

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL  
STUDY OF PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS, TEACHERS,  
STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS  
IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

by

Donna Connell

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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## ABSTRACT

With this transcendental phenomenological study, I sought to gain a richer understanding of parental involvement by gathering data about the perceptions of elementary parents, students, teachers, and community leaders in a rural elementary school setting in a southeastern state. I investigated how each of the 18 stakeholders (four parents, four teachers, four community leaders, and six students) conceptualize the term *parental involvement*, captured how they perceived barriers to effective parental involvement, and provided information from the stakeholders about issues that need to be addressed in order to have effective parental involvement programs in the school. The setting was rural with an elementary school population of approximately 650 students, 58% of whom are on free or reduced lunch. To describe the phenomenon of parental involvement and common perceptions among the stakeholders, I collected data using survey analysis, interviews, and focus groups. I analyzed the data using coding then synthesized the data to produce a composite of textural and structural information in narrative form. Three theories guided this study. Weiner's Attribution Theory addressed motivation, a factor that strongly influenced parents to participate in school-related activities. Secondly, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory on self-efficacy in individuals that determined their level of engagement in the educational community, and finally, Dr. Joyce Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Influences that addressed the spheres of influence surrounding students and the fluidity of these influences dependent upon external stimuli. All stakeholders agreed that parents are involved when they provide basic needs for their children. Perceptions diversified when relationship-building among stakeholders was the topic of the interviews.

**Keywords:** **parental involvement, student attitudes, teacher perceptions, barriers to involvement**

### **Dedication**

I would like to thank my Lord and Savior for his presence throughout this process. He has been with me throughout this journey.

I would like to express my eternal gratitude to my husband for his words of encouragement, support and love as I continue on this journey for my EdD. A special thanks to our children and grandchildren whose encouraging words and support have been a light and reason for this endeavor.

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**List of Abbreviations**

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

Parent Teacher Organization (PTA)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Conflicts arise when stakeholders' perceptions of parental involvement are not aligned. Student success in school is a concern of many stakeholders-families, politicians, world leaders, educators, and society as a whole. Parents' desires for their children's success are often a reflection of their own school experiences (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jeynes, 2011). Students' desires for success are frequently tied to their family's expectations (Panferov, 2010). Perceptions of the role parental involvement plays in the overall student success rates are often at odds with each other, creating unintended misperceptions and barriers (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Once these perceptions are articulated, dialogue can begin to create a positive flow from all the stakeholders, ultimately affecting student success, enriching the levels of parental involvement, and bringing unity to the home-school relationship.

### **Background**

Research on parental involvement has been well documented and prolific. Student achievement has become a focus of this research as it relates to parental involvement due to the strong connection that exists between parental involvement and student achievement (Epstein, 2001, Joe & Davis, 2009; Quilliams & Beran, 2009).

This dialogue began in earnest and in 2001 President George Bush signed No Child Left Behind into law as a result of the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), creating a framework to mend the educational system through mandated accountability systems. This law added a strong emphasis on parental involvement. Section 1111, section 9 (NCLB Law of 2002) of the law, requires states to identify factors affecting students achievement, include local education agencies (LEAs) in the state plan, and

require that each local agency submit a parental involvement plan. While school systems continue to address parental involvement, mixed perceptions on the parts of teachers, parents, students, and community leaders have created a disconnect that has led to barriers, miscommunication and misunderstandings about what parental involvement really means, thereby creating a need for more articulation among the stakeholders.

Research on parental involvement crosses ethnic boundaries and has revealed many commonalities in the interpretations of the term *parental involvement* (Bartel, 2010; Brock & Edmunds, 2010; Harris & Goodall, 2008). Research has also revealed a wide-range of practices that parents have observed contrary to what teachers have articulated as practices they employ (Barnyak & McNeely, 2009). Studies from many countries like the United Kingdom (Brock & Edmunds, 2010) and India (Choudhary & Malik, 2012) focus on various ethnic groups and have provided data to illustrate the obvious need to understand how individuals conceptualize the term, what common threads exist, and how to address these in order to enrich the parental involvement policies currently in place in the schools. Minimum research in the United States has addressed the common threads in understanding among parents, teachers, students and community leaders particularly among those in the elementary school setting (Adamski Fraser & Pietro, 2010; Bartel, 2010; Chang, Park, Singh, & Sung, 2009; Joe & Davis, 2009; Quilliams & Beran, 2009; Wyrick & Rudasill, 2009). This presented a gap in the current literature.

Joyce Epstein (2004) has outlined six topologies of parental involvement that many schools have used as models for policies they have implemented. These include:

- Parenting that addresses students' basic needs (Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007),

- Communication that includes basic responsibilities of the school to communicate with parents through conferences, notes and report cards (Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007),
- Volunteering that engages the parents in the daily activities of the school,
- Learning at home that includes homework, goal setting or projects, (Epstein, 2005),
- Decision making that involves parents in school governance and finally (Epstein, 2005), and
- Collaboration with the community where parents work in tandem with community leaders to strengthen bonds between home and school (Epstein, 2005). (See Figure D1).

The National Parent Teachers' Association (PTA) and The Family Engagement in Education Act of 2-11 (H.R. 1821/S.941) have used a framework to guide their policies that include parental empowerment through local policies, allowing states flexibility in the allocation of Title 1 funds, improving professional development and a national policy for parental engagement ([www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)). Schools have also relied on this framework to guide the construction of their parental involvement plans.

Past research on parental involvement focused on parent perceptions and barriers from many cultural backgrounds, and teacher perceptions from many different grade levels, yet few documented studies addressed elementary student perceptions or found where the four stakeholders –parents, teachers, students and community leaders- intersected in their perceptions (Gniewosz & Noack, 2012; Régner, Loose, & Dumas, 2009; Shepard, 2009; Urdan, Solek, & Schoenfelder, 2007).

Elementary schools have less difficulty in engaging parents, yet teachers' perceptions are that parents are not involved (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009). Understanding and conceptualizing

the term parental involvement may provide an avenue to effective parental involvement, unlock barriers that exist, and engage in dialogue to improve the systems that are currently in place that ultimately benefit the children in our schools.

### **Situation to Self**

As a federal Title I reading teacher and classroom teacher, I had many opportunities to engage parents in their children's education. Many preconceived notions on the parts of parents and teachers led me to want to understand what commonalities might exist between the groups coupled with how children view their parents' involvement in school, how the community interprets parents' roles in the educational process, and what causes parents to avoid participating in school activities. Parent efficacy, student efficacy, and teacher-parent relationships could be built up or torn down solely on the conceptualizations of the term *parental involvement*. This can lead to unnecessary miscommunications, misinterpretations, and resistance on everyone's parts and affect the family-school partnership. As students and parents construct their responses based on their social environments, working within a common paradigm would prove most beneficial to the students. A disconnect can be avoided as a definition and understanding others' viewpoints is articulated. The disconnects often lead to behavioral issues, student dropout, and poor academic success for the students.

Beliefs and assumptions researchers bring to the qualitative study that is being undertaken "inform our choice of theories that guide our research" (Creswell, 2013, p. 15). The research questions that guided this study focused on my assumptions about the topic of parental involvement and perceptions held by elementary school parents, teachers, students, and community leaders about the roles parents play in the educational process, the benefits of strong home-school partnerships, and the lasting affect these relationships have on student behaviors



and academic successes. The importance of articulating these assumptions lies in understanding how the problem evolved into a research question and how I attempted to respond to the research questions I have presented in this study. It is critical that these assumptions are articulated to provide readers with a basic understanding of how the study was formulated, implemented and evaluated.

*Ontological.* The identification of parental involvement perceptions currently in place within the school environment will lead to an awareness of consistent themes among the stakeholders and lay the groundwork for enhancing or modifying programs currently in place in the schools. Increased expectation for student success cannot be the sole responsibility of the schools. A strong partnership with schools, families, and the community will promote student success. In an effort to embrace the multiple realities of the participants, I used interviews and focus groups to unlock themes participants present in dialogues regarding the perceived roles of parents in their involvement in the educational process. This assumption guided my research as I attempted to look for areas where perspectives intersect and where they diverged.

*Epistemological.* The goal was to establish a framework that would take into account the similarities and differences among the stakeholders that will enhance the home-school relationship and understand what factors could strengthen this partnership. By conducting my research in the school and community where the participants lived and worked, I hoped to gain a critical understanding of perceptions from all stakeholders-parents of elementary students, elementary-aged students, and teachers in an elementary setting and community members in the area where the school was located. Additionally, I hoped to provide information from all stakeholders that facilitated strengthening the home-school connection.

*Axiological.* Having parental involvement clearly understood by all stakeholders, the possibility of creating a strong home-school connection increases. This supportive connection can shape positive perceptions in students that will affect their social and academic success. Values are critical to understanding perspectives stakeholders hold, to explain their roles in parental involvement. I recognized that personal biases are present from all persons who participate in the study. My own values were clearly articulated in the *Epoche*, where I set aside any prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about issues of parental involvement (Moustakas, 1994) that allowed me to see the essence from a new perspective. When speaking with the stakeholders, I revealed my past experiences with parental involvement and concerns for understanding perspectives from individuals in the study that can provide insight into the misperceptions that were in place causing parents to avoid participation in a positive home-school relationship.

It is our responsibility as educators to develop and maintain strong home-school relationships to encourage learning, decrease student dropout rates, and bring about a reduction in the number of behavioral issues facing students today. This needs to begin with an understanding of the common perceptions of all participants – elementary teachers, students, parents and community members who are part of the school's community. By creating strong bonds among all the stakeholders in the students' environment, student efficacy will be positively affected leading to academic and social successes for the students throughout their school experiences. By clearly identifying my personal perspectives, I articulated my findings through an unbiased lens.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is the lack of understanding of the perceptions elementary school students, their parents, teachers, and local community leaders hold about the term “parental involvement”. The decline in parental involvement and rising demands for accountability created a conundrum that must be addressed so the system could be realigned to accommodate the attitudes and perceptions of all these stakeholders. “Since it is acknowledged that both parents and teachers are responsible for educating our children, it would seem that it would be in the child’s best interest for us all to be working towards the same goal” (Parkay, 2010, p. 64). A disconnect still exists on a consensus of what parental involvement is and how children are affected by its decline.

Finch (2010) discussed the decrease in parental involvement as students progressed through school and indicated the need to understand what issues are present that prevent parents from being actively engaged in their child’s education. Likewise, Chang, Park, Singh, and Sung, (2009) did a longitudinal study designed to look at the long-term effects of the parent programs on Head Start students’ cognitive development and indicated that positive parental involvement brought about an increase in student cognitive development.

Harris and Goodall (2008) highlighted the importance of mutual understanding of the phenomenon of parental involvement and its impact on a child’s education and their academic achievement. By understanding parent, teacher, student, and community leaders’ viewpoints, the possibility of enhancing the programs currently in place and establishing a pattern of longevity for parental involvement should occur. Findings indicated the “need to consider how to balance engaging ‘hard to reach’ parents with keeping parents engaged over time” (Harris & Goodall, 2008, p. 286). Efforts on stakeholders’ parts toward understanding how to maintain parental

involvement and sustain it, coupled with parents' understandings of their value and the differences they can make in their children's education, are essential tools for relationship building to take place (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Until a mutual understanding of all stakeholders' roles is reached, the disconnect will still be present.

Understanding the self-efficacy of parents, teachers, and students increases the likelihood of unity occurring (Bandura, 1995). By recognizing the perspectives from which each stakeholder comes, it becomes more likely that mutual understandings among stakeholders can be addressed and used to reduce behavioral and dropout issues and increase student achievement, which reflect the goals of parents, teachers, and students (Quilliams, 2009). The gap in literature is apparent because so few studies exist that take into account the common positions of all four groups—parents, teachers, students, and community leaders—with little limited input from students in an elementary school environment.

The goal of this transcendental phenomenological study is to develop a narrative of the common threads linking the four groups, to understand where the perceptions may overlap and how to add to existing programs to enrich collaboration among the stakeholders. The goal is to influence policies that will lead to increased student achievement, reduced dropout rates, and reduce behavioral issues present in today's schools.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the perceptions elementary school students, their parents, teachers, and community leaders have about the term “parental involvement,” the perceived barriers that exist about this phenomenon, the common understandings that may exist from all stakeholders, and the possible recommendations to increase the effectiveness of parental involvement. This study is important

to the educational success of students not only in elementary school, but also in middle and high school, where parental involvement declines have been noted (Joe & Davis, 2009). The outgrowth of effective parental involvement is noted in achievement, reduced behavioral issues, and a reduction in student dropout rates (Chang, Park, Singh, & Sung, 2009; Joe, et al., 2009; Sheppard, 2009).

### **Significance of the Study**

One of the major challenges in schools today is to work with parents on various levels of engagement to facilitate student success. Parents and teachers generally want their children to reach success in areas of academic, emotional, and/or social success arenas (Brock & Edmunds, 2010; Ferrara, 2009; Quilliams & Beran, 2009; Régner, Loose, & Dumas, 2009). Teachers face academic challenges and want children to thrive under their tutelage. In our mobile, multi-cultural society, challenges to engage parents extend beyond PTA meetings and conferences. Brock and Edmunds (2010) stated that developing a clear definition for the concept of parental involvement “has not been easy because it has historically encompassed a broad range of behaviors” (p. 50). Another major obstacle is the perceptions parents, students, teachers, and community members hold about what parental involvement entails. Teachers’ perceptions of parents’ levels of involvement are often derived from preconceived notions of parents limited knowledge or experience (Ferrara, 2009), parents’ uncertainty as to their roles in the educational process (Ferrara, 2009), and students’ perceptions of their parents as monitors of their work not as partners in the process (Régner et al., 2009). The goal of this study was to understand what all stakeholders believed the role of parents to be, find a common theme upon which schools can enhance their current parental involvement program, and articulate these commonalities, which ultimately can lead to effective working relationships between homes and schools.

The study involved elementary parents, teachers, students and community members in a rural setting. Much research conducted includes teachers and parents but limited information has been collected from elementary school students and community members, leaving a gap in the understanding of how the four groups can come to consensus about the roles of parents in the educational process (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; Boncana & Lopez, 2010; Hindin, 2010; Régner et al., 2009).

### **Research Questions**

Concern over the apparent misconceptions of parental involvement leads to the questions about basic conceptualizations of the term and the long-range impact these understandings have on student success. The characteristics of parental involvement articulated by the stakeholders lead to the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do elementary school students and their parents, teachers, and community leaders conceptualize the term *parental involvement*?

Researchers have addressed concerns about parental involvement and perceptions or pre-conceived ideas about the role parents should have as opposed to the roles parents actually have in the educational community. Perceptions are discussed in many articles as deficiencies or obstacles that must be overcome to have a strong home-school relationship. In a worldwide study conducted by Adamski, Fraser, and Peiro (2013), about parents' perceptions of the role they have in the education of their children, consistencies appeared among various cultures, in geographic regions, and across socio-economic status that suggested parents' ideas aligned with each other. This prompted the first research question about the perceptions of other stakeholders (children, teachers, and community leaders) and the commonalities that might be present.

Understanding other perceptions and identifying similarities across the continuum might lead to a deeper understanding of parents' engagement in the educational community.

**RQ2:** What obstacles do elementary school students, their parents, teachers, and community leaders articulate, that impact parental involvement?

In a 2007 study by Green, Hoover-Dempsey, Sandler, and Walker about parents' self-efficacy, teacher biases and feelings of insufficient educational knowledge, findings indicated these obstacles affected the level of parental involvement. Other obstacles identified in a study by Brock and Edmunds (2010) pointed to parents' sense of feeling powerless particularly if they were from the Latino culture. This particular research focused on the Latino community and their engagement in the school community coupled with their frustrations they were experiencing. Other obstacles present in research studies pointed to teacher bias that made the parents feel marginalized and resistant to engagement. A study by Cooper (2009) dealt with African-American mothers who felt they could not embrace a partnership with the schools because of the perceptions they held about teachers and biases.

**RQ3:** What changes could be implemented to create effective parental involvement as articulated by elementary school students, their parents and teachers, and community members?

In a study by Panferov (2010), parents expressed concern over the lack of cultural understanding and embraced agencies such as Head Start as an avenue toward understanding the cultural communities of families. Dr. Joyce Epstein's six topologies of the levels of involvement suggested a variety of ways parents could engage (Epstein, 2005). Recognizing the participation of parents in one or more of these topologies provided an understanding of how and why parents engage and provide opportunities for them to be part of the educational community at their

comfort level. In a study conducted by Bartel (2010), parents who were interviewed indicated their reasons for involvement and personal perceptions of their roles were that of motivators for their children. Teachers, on the other hand, saw parents' roles in a different light (Bartel, 2010). These results are indicators of a problem with understanding engagement on all levels.

In further research conducted in Norway by Baeck in 2010, teachers' perceptions of parents' roles were interpreted through Bourdieu's concept of social field, with findings indicating that teachers tried to limit parents' influences over the educational process by emphasizing their (teachers') personal professionalism (Baeck, 2010). This addresses the first research question regarding the conceptualization of the function of parents and their involvement in the educational process, but does not address how elementary students interpret the role their parents play in their education. It also sheds light on the issue of obstacles as they are presented in the study.

The National Center for Education Statistics reported in its 2012 National Household Education Survey that the most common school-related activity involving parent participation during the school year was attending a PTA (Parent Teacher Association) meeting (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). The survey also questioned parents regarding volunteer work they had done during the school year. Forty-two percent of the parents reported volunteering at their child's school. This survey documented information provided from parents in grades kindergarten through high school. School size played a significant role in participation of the parents, particularly as volunteers in the school (Noel et al., 2013). This information further supported the need to understand how parents perceive their roles in the educational community, a question whose answer may provide insight into increasing the effectiveness of the parent involvement policies in the schools.



Parents come to the experiences of involvement from many different backgrounds that can interfere with a positive experience. Miscommunication among stakeholders, mainly with teachers or administrators, prior negative experiences with schools or school personnel, feelings of inadequacies, or merely lack of understanding of their roles, impact their efficacy in taking an active role in their children's education (LaRocque, Kleiman & Darling, 2011).

Student perception research is limited in scope. Most of the research involving student perceptions has been done with middle school (Régner, Loose, & Dumas, 2009), high school students (Harris & Goodall, 2008), and college-aged pre-service teachers (Hindin, 2010). A Canadian study of fifth and sixth grade students provided insight into the students' perceptions of their parents' involvement and the impact it had on their overall academic success. Although the sample was primarily White middle-class high achieving students, "from a theoretical perspective, this study provides strong support" for a family-school relationship model essential for academic success (Rogers, 2009, p. 52). This further supports the need for further research into the impact of parental involvement (research question 2) and the need to determine changes that would make this relationship stronger that addresses research question 3.

### **Definitions**

The following terms are pertinent to the phenomenological study of parental involvement from the perspectives of parents, teachers, elementary-aged students and community members in a small rural eastern North Carolina school.

1. *Parental involvement*- Parental involvement can mean direct involvement in the classroom and/or engaging in activities with children at home (Barneyak and McNeely, 2009). According to Dr. Joyce Epstein, it can also mean volunteering, communicating with the teacher, helping with homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, and attending school-related

events (Epstein, 2004). For this study, parental involvement encompasses the wide range of interchanges among stakeholders as suggested by Dr. Joyce Epstein.

2. *NCLB (No Child Left Behind)*- A law enacted by the One Hundred Seventh Congress of the United States of America and signed into law on January 3, 2001 whose aim was to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice so that “no child is left behind”(Ed.gov). This law includes requirements, allocation of money (Impact Aid), and changes to the ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) coupled with specific parameters for state and local agencies to follow.

3. *Self-efficacy*- Bandura’s social learning theory states that children interact with others, acquire behaviors, learn when and how these behaviors are acceptable, and become motivated to perform them (Miller, 2011). The acquisition of these behaviors becomes internalized and become part of their make-up leading them to adjust their behaviors to being about desired outcomes. Hoover, Sandler, Green, and Walker (2007) contend that “self-efficacy” can best be defined as “a person’s belief that he or she can act in ways that will produce desired outcomes” (Hoover et al, 2007, p. 533).

4. *Perceptions*- According to Yount, perception is “the act of attaching meaning to information we receive from the world around us” (Yount, 2010, p. 234).

5. *Relationship* as it relates to the current study is defined as rapport building among the stakeholders in the study. This includes parents, teachers, students, and community leaders.

6. *Support* as it relates to the current study means providing educational resources necessary for student academic achievement including materials such as pencils, paper, notebooks, markers, and other items requested at the beginning of the year. This term also

encompasses expectations for the provision of help with homework, a place to study, and access to after school sporting events/practices and school-related activities.

7. *Expectation*, for the current study, is an anticipation that something will occur.

### **Summary**

The current phenomenological study examined the perceptions of parents, teachers, elementary age students, and community leaders about the role parents played in the educational process using focus groups, survey analysis and reviews, and interviews with the stakeholders. This study provided valuable feedback for schools to utilize in the construction of the parental involvement component of their school plans and serve to enrich the dialogue among the respective stakeholders. Chapter 1 identified the purpose and significance of the study and its intended influence over school parental involvement plans. Chapter 2 was designed to address the current literature about the topic of parental involvement and address the gaps in the literature. Chapter 3 focused on the methodology for the study. Chapters 4 and 5 will address the findings and discussion about these findings.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

Parents perceive their involvement in their child's education on several different levels. It is these perceptions that possibly hinder the home-school relationships and student achievement. Barriers and personal role perceptions toward parental involvement can be counterproductive to the development of positive working relationships among the stakeholders, namely parents, teachers, students, and community leaders. As teachers attempt to engage families on many levels, obstacles like preconceived notions of expectations on the parts of parents, teachers, students, and community leaders inhibit the creation of positive role construction. Subtle conflicts arise within the relationships due to these perceptions. For example, passivity viewed by teachers as a negative force in home-school relationship development, is likely to be the outgrowth of misperceptions on everyone's part about what makes up the home-school relationship model. Uncovering these misperceptions will lead to a better understanding of the motivations of these individuals to become part of a positive home-school working relationship. Many schools have identified these factors and used the information to develop programs to increase the roles parents play in the educational process, help students understand the importance of parental involvement, and enlighten teachers about these roadblocks and how to understand and remove them.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Three theories were the framework for the study that encompasses behaviors that parents, teachers, students, and community leaders exhibit surrounding parental involvement. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory embraces self-regulation, self-control, and self-efficacy, all influencing

the relationships among the four groups of stakeholders in the study. Supporting Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1986) is Weiner's Attribution Theory (2000) that involves intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships and understanding the functioning of each in the relationships among the stakeholders. The third, Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence outlines how the intersections of parents, teachers, and communities overlap and affect student achievement and school success (Epstein, 2001). (See Figure E2).

Each theory provided insight into the common ideals each group holds and enabled the investigation to unlock these threads and begin to weave a design that will work in various school settings to guide the parental involvement programs mandated by NCLB (No Child Left Behind) ([www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)) and, more recently, CCSS (Common Core State Standards) ([www.ccss.gov](http://www.ccss.gov)).

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Social learning theory's characteristics, according to Miller, include "the centrality of observational learning, a causal model that involves an environment-person-behavior system, cognitive contributions to learning, and self-efficacy and agency" (Miller, 2011, p. 236). In 1963, Bandura and Walters expanded social learning theories by adding both observational and vicarious learning (Pajares, 2002, p.1). Pajares contended that in 1977, Bandura added a component labeled "self-beliefs," after writing "Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change" after realizing this was missing from his theory (Pajares, 2002).

The results of these ideas brought about a more detailed discussion of his theory and explained how learning occurred. Personal characteristics such as self-perceptions and thoughts, coupled with an individual's emotional states and the social environment in which the individual is functioning, comprised the interactive qualities required for learning to take place (Yount,

2010). From these three areas evolved yet other important elements necessary to the learning process: self-control where an individual controls his behavior in the “absence of punishment or reinforcement” (p. 226), self-regulation that requires the individual to adapt this behavior to a new environment, and self-efficacy that “determines how capable an individual feels in handling a particular task” (p. 226). “In the self-efficacy paradigm, people have to appraise the limits of their operative capabilities” (Bandura, 1986, p. 363). An individual has perceived self-efficacy that determines how they will perceive the task and the anticipated performance outcomes thereby influencing how they will handle a given situation (Bandura, 1986).

Self-efficacy in teachers, parents, children, and community leaders determines how they engage in the learning process. Parents with a strong self-efficacy will be involved in their child’s educational journey and likely take an active role in it (Green, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). If a student perceives his parents’ values as positive, the likelihood of developing a strong sense of self-efficacy is greater as found in Gniewosz and Noack’s (2011) study with adolescents and their perceptions of parental involvement. The social learning theory was the framework of the study, which concluded that “the perceptions of parental activities and behaviors were shown to be based on actual parental behaviors (as captured by way of parental self-reports)” (Gniewosz & Noack, 2011, p. 76).

Creating a positive working relationship among four major stakeholders in the educational process-children, parents, teachers, and community leaders-must address the self-efficacy of the participants and discover a baseline for the construction of a strong working relationship for all the individuals. By understanding what beliefs these individuals bring to the discussion, barriers can be addressed, broken down, and rebuilt to create a strong, positive relationship among all the stakeholders.

## **Attribution Theory**

Attribution theory, developed by Bernard Weiner in the 1970s, explains motivation in students. It is essential to understand what motivates students to learn, and how teachers, parents, and community leaders influence student learning and the impact this has on student success and self-efficacy. Two components of this theory include an intrapersonal theory that encompasses thoughts one has toward success known as self-directed thoughts, and self-directed emotions involving feelings of shame, guilt and pride (Weiner, 2000). The basis for this theory is that “people behave the way they do for a reason” (McDermott, 2009, p. 1). According to Weiner, his approach to intrapersonal motivation evolves from people who “try to understand themselves and their environment and then act on the basis of this knowledge” (Weiner, 2000, p. 2). He ascribes two main determinants of motivation: expectancy and value. When engagement has been successful in the past, the anticipation is that it will be positive in the future. However, if prior experiences led to failure, the expectancy is that it will fail again.

Interpersonal motivation is contingent on the actions of others and their perceptions of the behaviors in given situations. “This social environment includes peers, teacher, and parents who experience happiness and sadness given the performance of others, who express anger and sympathy, and who reward, punish, help or neglect” (Weiner, 2000, p. 7). Interpersonal relationships can be managed given accurate information and feedback. Motivating involvement means understanding the social interactions and perceptions of the participants, a goal of this particular study.

The motivation theory applies to learning environments, but can be easily defined in terms of relationships individuals have with others and their perceptions of others based on their behaviors. The interpersonal motivation that is contingent upon the actions of others and

perceptions resulting from these actions can also be used to identify the interpersonal motivation among the groups in the study-parents, teachers, students, and community leaders. In exploring these possibilities, addressing self-efficacy or self-esteem would provide a baseline for understanding motivations for involvement from all four perspectives.

Internal attributions referred to as “dispositional” attributions (McDermott, 2009, p. 1) involve situations where individuals observe and infer another’s behaviors resulting from some internal cause such as aptitude, personality, or upbringing (McDermott, 2009). As an observer, a parent, teacher, or student may attribute the level of parental involvement evolving from some internal attribute that affects personal involvement decisions.

External attributions or “situational” (McDermott, 2009, p. 1) are a result of an observer ascribing the cause of the behavior to some outside source. When considering the perceived quality of parental involvement, it is important to understand this may be a result of a prior negative experience or comments made by some individual that influence the decision-making process for each individual.

In constructing an understanding of how parents, teachers, students, and community members interpret and define parental involvement, this theory directed the study to uncover underlying attributes and reasons to explain the behaviors of these stakeholders in their personal motivations toward involvement.

### **Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory**

The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influences recognizes that students are shared with families, schools, and the communities. With emphasis on both mutual responsibility and mutual benefit to schools and families, this perspective provides a strong framework that details the dynamics of the participants and their impact on students. So that I might better understand



the impact of these influences on students, it is important to understand what perceptions are common to all four groups, articulate these perceptions, and build a strong relationship among the stakeholders. Mutual responsibility is defined by Epstein as a belief that the teachers and parents work together to help students attain important goals in their schooling (Epstein, 1995). Mutual responsibility must include students in the process. By having goals clearly articulated and understood by all members of the groups, the students efficacy and achievement are positively impacted. Mutually beneficial partnerships involve all stakeholders and posits that all members benefit from a strong interactive relationship (Epstein, 1995).

This theory was grounded in the symbolic interactionism theory posited by Mead in 1934 and the reference group theory developed by Merton in 1968 (Epstein, 2001). Mead's theory posits that an individual's self-concept, personality, values and beliefs "are products of our interactions with others" noting that these elements are an outgrowth of students' interactions with groups other than their peers (Epstein 2001, p. 23). Merton built on this by referring to a group or individual that is taken into "consideration by another group or individual to influence their abilities and behaviors" (Epstein, 2001, p. 23).

Families, schools, and communities had traditionally held different roles in the lives of the students. As the discussions increased in the 1960s and 1970s regarding whether "schools or families were more important" (Epstein, 2001, p. 38), an awareness of the value of each of these agencies toward student success brought to light the need for shared involvement of schools, families, and communities in the education of children in society. As the dialogue continued, federal programs such as Head Start included legislation that involved parents in the education process. As partnerships developed and student accountability took center stage as a result of the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), the

movement to involve communities and families intensified. Epstein noted the changes in viewpoints, most especially with the question changing from “Are families important for student success in school?” (Epstein, 2001, p. 42) to “*If families are important for children’s development*” (Epstein, 2001, p. 42) then how can programs be developed to help families in the relationships among the stakeholders, namely parents, communities, and schools?

The illustration of three concentric circles (parents, schools, and communities) that overlap with students at the center of the spheres conceptualizes the theory that all three groups affect students and support the need for understanding how these separate entities affect students’ learning, values, behaviors, and self-efficacy.

The theory is constructed upon two components-*internal* and *external*. The *external* component recognizes the three primary influences on the child that affect learning and growth. (See Figure E3).

Epstein continues to explain how these spheres can change. She notes that in the *external model*, there is a recognition that each of these spheres may be drawn together or pulled apart at any given time in the student’s school life. The time continuum is in constant flux, therefore these spheres will not be stable (Epstein et al., 2009, p. 150).

The *internal structure* addresses the interaction of the three spheres, showing interpersonal relationships and patterns of influence that occur between individuals at home, at school and in the community (Epstein et al., 2009, p. 151). The illustration depicts this inter-relatedness and further details two levels within the structure-institutional and individual levels within which participants work. The institutional level of the *internal structure* involves entire groups in activities such as PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) activities while the individual

level within the structure refers to one-on-one contact in situations such as parent-teacher conferences. (See Figure E1)

The theory goes on to point out three specific themes, separate responsibilities of schools and families, makes the assumption that conflict exists between families and schools with each group having different goals. The second perspective, shared responsibility, notes that there is an emphasis on “coordination, cooperation, and collaboration between schools and families” (Epstein, 2001, p. 22). Finally, the third perspective “sequential responsibilities of families and schools” (Epstein 2001, p.22) places emphasis on early parental involvement that is critical to fostering a student’s attitude and personality toward learning. This perspective focuses on the skills parents teach their children before they become part of the formal educational environment. According to Epstein, “A model of overlapping spheres of influence more complete and accurately depicts and explains the simultaneous influence of schools, families, and communities on students’ learning and development and on improving school programs and family support”(Epstein, 2001, p.74). This theoretical framework guided the interview process, attempting to delineate the similarities and differences in perceptions of elementary school parents, teachers, and students about the role parents play in the educational environment.

### **Related Literature**

Discussing perceptions of parents, teachers, students, and community leaders about the interpretations of the role of parental involvement also encompasses barriers perceived from each of the stakeholders. While it is difficult to separate perceptions from barriers, it became quite evident throughout the research process that barriers were responsible for these perceptions. When considering perceptions of individuals within each of the four groups, it became obvious that their perceptions were often guided by perceived barriers to involvement. In the following

sections, it might appear that the terms “perceptions” and “barriers” were used interchangeably; however, the intent is to bring clarity to the perceptions held by these groups of individuals- parents of elementary-aged students, teachers in an elementary setting, students in grades three through five, and community leaders in the region wherein the elementary school is located.

### **Parent Perceptions of Involvement**

Research conducted in schools worldwide attempted to understand how parents view their roles in the educational arena. Their findings have pointed to several areas that stand out as evidence that perceptions are consistent among various cultures, geographic regions, and across socio-economic lines (Adamski, Fraser, & Peiro, 2013; Bellibas & Gumus, 2013; Griffin & Galassi, 2009; Hourani, Stringer, & Baker, 2012). Parents had a variety of perceptions regarding their role in their child’s education. These included perceptions that their roles are as negotiators of the educational bureaucracy, their position as economically disadvantaged members of the community, their need to retain their cultural heritage, and their self-efficacy (Green, Hoover-Dempsey, Sandler, & Walker, 2007), feelings that they do not have sufficient educational knowledge to help their children, and teacher biases. These are just a few of the perceptions parents used to define their relationships with their school communities.

**Negotiators of the educational bureaucracy.** No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001 included requirements of parental participation in the educational process. Schools have become the center of the development of parent programs that include parents in the decision-making at the local, state, and national levels ([www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)). According to Section 9101 (32) of the law, “parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child” (Parent Involvement, Section 9101(32), ESEA, 2002). As parents negotiate the educational system, their

frustration over the bureaucratic environment leaves them with a sense that they are in a constant battle to be heard. Research indicates this is more evident in the middle and high school environment where students are involved in many different learning environments and parents who are not certain of their role in the school feel a sense of “un-connectedness” which grows as they move through middle and high school (Ferrara, 2009, p. 125).

In a report conducted in Norway by the National Parents’ committee for Primary and Lower Secondary Education, parents were described as employers and users with rights whose roles existed *outside* the school (Tveit, 2009, p. 293). Parents’ perceptions of their roles involved thinking the school is a “closed” (Tveit, 2009, p. 293) institution where they must exercise their rights daily to make certain their children’s needs are being met (Tveit, 2009, p. 293). Therefore, the parent perception implied that teachers are the providers of the educational services and parents remain outside the system. The parents in this study understood their value to their child’s educational success, yet they perceived their roles differently than other professionals.

Negotiating the bureaucratic maze can leave parents confused and frustrated. Many begin to step away from the schools feeling marginalized as valuable contributors to the process (Cooper, 2009).

**Personal sense of self-efficacy.** Parents’ views of their abilities to affect their children’s schooling are influenced by their perceptions of their personal abilities to bring about change. Feelings of inadequacy are perceptions they have that create barriers to their engagement in the educational process.

In many cases, parents do not feel they are in a position to help with homework because they themselves perceived themselves as possessing limited educational abilities. In an

interview with parents in a low-income neighborhood, Wanat (2010) found parents' reluctance to be involved addressed lack of confidence as a primary concern. In this study, a parent who was interviewed expressed concern over the feeling that others did not value her opinion because she was not college educated (Wanat, 2010, p. 270). Contrary to these findings were indicators that parents of special needs children were involved, thereby challenging the idea of low self-esteem as an inhibitor to parental involvement.

If parents felt powerless, as suggested in a study of Latino parents, their perceptions of their efficacy affected how they perceived their roles in their children's education (Brock & Edmunds, 2010). In a statement concerning parents role construction of efficacy, parents who "believe their activity will be recognized and bring about results have a strong sense of efficacy which in turn created a perception that brings credibility to their personal self-efficacy" (Brock & Edmunds, 2010, p. 217).

One way parents can experience a strong positive sense of self-efficacy is by observing others from similar cultural backgrounds in positions of leadership and authority. This creates a sense of empowerment that further enhances their sense of what they are capable of accomplishing. Brock and Edmund's (2010) study of Latino parents addressed the affect this has on parental involvement (Brock & Edmunds, 2010). Self-efficacy creates real or perceived barriers, as parents perceive the roles of teachers. "Parents think that teachers do a better job of teaching," leading to further resistance to involvement (Brock & Edmunds, 2010, p. 54).

Parents in an elementary school in the southeastern part of the United States were questioned about their roles in the education of their children, specifically their self-efficacy. After participating in a pre-interview, intervention, post-interview, evidence showed a small increase in their own sense of self-efficacy (Bartel, 2010). The programs conducted during the

summer were designed to enhance their (parents') personal education and entice parents to take on leadership positions in the school. Another component in the program was an interactive homework program that further engaged the parents (Bartel, 2010). During the post-intervention interview, parents indicated they were more "confident in helping their children with their work but also expressed uncertainty as to their confidence level in specific subject areas" (Bartel, 2010, p. 218).

Shah's research with Latino parents provided further data that validated the previous studies regarding self-efficacy. Because the parents' role construction centered on low self-efficacy, parental involvement on the part of this group of parents was minimal (Shah, 2009).

When parents perceive their self-efficacy through a positive lens, the likelihood they will become engaged increases.

**Economical deficiency perceptions.** Some parents see themselves as financially unable to provide their children with sufficient additional resources to support their education. Society puts considerable emphasis on the socio-economic status of families that, in turn, affects parents and leads them to shy away from the school communities (Brock & Edmunds, 2010). Some see this as an obstacle that will influence their child's educational journey. While this is a legitimate concern, it is the parents' perceptions of their abilities that affect how they participate in the educational community.

**Defender of cultural heritage.** Immigrant parents who are new to the American educational system perceived their roles as defenders of their heritage. In a multicultural mobile society where language and cultural differences determine how roles are defined, parents' perception of the system lead some to believe their concerns about the "Americanization" (Doucet, 2011, p. 2707) of their children will dilute and perhaps extinguish that which they hold

dear, their cultural identity. This led to feelings of vulnerability that can lead to a resistance to creating an alliance with the school community. Cultural conflicts can escalate when teachers interact with parents from different cultural backgrounds than their own (LaRocque et al., 2011). “These dichotomous interactions may also affect the ways in which family involvement is perceived by teachers and parents” (LaRocque et al., 2011, p. 116).

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) supported this claim with research that pointed to parents with strong “cultural capital” (p. 15) that is valued by the school as likely to develop a strong relationship with the school community. If parents have strong ethnic and cultural agency, they have a tendency to see their roles as defenders of their culture, particularly if they fear it is being threatened or lost in a system of acculturation.

Advocating for their children’s cultural heritage is important and must be “culturally relevant” (Panferov, 2010, p.111). Parents are attempting to have others understand their culture and have it integrated into the school community, not erased (Panferov, 2010). Parents perceived cultural diversity as an important element contributing to their children’s success in a school where diversity was celebrated and its value emphasized (Cucchiara & Hovart, 2009). Again, the parents perceived their role as defenders of cultural heritage.

Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, and George (2004) “viewed parental involvement from a critical race framework and believed that the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which people operate often frame the way that they get involved in schools” (p.3). Capitalizing on the positive aspects within these frameworks prevented barriers from being constructed that would further weaken home-school relationships (Boncana, 2010). Part of the parent perception of cultural defense is the recognition by agencies such as Head Start that believe “that parents are the most important resources for children’s learning and understanding the cultural community is



critical to a program's success" (Chang, Park, Singh, & Sung, 2009, p. 311). As parents and caretakers perceived their roles as cultural defenders, evidence pointed to real or perceived barriers to parental involvement inhibiting the development of strong home-school connections.

**Bias.** If parents feel marginalized, as Cooper (2009) suggests, they cannot "be truly embraced as partner in their children's education if they do not feel valued and respected" (p. 390). Data in her research has confirmed that many African-American mothers "are too experienced with being the target of such rash judgment" (p. 390), assumptions being made that they do not care. Contrary to this presupposition by teachers, she found this particular group's narratives were the same: committed advocates for their children, seeking high educational goals for their children, and even traveling great distances to keep their children in a school they feel is superior (Cooper, 2009).

These biases extend to other areas. One such area is not culturally based, but competency-based. Taliaferro, De-Cuir-Gunby, and Allen-Eckhard (2009) interviewed teachers about their perceptions about parental involvement and garnered a myriad of responses that depicted their biases. One teacher was quoted as stating "parents should stay in their place-come to school when asked, don't get angry. . ." (p. 284). These attitudes/biases determine the level of engagement, particularly in relationships with "non-majority and poor parents" (p. 285). As Kunjufu (2005) posits, "schools appear to be geared toward the needs of the majority, leaving these parents feeling less respected and valued.

**Summary of parent perceptions.** Many researchers have addressed parental involvement perceptions. These frequently perceived barriers inhibit positive home-school relationship building. The need to understand perceptions parents bring to the educational arena is critical to creating positive home-school connection that benefits the students in so many

ways. Sharing a common belief in what defines parental involvement facilitates taking steps to ensure that the relationship strengthens and follows the students through their educational experience.

### **Teacher Perceptions of Parental Involvement**

Teacher perceptions of parental involvement directly affect how they relate to parents in the quest for establishing and maintaining a positive home-school connection. Joyce Epstein's (2005) six topologies of parental involvement provide a comprehensive model of levels of parental involvement. This list has become a framework from which many schools design their parental involvement policies. Yet some of these levels of involvement lead teachers to have a negative perception of parents' levels of involvement. These six topologies include:

- Parenting and attending to students' basic needs,
- Communication with the school through conferences notes, report cards and memos,
- Volunteering,
- Learning at home that includes homework, goal setting or projects, (Epstein 2005),
- Being part of the decision-making team at the local school (Epstein, 2005), and
- Collaborating with the community leadership to strengthen the relationship with the school (Epstein, 2005). (See Figure D2)

The first level, parenting, is something teachers do not see, but through communication can get a sense of the level of involvement. Having the second step, communication, (Epstein, 2004) firmly in place, allows the teacher to move the perception from passive to active (p. 16). Some of the labels teachers might put on parents' levels of involvement might be "difficult"

(LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011) or unavailable, particularly when parents are not seen at school or participating in school-initiated events. On a positive note, the role of parents as caretakers of their children is seen as a form of parental involvement. Some of these perceptions will be considered in the study of these relationship misinterpretations in this transcendental phenomenological study. Having clarity in understanding role construction is essential for maximum parental involvement. Collaboration must evolve from common understandings of roles and desires of stakeholders.

Part of the onus for the perceptions teachers have of parental involvement may fall on teacher attitudes expressed in comments like “I don’t think it is my job or the district’s job to teach parents how to parent correctly” (Ferrara, 2009, p. 138). When teachers enter the field with these perceptions, a barrier exists from the very beginning that further strains the relationships between home and school (Hindin, 2010).

Hindin’s study (2010) with teacher candidates before and after student teaching experiences found that 37% of the candidates described the role of teachers as encouraging collaboration prior to the student-teaching experience. Following the student-teaching experience, role description about collaboration increased to 64%, further highlighting the importance of the student teaching experience that emphasized the value of establishing a collaborative relationship. The complexities of the relationships between home and school are interwoven among the stakeholders, their prior experiences, attitudes, and misinterpretations leading to breakdowns within the relationship that will influence student success.

**Difficult parents.** Parents can be considered difficult to deal with by classroom teachers as they, the teachers, attempt to engage these parents in interactions and discourse about their children. A study to investigate difficult parents to help understand the reasons parents provided

for their perceived reticence toward engaging in the academic pursuits of their children, provided insight into their reasoning. Barriers such as cultural differences, language differences, physical barriers (transportation and work schedules), and emotional barriers (their personal experiences as students) were analyzed to understand why teachers perceived parents as difficult, (LaRocque, et al., 2011, p. 116) when in fact, other circumstances predisposed their decisions to participate within the school community. Labeling parents as “difficult” (p.116) creates barriers in relationships that need to be avoided in order to promote positive home-school relationships. Trying to change attitudes within the same parameters will not bring about resolution. Clearly, more communication can change these perceptions to a more positive attitude.

Teachers’ perceptions of difficult parents lead to relational conflicts among stakeholder that are oftentimes misunderstood. This is particularly evident in multi-cultural environments where teachers feel the parents are not seeing the situations from the same perspective, namely theirs. In a Dutch study, ethnic differences in parent-teacher relationships were highlighted in interviews where one teacher alluded to the parent’s Moroccan background stating, “He is the only boy in a Moroccan family and his mum. . . does not see why I have a problem with him” (Thius & Eilbracht, 2012, p. 794). Conflict in the teacher-student relationship, particularly with the Moroccan-Dutch parents reporting in this study, also found teacher alliances with Moroccan parents were not as strong as with native Dutch or Turkish parents, translating to weak alliances between students and their teachers, creating the perception of a “relational conflict” (Thius & Eilbracht, 2012, p. 801).

**Non-participatory parents.** Passivity is a concern with teachers when faced with accountability for student achievement as an outgrowth of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001). “Teachers expect parents to help with homework, nurture their children, participate in fund-

raising, attend school functions and attend parent-teacher conferences” (Hornby, 2011, p.11).

When the parent is not visible, the teacher’s perception is that of a non-participatory parent. As teachers perceive parents as non-participatory, they are narrowing or restricting the definition of parental involvement. Many parents, particularly immigrant parents whose primary language is not English, work behind the scenes with their children in a supportive fashion, falling into the first category of Epstein’s six topologies, that of parenting (Epstein & VanVoorhis, 2010).

While teachers expect parents to take on a participatory role, the lens through which this term is viewed is often misinterpreted leading to the perception of parents as non-participatory.

**Parents are only caretakers.** Teachers may view parents as caretakers, limiting their roles as they (teachers) see them and relegating them (parents) to positions outside the school. This does not mean that this label does not fit all parents, but, in some minds, it is the only role. According to Epstein’s six topologies, the first level of parental involvement is parenting. At some level, this should be true of all caregivers, yet by limiting the perceptions, the involvement becomes perceived in a limited light. “Teachers expectations for parents, therefore, focused on participatory activities and practices that parent engaged in primarily to support their own children” (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012, p. 164). This role is significant and has shown to be the most important role for parents. This involvement affects student achievement and self-efficacy, thereby reducing student behavioral issues and increases motivation on the part of the students to be involved in their personal educational journey (Choudhary & Malik, 2012).

**Unpaid helpers.** Viewing parents as unpaid assistants in the classroom is a perception held by many teachers. In many instances, teachers feel they are the experts in the classroom (Baeck, 2010). This mindset relegates the parent volunteers to a position of an unpaid helper providing the teacher with free time. Some may see this as a negative relationship where the

parents or volunteers merely serve as relief workers who are undependable and have minimal commitment to the classroom (Epstein, 2001, p. 127).

Conversely, many find value in the time volunteers provide to the classroom, freeing teachers up to assist students and schools to accomplish daily instructional tasks (Christianakis, 2011).

In either case, the term *volunteer* implies that no compensation is provided for the tasks these individuals perform (Christianakis, 2011). The teacher's personal values and interpretations of the parent/volunteers' capabilities will determine the extent to which the volunteers are used within the classroom. According to Epstein's model, parent involvement should be designed as "augmenting classroom work, not replacing it" (Christianakis, 2011, p. 165).

The term "help labor" grew from Christianaki's (2011) interviews with parents and teachers. In this qualitative study, two themes emerged: "helping" that put teachers in supervisory roles where parents were assigned tasks by the teacher and viewed as uncompensated assistants rather than partners (Christianaki, 2001, p. 164) and "home helpers" where teachers expected parents to enrich students' out-of-school interactions and provide experiences to extend student learning (Christianaki, 2011). In either case, the perception teachers have of the parents and their abilities directly influences the role of parents as either partners or volunteers who are supervised by the teachers.

**Summary of teacher perceptions.** Teachers' perceptions based on prior experiences and positive or negative interactions with parents can influence their self-efficacy, which in turn determine the level of engagement they accept or expect from parents. Fully understanding their perceptions and articulating personal reservations or concerns can facilitate increased and varied

engagement practices involving the families with whom they have contact. Other perceptions may be articulated and be part of the larger categories presented above. Teacher perceptions are individual perceptions based on personal experiences and can be grouped with many similar perceptions. Clarification of understandings and misperceptions should be an outgrowth of research on perceptions of all four-stakeholder groups.

### **Student Perceptions of Parental Involvement**

The third group of stakeholders under consideration is students with a focus on elementary aged children. Research is limited about children's interpretations when asked about the roles they perceive their parents have in their educational journey and at home. Most of the data for student input comes from middle and high school aged children (Régner, Loose, & Dumas, 2009; Urdan, Solek, & Schoenfelder, 2007). Working with this age child can provide understanding regarding their perceptions. Understanding what elementary-aged children perceive as the role their parents have is more challenging. The overall goal is to understand how parents, teachers, community leaders, and students of elementary age children interpret parental roles and if there are commonalities among these stakeholders that can be articulated and utilized to enhance the home-school relationships. Academic support is different from academic monitoring (Régner et al., 2009). Parents placed on a continuum ranging from overbearing parents to parents with no apparent interest, illustrate the wide ranges of perceptions children have about their parents' roles in their education. Placement on the academic monitoring continuum has an impact on student motivation, student achievement, and student behavior (Coleman & McNeese, 2009; LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). Understanding students' perceptions about the level of interest their parents have in their learning is critical to educators' understandings of ways to engage all stakeholders in the learning process. The areas

of academic support, academic monitoring and over-bearing or dis-interested parents are areas of concern to be investigated.

**Academic support versus academic monitoring.** Researchers who investigated French middle school students used a questionnaire to pinpoint students' perceptions of parents' academic involvement and monitoring, coupled with the relationship between academic support and student achievement. The study confirmed "academic support was positively related to mastery goals" (Régner et al., 2009). Parents who have high expectations for their children but are not overly controlling, have children "who value school and have strong academic self-concepts, expect to do well, and often do perform at a high level" (Urdu et al, 2007, p. 10).

In a study on family influences on motivation, Urdu, Solek, and Schoenfelder (2007) described five student patterns of influence that emerged from the data they collected from the students regarding their perceptions of parental involvement. In the first pattern, *family pleasing* (Urdu et al., 2007, p. 11), the student had a strong desire to please the parents by achieving high academic status. The students perceived parents as making sacrifices for them and felt that they were rewarding their parents with academic success. The students perceived the parents as supportive but not over-bearing. The second pattern observed by researchers was *family obligation* (Urdu et al., 2007, p. 12), where students perceived the sacrifices parents had made such as immigrating to another country for their educational opportunities as a sense of gratitude or debt repayment. The third theme or pattern that emerged, labeled *parental support* (Urdu et al., 2007, p. 13) indicated students perceived the reinforcement they received from their parents as supportive with high academic expectations. "Students can infer academic values through the actions of their parents, thereby constructing perceptions of parental involvement through observing parental inactions and direct communication of these values" (Gniewosz & Noack,



2012, p. 76). Several students in this group sought academic success for their personal gain, but most acknowledged the parents as having the most influence. The negative influential pattern that emerged, labeled *aversive family influence*, (Urdan et al., 2007, p. 13) finds students' perceptions of family members' expectations as non-existent or role models were not positive in their views. Researchers found several students who overcame these influences but found a wide range of student achievement indicating unclear patterns within the *aversive family influence* pattern (Urdan et al., 2007, p. 13). All these patterns were indicative of student perceptions, yet these students were not elementary-aged children. Research surrounding students of this age provide a significant gap in research.

**Disinterested versus over-bearing.** Some students perceive disinterested parents as barriers to their educational progress. Research supports the need for parents to be motivational factors in their children's schooling indicating there is a fine line between support and control (Urdan et al, 2007). Students who viewed their parents as controlling tended to rebel and defy what their parents had ask them to do. This was particularly true of middle and high school students. In the patterns of family influences posited by Urdan's (2007) study, findings pointed to the *aversive family influence* (Urban et al, 2007, p. 13) as a negative force in the students' perceptions of parental involvement. Sheppard's (2009) study found that students who perceived their parents as disinterested claimed that their parents expected them to seek teacher or homework center support to complete homework. In this same study, indicators did not point to the students' perceptions of their parents' abilities as an issue, rather lack of interest (Sheppard, 2009). Students directed their responses toward parent work schedules and tiredness shaping their perceptions of their parents' willingness to participate in their education (Sheppard, 2009).

Contrasting the disinterested parent is the overbearing or coercive and demanding parent. Students' perceive this type of parental involvement as a negative force. This idea or perception is more easily articulated as students enter the middle school and high school arena, as they begin to recognize parenting styles simply through the interactions with their peers. Overbearing parents, often thought of as authoritative parents, are viewed as negatives in the perceptions of students toward parental involvement. Silva, Dorsa, Azhar, and Renk (2008) found that the authoritative parenting style of fathers actually decreased anxiety whereas that of the mother caused an increase in anxiety. Findings also indicated that the authoritative parenting styles of the mother, coupled with anxiety, affected student grades in college (Silva et al, 2008). Students were able to reflect on their perceptions of their childhood to determine how these parenting styles shaped their learning into adulthood. Adolescents who perceived their parents as authoritative were found to demonstrate more motivations in their academic pursuits. However, other variables, such as parent or student self-efficacy, must be considered when viewing these perceptions through the eyes of the students (Rivers, Mullis, Fortner, & Mullis, 2012).

Frequently, parents apply added pressure on their children to be successful. Levpušček & Zupančič (2009) focused their research directly on this issue as it related to the adolescent students' math success. Slovene parents were actively involved in the students' education but "parental academic pressure was a strong indicator of student goal mastery, academic self-efficacy, and their math success" (p. 559). The researchers went on to point out that when students perceived the exertion of "strong academic pressure, student academic success and self-efficacy" (p. 559) were undermined.

Gniewosz and Noack's (2012) findings suggested that the home environment was more influential than school in developing student attitudes. The study focused on students'

perceptions of their parents' values about academic success and their perceived involvement. These perceptions were predictors of the students' values. Adamski, Fraser, and Peiro (2012) supported this when studying students in Spanish classes but went on to posit that the home environment did not influence achievement to the same level of attitudes. Gould (2011) strongly suggested that students' home environment affected student satisfaction with school but that students residing with their biological parents experienced a higher level of satisfaction than those residing with stepparents. This addressed other factors affecting student perception that could easily be misunderstood by the children and perceived as being over-bearing or disinterested.

“Students want their families to be knowledgeable partners with their schools in their education and available as helpful sources of information, assistance, or guidance” (Epstein, 2001, p. 44). Studies have illustrated the importance of understanding individual stakeholders' viewpoints, yet clear communication of these viewpoints has not thoroughly identified common perceptions within these groups. (Epstein, 2001). In many cases, interventions must take place to address these perceptions. Articulation of these perceptions is easier for adults than elementary school-aged children, creating a gap in literature to determine where perceptions of students in elementary schools intersect with parents, elementary teachers, community leaders, and where they do not match.

**Summary of student perceptions.** Students perceive parents' involvement on many different levels depending on their understanding of their parents' involvement in their learning. Maturity plays a big role in this recognition. As students mature, they are more capable of articulating these relationships and can relate to the different ways their parents engage in the educational process. Little research is available about elementary students' perceptions. The

goal of this study was to reveal these perceptions of the children in grades three through five as it related to parental involvement.

### **Community Leaders' Perceptions**

Community leaders' perceptions are frequently pre-suppositions based on the actions of community members toward the educational institutions within the communities. Understanding the perceptions community leaders have regarding parental involvement could facilitate the inclusion of these individuals into the dialogue for enriching the school-community relationships.

**Schools as part of the community.** Schools are parts of communities, but many schools are strangely isolated from their community businesses, agencies, senior citizens, cultural centers, and other potentially helpful groups and individuals" (Epstein, 2001, p. 468).

Community leaders often overlap with parents, students, and schools when members are also parents within the local school. A definition posited by Epstein embraces not only parents in the community, but also includes those who have the interest in the educational quality of the schools (Epstein, 2011). With the expanded definition, coupled with the overlapping influences among the stakeholders, comes a positive perception-building environment upon which schools can develop programs that are all-inclusive and valuable to the students within the community. In Epstein's six topologies of parental involvement, the activities articulated in Type 6 respond to the interaction of families and communities where families can contribute their services to the communities and communities can bond with schools to advance school improvement goals (Epstein, 2001).

Community leaders' desire for a strong school system is reflected in their willingness to contribute financial resources, facilities, and personnel to make this happen. Their personal perceptions are not often articulated, yet their actions speak volumes.

**Community resources.** In Griffin and Galassi's (2010) article on parental perceptions of barriers to academic success, researchers worked with middle school students in a rural community. Findings indicated parents were not aware of school and community resources available to them, supporting the "psychological constructs of role construction" (Griffin and Galassi, 2010, p. 97) creating a disconnect among the stakeholders. With the emerging themes in their research came the knowledge that parents' perceptions of barriers included the limited understanding of the availability of community resources.

Addressing the community members' perceptions is limited in research that has been conducted. The presupposition that communities value the quality of the educational system and are willing to share resources, gave rise to the question about the perceptions of community leaders regarding the definition of the term *parental involvement*.

**School-community partnerships.** Choen-Vogel, Goldring and Smrekar (2010) addressed local partnerships within the communities surrounding neighborhood schools to determine the influence the neighborhoods had on the interactions among schools and community members. Their research concluded that schools in high-risk areas where crime rates were a higher liability and additional moneys were needed for safety, engaged the community in a more positive way to increase the involvement of parents and educators to promote a more positive outcome for the students. Students living in a community and attending school where there was a lower safety risk concern had less local agency engagement than those students within urban, higher-risk environments. The researchers found that the types of neighborhoods in which schools were located affected the level of engagement and the perceptions community members had regarding parental involvement (Choen-Vogel et al, 2010).

Additional studies by Nelson, McMahan, and Torres (2012) found that community partnerships needed to be supported by educators in order for them to be sustained. In order to maintain a forward momentum, according to these researchers, school leadership needed to involve community members in planning and decision-making if the programs implemented and included within the community were to survive. This study involved junior high school students in a high-risk environment. The authors of the study recommended that a change in focus to include community members in decision-making would bring about a positive change in the perceptions of community leadership.

**Summary of community leaders' perceptions.** Research on community leaders' perceptions is limited, at best. Frequently, community leaders become involved because of their personal children's activities within the schools. Community leaders are an integral part of the relationship identified by Epstein (Epstein, 2001). Having a positive relationship among these stakeholders can benefit the community as students become adults and participate in community functions. The African proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child" ([www.afriprov.org](http://www.afriprov.org)) further emphasizes the communal responsibility in raising children to be respected participants in society.

### **All Group Perceptions**

All stakeholders hold the key to students' academic and social successes. One of the primary avenues toward this is communication among the groups-parents, teachers, students, and community leaders. Clearly articulating goals and steps toward achieving the goals, addressing needs of schools within the community, and promoting positive communication among all stakeholders can enrich parental involvement and ultimately affect student success both socially and academically.

**Communication initiators.** Confusion often exists about who is responsible for initiating the communication among the stakeholders. Parents perceive this role to be that of the teacher (Hindin, 2010). In an interview with parents about their views on their roles in their children's education, a parent stated that, as a frustrated and dissatisfied parent, she felt as did others that "they got help only when teachers wanted them to stop complaining" (Wanat, 2010, p.169). Parents in the same study who did not appear to be involved in their child's education stated that they were waiting to be invited to participate (Wanat, 2010). While teachers frequently initiate this avenue of communication, parents often perceive this as an inhibitor to their involvement and hesitate to contact teachers. While many parents, particularly parents who may feel uncomfortable in a school setting, desire to attend events; they feel they need to wait for an invitation (Hovrani, Stringer, & Baker, 2012).

## **Barriers**

Barriers to parental involvement create disconnects among stakeholders that ultimately affect the academic achievement of the students. Much research has been done to address these barriers with the hope that they can be broken down and a strong home-school connection can be created that will endure throughout the years a child is in school. Five such barriers stand out in most of the research done both in this country and in Europe (Baeck, 2010). Support from parents and an understanding of what this entails is of primary concern to parents, teachers, and the students. Time constraint, addressed in many studies, is an issue that stands out as problematic in the development and maintenance of strong home-school connections. Third and fourth issues of critical importance are cultural/language barriers. Biases comprise a fifth barrier that presented itself in research articles. Other barriers most certainly exist, but these five stand out as issues to address in order to bring about strong home-school relationships.

**Time.** Many researchers have discovered that time constraints and schedules play a significant role in the reduction in parental involvement. The reasons range from the need for childcare (Turney and Kao, 2009) to work-related schedules that interfere with parents' abilities to attend school events or help with homework (Brock and Edmunds, 2010). Brock and Edmunds (2010) conducted research on this topic and found that parents listed this as the most critical barrier to their involvement. In this study, parents were asked to list five reasons they were not involved in their child's education, particularly when it involved coming to the school. Turney and Kao (2009) also reported that more than half of the parents surveyed in their study stated that their work schedules interfered with their level of involvement. Supporting this data, LaRocque, Kleinman and Darling (2011) found that parents also reported that meeting times were inconvenient.

**Support.** Parents, teachers, and students often misunderstand the amount and type of support parents are expected to provide for their children. In a study by Griffin and Galassi (2010), middle school parents in a rural middle school indicated they understood the impact their involvement had on their children's academic success, but lacked an understanding of how to provide help for their children. Not knowing when or whether to help their children or what amount of assistance they should provide, coupled with limited knowledge of locally available resources, prevented parents from being actively engaged in the educational process. In some instances, students do not want help with homework (Brock & Edmunds, 2010) as students in middle school are often resistant to parental involvement with homework. In many cases, parents are reluctant to help due to the nature of the assignments, feeling intimidated by the level of knowledge required to provide adequate assistance (Barnyak & McNeely, 2009). Baeck (2010) reported that teachers in the lower secondary schools in Norway did not expect parents to



become too involved with assignments but felt that encouraging their children would provide needed benefits for student success. Not surprising, parents are uncertain as to what type of support they are expected to provide, especially when the home-school connection is weak and these concerns are not clearly articulated.

**Language.** Establishing a positive communication relationship between home and school is difficult for many as language barriers often exist inhibiting complete understanding of what is being communicated. Language barriers are particularly strong when parents and teachers do not speak the same language. A Chinese parent in a study conducted by Ji (2009) addressed her frustration she experienced when she arrived in the United States. Her response to a survey question regarding her reason for not going to teacher-parent meetings was her lack of understanding of English, so she chose to stay away. Quintanar and Warren (2008) worked with Latino parent volunteers to determine how best to help their children. The parents indicated that they did not always understand what the teachers were asking; creating a communication barrier that affected their level of engagement in the schools.

Another issue teachers often overlook when they are addressing parents is the use of academic vocabulary many parents may not understand. When using academic jargon, parents can feel intimidated and withdraw from any school activities. This barrier will negatively influence the home-school connection, particularly when the parent feels inferior due to a lack of understanding of what is being said (LaRocque, et al., 2011). Communication is of critical importance but if all the stakeholders do not fully understand what is being asked, parents are likely to avoid being involved.

**Culture.** Schools in the United States are culturally diverse. Recognizing the cultural make-up of a school paired with shared knowledge of the cultural heritages of the stakeholders

provides avenues to bridging the divide between home and school for many families. Some families wish to retain most of their cultural heritage as much as possible whereas, others would like to be assimilated into the American way of life.

Cultural capital is important to immigrant families. Yet some families do not want their children to be “Americanized” (Doucet, 2011, p. 2725), creating a cultural divide that is difficult to cross. These families do not want to be part of the mainstream, yet their children are in the schools. Their decision to avoid engagement is a direct result of this feeling of resistance.

Many families choose to become part of the American way of life but experience difficulties due to language and cultural heritages (Epstein, 2001). In a study conducted in a large Midwestern metropolitan area, parents questioned about the roadblocks they encountered in the educational system and possible barriers to their involvement, indicated that language barriers are the primary barrier followed closely by lack of familiarity with United States schools (Vera, et al., 2012). Articulating this indicates a concern at the foundation of the barriers to involvement that require schools to address the concerns in order to build strong and healthy home-school relationships.

Haitian families were included in a study done by a researcher who immigrated to the United States and understood, firsthand, the cultural heritage of the participants (Doucet, 2011). The culture from which these families came had educational goals that conflicted with those in the United States school system where their children were students. Doucet’s research pointed to the fact that developing intercultural relationships is risky, but stated that people in positions of authority had an advantage over other stakeholders, creating a disconnect and a “resistance to bridging” (Doucet, 2011, p. 2728) the gap between home and school.

**Attitudes.** Parent and teacher attitudes develop from their individual “economic, cultural, educational, historical, ethnic, class and gender experiences” (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 45). The ensuing relationships among stakeholders, particularly between teachers and parents, can either be enhanced or degraded, dependent on the intersection of these attitudes. If parents and teachers misinterpret their understanding of education and its purpose, relationship building will be difficult under the best of circumstances.

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) explored the pervasive attitudes about education and the understanding of its function. In a 1997 article from the “Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development” (OECD), researchers highlighted a statement that succinctly illustrates these two schools of thought. “Should school teachers educate children while parents humbly support the schools? Or . . . Are parents the main educators of their children, while schools supplement home-learning with specialist expertise?” (OECD, 1997, p. 52). The first idea allowed for explicit and implicit barriers to develop, whereas, the second school of thought encouraged home-school relationships to enrich and enhance the educational environment.

**Summary of barriers.** Barriers in home-school relationship building exist on many levels. The lack of understanding of what “parental involvement” means, the amount of support parents feel they provide, and the amount of support schools expect the parents to provide are often at odds, creating dissonance among the stakeholders. Cultural barriers exist because of limited knowledge of cultures within the schools. Understanding cultures from everyone’s perspectives will open avenues of communication enabling the creation of stronger home-school connections, something that truly affects students’ social and academic successes. The lack of time was a barrier articulated by many as a reason for not becoming involved in the educational arena. Time constraints such as work schedules and meeting times were prominent in many

studies about barriers to involvement. Finally, language barriers existed on many levels. Families whose native language was not English had difficulty communicating with school personnel and school personnel have difficulty explaining content and school expectations where these families are concerned. All families are concerned with the well-being and academic success of their children, just as teachers are concerned with the overall success of their students. Bridging these barriers is needed to move forward in establishing and maintaining strong home-school relationships.

### **Summary**

Parental involvement continues to change as adults construct new and more effective definitions of the term. Much of the research done in the field addresses reasons parents hesitate to be involved (Bartel, 2010; Blackmore, 2010; Fletcher, Greenwood, & Parkhill, 2010). Countries from around the world (Bojuwoye, 2010; Choudhary & Malik, 2012; Sheppard, 2009) have addressed this portion of the educational environment and found many reasons parents do not feel they can be involved. Many researchers have conducted interviews, assessed programs currently in place, and observed the process from a spectator's point-of-view (Koshy, Brown, Jones, & Portman, 2013). School systems write parental involvement plans, often without input from the very stakeholders for whom the policy is intended. Children have not been subjects of many research studies, and many of those studies that involved children focused on middle school students. A significant amount of research from teacher and parent perspectives (Bojuwoye, 2010; Choudhary & Malik, 2012; Sheppard, 2009) has been done in countries other than the United States. While it is a law that parental involvement policies are present in all school systems, I would posit that few teachers are aware of the contents of the plan.

Based on the available research, I found that the impressions people have about the phenomenon of parental involvement varies considerably. The goal is to uncover the commonalities that exist among the four primary stakeholders- parents, teachers, students, and community leaders- then determine what barriers these four groups perceive to be in place, and finally, gather input from all four about changes they feel might enhance the programs currently in place.

Children and adults construct their knowledge based on what is occurring around them (VanBrummelen, 2002). “Bandura has emphasized *self-efficacy* –people’s perceptions of their competence in dealing with their environment and exercising influence over events that affect their lives” (Miller, 2011, p. 243). These attitudes will play a significant role in the conceptualization of the term parental involvement as the lens shifts from one group to the other. Finding common ground is important to understanding the issues that are part of the essence of the concept. Understanding the thoughts of these groups of individuals facilitated bridging the gap in home-school relationships.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand how elementary parents, teachers, students, and community leaders conceptualized the term parental involvement, identified barriers to this process, and articulated changes to the current system. By identifying commonalities among the stakeholders, reconfiguration of the current system can begin to take place. In this chapter, the design of the study was explained followed by supporting evidence about each research question. This chapter includes information on the site of the study and a description of the participants. It also contains detailed procedures, the researcher's role and explanations of each of the forms of data collection-survey analysis, interviews, and focus groups. Finally, the chapter details the analyses of the collected data.

### Design

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was conducted to understand the essence of the term parental involvement. Phenomenology in qualitative research “aims to identify and describe the subjective experiences of respondents” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 226).

Moustakas (1994) states that a researcher following the transcendental phenomenological approach must set aside any presuppositions about the phenomenology by using *epoche* or “setting aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (p. 85) in order to be completely objective and receptive when listening to participants' descriptions of the phenomenon known as parental involvement perceptions.

This was the most appropriate design because it is “more oriented toward describing the experience of everyday life as it is internalized in the subjective consciousness of individuals” (Schwandt, 2007, p.226). Husserl (1967) stated “natural knowledge begins with experiences and

remains within experience” (p. 45). Whatever belongs to the essence of an individual can belong to another individual and this continues until we can generalize the essence and “delimit” categories of the individual (Husserl, 1967, p. 47). According to Moustakas (1994), this particular design focuses on how things appear to individuals and removes individual biases.

I addressed any prior experiences with parental involvement. I made every effort to approach the participants’ responses and the interactions with participants without bias and preconceived attitudes. A transcendental phenomenological study assisted in articulating the barriers each group perceived to be in place. The themes expected to evolve from the focus groups highlighted areas in need of change and recommendations to bring about these changes.

### **Research Questions**

In an effort to understand how elementary school teachers, parents, students, and community members define and characterize the term parental involvement, this transcendental phenomenological study attempted to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do elementary school teachers, parents, students, and community leaders conceptualize the term parental involvement?

**RQ2:** What obstacles do elementary school students, their parents, teachers, and community leaders articulate that impact parental involvement?

**RQ3:** What changes could be implemented to create effective parental involvement as articulated by elementary school students, their parents and teachers, and community leaders?

### **Site**

The site chosen for the study was a rural school in a county in southeastern part of North Carolina. This school was selected because of the rural setting, the stability of families over an

extended period of time, similar socio-economic backgrounds among community members, and a community that shows support of school activities, particularly outside the school setting. The number of students on free and reduced lunch was about 58%. Walden Elementary School (pseudonym) had 630 students, 61% of whom were Caucasian, 31% were African-American, 7% were Hispanic and the remaining 1% were Native American. The staff of 41 was 79% White, and 21% African-American. There were two male physical education teachers, a male special education teacher, and a male principal on the staff.

### **Participants**

The goal of the study was to determine how each of the stakeholders characterized parental involvement commensurate with their personal experiences, and analyze the data to find common threads that existed in these experiences and conceptions of the concept of parental involvement. The total sample size of 18 included four teachers, four parents, four community members, and six students (two each from grades three through five). Student selection from these grades was done to achieve maximum feedback from students' points-of-view. The ability to articulate and respond to the focus group questions was taken into consideration, as was the ability to interact with peers while staying on task.

Data was collected and analyzed from teachers, parents, and students in an elementary school setting along with community members in leadership positions from the area surrounding the elementary school, to find commonalities that existed and themes that were present in their perceptions of parental involvement.

The participants were a cross-section of four parents and four teachers from kindergarten through fifth grade, six students (two from each grade three through five), and four community leaders selected from members of the community who were actively involved in the daily



operations of the community- the mayor, police officer, a member of the clergy, and a daycare owner.

The study had four teachers who were selected using maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation sampling involves “selecting a wide range” of participants “to get a variation on the concepts of interest” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 271). I chose this method because it allowed for the selection of parents and teachers from a wide range (kindergarten-five) of participants providing a variety of perspectives. Within this group of four individuals was at least one African-American teacher, one teacher with less than five years of experience teaching at the elementary level, and one with more than 20 years of experience at the elementary level. The goal was to mirror the school’s ethnic diversity with the participant selection.

The four parents were selected using purposeful sampling. This type of sampling was used because it can inform an understanding of the research problem from different perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Parents in the study included at least one African-American parent, one Hispanic parent, and the remaining parents were Caucasian to mirror the school’s demographic make-up.

Six student participants representing grades three through five were selected using snowball or chaining sampling because of the need to gather adequate information for analysis. It was felt that the teacher would be best at determining which child would be more articulate and would be comfortable in a focus group and interview situation. This sampling provided information-rich text (Creswell, 2013). Input from previous teachers was also included to help ensure the selection of articulate students to participate in the study.

Parents in the study did not have a child in the study and the teacher who was a participant did not have the student participant in their classroom. These teachers did not have

any of the participating parents as parents from their student population. This was an attempt to limit biases among participants.

Table 1

*Demographics of Participants and Methods of Selection*

Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Method of Selection
Ginger	41	Female	Black	Maximum Variation Sampling
Mary	32	Female	White	Maximum Variation Sampling
Lynn	25	Female	White	Maximum Variation Sampling
Carrie	45	Female	White	Maximum Variation Sampling
Jane	38	Female	White	Purposeful Sampling
Paula	41	Female	Black	Purposeful Sampling
Bill	39	Male	White	Purposeful Sampling
Hope	39	Female	White	Purposeful Sampling
Annie	11	Female	White	Snowball Sampling
Jacob	11	Male	White	Snowball Sampling
Lila	10	Female	White	Snowball Sampling
Anthony	10	Male	White	Snowball Sampling
Peter	9	Male	Black	Snowball Sampling
Alex	9	Male	White	Snowball Sampling
David	47	Male	White	Random Purposeful Sampling
Dan	38	Male	White	Random Purposeful Sampling
Joan	46	Female	White	Random Purposeful Sampling
Joe	42	Male	White	Random Purposeful Sampling

Note: *Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants.*

### Procedures

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I met with the Superintendent and Principal to further describe the study and elicit any questions or concerns they had.

I compiled the focus group questions and interview questions then piloted them to non-participating individuals to check for redundancy and confusion. Finally, I emended the questions as needed then proceeded with the data collection (Moustakas, 1994). Once this process was complete, I began the process of inviting my participants.

I invited participants from the community to be interviewed on their perceptions of parental involvement. This invitation (see Appendix A) was followed by an acknowledgement letter clarifying the time and location (see Appendix B). Prior to the interview, a consent form was presented, discussed, and signed by all participants (see Appendix C). The form included information about anonymity and described how data would be securely stored. Interviews were audiotaped and took place at an agreed upon time and place for the convenience of the interviewees. These participants included a local pastor, the mayor of the town, a police officer, and day-care owner. Each interview was followed by a complete transcription of the audiotape. Following the transcription, I met with the individuals to review the transcription for member checking and emended as needed (Moustakas, 1994). These semi-structured interviews ranged from 30-45 minutes in length. During the interview, I used an interview protocol sheet (Appendix G), and made notes in the margin that were added into the final summative report. These notes or memos helped ensure all details were included and accurately portrayed the phenomenon of the study. The choice to use semi-structured interviews was to “elicit stories of experience” (Schwandt, 2007, p.163).

Survey analysis of the school climate survey conducted in the spring of 2016 took place to bring to light other questions that became part of the interview and focus group sessions. Creswell’s compendium of data collection includes public documents as part of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013, p. 160). These provided insight into the overall feelings of parents regarding their perceptions of their roles and school attitudes about their involvement. The information gained from this helped guide the focus group questions and supported the research questions presented in the study. A matrix of both parent and teacher survey questions and their

relationship to the research questions and focus groups questions is found in the appendices (Appendix E).

The survey was administered to all families in the school system in the spring of 2016. NCR form were sent home with students at the beginning of the week and returned at the end of the same week (see Appendix D). In order to retain a level of anonymity, no names were put on the document. Teachers collected the returned surveys each day and turned them in to the office. At the conclusion of the data collection, raw data submitted to the Central Office was machine-scored, providing percentages for each category. The results were presented to the local school board in August of 2016 and published on the school system's website at the conclusion of the board meeting.

Barriers to parental involvement were discussed in depth in literature. Baeck (2010) addressed these issues in research noting misinterpretations of the roles parents play, time constraints and support for parents as primary concerns from both groups of stakeholders. Additionally, Nelson, McMahan, and Torres (2012) discussed the need for community partnerships and educator support to continue to move forward in developing strong home-school partnerships. When discussing misinterpretations among all the stakeholders, it becomes necessary to accurately report strengths and weaknesses within and without the school itself. The survey provided a window into the thinking of three of the groups of stakeholders. Community leaders were not part of the survey, but the questions highlighted in the focus group summaries entered into the discussions to further elaborate on all the groups' perceptions and focus on the phenomenon of parental involvement perceptions.

The parent survey addressed all the research questions, but not all questions on the survey were needed or reflected responses to the research questions (see Appendix D). Items B, D, G,

and H addressed the first research question about how parents conceptualized parental involvement. Item B also related to research question 3 because it could guide a discussion to have recommendations articulated by the focus group. Research question 2 about the obstacles parents perceived existed, could be incorporated into the discussion on items G, H, and L.

The focus group question 1 on the teacher survey could be guided using items D, G, J, L, and I. Question 2 on the focus group list could be supplemented with items G, H, I, and L. Item B would assist in discussing focus group question number 3 while questions 4 and 5 could be guided with items A, and I. Several of the questions on the survey would not be critical to the discussions regarding the three research questions. Research question 1 could be enhanced using items E and G from the teacher survey. Research question 2 about obstacles could be guided or supplemented with items A, B, D, F, I, and J. The information from items E, F, G, J, M, and I could be used along with research question number 3. Items C, H, K, L, and N through T would not be needed to respond to these research questions. The focus group question number 1 could most closely align with item E while focus group question 2 would be answered with item E as well. Focus group questions 4 and 5 could be included with items I and J. Many of the items were opinions about leadership, the sense of adequate safety measures in place, cleanliness of the buildings, and staff development that may enter into the discussions, but are not the primary focus of the research questions.

Selection of participants for the focus groups was completed in a specific order to ensure continuity in the process. It was important to maintain this order to prevent overlapping participants from the same classroom. Teachers were selected, followed by parents, and finally students.

The teachers were part of a focus group with questions addressing issues on parental involvement and perceived obstacles they observe from their interactions with parents and experiences with attempts at engaging them in school activities (see Appendix E). Teacher selection was voluntary after introducing the purpose of the study at a staff meeting. Teachers who volunteered to participate, and met the predetermined criteria of ethnicity and time in the profession were sent an invitation letter (see Appendix A), explaining the details of the study and provided contact information to participate. The letter contained a disclaimer stating that they could withdraw at any time, and reiterated that their anonymity would be protected. Following an invitation, an acknowledgement letter was sent to confirm their participation. Prior to the focus group, I met with each individual teacher and presented a consent form (see Appendix C), that detailed the study, reaffirmed how anonymity will be preserved, and explained how data will be carefully stored and destroyed at the completion of the study. The teacher focus group took place on the campus of Walden Elementary School.

The next step in the process involved soliciting volunteers from the parent population. Letters explaining the research and inviting them to participate (see Appendix A) were sent to parents in classrooms not represented by the teachers selected for the study, asking for them to volunteer for the study. The letter also contained a disclaimer stating that they may withdraw at any time, their anonymity would be protected and data would be carefully stored and destroyed at the completion of the study. Contact information for further questions was included in this letter (see Appendix A). The goal was to match the ethnicity of the school with the parent participants. Once the participant population was determined, an acknowledgement letter was sent via regular mail (see Appendix B). Prior to the beginning of the focus group session, I

presented each parent with a consent form (see Appendix C) and answered any questions they had regarding the study and their input.

Finally, I gathered my student focus group. These six students from grade three through five were part of the student focus group. Prior to student selection, I was visible to students in grades three through five in a volunteer capacity to bring facial recognition among the students and potentially reduce any anxiety they may feel toward participating in a focus group.

Student selection was last to prevent parents, students and teachers from being drawn from the same classroom. I met with each classroom teacher regarding the selection of the students they recommend to be part of the study. When the decision identifying who might be candidates to participate was complete, I contacted the parent(s)/guardians and obtained a signed “informed consent” form (see Appendix C). Students were provided with an assent form granting permission to be part of the study. I arranged the focus group schedule with the classroom teacher and notified the parent/guardian of the time and place.

Following the focus group meetings, I transcribed the information and returned it for member checking for correction, amplification, and emendation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I made any necessary changes as per the recommendations of the participants. I also encouraged participants to use their pseudonyms during the discussions to increase anonymity of the participants. Additionally, I maintained marginal notes to be added back into the text once the transcriptions were completed to ensure I have a detailed, accurate summative evaluation of each of these sessions.

I also maintained a reflective journal throughout the interviews and focus groups in addition to collecting the data. In it, I detailed the environment and any personal thoughts regarding the sessions.

Upon the completion of the focus groups, I completed individual textural and structural descriptions, followed by a composite structural and textural description (Moustakas, 1994). The organization, analysis and synthesizing of data completed the process.

### **The Researcher's Role**

I was the primary researcher in this study. I am a retired teacher with over thirty years of teaching experience with the primary focus in elementary education. I served as a Title 1 reading teacher for seven years, and this experience led to an interest in parental involvement. The research was conducted at the school from which I retired after five years as a classroom teacher. At the time of the study, three of my grandchildren attended the school and I am acquainted with some staff and members of the administration. I have been a teacher, parent, and grandparent whose primary concern is the successful academic career of my children, grandchildren and students with whom I have had contact as their teacher.

### **Data Collection**

To ensure that triangulation took place, I collected data using three different methods: surveys gathered in a school climate survey in Spring of 2016, interviews with community members, and three focus groups comprised of teachers, parents, and students from grades three through five. Schwandt (2007) defines triangulation as a means to use multiple sources of data to verify the integrity of the inferences drawn by a researcher. Creswell adds, "this process involves corroborating evidence from difference sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Additionally, I maintained a journal documenting sessions with each group session, both focus groups and interviews, to reflect on the atmosphere in the room while the focus groups and interviews took place along with any notations regarding individuals' reactions that may not be picked up in the audiotape.



I ensured validity and reliability throughout the process. *Reliability*, according to Schwandt, states that an account of a phenomenon will be judged reliable if the research can be “replicated by another inquirer” (Schwandt, p.262). The procedures in place such as detailed field note documentation (Creswell, 2012) and coding procedures ensures reliability of the study.

*Validity* strengthens the research by the time spent in the field studying the phenomena of perceptions of parental involvement through varied lenses (Creswell, 2012). Added to this was the detailed thick description, and the closeness of the researcher to the participants in this study” (Creswell, 2012, p. 250). I supported the validity of the research through triangulation and accurate recording of all interactions with participants coupled with accurate transcription of interviews. Each set of data was assessed and compiled with an unbiased perspective to ensure accurate reporting of the findings.

I utilized interview protocol (see Appendix G) forms to facilitate data collection during the sessions with community members.

Data collection took place in a specific order to ensure continuity in the process and provide detailed insight into the essence of the phenomenon of parental involvement from the perspectives of parents, teachers, and students in an elementary school setting, along with community leaders from the community in which the elementary school is located. Data collected first was through the interviews with community leaders, then a survey review of school climate from surveys completed in March of 2016 (see Appendix D) followed by the three separate focus groups, and a reflective journal compiling personal reflections about the interactions within each session of focus groups and interview sessions. Teachers were the first focus group followed by parents, and finally, students. The reflective journal was maintained on a daily basis throughout the study. I determined that teachers would be first in the focus groups

to accommodate their schedules. The parent focus group followed the teachers, and finally, the students. I gathered the six students, two from each grade three through five, to discuss their perceptions of the roles their parents play in their education.

## **Interviews**

Creswell (2013) notes that interviews set up an unbalanced dynamic between the interviewer and interviewee that can affect the direction of the research study. According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), establishing a collaborative setting can rectify the unbalance and bring about more authentic responses to the questions posed during the interviews. The goal was to have the community leaders-mayor, pastor, day-care owner, and police officer- articulate their perceptions freely and without reservation. At the beginning of each interview, I reiterated the purpose and goal of the study and reviewed the confidentiality measures I had put into effect.

Each interview was between 30 and 45 minutes in length. The interviews took place outside the school campus setting at a time convenient to the interviewees. The sessions were audiotaped coupled with notes taken on the interview protocol form (see Appendix G). An additional recorder was available in the event one fails to operate. The questions were semi-structured to “elicit stories of experience” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 163).

Due to the sensitive nature of the interviews, anonymity was assured and an interview protocol (see Appendix G) was followed, using a form to record information and providing me with a means of note-taking to ensure accuracy in the data collection (Creswell, 2013). The following questions were used in all of the interviews conducted for the study.

Table 2

### *Open-Ended Interview Questions*

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## Questions

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1. How do you view the role parents play in the school experience? (RQ1)
2. Do you feel they participate in their child's educational experience outside the school?  
How would you describe this? (RQ2)
3. What changes would you like to see occur to strengthen and/or enhance the connections between home, school, and community? (RQ3)
4. Do you feel, as a community member, that parents should be part of the decision-making process in the schools? Please explain your thoughts in detail. (RQ2, RQ3)
5. In what area do you feel they (parents) might have an active voice in the decision-making process? (RQ3)

The first question (RQ1) presented to the interviewees allowed them to elaborate upon their perceptions of the roles parents played in the educational community. Each participant, also a parent within the same community, would provide insight into what they defined as parental involvement. In some cases, these individuals could speak from the position of an observer indicating ways they saw interactions among the stakeholders taking place. Brock and Edmunds (2010) stated that to define the concept of parental involvement was not easy because “it has historically encompassed a broad range of behaviors” (p.50). Within the context of behaviors, McDermott (2009) posits that “people behave the way they do for a reason” (p.1) which supports the need to understand what parent involvement is and how others interpret this interaction. The fourth question (RQ2, RQ3) partially reflects the same idea about behaviors and reasons people respond as they do to the question about the definition of the term *parental involvement*. This question (RQ 1) was designed to provide additional information and build upon current literature to help understand the phenomenon of parental involvement. The second

question (RQ 2) was designed to engage the community leaders in discussing their observations of parents and their interactions outside the school environment. It provided feedback from these individuals that further build on Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence, one of the theories upon which this study was build. Building on Mead's theory (1934) that states an individual's self-concept, personality, values and beliefs are products of interactions with groups outside their peer-relationships, Epstein (2001) stated that families and communities play different roles in the lives of individuals at different times and in different settings. According to Epstein, "A model of overlapping spheres of influence more completely and accurately depicts and explains the simultaneous effect schools, families, and communities have on students' learning and development" (Epstein, 2001, p. 74). In order to understand the program needs, it was critical to gain an understanding of how community leaders desired to move forward in enriching the relationships among the stakeholders. This prompted the design of questions three through five (RQ 2, RQ3). It was necessary to identify obstacles in order to ascertain ways to move forward. One of the issues community leaders addressed with these questions was presented in a study by Griffin and Galassi (2010). The emerging themes from their study pointed to the limited understanding parents had of available resources outside the school setting. During the interviews about partnerships and engagement of parents and students outside the school setting, suggestions to bring about improvements to the programs now in place were encouraged. The information gained from interviewing community leaders should provide a perspective on how they viewed parental interactions coupled with suggestions for moving forward to increase the engagement

### **Survey Analysis**

The document review was conducted to “analyze and interpret data generated from the examination of documents and records relevant to a particular study” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 75). The source of the data was the school climate survey conducted in March of 2016. In this document, parents responded to questions regarding school climate and the perceived relationships they have with school personnel. “Surveys and questionnaires, which are traditionally quantitative methods, also can be used in conjunction with qualitative methods to provide corroboration and/or supportive evidence” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012, p.108). For the purposes of this study, the function of the survey analysis of the parents’ perspectives in the Spring of 2016 was to “facilitate discovery of cultural nuances, look for contextual information and insights into parents’ perceptions while gathering information in a natural setting” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012, p. 252). The surveys were completed at home and returned to school without any identifying information in an attempt to ensure parents’ anonymity. Teachers completed the surveys in an online environment during the same time frame as the parent surveys were taken.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus groups are used to bring together a group of individuals to “discuss a particular topic” (Schwandt, 2007, p.119), parental involvement, and the conceptualization of this term by teachers, parents, and students. Focus groups “are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information” (Creswell, 2013, p.164). The goal was to find commonalities among the stakeholders about their conceptualizations of parental involvement. Prior to the beginning of each session, I reiterated the purpose and goals of the study and reminded the participants of security measures I have put in place. I also restated the

need to use pseudonyms in the discussions. It was necessary to provide place cards with their pseudonyms to reduce the possibility of inadvertently using their given names on the recordings.

The first research question focused on the stakeholders' conceptualization of the term parental involvement. The teacher and parent focus group questions and interview questions asked how they described the role of parents in their school. Question 5 allowed for elaboration on the roles of parents in the children's educational journey. The student focus questions 3 and 5, designed with the age of the children in mind, were designed to arrive at the same conclusions. Question 3 in the student focus group questions asks about the kinds of activities in which the parents participate and question 5 in the student focus group questions, asks students to describe ways in which their parent(s) might help at school. (Appendix E).

The second research question addressed perceived obstacles that impede parental involvement. The parent and teachers' focus questions numbers two and four addressed these concerns. The second interview question for community members addressed this same issue. The student focus question number 2 addressed why they think their parents do not come to help at school very often, if they feel that is an issue and would address obstacles the children perceive were in place to prevent their parents from helping out at school or attending functions at the school (see Appendix E).

The third research question addressed changes these stakeholders would recommend to increase parental involvement. The teacher and parent focus questions numbers 2 and 4 were elaborated upon to gain a better understanding of these recommendations. Community members' interview questions addressed changes in relationships they would like to recommend. Additionally, question five provided insight into recommendations these two groups may have (see Appendix F).

Students' recommendations were answered with their focus question number 4 that addressed their personal feelings about having their parents helping or attending school events (see Appendix E).

Member checking is "an important procedure for corroborating or verifying findings" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 187). I met with each focus group with the transcribed information to correct for misstatements, amplification and emendation of the information as a form of member checking. The location of the focus groups was determined by each group of participants in the study, with student groups being conducted during the school day within the school setting. This was to reduce the unfamiliarity and create a comfortable environment for the children.

Table 3

*Open-Ended Parent Focus Group Questions*

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Questions

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1. How do you characterize your role in the school experience? (RQ1)
2. Do you feel you participate in your child's educational experience outside the school? How do you describe this participation? (RQ1)
3. From your perspective as parents, what types of parental involvement do you see occurring? (RQ1)
4. What changes would you like to see occur to strengthen and/or enhance the connections between home and school? (RQ2, RQ3)
5. Do you feel, as parents, you should be part of the decision-making in the school? What area do you feel you might have an active voice in the decision-making process? (RQ1, RQ3)

6. Do you have any other areas you feel you would like to share about parental involvement in education? (RQ3)

The focus group questions for parents were designed to gather information about perceptions of the term *parental involvement*, obstacles to involvement, and recommendations for improvement the parents had because of their personal interactions with the school.

Questions one, two, and three addressed research question one (RQ 1) in an attempt to identify parents' interpretation of the term *parental involvement*. According to Joyce Epstein's six topologies (2005), parents' levels of involvement were very diverse. These six topologies ranged from providing for their child's basic needs to meeting with community leaders in collaboration to enhance the home-school relationship. These three questions provided the parents with an opportunity to discuss in detail the interactions they had with the school and their children.

Questions four and six focused on research question two (RQ 2) that was designed to address the parents' concerns of obstacles they felt were present that inhibited parental involvement. A study conducted by Taliaferro, De-Cuir-Gunley, and Allen-Eckhard (2009) focused on teachers' bias that directly influenced levels of engagement, particularly among the economically disadvantaged parents and "non-majority" (p.285) parents. Additionally, questions four and six were asked to determine if the parents felt self-esteem affected parental involvement. As Shah's study (2009) pointed out, parents' role construction was influenced by the self-esteem of the parent. Green, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2007) also studied self-efficacy and found that parents with a strong self-efficacy would likely take a more active role in the educational community. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory influenced the construction of this line of questioning because of its focus on self-efficacy.



Question five centered on parents' attitudes about being part of the decision-making at the school. The responses were designed to address research question three (RQ 3) that attempted to have parents elaborate on the types of changes they recommended and how they would go about making these changes.

Table 4

*Open-Ended Teacher Focus Group Questions*

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Questions

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1. How do you view the roles parents have in the school experience? (RQ1)
2. Do you feel they participate in their child's educational experience outside the school?  
How would you describe this? (RQ1, RQ2)
3. From your point of view, what types of parental involvement do you see occurring? (RQ1)
4. What changes would you like to see occur to strengthen and/or enhance the connections between home, school, and community? (RQ2, RQ3)
5. Do you feel, as teachers, parents should be part of the decision-making in the school? (RQ2, RQ3)
6. What area(s) do you feel they (parents) might have an active voice in the decision-making process? (RQ3)
7. Do you have any other areas you feel you would like to share about parental involvement in education? (RQ2, RQ3)

Focus group questions one through three on the teacher focus group chart, were designed to respond to research question one (RQ 1), asking teachers to elaborate on their perceptions of

the roles parents play in the educational community. Dr. Joyce Epstein's six topologies (2005) list levels of parental engagement opportunities. To provide a window into the teachers' perceptions, the three questions were asked in order to look for commonalities among stakeholders.

The second and fourth questions posed to the teachers were designed to facilitate a discussion into obstacles teachers recognized as inhibitors to engagement. While Baeck's research (2010) identified teachers as experts in the classroom, a roadblock to relationship building was an outgrowth of this mindset. These questions would allow teachers to identify these roadblocks and move to research question three (RQ 3) responses to offer suggestions for improving the relationships.

Questions two and five through seven were built around the need for teachers to identify ways to bring about changes that were identified as obstacles in research questions two (RQ 2) and allow for recommendations as per research question three (RQ 3). While concerns over parent engagement is a priority and it affects student achievement and self-efficacy, input is important and the teachers must feel their ideas are well-received and taken into consideration. As many parents engage to benefit their own children "teacher expectations for parents, are therefore focused on participatory activities" (Ludicke & Kortmanm 2919, p.64), an important role for parents. These questions should provide insight into ways to encourage parent participation.

Table 5

*Open-Ended Student Focus Group Questions*

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Questions

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1. What kinds of help with your homework do you ask of your parents and who helps you with it? (RQ1)
2. What kinds of school-related activities do your parents do with you? (RQ1)
3. How would you feel if your parents volunteered here at school? (RQ3)
4. What kinds of help do you think your parents might provide if they came to school? (RQ2, RQ3)
5. What kinds of activities do you think the school could organize to get your parents to come out to school? (RQ3)

Questions one and two were designed to have students identify ways their parents were involved in their schooling. While students' answers would not be as detailed as adults, the attempt was to gain an understanding of whether parents were supportive of their academic success, participators in student activities after school, and get a sense of the value they saw their parents had in their education. According to Coleman and McNeese (2009) and LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011), parents' engagement has a definite impact on student achievement. Questions three through five were designed to gather information about ways parents could be part of their educational journey. According to Dr. Joyce Epstein (2001) students "want their families to be knowledgeable partners with their schools in their education and available as helpful sources of information, assistance, and guidance" (p.44). I used the focus group to add information to find commonalities among all stakeholders, of which students were an integral part.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was collected using tape recorders, interview protocol sheets, and a personal journal. A second recorder was present as a back-up recording device. For ease of analysis, I

converted the data to text for analysis. The information was reviewed with the participants for the purpose of member checking to verify the information is accurate (Creswell, 2013). Once the information was verified or emended (Denzin et al., 2011), I began the process of analyzing the data to find what themes recur through all interviews and focus group sessions Creswell (2013). Prior to analysis of the findings, I read over the transcripts several times to gain an understanding of the contents.

The first step in the process involved a description of my own experiences with parental involvement known as “reduction or bracketing (*epoche*)” which sets aside “existential assumptions” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 24). *Epoche* is defined as “setting aside personal experiences, as much as possible, to get a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon” (Creswell 2013, p. 80).

The next step was the “horizontalization” of the data (Creswell, 2013, p. 193). In this step, I reviewed all data looking for consistencies or themes about the perceptions elementary school students, teachers, parents, and community members have regarding parental involvement. Initially, I transcribed verbatim all recordings from the interviews and focus group meetings. By developing a systematic and manageable system of classification, I was able “to identify common patterns or short phrases assigned to a summative essence capturing pieces of data” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2014, p. 142).

Open coding was used to categorize the large amounts of raw data. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), coding and categorizing involves a “constant comparison method that continues throughout the process” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012, p. 137). Codes were assigned to the information and used to chunk or categorize the data into manageable amounts that addressed the research questions and assisted in further analysis and identification of themes. I also employed the strategy of jotting during the transcription process. Jottings or handwritten

notes in the margin of these transcriptions will assist in identifying emergent reflections and commentaries on the issues brought out during the transcription process (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2014). By expanding the field notes and adding back missing content, I was able to recapture all the events during focus groups and interview sessions (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2014).

Using pattern-coding (Miles & Huberman, 1984), I highlighted using a yellow highlighter first to identify any consistencies that appear in the collective documents. The yellow highlighter was used to identify consistencies among stakeholders' responses in order to find where all four groups may intersect in their perceptions of parental involvement. I set aside any extraneous information not applicable to the focus of identifying themes within the texts that answer my research questions. I repeated this process several times, once highlighting with pink, and once with blue, to focus on several emerging core themes present in the transcripts. I repeated this process looking for areas where some stakeholders may agree while others may not in an attempt to find where perceptions were not aligned and possible barriers that were present. Through several iterations, themes should begin to emerge that respond to the research questions.

Following this process, I organized these highlighted items into themes or "meaning" units (Creswell, 2013, p. 193). These are "broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). By reducing the information to themes, I can begin to write a description of the experiences of the participants.

Next, I wrote a "textural description" (Creswell, 2013, p.193) detailing what the participants experienced. This included "verbatim examples" (Creswell, 2013, p. 193) to support the findings from the thematic analysis.

The next step was to write a “structural description” (Creswell, 2013, p. 194). This referred to the “how” element of the phenomenon or experience occurred (Creswell, 2013, p. 194). During this time, I considered the participants’ situations (positions as parents, teachers, children, or community members) and context from where they have experienced parental involvement.

Finally, I wrote the “composite description” (Creswell, 2013, p. 194) of the phenomenon, whereby I combined both textural and structural descriptions to describe the *essence* of the phenomenon of parental involvement perspectives seeking to define areas where all stakeholders have common perceptions, areas of divergent opinions, and barriers each group perceives to affect the parental involvement concept. This description will “represent the group as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is the “quality of an investigation (and its findings) that make it noteworthy to audiences” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 299). In order to evaluate the trustworthiness of the research, four aspects were taken into consideration: credibility dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

**Credibility** or “internal validity refers to whether the participants’ perceptions match with the researcher’s portrayal of them” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012, p. 112). To achieve this objective, I “bracketed” or set aside any prejudgments (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33) about parental involvement. “Epoche requires a new way of looking” at the situation in order to distinguish and describe the essence of the phenomenon in a nonjudgmental way (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). I clarified any bias I brought to the discussion and recorded this information in a reflective journal. To check on the validity of my interpretations, I used multiple methods (focus groups,

interviews, and survey reviews) known as triangulation to corroborate these findings (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012). Triangulation is a “process involving corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Finally, using “member checks” (Bloomberg, 2012 p. 112; Creswell, 2013) to ensure I have accurately reflected what was stated will ensure the guarantee of credibility to the study.

**Dependability and confirmability** is defined as “the process of inquiry” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 299), confirming that the process was “logical, traceable, and documented” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 299). To ensure the dependability of the study, I clearly defined my role as a researcher, making certain data were collected in a consistent and logical manner across all data collection methods, checking the study for bias, (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2014) and providing an “audit trail” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012, p. 113).

**Transferability** or “external validity” (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2014, p. 314) deals with generalization in terms of case-to-case transfer (Schwandt, 2009, p. 299). By providing sufficient in depth details on procedures, the transferability of the research and its findings would be possible. The purpose of this element of the research plan was to provide readers with enough information so they could “decide whether similar processes will be at work in their own settings and communities” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012, p. 113). According to Schwandt, qualitative research is generally characterized by “thick description” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 296) which is a method of communicating a realistic picture to the reader (Denzin, 2001) and describing social actions “by recording the circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, and motivations” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 296) characteristic of parental involvement. In order to accomplish transferability, I fully described the participants, settings, and processes used in the study and

included enough information so readers could “access the potential transferability and appropriateness for their own setting” (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2014, p. 314).

**Confirmability** is defined as a confirmation that the resulting data and inquiry interpretations are authentic (Schwandt, 2007). “Auditing” is useful in “establishing both dependability and confirmability” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 299). I accomplished this by providing a detailed description of the methods and procedures I employed (Miles Huberman and Saldaña, 2014) and made certain I had been very specific about any presuppositions and biases. I made certain data is “retained and available for reanalysis by others” (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2014, p. 312).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The safety of the participants was of primary concern. This study was non-discriminatory and I fully disclosed this to all participants at the beginning of the study. The study would not result in emotional or physical harm to the participants; all proper approval was in place prior to beginning the study. This was accomplished by receiving IRB approval from the university, written permission from the school system, and permission from the principal of the participating school. The participants and I signed a confidentiality agreement that contained details about the proper storage of data, use of pseudonyms for participants and locations, proper disposal of information and electronic security of data.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants of majority age. Forms included the title of the study, the name of the researchers, the institution of affiliations of the researcher, along with the study’s purpose, how it was conducted, any risks associated with the study, the benefits of participating in the study, any compensation participants received, how



confidentiality would be maintained, how data would be stored, and permission to withdraw at any time during the study (see Appendix C).

Children who have not reached majority were provided with an assent for (see Appendix C) that described in child-friendly terms who was doing the study, what it was about, what would happen if they agree to be part of the study and what would happen if they changed their minds regarding participation in the study. Contact information was also provided for the child. A witness was present, preferably a parent/guardian.

Finally, I shared personal experiences of working in the Title 1 program, attempting to “minimize the bracketing that is essential to construct the meaning of participants in a phenomenology” (Creswell, 2013, p. 175).

### **Summary**

The methods chapter outlined the study’s design and support of the transcendental phenomenological approach to investigating common perceptions regarding parental involvement from the perspectives of four groups of individuals-community leaders, teachers, parents and elementary aged students in an eastern North Carolina rural school. Research questions were stated and supported with literature reviews. The chapter further details the procedures for collecting data and analyzing it to further understand the essence of parental involvement from the perspectives of four groups in an elementary school environment. Finally, the ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the study are presented for clarification.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the essence of parental involvement from the perspectives of parents of elementary school students, teachers in an elementary school, the students from grades three through five, and community members in leadership positions within the community where the targeted school is located. I used a transcendental phenomenological design to inform my understanding of the phenomenon of parental involvement experiences from the perspectives of all the stakeholders. The goal of a phenomenological study is to “explicate the phenomenon in terms of its constituents” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 49) to gain an understanding of the “essence of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 49).

The theories driving this study were Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) that addresses self-efficacy, Weiner’s Attribution Theory (2000) as it relates to intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships, and Epstein’s Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence that focus on the shifting interrelatedness of stakeholders who were part of this study.

Within this chapter are the purpose statement, a rich description of each of the participants, the findings about perceptions of parental involvement from the interviews with community leaders, and focus groups comprised of elementary school teachers, elementary school students in grades three through five, and parents of students attending the elementary school where the study was conducted. Five major themes emerged from the data analysis. These included (a) Support, (b) Relationships, (c) Expectations, (d) Self-efficacy, and (d) Communication. Initially, each theme is presented in light of the data analysis. This is followed

by a discussion of the research questions and the findings from the data analysis. The final section presents a chapter summary.

The selection of participants for the interviews and focus groups was completed in a specific order to ensure continuity in the process. It was important to maintain this order to prevent overlapping participants coming from the same classroom. Community members who are in position of leadership were invited to be interviewed based on their interactive roles with families in the community. Random purposeful sampling was used to collect data from these community leaders. This method was chosen because it adds “credibility to the study when the purposeful sample was too large” (Miles & Huberman, 1994,p. 28). Teachers were selected next. Maximum variation sampling was used to determine which teachers would be asked to participate. This method of selection provided a wide range of participants across the elementary school environment. Parents were selected using purposeful sampling to gain perspectives from parents who match the school’s demographics. The six students representing grades three through five were selected using snowball or chaining sampling because of the need to gather adequate information for analysis (Creswell, 2013). Teachers chose students whose parent or teacher were not part of the study, who were articulate and would provide adequate information for analysis. Community leaders were invited to participate in the study and were selected based on their willingness to be interviewed about parental involvement from their perspectives. Interview and focus group data was transcribed and categorized locating themes that reflected the responses to the research questions. Open coding was used to identify these themes. Repeated review of the data was conducted to extrapolate unnecessary data or eliminate any data that was repeated through each interview or focus group meeting.

## **Participants**

### **Community Leaders**

The community leaders who were part of this study ranged in ages 38 to 47 years of age. The leaders were close in age due to their interactions with students and families who were part of this study.

Four community leaders were selected for the study based on their perceived interactive roles with parents and students within the community setting. Each leader was interviewed at a designated location and time of their choice. Each participant has a pseudonym to protect his/her privacy.

#### **Joe**

Joe is a business owner in the community, a 42-year-old white male whose family business has been in the community for many years. Joe grew up in this community, attended the schools here and returned here to continue in the family business. His children attended the school where the study took place, and his wife is an educator in the same school system.

#### **Joan**

Joan is a 46-year-old white female and educator who also owns and operates a daycare facility in the community where the study took place. She, too, is a product of the school system wherein the research took place and a life-long resident of the community where she teaches and maintains her daycare facility.

#### **David**

David, a pastor, is a white male who is 47 years of age and resides in the county where the research study was conducted, but not in the community. Some children from the community where the study took place attend this church. He has been in the role of pastor for

more than ten years and an active participant in student-parent interaction activities, particularly in discipleship outreach and coordinating parent-child activities within the church community.

### **Dan**

Dan is a 38-year-old white male currently in the position of police chief in the community where the research took place. He has had many opportunities to interact with parents and students from the school where the research was conducted. He is also responsible for overseeing community events that purposefully include parents and students along with community agencies. These activities are designed to create positive interactions among community members and provide lists of resources for the families in the community.

### **Parents**

Four parents, selected to be part of the focus group, represent students in both elementary, middle, and high school whose children have and/or are attending the school wherein the research study took place. All four parents have had or currently have children in the school where the research took place. The study focus was on the elementary school-age parents, teachers, and students, consequently the age range of the parents is very narrow. All parents had pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

### **Paula**

Paula is a 41-year-old African-American female who works in the school system where Walden Elementary School is located and resides in the same community. Her children have or are attending the school that is part of the community in the study. Her children have been living in the community all their lives and have extended family in this community.

**Jane**

Jane, a 38-year-old white female, grew up in this community and stayed to raise her children in this community. She works in another town in the legal field and commutes thirty minutes to work. Her children have or are attending the school where the research took place.

**Bill**

Bill, a 39-year-old white male, has lived in the community for ten years. His children attended the school where the research took place and he served in a leadership capacity in the parent-teacher organization for several years. He has been and continues to be an active volunteer. The ability to volunteer was possible because of his flexible work schedule.

**Hope**

Hope is a 39-year-old white female who is in the medical field. She has had and has children at the school where the research was conducted. She has a flexible work schedule and works in another community within the same county as the school used for the research study is located.

**Students**

Six students were selected to participate in the study. The students came from grades 3 through 5. In keeping with the school's demographics, one student was Hispanic and one was African-American. The students have attended this school throughout their elementary school education years. Students have pseudonyms to protect their identity.

**Annie**

Annie is an 11-year-old Hispanic female in the fifth grade. She comes from a home where Spanish has been the primary language. She lives with both biological parents.

**Jacob**

Jacob, an 11-year-old white male, has attended the school where the research study took place and is in the fifth grade. He lives with both parents near the school.

**Lila**

Lila, a 10-year-old white female, has attended the school where the study took place and is the daughter of one of the former teachers in the same school. She is from a divorced home, spending time in both parents' households on a weekly basis.

**Anthony**

Anthony is a 10-year-old white male who has attended this school since kindergarten. He is in fourth grade and lives with both parents in a rural part of the community.

**Peter**

Peter is a nine-year-old black male in the third grade at the school where the study took place. He is part of the gifted and talented student population at the school.

**Alex**

Alex is a white male who is nine years of age and in the third grade. He lives with both biological parents in a rural part of the county where the school is located. He helps his family with farming tasks during the summer, on the weekends, and after school.

**Teachers**

The four teachers in the study's focus group were chosen based on the school's ethnic demographics and years of experience. The goal was to include perspectives from both experiential and ethnic backgrounds. Teachers have pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

**Ginger**

Ginger is a 41-year-old African American educator with a Masters in Guidance and eighteen years of experience in the classroom. She is a single mother with children and a grandchild who attends the Walden Elementary School. Her experience has been in both third and fourth grades. She grew up in the community where the study took place, attended the schools in this community and is familiar with the students and families who are a part of this study's school family.

**Mary**

Mary, a 32-year-old white female, is married and lives outside the community in which the schools is located. She has been at the school where the study was conducted for four years. Prior to this, she was at another school in the county where the research took place. She is pursuing her Masters' in Education at this time. Her positions have been in fifth grade in both locations.

**Carrie**

Carrie, a 45-year-old white female, has been at this school for 20 years. This has been her only teaching experience. She has been teaching kindergarten for a majority of this time. She has one son, a recent graduate of the school system where the study took place and attended the school where the research was conducted.

**Lynn**

Lynn is a 25-year-old white female who came to this school right after graduation from college. She has less than five years of classroom experience. She does not live in this community, and she grew up outside the community where the research study took place.



Table 6

*Demographics of Participants and Methods of Selection*

Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Method of Selection
Ginger	41	Female	Black	Maximum Variation Sampling
Mary	32	Female	White	Maximum Variation Sampling
Lynn	25	Female	White	Maximum Variation Sampling
Carrie	45	Female	White	Maximum Variation Sampling
Jane	38	Female	White	Purposeful Sampling
Paula	41	Female	Black	Purposeful Sampling
Bill	39	Male	White	Purposeful Sampling
Hope	39	Female	White	Purposeful Sampling
Annie	11	Female	White	Snowball Sampling
Jacob	11	Male	White	Snowball Sampling
Lila	10	Female	White	Snowball Sampling
Anthony	10	Male	White	Snowball Sampling
Peter	9	Male	Black	Snowball Sampling
Alex	9	Male	White	Snowball Sampling
David	47	Male	White	Random Purposeful Sampling
Dan	38	Male	White	Random Purposeful Sampling
Joan	46	Female	White	Random Purposeful Sampling
Joe	42	Male	White	Random Purposeful Sampling

Note: *Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants.*

## Results

### Theme Development

The purpose of the transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of parental involvement from discussions with students in grades three through five, parents of elementary school students, teachers in an elementary school and community leaders with whom these students would come in contact during the school day and in after-school activities. Five themes emerged from the data analysis. The study was grounded in Weiner's Attribution Theory (2000) that addressed intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships, Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Influences (2001) that focuses on the interactive movement among stakeholders and the influences each have on the other, and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory

(1986) with its focus on self-efficacy. Members of the focus groups and the interview participants met at specified times and locations to respond to the three research questions concerning parental involvement. Each session was recorded, transcribed, member-checked for accuracy and coded. The purpose of coding was to extrapolate themes present in all transcriptions. The results were collected and supporting evidence from each of the transcriptions related to each theme was recorded in an effort to organize data for presentation. Each research question presented themes when participants responded to the questions.

The research questions presented in the study were:

**RQ 1:** How do elementary school students and their parents, teachers, community members in a position of leadership, conceptualize the term *parental involvement*?

**RQ2:** What obstacles are seen from the viewpoints of elementary school students and their parents, teachers and community leaders that impact parental involvement?

**RQ3:** What changes could be implemented to create effective parental involvement as articulated by elementary school students, their parents and teachers, and community leaders in a position of leadership?

Research question one asked participants in the interviews and focus groups to explain their understanding of the term *parental involvement*. Within the responses collected from all focus and interview groups, three major themes surfaced: (a) support, (b) relationships, and (c) expectations. Teachers and community members mentioned volunteering as a way parents could be involved, but neither group expounded upon this area. Their (teachers' and community leaders') focus centered on support and relationships. While volunteering is a form of support, perceptions of these focus groups expanded on the term "support" to include volunteering but not to the exclusion of other types of support.

Research question two concerned obstacles each of these groups saw as inhibitors to parental involvement. Barriers that appeared as themes throughout the focus groups and interviews included time constraints, self-efficacy issues, and relationship building concerns.

Finally, research question three focused on recommendations each of these participants had to improve the level of parental involvement. Throughout the discussions, two primary themes evolved –determining ways to engage parents, and communication methods that could improve parental involvement. The five themes emerging from the data included (a) Support, (b) Relationships, (c) Expectations, (d) Self-efficacy, and I Communication.

**Theme 1: Support.** Support as it is related to this study means providing needed resources for the children to help ensure their academic success such as school supplies, a place to study, help with assignments, and transportation to after-school sporting events/practices and school-sponsored events. The first theme from all the focus groups and interviews centered on the parents' role in the formative years in their children's educational journey and the support they, as parents, provided. This theme included the school environment and required further expansion to include the school setting and a widening range of people with whom the children had contact.

**Theme 2: Relationships.** The second theme, relationships, was prominent to the discussions among the adults. Relationship as it relates to the current study is defined as rapport among and between stakeholders. The student focus group did not address this question. The discussion centered on individual perceptions and needs these individuals saw within the school community. Many of the adults interviewed felt parents' roles included maintaining a relationship with those with whom their children had direct contact, including teachers, pastors, and members of the community who were engaged in activities in which the children

participated. This particular theme evolved into a discussion that became one of the major obstacles to parental involvement. According to the survey conducted in the spring by the school system, relationships were not a critical problem in the school, but only 5.7% of the thirty-five questions asked on the parent survey were about relationships. The student survey had a larger percent of questions about relationships (15%) and only two areas were below the acceptable threshold for success. Similarly, the teacher survey contained four questions about relationships. The relationship questions often overlapped with questions about expectations and communication with parents. The parents also expected teachers to make the initial contact to establish a relationship with them.

**Theme 3: Expectations.** Expectation as it relates to this study is defined as the assurance that something will occur. Many expectations are not articulated, but are a product of prior experiences in previous grade levels. Teachers spoke of specific expectations they had of parents. The primary expectation was that parents provide materials needed for student success and that they (parents) check on their children. Teachers spoke at length about the conflict with their expectations and those of the parents.

**Theme 4: Self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy for the purpose of this study is defined as one's feeling of value. Self-efficacy was a concern among the individuals within the interview groups who are community leaders, a church leader, law enforcement providers and business leaders. Each addressed concern that parents may not feel comfortable interacting with teachers and administrators.

**Theme 5: Communication.** Communication, as it relates to the current study, is any attempt by one or more stakeholders to disseminate information to another. The methods of communication parents mentioned included Class DoJo (an application that permits instant

messages to/from parents and/or teachers), newsletters, weekly folders, phone calls, meetings both planned and unplanned with stakeholders, and comments on report cards.

### **Research Question Responses:**

**Research question one.** How do elementary school students and their parents, teachers, and community members in leadership positions conceptualize the term *parental involvement*? In response to the first research question, all participants provided their thoughts regarding their perceptions of *parental involvement*. Within this question, three of the themes emerged giving credibility to the perceptions of the participants. These include (a) Support, (b) Relationships, and (c) Expectations.

**Support.** Support was the first element mentioned in all the focus groups and interviews, and it centered on the parents' role in the formative years in their children's educational journey. For the purposes of this study, support is defined as providing educational resources necessary for students' academic success, help with homework when needed, a place where homework can be completed, and help in accessing after-school sporting activities and school-related events. This also included support from a widening range of people with whom the children had contact.

In an interview, Joe, a local business owner, noted that the role of the parent in the parental involvement scenario has shifted over the last decade and finds that those outside the home with whom the students had contact had increasing responsibility for the children, particularly in sporting activities after school and during the summer vacation. He went on to state that fewer families are traditional two-parent families. Children are living with grandparents and other family members due to circumstances beyond their purview. He went on to state that:

Few families are full families. They're with grandparents, aunts, and uncles. But you know, to say what the role is, um, I think it's ever-changing. I'm trying to be politically correct, but anytime you've got kids having kids, there is something is amiss.

Parents expressed their interpretations of parental involvement and elaborated upon these thoughts expressing concern that not all parents interacted with their children on a consistent basis. Most parents agreed on the importance of parents to make certain children did their homework. They (parents) all felt they have a role in supporting and encouraging positive behavior in school. Those who spoke about behavioral expectations stated that they questioned their children about their school day and how they (their children) were (implying the behavior) in school that day. It appeared the children of the parents who were part of the focus group had expectations for positive behavior from their parents and were encouraged to be respectful and co-operative on a daily basis. Parents in the focus group and those interviewed felt the role of the parent included participation in school-sponsored and community-sponsored events involving their children.

Yet, when children spoke about the parents and ways that they were involved, several stated that their parents would help them with their homework. They painted a very different picture about other ways their parents were involved. Children felt parents just did not understand how to help with homework, particularly in math. Alex, who attends an after-school program sponsored by the YMCA, agreed that his parents were involved by simply signing his planner. He did not feel he could ask them for help with his schoolwork. He went on to say, "I go to the YMCA after-school program on campus where I do my homework and it is checked by one of the teachers. I get help if I need it. My parents just check it off." Anthony contributed to Alex's statement by adding, "My parents don't understand how to do the math like they do it in

school, so I stopped asking for help.” When Annie was asked about her parents’ involvement with supporting her in school, she stated, “They (parents) help with homework if it gets too hard. They also give me a place where I can study.” Otherwise, she felt that was all that she expected from them regarding her schoolwork. When questioned further about after-school participation in events both on and off campus, only Peter stated his parent “coached” softball, but of the six, five stated that their parents dropped them off and either sat in their cars or came back to get them. Alex stated, “My dad was texting while I was playing soccer.” Jacob’s comment about the support he received from his parent(s) concerning attending any school-related functions was, “My mom never comes to school. She just takes me to school, drops me off, and then goes shopping.”

Teachers agreed that supporting the students also meant supporting them (teachers). Mary spoke at length about this concern that was, in her view, a perception of parents’ attitudes about supporting the teachers. She said:

I think it goes back to “we can create that (support) here but can’t foster that at home, no matter how hard, no matter how cool the thing is I send home. You cannot force an adult to put value into something they don’t find valuable. No matter what you do, I cannot physically make somebody participate in their child’s education.

The teachers in the focus group went on to give an example of an event that was taking place that evening. Step-up is an evening activity where parents and students can come to meet the teachers at the grade they would be attending the following school year. All agreed that the activity was designed to give parents and students an opportunity to meet and greet the adults

with whom they would engage during the following school year. Carrie, a kindergarten teacher, stated that if parents could drop their children off and pick them up later, they would.

Supporting teachers is important, according to one of the community leaders. Dan spoke of ways parents could help within the school such as volunteering or “making stuff” for the classroom. He suggested that volunteerism is not where it should be and that parents may not realize the value in supporting the classroom teacher. He suggested that parents provide support for children by providing clothing, food, and shelter along with teaching them responsibility.

A local business owner, Joe felt parents could support their children by being willing to commit time to their children and teach them to behave, echoed this perception. When asked if he saw parents coming together to support kids in the community, he stated:

They come together at PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) meetings and you know, in the sense of sports. I mean, you’ve got a lot of parents there (at sporting events). I mean, that for whatever reason, they’re busy with working, this, that, or the other and they don’t (attend events). They aren’t willing to commit time to say, mentor a kid, give this kid an opportunity to do sports, or scouts, whatever, something to keep kids engaged.

David, a local pastor, continued discussing supportive parents from his perspective within the church. He spoke from personal experience about his involvement with his daughters and stressed that by encouraging them to be their best and instill good work habits, as the children get older, this (work habits and behaviors) become “routine.”

The teacher focus group elaborated further on supporting children and teachers. Parents, according to the teachers, can support their children in multiple ways. Teachers felt very strongly that parents should show up for conferences, have expectations for their children and their learning, provide parameters for appropriate behavior, and have reasonable consequences



for behavior issues. Mary, a classroom teacher, said that parents could support their children by setting priorities and making school a priority. She went on to say, “I don’t know if that is the number one priority, the number one thing on parents’ minds.”

Teachers felt the role of parents was to facilitate whatever was happening in the classroom yet parents viewed their (parents’) roles as less academic support and more in building and maintaining relationships with their children’s teachers. Mary, a teacher, went on to elaborate the reasoning associated with the parent’s role as a facilitator. She indicated that if children had problems understanding how to complete a math assignment and the parent did not understand how to help, the parent should then write a note to the teacher asking for further assistance.

Really, a parent should be facilitating whatever is happening in the classroom so even if you’re in fifth grade math and don’t understand fractions, the expectation should still be that your child is at home, sits in an environment where they can attempt homework and you write out a question and send it back. Just like I would do the same for them.

Hope, a parent of both elementary and middle-school aged children stated that it was important for the parent to “make sure your kids do their homework and ask how they were in school. It is important to let the teacher know you are involved by communicating with them.”

Paula, a parent in the parent focus group, expressed the need for communication with the teacher stating:

I think at the beginning of the year, especially with elementary kids, they (teachers) need to meet one-on-one with the parent. Now, if the parent refuses to come out here, that’s one thing. But, you know, as soon as the one teacher sent a note asking me to come, I responded. The other teacher, I feel like there’s been no communication.

(Paula has twins in the same grade level).

***Relationships.*** The second theme, relationships, was prominent to the discussions among the adults and appeared in the responses to research question one. The student focus group did not address this component of the question. Relationship as it relates to this study refers to rapport building among and to stakeholders. The discussion centered on individual perceptions and needs these individuals saw within the school community. Many of the adults interviewed felt parents' roles included maintaining a relationship with those with whom their children had direct contact, including teachers, pastors, and members of the community who were engaged in activities in which the children participated. This particular theme evolved into a discussion that became one of the major obstacles to parental involvement that will be discussed in detail when research question three is covered.

***Expectations.*** The third theme from the discussion in response to the first research question on perceptions of the role of parents in their children's education was that of expectations. Expectations are defined within the context of this study as anticipation that something will occur.

Teachers spoke of specific expectations they had of parents. Coupled with the issue of priorities are expectations. Teachers were very vocal about this conundrum. At a recent event held on the school campus, fourth graders provided several musical selections. The parents received a letter specifically stating that parents needed to come to hear their child sing, then take their child home. Forty children participated in the event. Yet, some children had to wait for parents to pick them up long after the event was over. The primary expectation was that parents provide materials needed for student success and that they (parents) check on their children. They spoke at length about the conflict with their expectations and parents' perceptions of

expectations. Mary stated that “If she’s (parent) communicating with you and you communicated with her and did a great job, then when they get to fifth grade, there should be no doubt in their mind what the expectation is.” Mary went on to clarify by saying that parents’ expectations should be informed by prior years’ experiences. Lynn, one of the younger teachers on the staff, added to the discussion by saying “And, maybe, as teachers, we don’t let parents know what we expect up front. Also, expectations don’t change. They (teachers) just let the perception change and don’t do anything about it.” She indicated that teachers are just as responsible to parents as they are to students in articulating expectations. Mary went on to say that parents should have expectations that are part of prior experiences. “You need these supplies. You need these supplies every year. You need tissues every year. You’re going to need tissues this year. This year was one of the first years they came with nothing and I know they can afford it.” You get progress reports each year.” Ginger, a classroom teacher spoke of the frustration of expecting parents to understand how things work within the classroom. She stated, “You are in fourth grade and you have parents who are acting like they have never seen a weekly folder, when you know they (teachers) do one every week.” Again, teachers’ expectations of parents became an enthusiastic talking point. Additionally, teachers spoke of the frustration of having parents expect the school or teachers provide all the materials their children need. While the teachers emphasized that this was not the case for all parents, they spoke in an animated way about this issue. Ginger added to the discussion stating:

“Why don’t you have paper again today?” (indicating a statement made to a student).

But, as a parent, you know your child runs out of paper. That’s the other thing. If you have not bought paper since August 15 and it is December, you know, your child does not have any more paper.

The teacher focus group expressed concern over the expectation that parents come to school events and make school a priority stating, “it is not the number one thing on parents’ minds.” This theme appeared in response to research questions one and two and was not evident in research question three.

The parent focus group suggested that the expectations of parents included making sure the children behaved in school and did their homework. The parents also expected teacher to make the initial contact to establish a relationship with them. Jane suggested:

At the beginning of the year, especially with elementary kids, they (teachers) need to meet one-on-one with the parents. Now, if the parent refuses to come out, that’s one thing. But, you know, as soon as the one teacher sent a note asking me to come in, I did. The other teacher, I felt like there’s been no communication (this parent had twins at the grade level).

Bill, a member of the parent focus group, felt that there existed an expectation that the administration should also be responsible for opening dialogue and encouraging parental involvement. In a statement, Bill said, “but you have to have a buy-in by the parents. It has to be encouraged, obviously, by the administration at the school as well as otherwise the parents aren’t going to know that they are needed.

While community members’ expectations were that parents were active participants in their children’s lives, they understood the limitations among families who are struggling.

Students expected their parents would help with homework if they got stuck. According to Lila,

My mom, she reads them once or twice to herself then she reads it to me and she points out important facts that I missed if I read it too fast or she explains to me if how, if I got this answer and how I need to get that answer.

Alex spoke about the help he received during the after-school sessions with the YMCA. He said his coaches would help him if he needed it, but acknowledged that his parent(s) would be available to help with math. He told the group, “I think she (mom) might help me with math or something like that.” Other students nodded their heads in agreement, but did not add to the comments.

In review, question one highlighted the perceptions each group had about the meaning of the term *parental involvement*. Three of the five themes appeared in response to the initial question: support, relationships, and expectations.

**Research question two.** What obstacles are seen from the viewpoints of elementary school students, and their parents, teachers, and community leaders that impact parental involvement? The second research question posed to the participants concerned obstacles they felt inhibited parental involvement both in the school and with after-school activities. Multiple issues were articulated from the focus groups and interviews that addressed the reasons parental involvement was on the decline. These included (1) self-efficacy, (2) relationships among all groups in interviews and focus groups, (3) employment and financial constraints, and (4) priorities and expectations from different perspectives. Employment and financial constraints were sub-themes that surfaced during the discussions with community leaders and parents when the topic of obstacles was introduced. This sub-theme was not present in other areas of engagement.

*Self-efficacy.* Self-efficacy for the purpose of this study is defined as one's feeling of value. Self-esteem or self-efficacy was a concern among the individuals within the interview groups who are community leaders, a church leader, law enforcement providers and business leaders. Each addressed concern that parents may not feel comfortable interacting with teachers and administrators. When the question regarding the observations about why parents were reluctant to be involved, Dan, a law enforcement official, stated that:

Maybe they think the desire is not there, or, you know, vice versa, you know, or some are scared they're just going to interrupt any kind of instruction, they just stay away, or, possibly they don't feel they are educated enough. Parents need directions sent home to explain homework. I think they struggle with that (homework) at times.

Additionally, Joe, a local business owner who also volunteers as a coach in after-school activities, stated that parents "might get embarrassed because they don't know the stuff."

When teachers were asked the same question, Lynn stated that parents "feel uncomfortable because they might be held accountable." Two of the parents in the focus groups suggested that parents feel "undervalued" which would inhibit their willingness to participate or be involved on any level in the educational community.

Lila, one of the students in the focus group, summarized her feelings about why parents are not involved by stating, "I think that if they (parents) called their (school), they may feel more comfortable to coming to school and if the teacher sent home letters talking about what we are doing."

Within this issue, two distinct trends were noted: intimidation and value input. The first issue, intimidation, was addressed primarily from the perspective of the parents. Teachers and students did not indicate a concern about this issue. Two of the parents spoke of the

repercussions their children feared or actually experienced when the parent(s) addressed concerns with their child's teachers. In one instance, the parent had emailed the teacher about an incident with his child. Bill stated:

My daughter was afraid of the repercussions, and there were some, when I emailed the teacher about a concern I had. I had to go back (to the school). She (daughter) was called out because I sent an email and she was talked to one-on-one.

Additionally, Hope, whose son attends classes at the middle school said:

My son in middle school had a project to present but was on an AG (academically gifted) field trip. He was given a 60 on the project since he was not there to make the presentation. The partner got a 90 and so I called out there the next day. I called the teacher, left a voice mail and a phone number. My son said his grade was changed to an 85. I wanted to call and talk to the teacher, but my son insisted that it would put a mark on him for the rest of the year.

Valuing input was also part of the self-efficacy issue. One of the parent participants, Hope, stated that she had gone to the administration regarding placement for her daughter because of a concern over her child's first grade learning environment. The school policy was to not involve parents in placement recommendations. This parent persisted and at the end of the year was told she could write a request since she knew her child, and an attempt to honor it would take place. Another parent, Jane, stated that she approached her child's teacher and stated concerns she had from her child's kindergarten and first grade experiences. She was told that her child was "average" which offended her. She continued by stating:

I was told my child was "average". I was offended by the teacher calling my child average. One of my twin's teachers maintained contact with me while the other only

spoke to me at school events. He don't need extra help like his sister does. Just because he doesn't need that extra help, I just wish I had a relationship with his teacher and I tried on two occasions, on a field trip and on a Title I night. I asked how she was. She went on talking to another parent. If I'm ignored more than twice, I'm not going to talk to you.

The discussion about parental involvement and parental input continued, Bill spoke of the opportunities presented to parents to volunteer with the Parent-Teacher organization and serve in an advisory capacity alongside school officials. He detailed his experiences as the head of the Parent-Teacher Organization and the difficulty he had in finding others to take on positions within the organization. He elaborated on his concerns stating:

I'm coming off the PTO presidency for the past four years and you know, we've asked for replacements. There are three of us dropping off the board. We did have a table set up on Title I night to try to get the word out. Unfortunately, parents just walked on by, but I definitely think that parents need to be involved in those decisions at least being able to let the parents voice their opinions. At least, the administration will listen, even if they don't agree.

***Relationships.*** Building or establishing positive relationships was an important component of parental involvement and an inhibitor for several parents. Relationship as it relates to this study signifies the establishment of a rapport or working relationship among stakeholders. Three of the parents in the focus group suggested that “teachers need to make the initial contact with the parents” whereas, teachers articulated the need for parent to attend the open house prior to the beginning of the school year to meet the teacher and introduce the child to the teacher. One parent stated that all she did that night was fill out paperwork. Teachers



indicated that it was important for this contact to begin relationship building with students and parents. In this study, communication involved written and oral contact among stakeholders.

Teachers in the focus groups had concerns over relationships and communication with parents. To teachers, relationships and communication were critical to the child's successes. Lack of communication or the breakdown of communication between teachers and parents was discussed at length. Mary, a teacher, stated:

I don't think there's a breakdown in communication. I think it's a lack of effort to communicate. I think we send home lots of communication, sometime more than is necessary and yet, it's a little more convenient if you get it on your phone versus if you get it on paper in a folder. Then you have a parent that refuses to sign up for that appointment, so you know it's not a priority. I've sent my kid to school from this time to this time, they are with you and so you need to get done whatever you need to get done.

The discussion continued with Carrie stating, "I can't work on letter with them, that's your job." (quoting a parent's response during a phone conversation). The concern over relationships and misunderstandings generated discussions focusing on reasons that many parents resisted involvement. Mary, a teacher, spoke about the need for relationships to develop to help her students thrive in the classroom. She addressed the group and provided a summary of a discussion with a parent with whom she had attempted to develop a relationship, but met resistance. She told of a conversation to illustrate the need for relationship building that involves all stakeholders, not just the teacher. She stated:

The parent didn't know my name which was on Federal documents and other official papers because the child had special needs. The parent never came in to sign for the services that the child would be entitled to receive. This is providing your child with a

special service that they need and we can't even get you to come in to those meetings?

Lynn, a classroom teacher, detailed an experience she had during her first year as a teacher. She had made multiple attempts to engage the parent in a discussion about the student's academic difficulties. She went on to say "The first year I had a parent actually sign for her child to be held back and didn't know she had signed it. She got mad when she saw that her child would be retained."

The student focus group was asked about the relationship their parents had with their teachers. Several spoke about parents coming to school and using class DoJo (a communication app many teachers use to communicate regularly with the parent). One student elaborated further on the interaction parents have with their own children. Lila, a student, spoke about parent-teacher relationship and stated, "Sometimes I wonder if the parent, some parents don't interact with their children as much as others."

The pastor who participated in the interview process viewed the relationship with the parents as a partnership. He also addressed the importance of building a relationship with the school in the community. Of concern to him are the programs put in place to build relationships with parents and the church. It is important, according to him that the church is not so driven that they lose sight of the children's needs. He stated that anything they do is focused on relationship building. He discussed the vision-casting that needed to be done and the need for parents to buy-in to the vision. As part of his response, David stated:

I see us partnering so important. I see parents partner with us. Schools, if you're talking about the formative years in pre-K, kindergarten, you're really instilling great norms, great initial value systems teaching him right from wrong. You still partner with schools. You find a way, though, in our society, now, it's like the parents have a lesser

role as the kids get up. It's kinda like the schools say 'Hey, we appreciate it, but no thanks and it just seems like we were better when the community and parents were involved in the school system.

***Employment, time, and financial constraints.*** The third issue presented by the participants centered on employment, time and financial constraints. Participants from the interviews and focus groups indicated that parents have schedules that do not support involvement, particularly during the workday. Joe, a local businessman, expressed his concern and said, "For whatever reason, they're (parents) busy with working, and the others, they are not willing to commit the time." He continued by saying that parents would drop their children off at practice and come back in several hours to get them. He often provided meals, purchased equipment and provided transportation even though he knew parents were available and able to provide the necessary resources. While he willingly helped the children, he spoke of the frustration of taking on the parent's responsibilities so the children do not miss valuable opportunities.

The constraint of time affects parental involvement with the daycare provider and the teachers. According to Joan, parents who used her facility were not always available because of workplace constraints. Most of her parents were in positions that allowed them to interact or be available for conferences at the end of the workday and she indicated they were involved as much as their workday would allow. She stated, "most of them, they're not doctors or lawyers. They work at places where they can't take a half day every week and come out. They are involved as much as they can be involved."

From a pastor's point of view, David found the issue becomes one of reduced involvement as children get older. In order to assist families in interactions with parents, the

church, and the child, a program to incorporate all three groups was developed. “The Orange program helped bring families together,” according to David. The need to focus on the whole family drove the decision to institute this program.

The children’s focus group was very specific about this issue. When asked about the role their parents have in being part of their educational journey, their responses indicated the need for parents to be available after school so they could participate in extra-curricular activities. They summed up their feelings in few words, but the message they conveyed illustrated how they felt about parents’ availability after school. Alex spoke of a desire to play soccer after school. He stated that, “if their parents are working and the game starts at 5, the kids can’t get there.” Peter’s comment further illustrated the issue of time-constraints that influence parents’ willingness to be involved. He said, “A lot of parents take their kids and drop them off.” A similar comment made by Joe when he spoke of his coaching experiences and Carrie, who addressed the same issue from a teacher’s perspective illustrated the concern over time constraints and parents’ needs to prioritize how their time would be spent.

***Priorities and expectations.*** The fourth, and final obstacle that was prevalent in the focus groups and interviews with the question of obstacles affecting parental involvement, was that of priorities and expectations. Many participants had strong opinions about the priorities of the parents. As with other issues, perspective was obviously personal and included examples specific to the individuals. Yet, it became clear that priorities in the educational community were of great concern. Several teachers in the focus group expressed concern and frustration. Carrie, a teacher in the focus group elaborated upon the concern over parents’ priorities and attention to communications sent from school for the parents’ input. She stated, “They sign stuff and send it back. They don’t read it. They sign stuff that says you have pictures or there’s a

class party or a class field trip on blah, blah, blah. Then they call and ask about the party time or where the field trip will be.” Mary articulated potential reasons behind parents’ prioritizing and possible reasons parents make the choices they do. She provided reasons she felt the parents did not attend evening events while expressing concern over parent priorities. She said:

I don’t think they know what’s happening and when we had Title I nights and we try to show them what’s happening, the parents who really need to come are not about to come. They might be working, there’s lots of reasons why they might not be able to come. Also, it’s just that choice of not coming, not making it a priority and so I think school has not become a priority. I don’t know that that’s the number one thing in a parent’s mind.

Coupled with the issue of priorities are expectations. Teachers were very vocal about this conundrum. At a recent event held on the school campus, fourth graders provided several musical selections. The parents received a letter specifically stating that parents needed to come to hear their child sing, then take their child home. Forty children participated in the event. Yet, some children had to wait for parents to pick them up long after the event was over. The concern over conflicting expectations was discussed among participants in the teacher focus group.

Outside the school environment, community leaders expressed concern over expectations, priorities and the frustrations that accompany them. When the question was presented about parents and the community coming together Joe stated:

I mean, they come together there (at PTO events) and, you know, in the sense of the sports. I mean, you’ve got a lot of parents there. I mean, for whatever reason, they’re busy with working, this, that, and the other, that they don’t. They are not willing to commit time, to say mentor a kid, give this kid an opportunity to do sports. There are

many reasons, but there are so many reasons the parents, for whatever reason, it's a free babysitting service is what I call it. You know, drop the kids off and have two hours where they do their thing.

In summary, many obstacles that hinder parents' involvement both during and after school were articulated. The primary reasons given were (1) self-esteem, (2) relationships among all groups in interviews and focus groups, (3) employment and financial constraints, and (4) priorities and expectations from different perspectives.

**Research question three.** What changes could be implemented to create effective parental involvement as articulated by elementary school students, their parents and teachers, and community members in positions of leadership? The third research question posed to each of these groups and individuals focused on possible changes that would create and increase effective parental involvement. Resource availability, communication/connectivity, and activities for families were the three primary recommendations made by the interviewees and focus groups.

**Connectivity/communication.** Several participants spoke about the concern over communication and had recommendations to improve upon this issue. Connectivity became part of the dialogue as it addressed the need for parents, teachers, and students to be connected to the community, internet, and each other. The local police department intentionally and actively pursues activities that connect families to the police and the community. Creating a task force made up of educators, business owners, and churches is something the law enforcement officer, Dan would like to see "leaders from schools, police and community come together a couple of times a year to bring family and friends together and to educate or inform them about activities would be great."

David works with programs within his church to connect the community and parents with the children. He stated that it involved research to find programs that were successful and has been a part of the implementation of programs that connect parents with their children. The current program provides materials, classes, and activities for parents and their children from birth through high school. He stated that the program brought families into the church and has grown since its inception six years ago. Bill, a parent in our focus group, felt that having a liaison from a local church work on a school task force would be of benefit to the families within the community.

Another facet of the communication/connectivity component that was mentioned by several participants was the use of applications such as class messenger or a similar app that would connect parents to teachers on a regular basis. Carrie emphasized the need for connectivity and improving upon systems that are in place at the time of the study. She stated:

I use class Do-Jo to connect with my parents. The parents have to sign up for it, but I can use it to keep them up-to-date on what their child is doing and where the parent might help their child. I can also let them know about their child's behavior before he/she has a problem in class.

Another recommendation that was pointed out by several people in the study was the need to maintain the school website, keeping the information current and linking parents to resources that may help their children.

**Conferences.** Additionally, the issue of parent conferences and the meeting times was mentioned. Several suggestions were discussed as possibilities to increase the opportunities for parents to meet with teachers. Bill offered a suggestion based on something his church had done in conjunction with the school they had adopted. He spoke to events where church members did

whatever they could to relieve teachers during evening activities to allow them (teachers) time to interact with parents.

My church kind of adopted an elementary school and we did some stuff there. What the church did was do whatever the teachers would do as far as running the event (referring to a festival at the school) which freed the teacher up so they could spend time with the parent.

The suggestion was also made that volunteers could cover for teachers during a designated time during the day to provide time for the teacher and parent to meet. Another suggestion was to allow for flexible schedules so parents could come for conferences during the early evening hours. Many participants stated that these procedures were already in place, but indicated that parents had not taken advantage of these opportunities.

***After-school resources.*** Finally, several participants spoke about the lack of after-school resources for children who live within walking distance of the school. Joe said the new field that was constructed for students living in this particular section of the county was no longer easily accessible by students who at one time could walk to the elementary school for after-school activities. Also, the gym at the school is not always available and there are no volunteers to man it. It would be a place for children to play safely after school. Anthony said he liked to play softball but, “To play softball, we have to go over to the park by the high school. I don’t have a ride so I can’t go.” Lila suggested (when asked about sports on the school campus), “I think that maybe we would use the baseball field. If they regenerated that up (repaired), we could use it.”

Other resources mentioned by parents were those available in the online community. With internet connectivity, parents expressed a desire to have links provided that would support their children’s education. The parents expressed a desire to have the internet speed and



availability upgraded along with updating the teacher's webpages to provide up-to-date information about the class and the school.

The ideas presented for improving parental involvement took into consideration the need for parents, students, teachers, and community members to work more closely together to support the education of the children in the elementary schools. They noted that connectivity/connection, resources and communication were essential to improving parental involvement.

**Survey Analysis.** Three surveys conducted in the spring asked parents, teachers, and students about the educational system. Their responses were collected on a 5-point Likert scale and tabulated providing percentages for each question. The entire school system completed the survey and results were broken down according to the individual schools. Finally, scores were categorized into three color-coded groups: green had percentages greater than or equal to 90%, yellow percentages ranged from 70% to 89%, and red were scores less than 70%. Finally, district scores were averaged, as were individual school scores and schoolwide averages were posted to establish benchmarks and illustrate areas in need of improvement.

The parent survey produced responses for thirty-five questions dealing with relationships with teachers and the operation of the school, services they perceived were available for their children, communication among the stakeholders, and collection of and interpretation of data. The three areas receiving the highest scores were about expectations teacher had for their children, school safety, and the availability of qualified staff to educate their children. The three weakest areas centered on the school's governing body and its function, concern over support services, and opportunities parents perceived were available to students. The strengths addressed research question one with a strong emphasis on perceptions parents had of the education of the

children. The responses that addressed areas in need of improvement were primarily answering research question two, the obstacles parents perceived in their children's education, and engagement in the process. Opportunities for recommendations were not available in the questions posed to the parents; however, data would provide guidance toward this end.

The student survey produced percentages ranging from 53% to 96%. Among the lower scores were questions addressing self-esteem, communication, and respect. Students stated that teachers and the principal did not ask what they thought about school. Additionally, students responded that students do not treat adults with respect. Finally, at issue were the responses asking if teachers requested families to come to school. The students did indicate that teachers explain the expectations for proper behavior, the school provides computers to help with learning and the school has many places where students can learn, including the library.

The staff survey of thirty-five questions requested input from all phases of the educational process. Three of the areas in need of improvement according to the survey include support services that were available for new staff members, the provision of learning support services for all academic standards, and regularly engaging families in their children's learning process. The areas receiving the highest percentage included the staff members being held accountable for student learning, the use of a process to inform students of their learning expectations and standards of performance, and using student data to address the unique learning needs of all students.

Table 7

*Percent of Survey Questions per Theme*

Theme	Parent Survey 35 questions	Student Survey 20 questions	Teacher survey 55 questions
Support	11.5%	20.0%	25.5%
Relationship	5.7%	15.0%	7.2%
Expectations	57.1%	30.0%	47.3%
Self-efficacy	5.7%	20.0%	5.5%
Communication	20.0%	15.0%	14.5%

Table 8

*Feedback Results Below 70%*

Theme	Parent Feedback 35 questions	Student Feedback 20 questions	Teacher Feedback 55 questions
Support	1	0	0
Relationships	1	1	0
Expectations	4	0	0
Self-efficacy	2	1	0
Communication	0	1	0

Note: The number represents the number of questions below 70% approval

Table 9

*Feedback Results Between 71% and 89%*

Theme	Parent Feedback 35 questions	Student Feedback 20 questions	Teacher Feedback 55 questions
Support	2	0	9
Relationships	1	1	1
Expectations	15	4	2
Self-efficacy	0	1	2
Communication	7	1	5

Note: The number represents the number of responses by theme for each set of stakeholders.

Table 10: Open-Code Enumeration

Open-Codes	Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets	Theme
Volunteering	14	Support
Support from social agencies	15	
Spiritual	12	
Teacher support by community	12	
Teacher support by parents	6	
Family support by community	13	
Support of family by teachers	7	
Funding/technical and materials support	6	Relationships
Teacher-parent relationship	14	
Community-student relationships	11	
Student-teacher relationships	13	
Student-community relationships	7	
Student-parents relationships	15	
Parent-student relationships	7	
Community-parent relationships	13	Expectations
Parent expectations of teachers	14	
Parent expectations of parents	8	
Parent expectations of students	6	
Parent expectations of community leaders	5	
Parent expectations of social services	4	
Teacher expectations of parents	16	Self-efficacy
Teacher input on self-efficacy	4	
Community input on self-efficacy	9	
Parent input on self-efficacy	9	
Student input on self-efficacy	5	Communication
Teacher-parent communication	6	
Community-parent communication	8	
Teacher-student communication	6	

### Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings from the interviews, focus groups and schoolwide survey. Several important facts emerged from these sessions. The first, recognition that there is a gap in parent-teacher relationships across the grade levels. A significant amount of time was devoted to discussing this issue and possible solutions. The children did not appear to be concerned about the relationship their parents had with the teacher

and indicated that as long as they were not in trouble, it was not important for their parents to have regular contact with the teacher. That being said, students did not appear to perceive the value in having teachers and parents working with them on a regular basis to ensure their educational success. Likewise, the teachers' concerns centered on those parents they cannot reach and were looking for ways to engage all parents, particularly those whose children were having difficulty with classwork and behavior issues.

Secondly, the parents indicated a real concern over the relationships they had with teachers and administrators. These parents embraced the apps teachers used to notify them of events and progress with their children, yet indicated their concern over parents who ignored attempts on the part of the school to keep them informed about these same issues.

This study explored the phenomenon of parental involvement from the perspectives of parents, elementary school students, teachers, and community leaders to determine whether there was a common thread woven among the groups that would be beneficial in the maintenance, development, and/or implementation of parental involvement activities. Three focus groups were conducted (parents, teachers, and students in grades three through five), four interviews of community members (police chief pastor, daycare provider/educator, and business owner) and a school-wide survey conducted in the spring of the same year as the research study was conducted. The conclusions are as follows:

**Research question 1:** How do elementary school students and their parents, teachers, and community leaders conceptualize the term *parental involvement*? According to the interviews and focus group discussions, parental involvement was interpreted to mean parents making certain their children did their homework and got them to school. However, the teacher focus group addressed specific issues they felt affected their relationship with the parents and

saw as lack of concern for what their children were encountering on a daily basis. Teachers indicated that the parents who needed to be involved were not, and those with whom they had a positive relationship came about through parent responses to invitations to engage in their child's education. As a positive note, teachers and parents recognized that parents often have obstacles over which they have no control that inhibit their participation in certain events such as conferences and schoolwide activities. Community members, along with teachers, indicated their willingness to accommodate parents' schedules. They also stated on more than one occasion that some parents just do not care. This led to the findings answering the second research question.

**Research question 2:** What obstacles are seen from the viewpoints of elementary school students, their parents, teachers, and community leaders that impact parental involvement? The themes prevalent throughout this research question is relationships among stakeholders, factors such as self-esteem, employment, and communication, and priorities and expectations participants held for others. While parents' main concern centered on the need for better parent-teacher relationships, parents had the tendency to hold the teachers accountable for the breakdown whereas teachers felt they reached out and were frequently met with resistance. The community members who were part of the study, all had children who are or have attended Walden, and spoke of the positive relationships they had with teachers as well as administrators. Children who were part of a focus group were ambivalent about having their parents involved. Several spoke of school events where parents came, but did not participate in the same activities as they did. Other children said their parents took them to after school activities and sporting practices, left them or sat in their cars and checked email, and came when practice was over. One of the community members who coached these children indicated that some parents

expected the coaches to provide meals and transportation for their children. Several participants mentioned self-esteem as a reason some parents avoided interactions with the schools and their children in an educational setting. Some felt parents' reasons for not being involved with their children was due to feelings of inferiority. On the positive side of this, several parents indicated they made conscious efforts to engage with the school and their children by establishing relationships with their children's teachers.

**Research question 3:** What changes could be implemented to create effective parental involvement as articulated by elementary school students, their parents and teachers, and community leaders? This question provided insight into how the community, schools and parents could come together to benefit the children. Many community members addressed the concern over the availability of after-school activities and easy access to sporting venues that would make it possible for children to participate in activities that were within a reasonable distance of their homes that would minimize transportation concerns. Another concern centered around the need for funding to support activities for children who otherwise could not gain access to them due to financial and transportation constraints. The community is rural, therefore the population is spread out creating yet another obstacle since parents who work outside the home usually must travel at least thirty minutes to their employment, so accommodations have to be made to meet with these parents in the evenings. Teachers are willing to meet before school, during planning, or in the evenings, yet many parents indicated they had trouble meeting with their children's teachers. Another suggestion that came from parents was to have parents serve in an advisory capacity on a school team where their concerns could be heard. One of the community members suggested this would be very beneficial if parents would "step-up to the plate" and the administration would listen to their concerns. This individual has been a volunteer

for several years and cannot garner interest, even though he hears complaints, he feels none of the parents are willing to become part of the solution. The parents all felt they wanted their voice to be heard, even if the administration did not do what they suggested, they at least had their say in some of the activities at the school.

The final chapter of this study will provide a summary of the first four chapters and address discussions, conclusions, and recommendations.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

### **Overview**

The current study was designed to understand the perceptions of parental involvement from the perspective of teacher, students, parents, and community members to facilitate positive partnerships among the stakeholders. Additionally, a survey analysis was conducted from parents, staff, and students. In this chapter, a summary of the key elements from the previous chapters is presented. The first section, a summary of the findings of the study, is presented. This is followed by a discussion of the findings, the implications in light of the relevant literature and theories presented in the study, an outline of the study's limitations and delimitations and the implication both methodological and practical with recommendations for the stakeholders, and finally, recommendations for further research.

### **Summary of Findings**

The importance of parental involvement and student success is well documented (Epstein, 2001; Joe & Davis, 2009; Quilliams & Beran, 2009). The discussion among educators, Federal agencies and parents increased following the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The parent component of the Title I plan (section 111, section 9 (NCLB Law of 2002) put accountability with local education agencies, (LEAs) thereby requiring increased implementation of activities that engage parents in the educational system. Results of these mandates have seen schools increase the number of interactive activities that involve families. However, many of the issues presented in previous research supported the explanation as why parents are still resistant to interacting with schools and children.

Concern over multiple interpretations of what parental involvement means, directed the study and guided the first of three research questions.

The first research question asked participants for their interpretation of the term *parental involvement*. These participants articulated the reasons for these perceptions in recorded focus groups and interviews. Once the data had been collected, coded, and analyzed, findings indicated that parental involvement spanned a vast continuum from asking how a child behaved during the day to being part of the school community by volunteering and engaging in extra-curricular activities after school and on weekends. Parents saw their roles as support roles in the home, whereas teachers and community leaders felt that to have a relationship with parents was extremely valuable. Children who were questioned were vague in their definition of parental involvement, focusing on parents providing a place to study and taking them to sporting events. At no time did the students indicate that their parents were not involved, but felt they, the parents, were doing just what the students expected of them.

The second research question addressed obstacles that were present that prevented parents from being engaged in the educational process. The groups discussed obstacles at length, indicating the perceptions from each group did not necessarily fall in line with the expectations that they, as parents, teachers, community leaders, or student, had. Common to all groups was the mention of feelings of inadequacy as a reason or perception of an obstacle to involvement. Parents expressed concern over not understanding curriculum, particularly math. Students felt parents could not help with homework because they did not get it. Community leaders articulated similar concerns about not being comfortable with curricula whereas teachers, who understood these concerns, attempted to educate the parents and community by providing external and internal resources to help parents with curricula in order to reduce feelings of

inadequacy when helping their children with school-related work. Teachers perceived the reasons for parental involvement or the lack thereof due to the challenges parents faced to balance work, home and school-related activities. Noted too, were concerns over relationship building. Parents voiced desire to build relationships with teachers, yet felt they would be intruding in the teachers' already busy schedules. Teachers wanted to improve the relationships they had with parents, but expressed concern over finding ways to reach parents who refused to respond to repeated requests for conferences or meetings for assigning additional resources to aid their child. Self-esteem was addressed on several occasions and by several separate groups as a hurdle that these individuals perceived was in front of parents. Parents, by their own admission, stated that they often felt intimidated by teachers and curriculum, further advancing the idea that there is a relationship between parental involvement and self-efficacy. Students also indicated that their parents were reluctant to help them because they did not understand the process. Several parents stated that they did not go to school because they felt unwelcomed. Some of the teachers felt parents avoided the school because they, the parents, would feel the school is holding them accountable for their child.

Finally, all the participants had an opportunity to make recommendations to facilitate parental involvement and enrich the relationships among the stakeholders. The community leaders spoke of various attempts to provide family-oriented community events such as Annual Night Out, to engage entire families in a positive venue while interacting with agencies within the community who support children and their families. Church groups are active within the community, often supporting students with backpacks to provide food over the weekend, helping to provide food for some of the at-risk children. While many felt these resources were limited, they felt they were necessary. A recommendation by the parent focus group was to add a

member of a local church to the school improvement team to gain perspective from this resource. Teachers discussed the evening school-related Title I events and the parent participation. These activities have entire families participate in curriculum-related activities. Attendance, they stated, was high, but opportunities were limited to engage with classroom teachers in an attempt to forge a positive relationship. Bill suggested that a team of volunteers come to these events and take over the teachers' duties, thereby freeing the teacher to engage one-on-one with parents. He used a church group to facilitate this at another elementary school and found that it was very successful. Lila, a fifth grade student, felt teachers could send newsletters more frequently and include ideas on how to master a skill (usually math skills, as they felt that was an area parents had difficulty understanding) and other valuable information. Teachers stated that evening events involving families were valuable and said that curriculum nights gave parents insight into curricula and suggestions for assisting their children. Hope, a parent with extended experience with children at the same location, suggested that parents would like to have an opportunity to share ideas with the administration, acknowledging the administration may not agree, but at least the parents were given an opportunity to be heard and their opinion valued. Joan, a local business woman, stated she encouraged her staff to engage parents as much as possible to help all the adults who dealt with the children would have a better understanding of the child and his/her needs. Joan also stated that her facility was private and therefore was able to hold parents more accountable than, perhaps, the public schools, which would benefit the children in her care. She also felt it laid the groundwork of expectations for parents who would soon be entering the public school experience.

In all focus groups, the paramount concern was for student success. Students even sensed that the adults with whom they worked wanted them to succeed. Community leaders, teachers,

and even the students, felt that parents were valuable assets to the educational environment and wanted parents to feel valued and willing to participate in activities, volunteer, or be able to help students at home.

### **Discussion**

This section will discuss the study findings in relation to the three theories used to bracket the research. Bandura's social cognitive theory, Weiner's attribution theory, and Dr. Joyce Epstein's Overlapping Sphere of Influence theories guided the study on the perceptions of the meaning of parental involvement from the perspectives of parents, teachers, students in a rural elementary school and the community members with whom these parents and students had contact.

In a 2010 study conducted by Bartel, parents interviewed indicated their reasons for involvement and personal perceptions of their roles were that of motivators for their children. Teachers, on the other hand, saw parents' roles in a different light (Bartel, 2010).

In further research conducted in Norway by Baeck in 2010, teachers' perceptions of parents' roles were interpreted through Bourdieu's concept of social field, with findings indicating that teachers tried to limit parents' influences over the educational process by emphasizing their personal professionalism (Baeck, 2010). This addressed the first research question regarding the conceptualization of the function of parents and their involvement in the educational process, but did not address how elementary students interpret the role their parents play in their education, nor did it address how community members defined parental involvement.

The National Center for Education Statistics reported in its 2012 National Household Education Survey (Noel et al., 2013) that the most common school-related activity involving

parent participation during the school year was attending a PTA (Parent Teacher Association) meeting. The survey also questioned parents regarding volunteer work they had done during the school year. Forty-two percent of the parents reported volunteering at their child's school. This survey documented information provided from parents in grades kindergarten through high school. School size played a significant role in participation of the parents, particularly as volunteers in the school (Noel et al., 2013). This information further supported the need to understand how parents perceived their roles in the educational community, a question whose answer provided insight into increasing the effectiveness of the parent involvement policies in the schools.

Parents come to the experiences of involvement from many different backgrounds that can interfere with a positive experience. Miscommunication among stakeholders, mainly with teachers or administrators, prior negative experiences with schools or school personnel, feelings of inadequacies or merely lack of understanding of their roles influence their efficacy in taking an active role in their children's education (LaRocque, Kleiman and Darling, 2011).

Student perception research is limited in scope. Most of the research involving student perceptions has been done with middle school (Régner, Loose, and Dumas, 2009), high school students (Harris and Goodall, 2008), and college-aged pre-service teachers (Hindin, 2010). A study involving fifth and sixth grade students done in Canada provided insight into the students' perceptions of their parents' involvement and the impact it had on their overall academic success. Although the sample was primarily White middle-class high achieving students, "from a theoretical perspective, this study provides strong support" for a family-school relationship model essential for academic success (Rogers, 2009). This further supported the need for further research into the influence and effect of parental involvement (research question 2) and

the need to determine changes that would make this relationship stronger that addresses research question 3.

**Social Cognitive Theory.** Bandura's social cognitive theory addresses self-regulation, self-control and self-efficacy that centers on reasons behind relationship development. Yount (2010) addressed the impact self-perception, an individual's emotional state, and environment influences on learning. Self-efficacy has been a determining factor in the level of involvement parents have in the educational process. Findings from this study strongly support this as parents indicated feelings of frustration regarding curricula and their perceived inadequacy to help their children. Information gathered from the interviews indicated that parent felt involvement was negatively impacted by parents' feeling of uncertainty and discomfort when they were in a school setting or asked to come for conferences. Students recognized when their parents could not facilitate homework or behavior issues, often requesting that their parents just leave the situation alone because they were concerned about perceived backlash from teachers and/or administrators. Part of the social cognitive theory focuses on self-efficacy. Findings supported the theory as parents' perceived outcome results based on prior experiences, which in turn, determined their level of involvement. Most stakeholders hold that past experiences whether positive or negative, contribute to the parent's self-efficacy which, ultimately affect their comfort in participating in school-related events or relationship building. Educators indicated that in order to create a working relationship with parents and be able to encourage parents to be part of the educational journey, understanding prior experiences would be beneficial. In several instances, teachers indicated that parents come with unfair biases that influence the relationship with the teacher and/or students.

**Attribution Theory.** Weiner's theory explains motivation in students. The two components of this theory, intrapersonal and interpersonal motivation are essential to understanding the driving forces behind parental involvement. Interpersonal motivation is contingent upon other's action and behavioral perceptions in given situations. Findings from the research, support Weiner's premise that the social environment surrounding people who experience happiness or sadness dictate their motivational response in any given situation. Understanding how participants (parents, teacher, and students) view their experiences helps to understand the behaviors that are linked to the motivation and responses to parental involvement. By addressing the theory coupled with Bandura's social cognitive theory, the issue of self-efficacy becomes a focus for understanding both acceptance or and reluctance toward parental involvement. McDermott (2009) referred to internal attributions as "dispositional" attributes whereby individuals observe and infer the behaviors of others with whom they interact as a result of aptitude personality, or upbringing (McDermott, 2009) which influence individual's personal involvement decisions. Based on this information, feedback from parent, teachers, and community members indicated that this possibility exists, whereas students' interpretations of the motivating factors behind parental involvement were more closely related to their perceived needs and not parent motivations. This was an anticipated response due to the maturational and emotional development of the students. The research study explored Weiner's theory in relation to parental involvement, highlighting the reasons individuals expressed for parents' hesitancy to be involved according to their individual perceptions of what parental involvement entails.

Weiner's theory also addresses external attributes where an individual ascribes behavioral causes to external sources (McDermott, 2009). While considering internal attributes, results also pointed to external attributes, thereby supporting Weiner's theory that prior negative experiences



may affect the parents' decisions regarding their chosen level of engagement. This information can be extrapolated to define barriers in relationship building, a concern all of the adults expressed. The students in the study were not concerned about relationship-building among the adults with whom they had contact, but were more concerned with peer relationships, a concern children of that age have in common. The students' focus centered on parental support in getting them to sporting events and, on occasion, helping with homework.

Weiner's attribution theory coupled with Bandura's social cognitive theory further supported the major reason parental involvement is an individual decision. The self-efficacy of the adults and prior experiences affected decision-making processes. Teachers felt parents were resistant because of feelings of inadequacy. Many of the adults who were interviewed were familiar with families in the community. They stated that, in many cases, parents didn't want to come to school because of the feeling that they would be held accountable for and to their child and their child's teacher. This perception was something teachers felt was based on their (parents') perception of the relationship they (parents) had with the school. Prior experiences, according to some adults who were interviewed, may influence these decisions.

**Overlapping Spheres of Influence.** The third theory used to support the research was Dr. Joyce Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence. According to Dr. Epstein, three major fields of influence affected children-families, schools, and community. These spheres or influences take in to account the shifting of these spheres based on each situation at any given time, but are part of student success and self-efficacy. The shifting of spheres is dictated by the needs of the child at specific junctures on his/her life. In a school environment, the impact of parents and school is stronger than might exist at perhaps baseball practice where the child may have other adults with whom he/she may engage. These spheres bear importance throughout the

child's life, but to varying degrees throughout the education process. The current research supported this based on input from community members who were interviewed and indicated the responsibility they felt they had toward children. Teachers articulated the desire to provide the best opportunity at an education for each child, but expressed awareness of the need for community and parental support. Teachers in the study expressed concern over parents whose sphere was not as present as they had hoped. The concern teachers had was over the children whose parents did not attend conferences or events in which their children participated, thereby articulating that the parent appeared to not care what the school did. In several instances, the teachers alluded to parent perceptions of school as a place where their children go to during the week. Other than that, some parents, according to teachers, felt the school, and teachers in particular, had little or no influence or capital in their child's life. The teachers in the focus group expressed frustration that parents were not interested in their child's education or they would be more present and available to teachers. This theory had students at the center of the diagram (Appendix H, Fig. 2). In this study, students were also part of the study. By including students, the researcher illustrated that students could draw from the other three sources of support and this draw varied, based on the needs of the student. Therefore, student self-efficacy that was discussed by Weiner and Bandura played a significant role in student success.

Understanding the dynamics of parental involvement from these stakeholders helps understand the needs of these individuals both individually and collectively as they influence motivating parents to be more active in their children's journey. By including students in the group, the anticipation was that understanding children's perceptions would help formulate and help increase the level of parental involvement both at home and within the educational environment. It was noted that, when referring to the illustration, student-centered focus should also include

the influences peers have on parental involvement. This was noted as students referred to social media as an avenue for engagement. The indications from the students pointed to a more competitive reason for involvement, perhaps even a selfish reason from the child's perspective- the desire to do what his/her peers are doing socially. The desire to be part of a group was evident in the student focus group which, in turn, involved their parents, as they felt they wanted to be part of the after-school activities if only their parents were more available. This indicated that the student pressuring parents to be involved, was a driving force to get parents involved. At the juncture where parents and students interact, there appeared to be a reduction in the influence of the school and community, thereby recognizing the ever-shifting requirements from the other influential groups. The continued flux among these stakeholders and perceptions parents had regarding their placement in the continuum coupled with parent self-efficacy, proved to be a determining factor in the level of involvement. It became evident, through discussion that articulation of understanding these spheres and their influences and addressing them at different times in the child's educational journey were not, in actuality, aligned, therefore the balance was shewed. Parents, teachers, and community members spoke of their individual influences but had limited suggestions to resolve the issue of reduced or limited parental involvement. Many spoke of the need to build relationships, but acknowledged the perceived resistance on the part of parents with whom they had no or limited contact, making this process appear to be one-sided and very frustrating for teachers and community members in particular.

The current study confirms the findings of previous studies, particularly as perceptions about parental involvement. Although this study found a stronger emphasis on obstacles, it, nonetheless corroborated the majority of perceptions from teachers, parents, and community members. However, prior research did not address elementary age students as often as middle

school and high school students. The elementary students in the current study did agree with prior research when they identified their perceptions of how they (parents) were involved in students' lives. Parents agreed that meeting the basic needs of their children was their primary concern. Prior research supported this. When the focus on parental involvement addresses Epstein's six topologies (2005), findings indicate that four of the topologies are supported by this study, whereas two of the topologies are not considered to have strong parental involvement. The four topologies that this study support are (a) parenting and attending to students' basic needs, (b) communication with the school through conferences, notes, report cards, and memos, (c) volunteering, and (d) learning at home that includes homework, goal setting or projects. While communication is found to be an obstacle and also a recommendation for improvement, there is, nonetheless support that it does exist on some level. The two areas that Epstein maintains are levels of involvement, but not strongly supported through responses from the stakeholders in this study are (a) being part of the decision-making team at the local school, and (b) collaborating with the community leadership to strengthen the relationship with the school. The last item, collaborating with the community leadership, was mentioned by the police chief and mayor when they discussed community wide activities designed to engage families and introduce them to resources that are available to them. Parents did not speak to these issues during their focus groups.

### **Implications**

**Parents:** The Title I parental involvement component continues to be utilized to engage parents in the educational community, but it has not involved all the parents, particularly those whose children are educationally at risk. It is even more frustrating that parents will say they will come to events, help with school activities, or come in for conferences, yet do not follow

through. These parents continue to provide the same reasons for their reticence: no ride, work schedule (even though these events are held in the evening), no child-care is available, or they just feel they would be cornered by a teacher that would make them feel uncomfortable.

**Teachers:** Most educators indicated that the parents who want to be involved would be involved and those who have no interest or do not understand the magnitude of their actions resist engaging in school-related activities. The school where the study occurred has increased the family-related activities and has seen a small increase in participation. As stated by teachers in the study, parents in the primary grades are more engaged than those in the upper elementary grades.

**Students:** The students indicated that they would like to attend these events, but due to parents' schedules they are unable to be part of these events. The trend continues. Parents, whom teachers hope would come to school for these events and whose children really need the interaction with other students and parents, are most likely to not attend.

**Community leaders:** Community leaders addressed concern about parents who drop children off at events, leave, and return when the event is complete. Children recognize this, as indicated in the student focus group. Students interpreted this as parents who are not interested in what their children are doing whereas, parents expressed frustration over the fact that they, as well as community leaders, were responsible for children other than their own. Community leaders have been making efforts to create activities that involve families and voice their frustration that only a small percentage participate on a regular basis. These leaders felt that if parents were part of the activity, children would be more involved and would be anxious to be part of other community activities.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The decision to define boundaries of the study to include only one section of the county in which the study was conducted was to understand the parent involvement in this particular section of the school system. Parental involvement at community and sporting events is much higher than in other parts of the system. The study addresses the perceptions community members, parents, teachers and students in this community have that may influence the levels of participation at some events and provide insight into how this participation can be transferred to the school environment.

A limitation to the study was not being able to generalize the results due to the demographics of the study groups. It would be difficult to generalize the results to an urban environment, wealthy/privileged community, or an area where families are highly educated professionals. Another limitation was the use of children and the lack of their understanding of the impact their parents have on their success. They did not view their parents as part of a collaborative group to help them succeed. Additionally, the time of year when these focus groups and interviews were conducted possibly affected the outcomes. The beginning of a school year mindset is very different than it is at the end of the school year.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

A recommendation for a future study could include interviewing parents, teachers, students, and community members who impact or are part of the middle school and high school communities. The possibility exists that further research may unlock the motivations behind the decrease in in-school parental involvement. These findings may provide valuable information that could be used by the local school system to develop a more detailed plan to encourage parental involvement.

Another recommendation would include expanding on the findings of the survey to determine areas at risk and use this information to create a community-school forum to address the weaknesses presented in the results.

A study of all elementary schools using the same methods could provide information to facilitate the writing of the parent component of the Title One document. Coupled with this would be a study of the best practices of schools with similar demographics and an opportunity to dialogue with similar school environments to extrapolate strengths and weaknesses and use this in the construction of the school-based plan.

One modification to this study would be to increase the number of parents in the dialogue to gain an even broader perspective of their perceptions of school strengths and weaknesses. Including administrators and/grade level representatives may provide even more insight into the current perceptions of parental involvement and methods to improve upon them.

Perhaps, an additional focus group could include administrators, whose perceptions of parental involvement are from a different experiential basis. Frequently, administrators' contact with parents is a result of a problem, whereas, teachers' involvement is more likely ongoing. This may provide direction for the school to take in engaging yet another group of adults who interact with the children.

### **Summary**

The purpose of the study was to determine common perceptions of the term *parental involvement*, find obstacles that inhibit parental involvement, and request recommendations from four different groups: community members, parents, teachers, and students. One of the insights gained from the study was that all of the groups who were part of the study were concerned about the decline of parental involvement, but felt frustrated on how to develop or improve the

relationships among the stakeholders. Several recommendations were made, but findings from the interviews indicated that those in a position of authority within the school did not have time to listen to parental concerns. The study also enlightened me about how important teacher-parent relationships are to the parents. Although this issue was discussed at length, it was obvious that this is where the work must take place and the frustration from the teachers, which is not a new frustration, is engaging “resistant” parents like the one who stated that she did not teach her child, that was the teacher’s job. Several comments were made about having a class at the high school level similar to a life skills class that includes methods on developing and maintaining relationships, especially with home and school.

The biggest “take away” from the research was that many parents do not see how important they are in influencing their children’s educational, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. How children function in society in the future is contingent on the relationships they have along the way that positively influence their decision-making processes.

This study was prompted by my own experience as an educator with more than forty years in the classroom. Two things stood out as a result of my meetings with parents, teachers, students and community leaders: opportunities or lack of opportunities and expectation disconnects.

The first “take-away” involved the availability of opportunities for interaction among the stakeholders who were part of the study. Personal experience has provided a backdrop for my inquiry into the opportunities that were present for parents to engage in school-related activities. Research theories also provided impetus to investigate parental involvement further. Dr. Joyce Epstein’s Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence (2005) provided relevance to the investigation as it documented the interactions of community, parents, teachers, and students in a



variety of environments and discussed the fluidity of these interactions. Students are influenced by community leaders outside the school day, whereas, teachers and oftentimes parents interact more closely throughout the school day. Parents who were part of the focus group indicated that they used school-related events to interact with their children and school staff but found that others with whom they had contact made conscious decisions to not participate. At a PTO event designed to have families interact with school staff, one of the focus group participants said that if Bingo could build relationships, then we would have achieved our goal. During another session, students said their parents would rather drop them off and pick them up after it was over. As a Title One teacher many years ago, I had an opportunity to design an evening event with families of students I worked with during the day. I provided dinner and games for this evening and had arranged to have it in the community center in the housing area from which most of these students came. Everyone was within walking distance of the center, yet only one parent out of forty-six attended. Several students came and participated. The parents had received several written invitations and reminders of the activity, yet most did not to attend.

Opportunities by local law enforcement occur in August and in October. According to the Police Chief, the goal is to engage families to do activities together and provide information about local support agencies available to the families. Part of the school system's Title One program has a parental involvement component that includes funding, engagement opportunities, and resources to support families. Schools have plans in place to bring families together, advertise these events, and most often provide meals at no charge or minimal charge, yet teachers state that families whom they hope to see and engage in conversations do not attend. Research studies support the fact that when parts engage on any level, student achievement benefits. This leads me to the second "take-away" from my study: expectations.

A disconnect in expectations was very evident as I met with the focus groups and the interviews I conducted. The teachers indicated that they make multiple attempts to contact parents throughout the day and after school. Community leaders felt they did not want to interfere with the operations of the school and parents expected teachers to make the contacts with them. As a new teacher many years ago, there was an unspoken expectation that parents would be included in any decision-making and would attend any events or conferences that were scheduled. Parent or family expectations are often not in line with those of the school, creating a communication disconnect that limits or eliminates parental engagement on many levels. During one of the focus groups, a teacher presented a rather crass example to illustrate this point. A student had “pooped” in the trash can in the classroom. When his father came in to discuss the incident with the principal, the father did not see anything wrong with the occurrence. The child had been in that school for five years and was ten years old. Clearly, the expectations of the school did not mesh with those in the child’s home. Sending mixed messages to the children, impedes learning.

Social media, when used appropriately, can benefit all the stakeholders from the study. Parents can receive information almost instantaneously using the messaging applications on their phones. However, the expectation teachers have is that parents contact them if a situation needs to be addressed; yet many use social media to air grievances in lieu of face-to-face meetings with the teachers. Face-to-face meetings would provide both parties the opportunity to interact and find a resolution to the situation. The opportunities for relationship-building are better than they have been in the past because of the availability of computers and social media. Yet, in many instances, I have found that it has created the exact opposite effect- isolation. Clearly,

relationships are important to the stakeholders and finding ways to increase this among stakeholders who are otherwise reluctant to engage is the goal of these stakeholders.

While interviews and focus groups differed in many thoughts and recommendations, all had the same objectives in mind: student success and continued work on relationship building among the stakeholders. The focus on parents and their reasons for remaining in the background is and will continue to be of primary concern from all stakeholders as their children move through their educational journey. Resolving obstacles will certainly provide avenues to academic success for all the students.

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**Appendix A****Invitation Letter****Teacher Invitation****Donna W. Connell****Dconnell2@liberty.edu****(252) 229-3053**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (insert teacher's name),

I would like to offer an opportunity for you to participate in a research study on parental involvement perceptions. As part of the study, several teachers will participate in a focus group session that will address the concerns and perceptions about parental involvement. A focus group is a group of individuals who meet to discuss the topic of the study and provide valuable feedback. Research has documented that the level of parental involvement has a direct bearing on student achievement and behaviors.

The goal of my study is to determine common themes that exist among parents, teachers, students at the elementary level and community members about parental involvement. I also hope to gather information from each group regarding ways to enhance the programs already in place.

If you are willing to participate in this study, which will be confidential, please contact me either by phone or email. I hope to include seven teachers in the study. I will be available to answer any questions before you make the decision to participate. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. You will be notified within seven days of this letter regarding your participation.

My plan is to provide feedback from all the groups to help make the relationship among these groups stronger.

I am looking forward to working with these groups to make what is already in place stronger.

Sincerely,

Donna Connell



**Parent Invitation****Donna W. Connell****Dconnell2@liberty.edu****(252) 229-3053**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (insert parent/guardian name),

I would like to offer an opportunity for you to participate in a research study on parental involvement perceptions. As part of the study, several parents will participate in a focus group session that will address the concerns and perceptions about parental involvement. A focus group is a group of individuals who meet to discuss the topic of the study and provide valuable feedback. Research has documented that the level of parental involvement has a direct bearing on student achievement and behaviors.

The goal of my study is to determine common themes that exist among parents, teachers, students at the elementary level and community members about parental involvement. I also hope to gather information from each group regarding ways to enhance the programs already in place.

If you are willing to participate in this study, which will be confidential, please contact me either by phone or email. I hope to include seven parents in the study. I will be available to answer any questions before you make the decision to participate. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. You will be notified within seven days letting you know if you are one of our participants.

My plan is to provide feedback from all the groups to help make the relationship among these groups stronger.

I am looking forward to working with these groups to make what is already in place stronger.

Sincerely,

Donna Connell

### Interview Invitation

Date:

Name:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I would like to invite you to meet with me to discuss parental involvement and your perceptions of this activity. The study/research I am conducting is to gain an understanding of the perspectives of four different groups of individuals (elementary school parents, teachers, students, and community leaders) on parental involvement. Much of the education of our youth hinges on the interactions among these critical groups. Your perspective, coupled with other members of these groups, will provide a lens through which to view how these four very different groups interpret the roles parents play in their children's education. I am including children's perspectives, as they are critical to determining whether misinterpretations are present.

If you have additional questions, feel free to contact me by phone at (252) 229-3053 or email at [dconnell2@liberty.edu](mailto:dconnell2@liberty.edu). I am looking forward to meeting with you soon.

Sincerely,

Donna Connell

**Appendix B**  
**Interview/Focus Group Acknowledgement**

Date:

Name:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for accepting my invitation to discuss parental involvement and your perceptions of this activity. The study/research is being conducted by me, Donna Connell, to gain an understanding of the perspectives of four different groups of individuals (elementary school parents, teachers, students, and community members) on parental involvement. Much of the education of our youth hinges on the interactions among these critical groups. Your perspective, coupled with other members of these groups, will provide a lens through which to view how these four very different groups interpret the roles parents play in children's education. I am including children's perspectives, as they are critical to determining whether misinterpretations are present.

If you have additional questions, feel free to contact me by phone at (252) 229-3053 or email at [dconnell2@liberty.edu](mailto:dconnell2@liberty.edu). I am looking forward to meeting with you soon.

Sincerely,

Donna Connell

## **Appendix C**

### **Consent/Assent Forms**

#### **CONSENT FORM: TEACHER**

##### **Understanding Parental Involvement Perceptions**

Donna W. Connell

Liberty University

School of Education

You are invited to be a part of a research study focusing on parental involvement and real or implied barriers to parent-school relationships. You have been selected because of your teaching experience and dedication to the children of Walden Elementary School.

Donna W. Connell and the School of Education at Liberty University, in Lynchburg, Virginia, will conduct this study.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to find commonalities, if any exist, in how parental involvement is defined by parents, teachers, students, and community members. As a part of the No Child Left Behind law, parental involvement has been brought to the forefront as research points to increased student achievement, reduced disciplinary actions and increased self-efficacy on the parts of parents and students as a result of more parental involvement on many levels.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group with your peers about parental involvement. This engagement will occur at your work site at a time determined by the group as most convenient. This focus group session will be approximately forty-five minutes to one-hour in length. The interviews will be recorded and

transcribed, reviewed with you for accuracy and used to help understand this phenomenon of parental involvement.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The study has several possible risks. The risk of having a parent of a student and the student's teacher as participants is possible. Every effort will be made to accommodate this situation.

The benefits to participation are being part of a study that could benefit the improvement of school-family relationships that, in turn, could improve student performance and behavior.

**Compensation:**

There will be no monetary compensation for participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

All interviews and transcriptions of these will remain in the researcher's possession. In the event that any report is published, no information will be disclosed that will make identification of participants possible. All sensitive material will remain in a secured location and stored until the end of the study at which time all sensitive materials will be shredded within four months of the completion of the study. Any notes from this session will be stored on a computer with password protection for added security. All video-taped and recorded information will be erased four months after the completion of the study. All participants will be identified with a pseudonym for security.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect any relationships with your school or Liberty University. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so at any time.

**Contact Information:**

The researcher conducting this study is Donna Connell. You may address any questions to her at 252-244-0117 or via email at [dconnell2@liberty.edu](mailto:dconnell2@liberty.edu). Questions are encouraged.

If you would like to speak to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1972 University Blvd., Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*You will receive a copy of this document for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the contents of this contract and understand that all interviews will be transcribed, reviewed by me for accuracy, and hereby give permission to be video-taped / recorded for the purpose of this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to have my conversations video-taped/recorded and transcribed for the purpose of this study.

I have read and understood the information in this contract. I have received clarification from Donna Connell regarding any concerns. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_Date:\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher\_\_\_\_\_Date:\_\_\_\_\_

*You will receive a copy of this form for your records.*

**IRB Code Number:**

**IRB Expiration Date:**

## CONSENT FORM: PARENT

### Understanding Parental Involvement Perceptions

Donna W. Connell

Liberty University

School of Education

You are invited to be a part of a research study focusing on parental involvement and real or implied barriers to parent-school relationships. You have been selected because you have children at Walden Elementary School.

This study will be conducted by Donna W. Connell and the School of Education at Liberty University, in Lynchburg, Virginia.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to find commonalities in the how parental involvement is defined by parents, teachers, students, and community members and understand how these definitions are the same and how they differ and the reasons for this phenomenon. As a part of the No Child Left Behind law, parental involvement has been brought to the forefront as indications point to increased student achievement, reduced disciplinary actions and increased self-efficacy on the parts of parents and students.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group with several other parents from your child's school. The session will occur at a location convenient to you and a time mutually agreed upon. The session will be recorded and transcribed, reviewed with you for accuracy and used to help understand this phenomenon of parental involvement. The time allocated for this is approximately one hour.



**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The study has several possible risks. The risk of having a parent of a student and the student's teacher as participants is possible. Every effort will be made to accommodate this situation.

The benefits to participation are being part of a study that could benefit the improvement of school-family-community relationships that could improve student performance and behavior.

**Compensation:**

There will be no monetary compensation for participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

All interviews and transcriptions of these will remain in the researcher's possession. In the event that any report is published, no information will be disclosed that will make identification of participants possible. All sensitive material will remain in a secured location and any computer files will be password-protected for additional security. Data will be stored until the end of the study at which time all sensitive materials will be shredded within four months of the completion of the study. All video-taped and recorded information will be erased four months after the completion of the study. All participants will be given a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study. No personal information will be shared by the researcher. Confidentiality will be protected by all participating in the study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect any relationships with your school or Liberty University. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so at any time.

**Contact Information:**

The researcher conducting this study is Donna Connell. You may address any questions to her at 252-244-0117 or via email at [dconnell2@liberty.edu](mailto:dconnell2@liberty.edu). Questions are encouraged.

If you would like to speak to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1972 University Blvd., Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*You will receive a copy of this document for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher : \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**IRB Code Number:** \_\_\_\_\_ **IRB Expiration Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

CONSENT FORM  
COMMUNITY MEMBER

Understanding Parental Involvement Perceptions

Donna W. Connell

Liberty University

School of Education

You are invited to be a part of a research study focusing on parental involvement and real or implied barriers to parent-school relationships. You have been selected because you are a member of the community in which the study is taking place.

This study will be conducted by Donna W. Connell and the School of Education at Liberty University, in Lynchburg, Virginia.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to find commonalities in the perception of how parental involvement is seen by parents, teachers, students, and community members. The goal is to understand how these perceptions are the same, how they differ, and the reasons for this phenomenon. As a part of the No Child Left Behind law, parental involvement has been brought to the forefront as indications point to increased student achievement, reduced disciplinary actions and increased self-efficacy on the parts of parents and students.

**Procedures**

If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group with several other community members. The session will occur at a mutually agreed upon location and time. The session will be recorded and transcribed, reviewed with you for accuracy and used

to help understand this phenomenon of parental involvement. The time allocated for this is approximately one hour.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The study has several possible risks. The risk of having a parent of a student and the student's teacher as participants is possible. Every effort will be made to accommodate this situation.

The benefits to participation are being part of a study that could benefit the improvement of school-family-community relationships that could improve student performance and behavior.

**Compensation:**

There will be no monetary compensation for participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

All interviews and transcriptions of these will remain in the researcher's possession. In the event that any report is published, no information will be disclosed that will make identification of participants possible. All sensitive material will remain in a secured location and any computer files will be password-protected for additional security. Data will be stored until the end of the study at which time all sensitive materials will be shredded within four months of the completion of the study. All video-taped and recorded information will be erased four months after the completion of the study. All participants will be given a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study. No personal information will be shared by the researcher. Confidentiality will be protected by all participating in the study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect any relationships with your school or Liberty University. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so at any time.

**Contact Information:**

The researcher conducting this study is Donna Connell. You may address any questions to her at 252-244-0117 or via email at [dconnell2@liberty.edu](mailto:dconnell2@liberty.edu). Questions are encouraged.

If you would like to speak to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1972 University Blvd., Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*You will receive a copy of this document for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher : \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Your will receive a copy of this form for your records.*

**IRB Code Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**IRB Expiration Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## ASSENT FORM

### STUDENT

#### Understanding Parental Involvement Perceptions

Donna W. Connell

Liberty University

School of Education

I would like to invite you to meet with me and discuss how your families help you in school and at home. This is part of a study I am doing to understand how important parents are to your education.

This study will be conducted by me, Donna W. Connell and the School of Education at Liberty University, in Lynchburg, Virginia.

#### **Background Information:**

Our families are very important to our education and I am trying to find out what teachers, parents, and students in elementary school think about parents and how they are involved in school and at home.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be asked to meet with me and several classmates to discuss how your parents help with your schooling. I will meet with you at school at a time your parents and teachers feel would be appropriate.

#### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

I will try to avoid any risks this study may have.

The benefit to participation is being part of a study that could benefit the improvement of school-family-community relationships.

**Compensation:**

There will be no monetary compensation for participation in this study. I will give you a reading book for your participation.

**Confidentiality:**

All interviews and transcriptions of these will remain in the researcher's possession. In the event that any report is published, no information will be disclosed that will make identification of participants possible. All sensitive material will remain in a secured location and any data on the computer will be password protected for further security. The information will be stored until the end of the study at which time all sensitive materials will be shredded within four months of the completion of the study. All video-taped and recorded information will be erased four months after the completion of the study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect any relationships with your school or Liberty University. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so at any time.

**Contact Information:**

The researcher conducting this study is Donna Connell. You may address any questions to her at 252-244-0117 or via email at dconnell2@liberty.edu. Questions are encouraged.

If you would like to speak to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1972 University Blvd., Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

*You will receive a copy of this document for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the contents of this contract and understand that all interviews will be transcribed, reviewed by me for accuracy, and hereby give permission to be audio-taped for the purpose of this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to have my conversations audio-taped/recorded and transcribed for the purpose of this study.

I have read and understood the information in this contract. I have received clarification from Donna Connell regarding any concerns. I hereby consent to have my child participate in the study.

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_Date:\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of witness (parent/guardian)\_\_\_\_\_Date:\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher:\_\_\_\_\_Date:\_\_\_\_\_

*Your parent/guardian will receive a copy of this form for your files.*

**IRB Code Number:**\_\_\_\_\_ **IRB Expiration Date:**\_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix D

### Parent Survey Questions

Item	Statement	Percent
A	All of my child's teachers give work that challenges my child.	
B	All of my child's teachers help me to understand my child's progress.	
C	All of my child's teachers keep me informed regularly of how my child is being graded.	
D	All my child's teachers meet his/her learning needs through individualized instruction.	
E	All of my child's teachers provide an equitable curriculum that meets his/her learning needs.	
F	All of my child's teachers report on my child's progress in easy to understand language.	
G	All of my child's teachers use a variety of teaching strategies and learning activities.	
H	All of my child's teachers work as a team to help my child learn.	
I	My child has access to support services based on his/her identified needs.	
J	My child has administrators and teachers that monitor and inform me of his/her learning progress.	
K	My child has at least one adult advocate in the school.	
L	My child has up-to-date computers and other technology to learn.	
M	My child is given multiple assessments to measure his/her understanding of what was taught.	
N	My child is prepared for success in the next school year.	
O	My child knows the expectations for learning in all classes.	
P	My child sees a relationship between what is being taught and his/her everyday life.	
Q	Our school communicates effectively about the school's goals and activities.	
R	Our school ensures that all staff members monitor and report the achievement of school goals.	
S	Our school ensures the instructional time is protected and interruptions are minimized.	
T	Our school ensures that the facilities support student learning.	
U	Our school ensures the effective use of financial resources.	
V	Our school has established goals and a plan for improving student learning.	
W	Our school has high expectations for students in all classes.	
X	Our school provides a safe learning environment.	
Y	Our school provides an adequate supply of learning resources that are current and in good condition.	
Z	Our school provides excellent support services (e.g., counseling and/or	

	career planning.)	
AA	Our school provides opportunities for stakeholders to be involved in the school.	
AB	Our school provides opportunities for students to participate in activities that interest them.	
AC	Our school provides qualified staff members to support student learning.	
AD	Our school provides students with access to a variety of information resources to support their learning.	
AE	Our school shares responsibility for student learning with its stakeholders.	
AF	Our school's governing body does not interfere with the operation or leadership of our school.	
AG	Our school's governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	
AH	Our school's purpose statement is clearly focused on student success.	
AI	Our school's purpose statement is formally reviewed and revised with involvement from parents.	

Source: <https://www.cravenk12.org/Page/9389>

### Teacher Survey on School Climate

Item	Statement	Percent
A	All teachers have been trained to implement a formal process that promotes discussion about student learning ( e.g., action research, examination of student work, reflection, study teams, and peer coaching)	
B	All teachers in our school monitor and adjust curriculum, instruction, and assessment based on data from student assessments and examination of professional practices.	
C	All teachers in our school participate in collaborative learning communities that meet both informally and formally across grade levels and content areas.	
D	All teachers in our school personalize instructional strategies and interventions to address individual learning needs of students.	
E	All teachers in our school provide students with specific and timely feedback about learning.	
F	All teachers in our school regularly use instructional strategies that require student collaboration, self-reflection, and development of critical thinking skills.	
G	All teachers in our school use a process to inform students of their learning expectations and standards of performance.	
H	All teachers in our school use a variety of technologies as instructional resources.	
I	All teachers in our school use consistent common grading and reporting policies across grade levels and courses based on clearly defined criteria.	
J	All teachers in our school use multiple types of assessments to modify instruction and to revise curriculum.	
K	In our school, a formal process is in place to support new staff members in their professional practice.	
L	In our school, a formal structure exists so that each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the school who supports that student's educational experience.	
M	In our school, a professional learning program is designed to build capacity among all professional and support staff members.	
N	In our school, all school personnel regularly engage families in their children's learning progress.	
O	In our school, all staff members participate in continuous professional learning based on identified needs of the school.	
P	In our school, all staff members use student data to address the unique learning needs of all students.	
Q	Our school communicates effectively about the school's goals and activities.	
R	In our school, challenging curriculum and learning experiences provide equity for all students in the development of learning, thinking, and	

	life skills.	
S	In our school, related learning support services are provided for all students based on their needs.	
T	In our school, staff members provide peer coaching to teachers.	
U	Our school employs consistent assessment measures across classrooms and courses.	
V	Our school ensures all staff members are trained in the evaluation interpretation, and use of data.	
W	Our school has a continuous improvement process based on data, goals actions, and measures for growth.	
X	Our school has a systematic process for collecting, analyzing, and using data.	
Y	Our school leaders monitor data related to school continuous improvement goals.	
Z	Our school leaders monitor data related to student achievement.	
AA	Our school maintains facilities that contribute to a safe environment.	
AB	Our school maintains facilities that contribute to student learning.	
AC	Our school provides a plan for the acquisition and support of technology to support student learning.	
AD	Our school provides a plan for the acquisition and support of technology to support the school's operational needs.	
AE	Our school provides a variety of information resources to support student learning.	
AF	Our school provides high quality student support services (e.g., counseling referrals, educational, and career planning)	
AG	Our school provides instructional time and resources to support our school's goals and priorities.	
AH	Our school provides opportunities for students to participate in activities that interest them.	
AI	Our school provides protected instructional time.	
AJ	Our school provides qualified staff members to support student learning.	
AK	Our school provides sufficient material resources to meet student needs.	
AL	Our school uses data to monitor student readiness and success at the next level.	
AM	Our school uses multiple assessment measures to determine student learning and school performance.	
AN	Our school's governing body or school board complies with all policies, procedures, laws, and regulations.	
AO	Our school's governing body or school board maintains a distinction between its roles and responsibilities and those of school leadership.	
AP	Our school's leaders engage effectively with all stakeholders about the school's purpose and direction.	
AQ	Our school's leaders ensure all staff members use supervisory	

	feedback to improve student learning.	
AR	Our school's leaders expect staff members to hold all students to high academic standards.	
AS	Our school's leaders hold all staff members accountable for student learning.	
AT	Our school's leaders hold themselves accountable for student learning.	

Source: <https://www.cravenk12.org/Page/9389>

### Student Survey Questions

Item	Statement	Percent
A	In my school, I am learning new things.	
B	In my school, I am treated fairly.	
C	In my school, my principal and teachers want every student to learn	
D	In my school, my teachers want me to do my best work.	
E	In my school, students treat adults with respect.	
F	My principal and teachers ask me what I think about school.	
G	My principal and teachers help me to be ready for the next grade.	
H	My principal and teachers tell children when they do a good job.	
I	My school has computers to help me learn.	
J	My school has many places where I can learn, such as the library.	
K	My school is safe and clean.	
L	My school wants children in our school o help each other if we can.	
M	My teachers always help me when I need them.	
N	My teachers ask my family to come to school activities.	
O	My teachers care about students.	
P	My teachers help me learn things I will need in the future.	
Q	My teachers listen to me.	
R	My teachers tell me how I should behave and do my work.	
S	My teachers tell my family how I am doing in school.	
T	My teachers use different activities to help me learn.	

Source: <https://www.cravenk12.org/Page/9389>

## **Appendix E**

### **Focus Group Questions**

#### **Parent**

1. How do you characterize your role in the school experience?
2. Do you feel you participate in your child's educational experience outside the school? How do you describe this participation?
3. From your perspective as parents, what types of parental involvement do you see occurring?
4. What changes would you like to see occur to strengthen and/or enhance the connections between home and school?
5. Do you feel, as parents, you should be part of the decision-making in the school? What area do you feel you might have an active voice in the decision-making process?
6. Do you have any other areas you feel you would like to share about parental involvement in education?

## **Focus Group Questions**

### **Teacher**

1. How do you view the roles parents have in the school experience?
2. Do you feel they participate in their child's educational experience outside the school?  
How would you describe this?
2. From your point of view, what types of parental involvement do you see occurring?
3. What changes would you like to see occur to strengthen and/or enhance the connections between home, school, and community?
4. Do you feel, as teachers, parents should be part of the decision-making in the school?
5. What area(s) do you feel they (parents) might have an active voice in the decision-making process?
6. Do you have any other areas you feel you would like to share about parental involvement in education?



**Focus Group Questions:****Student**

1. What kinds of help with your homework do you ask of your parents and who helps you with it?
2. What kinds of school-related activities do your parents do with you?
3. How would you feel if your parents volunteered here at school?
4. What kinds of help do you think your parents might provide if they came to school?
5. What kinds of activities do you think the school could organize to get your parents to come out to school?

## **Appendix F**

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Community Members**

1. How do you view the role parents play in the school experience?
2. Do you feel they participate in their child's educational experience outside the school?  
  
How would you describe this?
3. What changes would you like to see occur to strengthen and/or enhance the connections between home, school, and community?
4. Do you feel, as a community member, that parents should be part of the decision-making process in the schools? Please explain your thoughts in detail.
5. In what area do you feel they (parents) might have an active voice in the decision-making process?

## **Appendix G**

### **Protocols**

#### **Interview Protocol for Community Members**

Participant:

Date:

Time:

Interviewer:

Location of interview

Questions for consideration:

1. How do you view the roles parents have in the school experience?
2. Do you feel they (parents) participate in their child's educational experience outside the school? How would you describe this?
3. From your point of view, what types of parental involvement do you see occurring?
4. What changes would you like to see occur to strengthen and/or enhance the connections between home, school, and community?
5. Do you feel, as a community member, parents should be part of the decision-making in the school?

6. In what area do you feel they (parents) might have an active voice in the decision-making process?

7. Do you have any other areas you feel you would like to share about parental involvement in education?

## **Parent Interview Protocol**

Participant:

Date:

Time:

Interviewer:

Location of interview

Questions for consideration:

1. How do you characterize your role in the school experience? Do you feel you participate in your child's educational experience outside the school? How would you describe this?
2. What types of parental involvement do you see occurring from your point of view?
3. What changes would you like to see occur to strengthen and/or enhance the connections between home and school?
4. Do you feel, as a parent, you should be part of the decision-making in the school?  
What area do you feel you might have an active voice in the decision-making process?
5. Do you have any other areas you feel you would like to share about parental involvement in education?

## **Appendix H**

### **Charts**

#### **Figure 1**

Image for Epstein's Six Topologies of Parental Involvement is available at:

<http://www.pebsaf.org/page47.html>

**Figure 2**

Image of Overlapping Spheres of Influence is available at:

<http://www.pebsaf.org/page47.html>

Source: Joyce L. Epstein, PhD., et al., Partnership Center for Organization of Schools.

**Appendix I**  
**Correspondence**

6-27-14

To: Donna Connell

From: Joyce Epstein

Re: Permission granted

Of course, you have permission to refer to my theoretical model *Overlapping Spheres of Influence* (or to any of my or others' published work) simply by providing full references to the original publication.

I am glad that my model is useful to you.

Best of luck with your study.





Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D.  
 Director, Center on School, Family, and  
 Community Partnerships and  
 National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)  
 Research Professor of Sociology and Education  
 2701 North Charles Street, Suite 300  
 Baltimore, MD 21218  
  
 Phone: (410) 516-8807  
 Fax: (410) 516-8890  
  
 Email: [jepstein@jhu.edu](mailto:jepstein@jhu.edu)  
 Web: <http://www.partnershipschools.org>

**From:** Connell, Donna [<mailto:dconnell2@liberty.edu>]

**Sent:** Wednesday, June 04, 2014 12:28 PM

**To:** Joyce Epstein

**Subject:** request

Dr. Epstein,

I am referring to your theoretical model “Overlapping Spheres of Influence” in my dissertation and would like to request permission to use the illustrations on pages 150 and 151 of your book *School, Family, and Community Partnerships, Third Edition*. This theoretical framework fits nicely with my dissertation topic on parental involvement and has provided much information for my research.

Thank you so much for your consideration in this request.

Sincerely,

Donna Connell

Liberty University

## Appendix J

### IRB Approval Letter

April 11, 2016

Dear Donna,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases are attached to your approval email.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**The Graduate School**



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