their children's lives and education. For parents to be able to come into the school at any time, in the classrooms, they need to feel more comfortable helping their student at home."	Member 4: "More varieties of ways for parents to become involved such as the Math Night and Reading Night and Curriculum Day and Night."	Member 3: "Our Title 1 Plan and a change in our administration with the hiring of our new principal."	Member 2: "The number of required outings and meetings, timing of activities, and childcare for staff."	Member 3: "advertising, language barrier, scheduling, childcare, daycare hours"	Member 1: "A lot of them don't realize their importance to the education of our children, because it takes the whole community to educate them, not just the teachers, not just the parents."	Offered different times for the same event, doing events multiple times for parents with children in different grade levels.
	Member 2: "We had included it as part of our School Improvement Plan and realized that we needed a lot more than what we were doing."	Member 5: "Skate Night and all those things we did with Partners in Education."	Member 2: "Going back to some of what she said- because we don't have as many parents that are dropping by on a regular basis, we've had to really do more, go more out of our way to try to keep them involved."	Member 4: "Commute for staff, advertising too late, spouses not understanding extras."	Member 2: "Understanding the importance of it; recognizing it as something valuable."	Member 3: " I know that some of the bigger corporations here in our community, if you go to them and ask them to do something, sometimes the corporate level doesn't allow the smaller branches to do it."	

<p>Member 3: "I thought it was all a part of the Title I improvements and made us realize what we needed to be doing."</p>	<p>Member 1: "In the past couple of years we've seen a decrease in parent and community involvement and I think a lot of it is because we have more students whose parents work outside of the home and a lot of students get home and one parent is working during the day and the other parent is working at night; just them not being able to spend as much time."</p>	<p>Member 1: "Also, with our previous English Language Learner teacher she pulled parents in through workdays she set up. I know, the year before last, they had several meetings with Hispanic families and the Hispanic families came in and did a teacher appreciation night and made food for all of us. So, her effort of pulling them in and making them feel a special part of our school; a lot of times they don't feel, well, they're afraid to come and get involved because they don't feel they can overcome the language barrier. Some of our Partners in Education (PIE) are working more towards helping to increase parent and community involvement because of the change in PIE this year. In the last couple of years, we didn't even know who a lot of our PIE was or what they were doing for the school. And they had gotten so slim; you didn't know that anything was going on with them. During the 06-07 school year, we had a lot more involvement with PIE and pulling in family activities for the kids to go to like Skate Country."</p>	<p>Member 3: "Mindset/philosophy: the mindset that this is something else we have to do, past beliefs/experiences."</p>	<p>Member 4: "I think there are some parents that just don't realize how important their roll is. If we don't do it right, they'll let us know we didn't do it right; but, if they don't want to be involved and find out what they need to do, we can't do our part right."</p>	<p>Member 4: "scheduling/bus iness hours"</p>
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		<p>Member 3: "I think it had to do with like the principal being in charge of getting together the parent and community involvement and getting the Reading Night and Math Night; that really got the parents involved. And as far as individual levels, some people are shy towards others."</p>					

Community member, School Council member, and Partner in Education with study school	What factors affect your involvement at study school?	What factors do you think affect the involvement of other community members?	What ways have you noticed that study school is trying to break down some of the involvement barriers for community members?	How effective do you think partnerships between schools and local businesses are?			
	<p>"Work appointments, especially during evening hours. I really can't do those because I commute and live an hour away. But all the stuff during the school hours, with us being so close, has been really easy for me to get over to the school."</p>	<p>"If I hadn't made a sales appointment with you guys, I probably would have never done anything. So, I didn't even know you could be a Partner in Education. Lack of knowledge about the program. We wanted to get involved. We had talked about it. We didn't know what to do until that option was presented to us."</p>	<p>"The principal is very good about rescheduling meetings to make sure everybody can be there and be represented. I feel very involved. I know about events ahead of time- we receive letters at work about events. More activities during the workday would be great for me, but I think that's just because I don't live in the area. Scheduling something during lunch with the students- we did that one time and it was good."</p>	<p>"Very effective! To be honest, we've gotten a lot of business from the school, because we are Partners in Education. If we have services that you need, we have built a relationship where that actually works out great for everybody. I just feel better as a business person being involved as a part of the school."</p>			