A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF HIGHLY ACHIEVING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

STUDENTS DESPITE LACK OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

by

John Ralph McKinley

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover how certain students achieved

academic success despite the lack of parental involvement. Eight students in grades 4-6 at

Riverton Elementary School were selected for the study. The name Riverton Elementary School

is a pseudonym. Pseudonyms were used in this study for the name and location of the school and

also used for the names of students, teachers, and parents. This study asked what is it about

highly achieving students' culture which makes them achieve at high levels despite the lack of

parental involvement? What habits do these highly achieving students possess? What attitudes do

these highly achieving students exhibit? Eight students were identified through the use of the

Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS) survey and grade reports. Once identified, these students

were observed in the classroom setting. Along with the observations, further information was

collected via open-ended interviews of students, teachers, and parents. The results of the study

were reported by examining commonalities among the experiences of the students being studied.

 Keywords: family, parents, involvement, students, achievement

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my wife Jaime. She has been my rock throughout this entire journey. She has been with me through thick and thin. I am everything I am because of her. Her love, her dedication, her support help me be a better man. I also dedicate this to my amazing children Finnegan, Grayson, Sawyer, and Sterling. Without the love, understanding, and support of my family, I would have never been able to complete this work.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

Effective parental involvement has positive outcomes on individual student success in school (Jeynes, 2005). The legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) was originally developed to help decrease a widening achievement gap among specific subgroups of students. After years of implementation, the achievement gap continues to widen. Wagner (2008) asserted, "There is mounting evidence that, as a nation, we are not making any progress toward solving the very problem the No Child Left Behind law was designed to address" (p. 72). Bandura's (1977, 2002) Social Cognitive Theory purported individual learning is interconnected with social relationships and interactions have a strong result on educational outcomes. Bodovski (2010) explained this is demonstrated by experiences, links, and interactions within the home and interactions with individuals that include parents, family, teachers, and community. Marzano (2007) stated there must be valuable and meaningful connections and partnerships between the school and home community in order for students to thrive academically.

The home relationship has proven to contribute to a major impact on positive school outcomes (Desforges, 2003). Nechyba et al. (1999) identified parental involvement, within the community and at school, could lead to higher student achievement. Modeling, learning, and interaction at home is reinforced by a caring and involved parent or parents as delineated by Noddings (2002). Sacker et al. (2002) also concluded social class of parents plays a factor in student achievement outcomes. Almost every major facet of parental involvement yielded higher results in student achievement (Jeynes, 2005). Parental involvement positively impacted children's educational experiences.

Parental involvement is evident in various forms. Parental goal setting, for example, contributed to an increase in student outcomes (Kyle, 2011). Oftentimes, parental goals are collaborated in conjunction with teacher goals, although this is not always the case. Rath et al. (2008) concluded parental involvement leads to pro-social and improved behavior. The work of Huang and Mason (2008) identified three key aspects to parental involvement: (a) The need for affiliation, (b) the need for power, and (c) the need for achievement. Parents of English Language Learners (ELL), when promoting retention of the Heritage Language (HL), were involved in the educational process (Brown, 2011). Wanat (2010) found schools must be careful and deliberate in developing relationships, as they can sometimes be more of a deterrent than contributing factor to increased parental involvement. While this research does not suggest parental involvement should be decreased, it does suggest parental involvement is not a panacea that can be easily applied in all situations. It merely is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Despite ample research connecting home and school relationships, as it relates to academic achievement of students, there are some students who continue to excel and achieve despite lack of parental involvement. There is a gap in the literature that is unable to explain the phenomenon of student academic success despite lack of parental involvement. Often, schools cannot control the level and degree of parental involvement. By gaining an understanding of how some students achieve on their own, schools may help support and promote student achievement even when there is lack of parental involvement.

Situation to Self

The motivation behind this study is to gain an understanding of how particular students achieve academic success despite lack of parental involvement. As the researcher, I am interested in taking an epistemological approach in order to better understand how students tap

into their own individual potential for learning and success. I will also apply a constructivist

approach as the research is conducted. This will allow for information to be garnered as it relates

to individual ability, achievement, motivation, and success.

Problem Statement

The problem of the study is the lack of parental involvement for students that despite this

lack exhibit signs of academic success. Academic success, for the purpose of this study, is

defined as showing grade level proficiency on Math and Reading assessments and receiving

grades of 'B' or higher on semester and/or year-end report cards. Considerable research supports

the need for parental involvement to promote student success. However, there is a gap in the

research to show how students can still exhibit academic success despite lack of parental

involvement.

High achievement of students despite lack of parental involvement occurs among some

students. These students continue to excel academically even when there is little to no parental

involvement. While much research supports the effectiveness of parental involvement in

fostering student achievement, there is a gap in the research to explain the phenomenon of high

achievement of students despite lack of parental involvement. This study will investigate reasons

which explain why some students still succeed academically even when their parents lack

involvement.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover how students achieve

academic success despite the lack of parental involvement for eight students in grades 4-6 at

Riverton Elementary School.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it will strive to identify factors which promote student success despite lack of parental involvement. The results of this study will add dimension and understanding to the existing research. The results of this study can contribute to existing research by providing educators with more information which can support and promote student academic achievement when parental involvement is limited or nonexistent.

Furthermore, the results can have great impact to both the school where the study is conducted and to other schools as well. First, it will have direct benefit and application to the school of study and its general population. Results from this study can add insight to teachers and staff providing a better understanding of how students achieve despite the lack of parental involvement. Once this phenomenon is better understood, it can be applied to other students in similar schools and scenarios. Future studies could also be applied to schools on a larger scale thus identifying commonalities among those studied.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were developed as related to Self-Determination Theory. Self-Determination Theory was greatly developed by Deci and Ryan (1991). Self-Determination Theory examines natural or intrinsic tendencies within individuals and how this relates to self-efficacy. The research questions for this study were designed to identify what attributes the research participants have which contribute to their academic success despite the lack of parental involvement.

The following research questions will form the basis of this study:

1. What is it about highly achieving students' personality, work ethic, and habits that make them achieve despite the lack of parental involvement?

2. What habits do these highly achieving students possess?

3. What attitudes do these highly achieving students exhibit?

4. What motivates these students to succeed?

5. What obstacles do these students overcome?

Research Plan

I will conduct a qualitative study implementing phenomenological research methods. Eight students will be identified through the use of the Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS). This validated tool is designed to identify parents that have limited or no involvement in their child's educational process. Data will be collected through the use of the Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS), classroom observations, field notes, teacher interviews, parent interviews, student interviews, and student records. It is possible during the implementation of this study student participants might also be identified as those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This will not be a requirement sought after when looking to identify participants. However, it may become evident as a commonality or emerging theme among the student participants of the research study.

All instruments in the study will follow guidelines and procedures suggested by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007). These methods will include observations and individual interviews of students, teachers, and parents. Commonalties will be identified among the participants by analyzing data and identifying the core of common experiences. Specifically, I will identify emergent themes from the data and commonalities among the research participants.

Delimitations and Limitations

To identify the key phenomenon of achieving students despite the lack of parental involvement, the research will be limited to eight students. In order to identify these students, the

Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS) will be used. This survey will help identify parents who are not involved in their child's education for a variety of reasons. Another delimitation of this study is the study will utilize students in grades 4-6. Grades 4-6 were selected in order to identify factors that contribute to success of younger students. If these factors can be identified, they can be further developed for older students in other schools. One limitation of this study is the age of the students being studied. Once research is conducted, it will be beneficial to conduct further research with students at the middle, high, and college levels to look for similar commonalities that build from year to year.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Numerous examples of research support parental involvement as promoting student success in school (Desforges, 2003). However, there is a lack of consensus on what type of parental involvement is best. There are differing attitudes and opinions between the school and home that determine which type of parental is most ideal. Also, there are many factors which inhibit parents from being able to play an active role in the educational process of their child. Some parents are limited in their involvement due to work, family, or other demands. Other parents lack the skills and ability to play an effective role in their children's education. At times, children excel academically even though there is a lack of parental involvement. This study will investigate from the viewpoint of highly achieving elementary school students which aspects in their lives contribute most to their academic success.

Parental involvement is an important factor in contributing to student achievement and success (Desforges, 2003). The author explained:

> Of the many forms of parental involvement, it is the 'at-home' relationships and model-
> ing of aspirations which play the major part in impact on school outcomes. Involvement
> works indirectly on school outcomes by helping the child build pro-social, pro-learning
> self-concept and high educational aspirations. (p. 86)

Many parents are willingly and effectively involved in the educational process of their children. However, there are a variety of parents, who for various reasons cannot, nor will not, elect to play a participatory role in their child's education. Some parents may have limitations due to work schedules or other factors. Other parents may be limited in their own background knowledge and education thus feeling inadequate to assist their children academically. While

schools can work to increase parental and familial involvement, this can often be met with challenge and opposition. Nonetheless, many students thrive in an academic setting despite the lack of parental involvement. There is a gap in literature to explain this phenomenon. Desforges (2003) explained "The evidence of impact on pupils' achievement and attainment is patchy, ad hoc, mainly subjective and impossible to relate to the parent/teacher/child activities" (p. 69). Furthermore, Jeynes (2005) ascertained parental participation does not have strong results related to student achievement. Although parental involvement can be effective, it is by no means a true predictor of student academic outcomes.

Some students succeed academically despite the lack of parental involvement. Why do some students succeed even when there is a lack of parental involvement? However, there is not sufficient evidence to suggest how these students succeed. For the purpose of this study, academic success will be defined as reaching grade level proficiency on Reading and Math assessments and receiving year-end grades of "B" or higher.

This will be a phenomenological study. Creswell (2013) stated a phenomenological study focuses on the experiences of a group of individuals and attempts to identify common experiences. Patton (2001) also explained a phenomenological study looks to identify the textural description and structural description of the research participants. Specifically, the textural description seeks to explain the "what" and the structural description seeks to understand the "how" of the phenomenon. The literature review will identify recent research findings that support the importance of specific environmental factors which promote student learning and success.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study will be Bandura's (2002) Social Cognitive Theory. Social Cognitive Theory states human development is related to environmental factors such as family and other relationships. Moreover, children are shaped by their environment and models that they observe within their environment. Often, these models are observed in the home. Individuals also observe these models via peers, teachers, and others within their home and school environments. These models and experiences shape their outlook and can affect student behavior and performance. Furthermore, Social Cognitive Theory purports effective modeling leads to positive outcomes.

Piaget's (1977) Cognitive Development theories suggest all individuals grow and progress along a continuum of development. However, individuals move along this continuum at different paces and at different intervals. Because individuals progress at different rates, it is important to recognize unique strengths and growth. For the purpose of this study, this is relevant because it is possible students within the study are achieving at higher levels because they have advanced further along the continuum. Some of these factors may be influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Factors which contribute to students moving further along the continuum will be identified and analyzed.

Review of the Literature

Parental involvement promotes student success (Desforges, 2003). Often schools try to create or promote parental involvement when it is lacking or insufficient. Sometimes, there is a disconnect between the type of involvement that schools deem most effective and the type or level of involvement that parents themselves are able or willing to provide. This review of literature will identify a variety of components related to parental involvement. While

conducting this literature review, specific themes were identified relating to parental involvement. This literature review will analyze details within the identified themes.

Parental Involvement Is Not Always Effective

While much research concludes parental involvement leads to student success, there is also research which is inconclusive about which types of parental involvement are most effective. While some research suggests a two-parent home is most effective in contributing to student success, other researchers have found the role of the mother to be the most important. For example, Annear and Yates (2010) concluded the biggest factor which contributes to student success is the autonomy of mothers. In this regard, parents can have strong influence on how their children view school and the attitudes associated with learning. These researcher also concluded that students of mothers with high autonomy support typically enjoyed school more. Restrictive parenting had an opposite effect. When restrictive parenting was present among mothers and fathers, students increased in negative emotional behaviors. These behaviors included most notably loneliness and unhappiness. Suleyman and Oguz (2013) also concluded that mothers play an important role in promoting student success. They found that mothers were more likely to assist their children with homework and other school tasks. Furthermore, the researchers explained restrictive parenting often leads to more emotional problems in students, which in turn affects academic progress.

One study reviewed the involvement of parents at home and how this affects their child's attitudes toward Science achievement. Other studies have shown a link between parental involvement and student interest in academic subject areas. Shumow, Lyutykh, and Schmidt (2011) were unable to provide a correlation between parental involvement and increased interest and success in Science instruction. This study did verify parents provided a powerful

contribution, yet the results of the study were unable to suggest parental involvement did in fact increase academic success. While many research studies prove the effective of parental involvement, studies such as this one suggest that parental involvement is not an easy solution when addressing issues of student achievement.

One area in which the school and home can sometimes differ is the approach or methods used regarding parental involvement in school. Pryor and Pryor (2009) concluded there is a disparity between teacher attitudes and parent attitudes regarding school involvement. Teacher methods and parent methods differ in determining what type of parental involvement is best. This creates a divide in implementation of what type of parental involvement therefore takes place. This disparity exists between how teachers think parents should be involved and methods of involvement that actually lead to improved student success. Even though schools have expertise in the educational process, they are not always correct in determining what type of parental involvement is most effective to promote increased student achievement. Mattingly et al. (2002) analyzed 41 studies which evaluated K-12 parental involvement programs. They concluded parental involvement programs lack evidence to prove they are effective in raising student achievement.

Wanat (2010) discovered some schools deter parental involvement by putting limitations on the type of parental involvement that was allowed. Sometimes, schools can be a deterrent to parental involvement. Even though schools are aware certain parental involvement increases student performance and success, schools often hinder the amount or type of parental involvement. Deterring parental involvement is observed in terms of limitations on classroom and school visits. Parents needed to receive prior approval to be allowed to participate in certain ways within the school walls. Placing restrictions on parental involvement can lead to parental

dissatisfaction and parents get discouraged by having to wait to get approval for certain activities, while being excluded from other activities altogether. Interestingly, the author found satisfactory social networks led to increased home-school relationships. Outside interaction and networking proved a more effective factor in increasing student achievement and outcomes.

Another factor which helps to increase student achievement is related to the education level of the parents. While difficult to predict parental involvement at home, Shumow, Lyutykh, and Schmidt (2011) found the education level of parents was a good predictor of student academic outcomes. As the educational level of parents increased, so did the academic success of their students. Also, as the educational level increased, parental involvement also increased. The study also reviewed outcomes of students who receive free and reduced lunch. They ascertained students that receive free or reduced lunch were less likely to have high parental involvement. This suggests socioeconomic status can determine the level to which parents are involved in the educational process of their child.

Kyle (2011) identified the complicated nature of the home-school relationship. The goals parents have for their children were often complex. These were not always congruent with the goals schools had for the students. This inconsistency resulted in hesitancy on the parent's part regarding school involvement. Furthermore, because many parents had negative experiences in school themselves they often viewed their child's school in an unwelcome light. Therefore, parents may want to be involved in their child's educational process but are inhibited by their own negatives biases and experiences. Schools can create environments which promote the ability for parents to overcome the negative experiences and histories that they encountered when they were in school.

Parental involvement does not always necessarily lead to increased academic achievements. El Nokali, Bachman, and Votruba-Drzal (2010) studied the effects of parental involvement as it relates to academic and social development. Their study concluded parental involvement did not lead to an increase in student achievement. They concluded parental involvement did have a positive effect on student behavior and social skills. The authors expounded, "Increases in parent involvement were largely unrelated to individual growth in academic skills, regardless of whether parents or teachers reported on parent involvement practices" (p. 996). Furthermore, there was no evidence of student growth over time as it relates to parental involvement. They concluded there were no significant associations between parental involvement and student achievement. Thus, parental involvement can indeed have positive effects on student outcomes, however parental involvement was not found to be a predictor of increased student achievement.

More students are being raised in single-parent families or fragile families. A fragile family is defined as a family where the parents were unmarried at the time of birth. McLanahan and Beck (2010) studied the effects of parental relationships in fragile families. The authors indicated many parents are choosing to raise children but often do not remain together as a couple. Most parents worked together for the benefit of the child within the first few years. The researchers found that eventually, relationships and commitments fall apart. This affected the degree and level to which both parents were involved in childrearing and also parental involvement in the educational process. Conflict between parents perpetuated a situation where one parent avoided involvement in the educational process because of the possible conflict when interacting with the other biological parent. In conclusion, this suggests some parents may avoid parental involvement due to constraints which exist within interpersonal relationships within the

family dynamic. Schools should be sensitive of these issues and needs and offer ways to overcome this barrier.

Useful Parental Involvement

It is important to identify what types of parental involvement are conducive to increased student achievement. Boncana and Lopez (2010) concluded parental involvement was a key factor associated with student achievement. However, there must be purpose and specificity to the type of parental involvement which is most effective. Parental involvement must be calculated and meaningful in order to have a long lasting effect on student achievement. Specifically, parental involvement must be present for long periods of time (Jacobs & Harvey, 2005). The researchers also concluded parental involvement increased the success of students of low socioeconomic backgrounds. In order to achieve this, parents were involved in ways which were appropriate, meaningful, and continuous.

One key aspect in which parents can provide meaningful help and support is through assistance with homework. This type of assistance can be directly related to homework assistance. Parents can also promote student success by creating an environment that expects and requires the completion of homework on a daily basis. Suleyman and Oguz (2013) studied effective levels of parental involvement among primary school students. They concluded that parental involvement was most effective when related to task such as communication, creating enabling setting within the home, supporting emotional development, and finally assistance with homework. While schools may see a need for parental involvement through volunteering within the school building, these researchers found parental involvement to be low. This was likely due to factors related to the socioeconomic status of the families. In this study, parental involvement

related to influence that the parent has in the home was more effective than volunteering within the school itself.

Other researchers also recognized the importance that parental influence and support played regarding homework. When parents promoted an expectation regarding homework, this helped students be more successful in completing their homework on a daily basis. Vera et al. (2012) found that parents can monitor homework and other home routines in a variety of ways. Direct supervision is likely the most effective way in which parents can monitor student completion of homework. However, there are many parents that are limited due to economic factors and cannot always be in the home to monitor their child's progress. Job scheduled can also limit the influence that a parent may have on their child regarding homework. Vera et al. (2012) found other ways in which parents can monitor their child's progress. The researchers explained, "For children who have no such readily available supervision, schools may want to reach out to their parents to inform them of after school tutoring opportunities either sponsored by the school or available in the community" (p. 195). The researchers also concluded that parents can promote individual student success by asking their child about their school day and their daily progress.

Goal setting with parents is one way in which parental involvement can have positive outcomes. Specifically, parental goal setting has been found effective in promoting graduation rates among students. Kyle (2011) studied goal setting among parents and found when parents set meaningful goals for children related to high school graduation, children's chances to graduate increased. This was readily prevalent wen parents set goals for their children instead of the children setting goals for themselves. Also, as parents participated in parent leadership opportunities children were more apt to participate in future leadership opportunities

(Cunningham, Kreider, Ocon, 2012). One conclusion that can be drawn from these experiences is that as parents took on more roles of leadership, their children were more likely to follow their example and take part in leadership activities too. Students were more apt to accept leadership opportunities when they witnessed their parents working in similar capacities.

School climate was an important element to consider when hoping to increase parental involvement. The climate of the school greatly affected the level in which parents were involved in the educational process. When schools created environments that were more comfortable for parents and families, parents were more apt to increase their involvement in educational processes. As the school looked to increase and improve parental involvement, the school indirectly influenced socioeconomic variables. McCoach et al. (2010) found school climate and teacher-related variables influenced sociodemographic variables.

Parent partnerships can be a key element to promoting the success of students by increasing parental involvement. While Desforges (2003) confirmed that parent involvement is directly linked to student achievement, more research is needed to determine what types of program promote the best types of success. Other researchers found parent workshops to be effective in instructing parents how to best assist with mathematics assistance in the home. Marshall and Swan (2010) studied the effectiveness of workshops designed to instruct parents in these methods. They concluded, "Carefully constructed parent workshops have the potential to break down barriers between the school and home, particularly in an area such as mathematics where adults often lack confidence" (p. 30). An important factor to consider when forming parent partnership is to determine what training is necessary. Most, if not all parents will require specific levels of training. While the training may be a simple and streamlined process, it is important that it occur. This burden rests upon the school to determine what type of training is

most effective and in what format it is to be delivered. The researchers further concluded that increased support from parents will lead to positive academic outcomes for their children.

As virtual learning increased, parents were presented with new challenges as to how this changed the educational needs of their students. In virtual learning scenarios, the home and the school relationship lines are blurred. Home is now certainly an extension of the school. Liu, Black, Algina, Cavanaugh, and Dawson (2010) asserted the importance of parental involvement in virtual learning environments. Parental involvement was especially important because virtual learning lacked the physical presence of a teacher. Within the environment of virtual learning, parents must be involved or student academic progress will be greatly jeopardized.

Home visits also proved to be an effective method in improving and increasing parental involvement. Stetson, Stetson, Sinclair, and Nix (2012) found home visits to be effective in building home—school relationships. When conducted, school visits helped improve the home-school relationship. The researchers also found teacher-student interaction improved as well. Teachers reported an increase in positive behavior, work habits, and achievement. By developing stronger interpersonal relationships between the school and home, student achievement increased. Some research suggested although the home visit had powerful applications, outcomes were still inconclusive. Kyle (2011) expounded family visits were a useful tool in developing relationships between teachers and families. They however were inadequate in promoting improvements in academic work within the classroom. Increased home-school relationships did not support an increase in student academic outcomes.

While conducting home visits and interacting with parents, it was vital to understand the background and culture of specific families. Payne (2005) suggested many times, schools must take the first step in forging meaningful relationships. Woolly and Bowen (2007) found

relationships were reinforced at home. When schools were a part of this relationship, the effectiveness and strength of the relationships increased. When dealing with home visits, many teachers and other school employees are apprehensive about the process. By delineating the parameters and expectations of the home visits, educators are better prepared and understand the benefit that this had on student achievement. Many teacher preparation programs have helped identify the benefits of the home-school relationship. Teacher preparation programs promoted success at teaching the benefits of the home-school relationship and instilled this important aspect within the teaching attitudes of newly trained teachers (Warren, Noftle, Ganley, & Quintanar, 2011). Stetson, Stetson, Sinclair, and Nix (2012) found home visits built strong allies among the parent participants. While the relationship between school and home improved, no evidence was provided that student academic outcomes increased.

Although student performance was often measured in terms of academic achievement, other factors were weighed and considered when looking at parental involvement. Eyler et al. (2006) found successful parental involvement was measured in three areas. First, success was measured through good student participations. Second, community collaboration helped improve parental involvement. Finally, as parental involvement increased, so did progress toward cultural change. The authors also found family and community building also contributed to increased student achievement. Finally, student perception of parental involvement increased academic performance. The greater the perceived parental involvement, the greater academic outcomes. There was also a marked decrease in classroom disruptive behavior. Wong (2008) elaborated that perceived parental autonomy and involvement related to an increase in academic performance. The role of student autonomy will discussed further in the literature review.

Specifically, it is possible to involve parents in outreach programs and parental training. Because parents are often unsure of how to take the first step, it is important to steer them into training opportunities are meaningful. Community outreach programs can help engage parents (Cho & DeCastro-Ambrosetti, 2005). These programs can arm parents with specific ways in which their involvement can help increase student achievement. By teaching the importance of the role of parents, they become more engaged in parental processes (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Specific strategies can help parents know ways in which they can best support and help their children. Kuzin, De Pedro, Smith, and Wohlstetter (2011) found effective strategies to include wrap around services, incentives, and contracts.

Understanding Racial Backgrounds

Racial backgrounds can present a variety of challenges to parents. Parental involvement can lead to an increase in graduation rates. Students of different racial backgrounds exhibited an increase of graduation rates with higher parental involvement (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007). Sometimes, families of different racial backgrounds can also be included in categories of low socioeconomic backgrounds. Parental involvement among these students is also important. Henry, Cavanaugh, and Outing (2011) found parental involvement of students of racial backgrounds, in this case African-American families, and low socioeconomic status increased in student achievement and academic outcomes. Furthermore, parental involvement in low-income, African-American population supported improved student behavior and increased pro-social behaviors (Rath, et al., 2008).

Specific themes have been identified when looking at parent and child literacy programs. Huang and Mason (2008) found three themes when looking at a literacy program involving parents and children. The first theme is the importance of developing relationships. As

relationships were fostered, parents were more comfortable being involved in certain academic settings. The second theme is the need of parents to influence children's learning. When parents feel a connection to their child's learning, their involvement increase. The third theme is the notion that education is the key to a child's success. When parents have a deeper appreciation for the importance of academic success for their child, they recognize the importance of education and how it can help increase future achievement.

Historically, parents have encountered obstacles which impede parental involvement. Many of these obstacles were unintended consequences of school processes and procedures. Williams and Sanchez (2013), in their research, concluded there are four descriptive categories which create barriers for inner-city African-American parents. They define the four barriers as: (a) Time poverty, (b) lack of access, (c) lack of financial resources, and (d) lack of awareness. They suggest schools can take these considerations into context while planning school-based programs. In these circumstances, parents do not lack involvement by choice but rather by limitations they often cannot overcome.

Sometimes racial backgrounds create barriers between the school and the home. Perceptions and attitudes of parents of certain race groups may not mesh with the expectation of the school. Wang (2008) studied family-school relations of Chinese parents in the United States. The researcher found even though Chinese parents had specific attitudes and expectations regarding the role of education in their home country, these attitudes often changed drastically once applied to the United States' educational system. The author observed parents, who were once strongly connected to the educational process in China, became disconnected once in the United States. Specific factors led to this divide: Time, jobs, language, and cultural differences. Furthermore, Chinese parents viewed American schools as less competitive than Chinese

schools. Wang further explains Chinese parents view American schools as egalitarian and mostly free of competition. They viewed parent-teacher relationships less important than in China. Such strong misconceptions create significant barriers to the school and home relationship. While it may appear to the school some parents are disconnected, it is in fact the contrary. These parents lack involvement because they feel they do not need to be involved. In fact, they are involved in other ways.

Another group greatly affected by racial barriers were Latino students. Of all major ethnic groups, it was startling to note Latinos are the least educated (Gandara, 2010). Perhaps this can be attributed to parents of Latino students regularly being limited in their own educational experiences. While this ethnic group benefited from increased parental involvement, they were limited in both education and resources. Therefore, it was important to reach out to parents in ways which are culturally appropriate. It was not enough to prepare students for higher education, but to also prepare their parents for what was to come. The author concluded the primary reasons Latino students do not complete college degrees is due to a lack of understanding of how to prepare for college or even the importance of attending college at all. Parents must be informed about how to help their children and what their future opportunities mean to them.

Understanding Language Barriers

Language barriers presented another hurdle to surpass when forging a strong home-school relationship. There were ways in which this challenge could be overcome. This could be overcome through increased time spent in the United State and increasing English language ability (Turney & Kao, 2009). Tied with language barriers, parents often worked hard to maintain the Heritage Language (HL). Maintaining HL was most effective when parents were

involved in and supported the process (Brown, 2011). Schools should seek to enhance and encourage maintenance of the HL. Different language backgrounds and cultures view the importance of education differently. Lim (2012) found Korean parents understood the importance of education for advancement but they were often perceived as not as involved as other parents. Parents were often perceived as not as involved as they could be. However, when examined more closely, parental involvement may in fact have been at a deeper level than originally observed.

Lack of parental involvement can be perpetuated due to limitations in language abilities of parents. Jung (2011) also found barriers existed for parents from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. Specifically, the researcher studied parental participation and the use of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Regarding parents' underlying values, Jung, explains parents maintained a certain distance from school professionals in order to nurture and maintain good relationships on their children's behalf. Sometimes, CLD parents found resistance from the school when they sought to be more involved in the IEP process. Parents in turn felt isolated in this process and became more withdrawn. The author expounded, many parents experienced emotions of isolation and frustration as it related to feeling welcomed. This perpetuated attitudes upon the school where they interpret parental interaction to be distanced or cold when in fact it was such due to school attitudes. Furthermore, when parents were limited in their English proficiency this exacerbated negative interactions and communications. There was a need for effective interpreters in order for parents to have had a clear understanding of the IEP process. The author purported improperly trained interpreters also hindered communication because ineffective translators often, failed to include key issues and opinions of parents as

documents are translated. This knowingly or inadvertently perpetuated a divide between the school and home.

School Beliefs and Attitudes Can Shape and Promote Parental Involvement

The school itself has much control over how parental involvement shaped student success. Nonetheless, the school should be methodical and deliberate in this approach. Barnyak and McNelly (2009) concluded even though teachers and administrators had strong beliefs about parental involvement, often their practice was incongruent with their beliefs. The authors concluded schools should do a better job at recognizing parent involvement practices to better create stronger partnerships with parents. They further concluded just as student self-efficacy was a major factor in determining student success, so too must there be a focus on teacher and administrator self-efficacy. The authors stated by developing stronger self-efficacy among teachers and administrators, this could help to increase and improve parental involvement.

When the school and home shared different views relating to parental involvement, the home and school relationship was weakened. Patel and Stevens (2010) studied a similar focus within the context of middle school. The researcher's hypothesized social ties were weakened when there were differing views between parents and teachers. When attitudes and beliefs differed between the school and the family there was a breakdown in communication and understanding. Ultimately, this led to a breakdown in parental involvement. Parental involvement and school interactions broke down due to lack of communication and interaction between school and home.

When teachers and administrators better understood the lives of parents and students, parental involvement was more meaningful. Bartel (2009) conducted a study of parental involvement of Title I students and parents. The results of the study indicated teachers needed to

better understand the lives of their students and parents. When there was a clearer understanding of this, parents were more likely to be involved in the educational process. Teachers and school administrators can foster and build more effective parental involvement strategies through effort and diligence. Time, resources, and knowledge are requisite for successful collaboration.

Another study looked at a low cost program that schools could implement to promote more effective parental involvement. Bennett-Conroy (2012) studied a low-cost intervention program to increase parental involvement at school and at home. The researcher concluded that a low-cost intervention program could be implemented to help promote student success. Because schools sometimes underestimate the degree to which parents are willing to be involved, programs such as this one can help parents to have more involvement in student academic success. Benner-Conroy reported, "Most parents have a parent involvement role construction, but schools can assist in overcoming limitations related to self-efficacy, invitations, and perceived lack of respect, care, and trustworthiness" (p. 108). This study concludes that inexpensive and simple programs can bridge the partnership between school and the home.

Limitations to Parental Involvement

There were many factors to explain the lack of parental involvement. For some parents, it was a conscious choice to not be involved in the educational process of their child. For other parents, there were circumstances beyond their control which inhibited their ability, willingness, or resources to be involved in educational processes. Parents did not play an active role in the educational process for many reasons. These included limitations in work schedules, transportation issues, negative attitudes about their own school experiences, lack of educational background to assist with homework, and other factors.

In a recent study in Abu Dhabi, the researchers Hourani, Stringer, and Baker (2012) looked at constraints and limitations of parents in primary schools. They noted at times there were perceived barriers to parental involvement which may be misinterpreted. They explained in Latino culture, parents are responsible for nurturing and instilling morals and good behavior. This may be contradictory to methods in which educators deemed appropriate for student achievement and success. The researchers also concluded it was a difficult challenge to build relationships. They expounded by stating it was difficult to build effective relationships whether cultural differences exist or not. Many times there was a vast divide between a teacher and school's cultural divide and that of the home. Another limitation identified for inhibiting open communication and dialogue was a lack of time for informal opportunities to build relationships and proper communication of the roles of educators and parents. Specifically, the authors identified four themes which contributed to constraints to parental involvement: Expectations of roles and responsibilities for parental involvement; communication; sociocultural contexts; and provisions. Regarding expectations and roles, it was evident parents and educators were in agreement in ways in which the school and home could increase parental involvement, yet there was a disconnect which promoted a system of blame indicating one side of the relationship was not involved in the process sufficiently. Although many methods of communication existed between the school and home, there were still constraints evident within these processes. The authors identified barriers to communication as language barriers, lack of understanding of policies and procedures, and also how to initiate. Just because the school employed multiple methods of communication did not guarantee effective communication was actually taking place. Follow up communication and conversations were necessary to check for understanding and alignment of goals and initiatives.

Sociocultural contexts must also be taken into account when understanding the constraints between the school and home relationship. Hourani, Stringer, and Baker (2012) identified barriers created by sociocultural context. Specifically, the constraints which acted on the school included gender segregation in schools, understanding the roles of mothers and fathers, and issues related to divorce and separation. The school was not aware of these contexts and how to navigate them thus creating yet another barrier to increased and effective parental involvement.

Another limitation to parental involvement is caused by limitations due to work schedules and dynamics. Some might argue that schools should be more methodical about providing after-school care for children of working parents. While beneficial, there are other alternatives to providing daycare options for working parents. Some research suggests that employers should take the lead in offering alternatives to after-school care for working parents. Christensen, Schneider, and Butler (2011) argue that the workplace, and not the school, should take the lead role in offering flexible schedules and after-school care to support student learning and academic success. The researchers also presented two flexible work practices that benefit parental involvement in school. They suggested that employers should offer flexible schedules so that parent and student schedules could better coincide. The second work practice is to offer short periods of time off that would allow parents to attend parent conferences and other school events. They referenced other companies that have instituted such policies and where worker satisfaction and employee retention was higher. This perspective is different than placing the typical burden of parental involvement on the school's shoulders. The workplace, according to these researchers, can have a much greater impact and outcome on parental involvement and student success.

The relationship between parents and teachers has been well established to show that students are more successful when there is strong collaboration between these two entities. The burden rests upon the shoulders of the school and the teachers to promote and cultivate these relationships. A study of first-year and kindergarten teachers was conducted in New Zealand and identified the importance of training teachers in how to build these relationships. Mahmood (2013) identified four challenges in which schools could overcome barriers in order to promote these relationships. These included parents lacking reciprocity, challenges to building relationships, power-dependence, and the social identity of the new teachers themselves. Mahmood concluded, "The findings reveal that, despite the new teachers' efforts, some parents are not responsive. The successful functioning of this partnership requires active participation and willingness of not only the teacher but parents as well" (p. 55). It is simply not enough for the school or teacher to pursue a one-sided partnership. Unless there is reciprocity and buy in from the parents, the home-school partnership will fall flat.

Finally, another category in which parents became inhibited in their ability to be involved in their child's education related to provisions which schools employ. Many times parents simply did not understand specific aspects of curriculum and pedagogy. Furthermore, schools were ineffective in effectively communicating and educating parents to these provisions. Hourani, Stringer, and Baker (2012) identified although schools employed certain provisions, they were done ineffectively. They identified budget and staffing promoted a lack of organization for parental involvement. Although parent workshops were organized, they often were funded inadequately and were not delivered in parents' home languages. Also, parents were not involved as stakeholders in decision-making processes.

Lack of Parental Action

What might be considered apathy or lack of involvement, can in fact sometimes be classified as agency. Schools may consider a parent's lack of involvement is due to inaction when in fact it may be purposeful by design. Schnee and Bose (2010) observed some parents chose to not be involved purposefully. They found parental null actions sprouted from two very specific circumstances. First, parents sometimes choose null actions to instill self-reliance strategies. Parents hope this strategy will result in their children becoming more self-reliant. Second, parents fail to act in certain situations in fear it may inhibit their children's attainment of goals. Thus, lack of parental involvement appeared to many, including the school, to be indicative of apathy or disinterest. From the parent viewpoint, this was in fact the opposite. Parents saw themselves as involved, just not in the exact ways in which the school expected them to be.

Schools often have the perception that parents lack involvement in the educational process. While this may seem the case on the observational level, there is often more to the story that remains unseen. Parents find other ways to get involved that are not usually visible to school representatives. One study found that parents of Latino students used other alternatives to be involved. Poza, Brooks, and Valdes (2014) noticed that schools often complain about the indifference towards education that Latino immigrant parents possess. This attitude is often perpetuated because these parents have low visibility within the school walls and often lack face-to-face communication with teachers. The researchers found that while these parents lacked visible involvement, they in fact were involved in other ways significant to student learning and success. The researchers identified three key behaviors these parents possessed. First, these parents were good at asking questions about school. These parents were also adept at attending

events, mostly outside of school, that supported child learning. Finally, these parents worked to alter or augment educational outcomes so that their children would be afforded more educational opportunities than they were during their school experience. These parents do not opt out because of indifference. Conversely, they are involved and concerned about the educational process of their children. Their approach and methods are often unaligned with what the school might consider most important.

The Role of Student Autonomy

What happened when parents were not involved? Sometimes this was due to parental disengagement. Parents also reported being restricted to educational involvement due to work or other factors. Other times, students themselves exercised autonomy. Students often initiated this process. Desforges (2003) concluded children discouraged and evaded their parents' involvement. Children discouraged this involvement in order to maintain autonomy and privacy. What role did student autonomy play when there was a lack of parental involvement? There were students academically successful despite the lack of parental involvement. There however was a lack of research which explained how these students were able to thrive without necessary support from home.

Teachers can work to promote autonomy among their students. In fact, as autonomy grows, so too does student success. Oguz (2013) suggested, "Autonomy support to be provided by teachers in learning environments could help students develop autonomous learner behaviors" (p. 2189). While initially teachers must model and teach how to develop autonomy, students will eventually become proficient to a point where they grow in their own individual autonomy. As students grow in their autonomy they in turn become more independent and successful. This is especially vital at the elementary school level. The earlier in which a student can learn and

develop autonomous behaviors, the more likely they are to cultivate, develop, and retain the ability to act autonomously.

While some research suggests student success is related to student motivation, there are conflicting results. Coleman and McNeese (2009) studied the importance of student motivation and student success. Their study concluded parental involvement was important only to a limited degree in which it promoted student motivation thus promoting student success. In a study of 5th grade students, they found parental involvement actually had a negative impact on student achievement. The authors explained the inverse relationships between parental involvement and student motivation was best explained by the age and maturity level of the students. Thus, as students aged, student autonomy increased. At certain ages, parental involvement was no longer a factor in promoting student achievement.

Self-Determination Theory

Intrinsic motivation is a key element of self-determination. Many students find intrinsic ways in which they demonstrate motivation and other positive behaviors. Grolnick, Deci, and Ryan (1991) developed the Self-Determination Theory. This theory states individuals act in positive ways based on intrinsic motivation and the need for the attainment of knowledge and understanding. The authors identified three components to this theory which are competence, connection or relatedness, and autonomous growth. Competence refers to the need to gain mastery of a specific task and to learn a variety of different skills. Connection or relatedness explains that people need to feel connected to others or a sense of belonging. Individuals must also feel autonomous so they feel in control of their behavior, goals, and growth. The authors also suggest some individuals may have a greater propensity to this type of growth, however in

the right setting it can be achieved by anyone. Relationships and interaction with other individuals is essential to this type of growth.

As educators seek to promote intrinsic motivation among students, there are key characteristics that can be fostered and developed. While studying ways in which upper elementary schools could promote these characteristics among students, Crow (2011) identified key elements present among students that exhibited traits of intrinsic motivation. The main conclusions of this study identified commonalities among the students of the research study. First, the students demonstrated a need for play and discovery. Second, the students in this study benefitted from creativity in the classroom. Finally, non-competitiveness was another key element in the student classroom. Furthermore, this study confirmed the importance that students have a passion for learning and it also identified the importance of having a connection to relationships within the classroom. Intrinsically motivated students within this study also had commonalities regarding learning styles and learning methods. Topic interest was an important factor as was the relevance of the curriculum. These students also benefitted from working collaboratively, having choice of task, creating final products, and also enjoyed the benefit of having more autonomy related to time constraints when completing assignments.

Other key elements related to increasing self-determination among students are praise and feedback. Burnett and Mandel (2010) identified the role of praise and feedback and its importance to student success. The researchers identified two types of feedback. First, ability feedback is tied to input related to student ability. Second, effort feedback is tied to student outcomes and the effort they exert. While this study concluded that non-targeted praise was regularly used with students and teachers, this type of praise did not show to be truly effective. Burnett and Mandel explained that this method of praising is ineffective because it does not link

the praise to specific behaviors. Also, it does not link the praise to completion of tasks and assignments. The researchers concluded that educators should use more effort feedback and praise with elementary students through grade four. As students develop, they benefitted more directly from ability feedback. This was consistent among students in grades five through seven. When educators use specific types of feedback related to effort and ability, this helps increase intrinsic motivation among students.

When students are given ownership of their learning and presented with goal setting their ability to excel academically increases. Ocak and Yamac (2013) examined the relationship of self-regulated learning strategies, beliefs, attitudes, and achievement as it related to mathematics instruction among fifth grade students. Their first finding identified the importance of self-efficacy. They found that self-efficacy was a predictor of achievement in mathematics. When students had high levels of self-efficacy they achieved at higher rates. Self-regulation was also identified to have a positive role in the outcome of student mathematics achievement. Goal orientation is a concept that helps identify the reasons for conducting certain tasks. When students understood the importance for completing a task they were more likely to perform that task successfully. Related to this concept is task value or the ability to assign value to a certain task. The researchers explained, "Individual's high perception with respect to importance of task increases attitudes towards mathematics" (p. 384). Conversely, when students exhibited these characteristics at lower levels they did not excel academically.

Darner (2014) studied the effects of certain instructional elements that helped promote student aspects of Self-Determination Theory. This researcher identified three components which helped foster self-determination in science instruction. The first area was conceptualization problem sets which allowed students to categorize their learning within zones of proximal

development. This is mainly achieved by application to real problem solving. This helps create an identity of belonging or connectedness. The researcher also found that an interconnected curriculum helped the students increase in scientific understanding and were thus able to solve key environmental problems. Furthermore, this helped increase levels of competence as students learned to solve problems. The last component was socio-scientific integration which allowed the students to feel connected to each other, their communities, and the environment.

Darner (2014) offered suggestions which helped promote students' sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The first suggestion in which teachers can promote autonomy among students is to offer choices when it comes to student learning. Solutions to student learning come from within the student and not pressure from the teacher to perform a task in a certain way. This also is aligned with the best practice of differentiated instruction. Competence is increased by presenting students with educational scenarios in which their expertise and knowledge is challenged and stretched. Challenging situations for students help them to realize they are developing the necessary skills for problem solving. Finally, relatedness to learning is increased when educators make direction connection to resources within the students' environment. Case studies and other specific examples are ways in which educators can engage students in the learning process. The more educators seek to connect learning to relevant examples within a student's environment and promote components of self-determination, the more that students feel connected to their learning.

Another key element tied to Self-Determination Theory is the role that intrinsic motivation plays as related to student success. Kover and Worrell (2010) identified the importance is growing intrinsic motivation among students. Their study concluded that students developed deeper levels of intrinsic motivation when their behavior was linked to goal setting.

The researchers stressed the importance of goal setting. They suggested the effects of future goals were tied to students growing in intrinsic motivation. The researchers explained, "They argued for three types of long-term goals: Those that are both autonomously chosen and intrinsically valued, goals that are autonomously chosen but not intrinsically valued, and finally goals that are neither autonomously chosen nor personally valued" (p. 478). Long-term goals are essential to developing intrinsic motivation among students. This can be attributed to students taking ownerships for their own actions and working toward both short-term and long-term outcomes.

Resilience

Another way in which students exceled in school was attributed to resilience. Resilience may be described as the individual ability to overcome challenges and obstacles in the face of extreme hardship or difficulty. Some students were able to cultivate resilience on their own, while others learned it from those within their support systems. Parents of African-American children taught resilience through various methods. West-Olatunji, Sanders, Meta, and Behar-Horenstein (2010) suggested certain coping mechanisms were intergenerational. Resilience methods were passed down through spoken word. They expounded, "These findings suggest that African-American parents have coping mechanisms and demonstrate resilience despite systemic and personal stressors, such as poverty, marginalization by school officials, and the death of a loved one" (2010, p. 142). Certainly other students learned resilience without it being passed from a parent or a grandparent. Perhaps, these traits were learned from a teacher or other peer. Resilience in a student was present even when a parent or guardian did not seem involved to the degree in which the school should see fit.

Some studies identified that while helpful for teachers to understand the role resilience plays in students' lives, many educators are challenged with proper identification of resilience among their students. Russo and Boman (2007) conducted a study investigating teachers' ability to understand and identify resilience among their students. In this study, teachers reported high levels of understanding what resilience is and how it relates to student achievement. The teachers in this study also reported high levels of confidence related to their ability to help students build resilience. However, this study identified that most teachers were unable to identify levels of resilience among their students. This suggests a disconnect between understanding resilience and being to further cultivate resilient behaviors among students. Russo and Boman (2007) stated, "It may not necessarily follow that having an understanding of resilience means that teachers are able to distinguish resilient or vulnerable children in their classrooms" (p. 21). Knowing about resilient behaviors is not enough. Teachers must also be readily able to identify these behaviors among their students so they are better able to help cultivate growth of resilience. One major element identified in this research was the lack of training or professional development for teachers related to resilience. Although teachers had solid foundations related to aspects of resilience, further professional development could prove beneficial in helping educators better identify resilient behaviors among their students. This professional development can be delivered to help teachers have specific training that would help them better identify resilient characteristics among their children.

Studies associated with resilience among students have been careful in identifying the importance of cultivating resilience among students. Hanewald (2011) suggests the importance of differentiating between the concepts of "at risk" and "vulnerable" children. While some may consider these two terms to be interchangeable, the researcher identifies the key differences

between the two. At-risk students have one or more indicators often related to environmental factors. These can include disruptive behaviors, social or emotional challenges, learning challenges, and living in low-income families. Vulnerable students are affected by challenges related to biological, cognitive or sensory disorders. Hanewald explained, "In reviewing the definitions: Resilience is positive adaptation in the face of severe adversities; vulnerability is a feature that renders a person more susceptible to a threat" (p. 22). Therefore it is important that educators understand the difference between students that are at-risk versus those that are vulnerable to school failure and other negative outcomes. While parents can help promote resilience, educators have a major influence in cultivating these behaviors. Hanewald further concluded that teachers should seek to promote resilience of their students along a continuum. This continuum includes the domains of physical, psychological, and interpersonal growth.

Summary

In conclusion, there are a variety of studies which support the importance of parental involvement. Schools are constantly looking for new and relevant ways in which they can increase parental involvement. Nonetheless, research is inconclusive as to which type of involvement is most effective. Schools regularly believe they must be the gatekeepers when it comes to parental involvement. Often, they try to replicate programs or methods of parental involvement which have shown to promote student success and achievement. Because some students are able to achieve academically despite the lack of parental involvement, it is useful to understand how and why. This means that schools can identify other ways to engage and improve student achievement when parental involvement is limited or nonexistent.

By reviewing the literature, much research suggests parental involvement can have a positive effect on student achievement; yet the results are inconclusive. Numerous research

studies point to the importance of parental involvement and its relationship with academic achievement. However, the review of literature is unable to ascertain which type of parental involvement works best and in which educational settings. Furthermore, there are many students which are able to perform and achieve at higher levels despite the lack of parental involvement. This suggests that parental involvement is not necessary for academic achievement of students. The literature fails to explain how these students are able to succeed without this type of support.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discover what it is about highly achieving students' personality, work ethic, and habits which make them achieve academically despite lack of parental involvement. This study was a qualitative phenomenological study. A qualitative study is meaningful for studying this type of question because it helps to identify meaning and understanding as it relates to a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The results from this study can have implications on how schools can help students achieve when faced with a lack of parental involvement.

Design

This qualitative study implemented a phenomenological approach. The approach was a valid design for the study because it identified common experiences and commonalities among the highly achieving students. Creswell (2013) purported a phenomenological approach is best used when the researcher seeks to find the essence of the phenomenon being investigated. Creswell (2013) defined this approach as one which seeks to identify meaning of lived experiences shared by several individuals. This approach looked to identify "what" has been experienced and "how" it has been experienced. The eight participants of this study were all highly achieving students who were able to achieve at high academic levels even though they lacked parental involvement.

In order to adhere to ethical considerations, appropriate measures were employed to identify students for the purpose of this study. With parental permission, students were administered the Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS) survey. This survey helped identify the student participants as well as the students who were unable to be involved. Initially, a

participant letter was sent home to over 300 students in grades four through six. Students that returned permission forms were administered the Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS) survey. As students were administered this identifying survey, most of them did not meet the qualification of having a parent or guardian who lacked involvement in their educational process. Eight students were identified as having a parent who lacked involvement in their education. These eight students were chosen, from those originally surveyed, for the phenomenological study. The eight students, with parental permission, were observed in the classroom under three different educational settings. From the data related to the observations, I identified attributes and commonalities which helped perpetuate the academic success of these students. I conducted interviews with the teachers and parents of these students. Finally, I conducted interviews with the students themselves. Through these interviews and observations I was able to specifically pinpoint which habits, actions, and attitudes they possess while looking for commonalities among the student participants. Pseudonyms of parents, teachers, and students were employed during the research process.

Research Questions

The following research questions formed the basis of this study:

1. What is it about highly achieving students' personality, work ethic, and habits that make them achieve despite the lack of parental involvement?

2. What habits do these highly achieving students possess?

3. What attitudes do these highly achieving students exhibit?

4. What motivates these students to succeed?

5. What obstacles do these students overcome?

Participants

This study examined why certain students were able to achieve at high rates even though they lacked the involvement of a parent or guardian in the educational process. The study identified characteristics and attributes that these students possessed. The type of sampling employed for this study was purposeful sampling. Creswell (2013) explains the researcher selects participants to purposefully inform the phenomenon being studied. This study identified the common experiences of eight students in grades four through six. Eight highly achieving students were identified through the use of the Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS) surveys. The purpose of this survey was to first identify students that lacked parental involvement. After they were identified, the students were screened to verify they had at least a 'B' average or higher in their academic classes. The eight students were observed through classroom observations in three different settings. Interviews were conducted with the teachers of the students, their parents, and the students themselves.

Site

This study was conducted in Riverton, Virginia (a pseudonym)**.** Eight students, that attended a grades 3-6 elementary school in a suburban town in southwestern Virginia, comprised the test subjects. As reported by the Virginia Department of Education School Report Card, this school received Title I funding to assist in the remediation of reading and mathematics. Forty-four percent of the student population received free or reduced lunch services. The parents of students that received free or reduced lunch were typically working class employees or received government assistance. The population of students within this school that receive free or reduced services has grown significantly over the past ten years. This school site was chosen in order to address how schools can help close the achievement gap among students of low socioeconomic

backgrounds. The study did not limit the participant selection to only students identified from low socioeconomic backgrounds, because the data gained from this study may be transferable to students of all backgrounds. Through this research study, I gained insight that will be valuable to students of all backgrounds.

Procedures

In order to initiate this study, it was essential to complete all necessary documentation. The first step in completing this documentation was to meet with school officials to garner permission to conduct the study within the aforementioned school. Because I was the principal of the school at the time, it was not needful to receive permission at the school level. Therefore, I scheduled a meeting with the superintendent of the school system and explained my role as the researcher and shared my research proposal. I was able to successfully receive permission from the superintendent to conduct the study. I successfully completed a proposal defense with my committee. Once all approval was received, I applied for permission to conduct the study through Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). After receiving approval, I was able to conduct the research study. No data was collected until final permission was received from the IRB office. A copy of the IRB approval letter can be located in Appendix F.

After permission was received from the Liberty University IRB office, the first step in identifying participants for the study involved sending home recruitment letters to parents (Appendix G). In order to more readily identify possible participants for the study, parental agreement letters were sent home to all of the students in grades four through six. These letters were provided to the classroom teachers and sent home with the students. Informed consent forms for the teachers and parents, along with student assent forms can be found in Appendix H. As the permission forms were returned, I scheduled sessions where students were informed about

the purpose of the study. Students were given the opportunity to agree to the requirements of the study. If any student opted out, they were excused from the identification process. All students who agreed to participate in the study were administered the POPS survey. These surveys were administered by myself as the principal researcher. The surveys were collected and scored. As the surveys were scored, many of the students did not meet the qualifications of the study. Namely, many of the scored surveys identified students with parents or guardians involved in their education. One by one, certain students met the criteria of the POPS survey and were identified as qualifying students for the research study. The next step was to verify that these students were highly achieving students. As the researcher, I had permission to obtain student records to verify their grades. Ultimately, eight students were identified as students that lacked parental involvement, as verified through the scoring of the POPS survey, and also as students that were highly achieving academically.

The next step was to conduct observations of the students. These observations were conducted in various academic settings. Each student participant was observed during three different occurrences. I conducted interviews of the student participants, their parents, and their teachers. For the interview process, I used various guiding questions. A similar set of questions was employed for the interviews of the students, teacher, and parents. Both parents and teacher signed agreement forms consenting to the interview process. The interviews were recorded so they could be more easily transcribed at a later time. Once the interviews were transcribed, the recordings were deleted.

After all research was collected through classroom observations and interviews, I initiated the process to identify themes and commonalities among the student participants. This

was necessary in order to identify and establish an essence of the phenomenon of this research study. Themes were identified in chapter four and an analysis was completed in chapter five.

The Researcher's Role

I am an elementary school principal. I grew up in a small rural area of southern California. Education was highly valued. I have numerous family members that have entered the educational profession. Education has been a method for me to advance economically and socially. I lived abroad as a missionary in Brazil from the ages of 19-21. I am fluent in both Portuguese and Spanish. In my teaching experiences, I have taught English as a Second Language and Spanish at the elementary, middle, and high school levels for five years. For the past nine years, I have worked as an elementary school principal with experiences at two different elementary schools. Through my earlier experiences and those as a missionary, I have come to learn that the worth of each soul is great in the eyes of God. Education is the great equalizer. I believe all students must be given the opportunity to achieve individual success. My personal experiences and my religious beliefs shape my actions. We must see children and other individuals the way God sees them, thus recognizing their true potential.

This study was relevant to me as a researcher because I was interested in better understanding the phenomenon of highly achieving students despite the lack of parental involvement. As an educator, I have witnessed countless circumstances which have inhibited parents and guardians from having more involvement in the education of their children. This was often due to a variety of factors. Some parents were not involved because of factors beyond their control. Other parents were not involved due to poor choices on their part. Nonetheless, some students who lack parental involvement excel when most do not. This study was of interest to me

because I wanted to learn what these highly achieving students possessed and how it might be replicated.

Data Collection

A variety of methods were employed to collect data for this phenomenological study. These methods attempted to identify what it is about highly achieving students' personality, work ethic, and habits that make them achieve despite lack of parental involvement at Riverton Elementary School. Data collection methods used in this study included site selection, purposeful sampling, the POPS survey, student grade reports, and interviews conducted among the student participants with their respective teachers and parents as well (Creswell, 2013). By employing various sources of data, including observations, student interviews, teacher interviews, and parent interviews, information was triangulated to identify the common themes that became prevalent during the research study.

The Use of Surveys in Data Collection

Surveys are often used in qualitative research as a tool to identify research participants and subsequently generate data used to identify themes and commonalities among the research participants. Surveys can be used in qualitative research to move from generalities to specific ideas. Creswell (2013) explains surveys function to generalize results within a broad population. During a second phase, the researcher can use open-ended interviews to collect detailed perspectives from the participants. For this study, I employed the use of surveys to identify the research participants. Specifically the Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS) survey was used to identify possible student participants. This survey is further explained in the next section. Once student participants were initially identified, grade reports were used to verify that these same students had grades of 'B' or higher in their academic classes. As the researcher, I sought further

understanding of the phenomenon being studied by conducting observations of the identified

students and interviews of the students, parents, and teachers.

Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS) Survey

A validated survey entitled the Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS) was used to identify

the eight students in the study. A copy of the POPS survey can be found as Appendix A. The

POPS survey was developed and validated by Grolnik, Deci, and Ryan (1991).The purpose of

this scale is to assess children's perceptions as it relates to autonomy that parents provide and the

degree in which parents are involved in their children's lives. This survey was administered to all

students whose parents agreed to its administration. As the researcher, I administered the survey

to students of all who had returned parent permission forms. Once the surveys were scored, eight

students were identified for the study. Other students who took the survey, but did not meet the

qualifications were not included in the research study. Specific items within the POPS survey

focused on mother involvement and father involvement. All 22 items of the POPS were

administered. Items 1, 4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15, 18, 20, and 21 were scored on a scale of 1 to 4. Items 2,

3, 5, 6, 8, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17 19 were scored on a scale of 4 to 1. Subscale scores were computed

by averaging all items within a specific subscale. Students that identified through the scoring of

the POPS survey as having a parent that was not involved in the academic process were thus

identified as eligible participants for the study.

The POPS survey is generally used with children as young as eight years old. For the

purposes of this study, this survey was administered to students in grades 4-6. The POPS survey

was appropriate to identify students of this study because it is effective in assessing children's

perception of parental involvement in their lives (Wong, 2008). Specifically, as this relates to

the research questions, student interview questions 1, 2, and 3 were addressed by this data collection method.

Student Grade Reports

Once students were identified through the POPS survey as having parents who were not readily involved in the educational process, it became necessary to verify if these same students also met the qualifications of being highly achieving students. Grade reports were received from the school and used to determine which students were also highly achieving. In order to be considered highly achieving, students had to have grades of 'B' or higher in their academic classes. Eight students met this qualification.

Classroom Observations

After the eight student participants were identified for the study, classroom observations of the identified students were conducted. The field notes template is included as Appendix B. Creswell (2013) addressed the importance of using appropriate methods of observations. He suggested the researcher should look for a balance between a participant and nonparticipant observer. Too much involvement as a participant can lead to "human relation problems" (Creswell, 2013, p. 172). Because I was the principal of this school, I had the challenge of minimizing my involvement in the classroom during the observation process. Also, during this process I played the role of the nonparticipant observer as much as possible.

Creswell (2013) stated the researcher should incorporate important methods while conducting observations. These methods included the use of field notes, choosing optimal times for observations, and funneling information from a broad picture to a narrow picture. I incorporated the use of field notes during the observation. Specifically, I employed the use of an observation protocol as prescribed by Creswell (2013). The field notes observation protocol

included information such as the setting and the length of the activity. I also used descriptive and reflective notes as part of the classroom observation protocol. The descriptive notes recorded various events of the observation while the reflective notes were added both during and after the initial observations. The purpose of these notes was to look for commonalities and themes of student behavior as it related to the research study. These field notes were used in the data analysis when looking for commonalities among the highly achieving students.

One-on-One Interviews

I conducted one-on-one interviews with the eight student participants. After the student interviews were conducted, teachers of the eight identified students were interviewed. Finally, their parents were also interviewed. The interview protocols for student, parent, and teacher interviews can be found as appendices C, D, and E respectively in the Appendix section. The data I sought through the interview process was to answer the question, what do students do to be successful academically when they lack parental involvement? I implemented the interview protocol as prescribed in the appendices. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. During the interviews, I asked open-ended questions in order to ascertain the most important information available. Interviews began with structured interview questions with some questions being open-ended as the interviews ensued. At times, this gave me the opportunity to ask for further clarification or explanation. Whenever more information was needed, as the researcher I could ask, "Tell me more". This method of interviewing enabled me to identify characteristics of students which were highly achieving despite lack of parental involvement. Creswell (2013) suggested these interviews should be held in a quiet place free from distraction. All of the student interviews were conducted within a quiet room at the school. The room which was used was a neutral location within the school. As the researcher, I felt it was important students feel

comfortable in the interview environment. This would allow students to be more comfortable and open with the interview questions. Subsequently, the teacher interviews were also held in a neutral room of the school. Parents were given the option to have their interviews conducted either in their homes, at the school, or another location. Six of the parents chose to be interviewed in their respective homes. The remaining two parents chose to have the interviews conducted at the school. Specifically, these methods helped address answers from research questions 1, 5, and 6.

Data Analysis

After all the research was collected, the data was analyzed. Moustakas (1994) explained the importance of summarizing human science research, "Phenomenology is concerned with wholeness, with examining entities from many sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience is achieved" (p. 58). During data analysis, equal attention was given to results from observations, student data, and interviews. Through this variety of information and data, I was able to capture the essence of the student participant experience as it related to academic achievement despite the lack of parental involvement.

Open Coding

Open coding was implemented throughout the study. Through the use of open coding I was able to identify commonalities among the qualities of highly achieving students. Creswell (2013) explained open coding is a method used to identify major categories of information. He explained through coding, the researcher identifies core phenomenon and through closer study of the data can create categories around the core phenomenon. Open coding was used while reviewing the data collected through classroom observations and interviews conducted with

students, teachers, and parents. Various themes and topics and subgroups were identified and from these, more specific themes were identified.

Data Managing

Methods of data managing were employed for this research study. Namely this was implemented by creating files for data keeping. File types included both paper and digital records. All research was organized into corresponding files. All files were stored in a secure location and the protection of all participants were guaranteed via anonymity (Creswell, 2013). Computer files were password protected and paper files were double locked. In some cases, digital and paper files were only used in a temporary manner. For example, interviews were recorded digitally. Once the recordings were transcribed to a digital file, the original digital voice recordings were deleted.

Reading and Memoing

Reading and memoing were employed throughout the process of data collection and analysis. This was implemented by reading through text and taking notes in the margins. Initial codes were formed throughout the reading of the observation data and the interview data. Creswell (2013) defined memoing as a process in which the researcher writes down ideas as they evolve throughout the process of coding. As transcripts from interviews and notes from observations were read and reviewed, I circled, highlighted, underlined, and identified pertinent themes that were identified from these data sources. As themes were identified, it was necessary to categorize these themes into bigger more overarching themes that could be used to answer the research questions that have been addressed throughout this research study.

Bracketing

Schutz (1967) defined bracketing as a suspension of belief and judgment within the confines of the phenomenon being studied. Creswell (2013) explained further, "The researcher needs to decide how and in what way his or her personal understandings will be introduced into the study" (p. 83). Throughout the study it was necessary to suspend belief and judgment. Because this study involved parents that lacked educational involvement, it would have been easy to judge these parents for bad choices they had made in their lives. By bracketing my feelings and opinions, I was able to interview the parents, students, and teachers without judgment or prejudice. There were moments throughout the study in which my personal beliefs and opinions overlapped with the phenomenon being studied. However, I was able to remain neutral and suspend judgment.

Interpret and Represent the Data

After the data had been collected, I had the task of interpreting and representing the data. This allowed me to describe the essence of the phenomenon that was being studied. The data was interpreted and represented in the following chapters. Specifically I was able to determine the following:

- What happened?

- How was the phenomenon experienced?

- Present the "essence" in a variety of formats such as narrative and discussion.

Trustworthiness

In order to promote trustworthiness, I implemented the use of various research methods. These methods included transcript review, peer review, and considerations for maintaining authenticity through the use of triangulation. Triangulation of research methods was achieved

through the use of student interviews, parent interviews, teacher interviews, classroom observations, and field notes.

Transcript Review

In developing a transcript of the interviews, I checked for accuracy among the transcripts. First, I checked personally to make sure that I had transcribed the interviews correctly. Next, I had a peer check the transcriptions for any inconsistencies or inaccuracies. Finally, the participants of the study were invited to review the transcripts and verify the authenticity of the record. Through the use of member checks I was able to ensure those being interviewed were appropriately understood.

Peer Review

I implemented a peer review system with the research and interview methods. The peer review also included a review of the research study in its entirety. This ensured I did not sway or influence any of the information received or responses given.

Authenticity

I incorporated aspects within the research to make sure authenticity was achieved. Creswell (2013) explains authenticity and validation are interconnected and validation is a strategy used to document the accuracy of a study. In order to confirm the authenticity of this study, I employed the strategy of triangulation. Creswell explained triangulation is a method used to provide evidence among a variety of different sources, methods, and investigators. In order to achieve triangulation, I included the data from observations, student records, field notes, and interviews conducted among the student participants, as well as teachers and parents. Member checks were also used.

Dependability, Confirmability, and Transferability

Creswell (2013) explained dependability, confirmability, and transferability are major components of trustworthiness. Dependability and confirmability were achieved by conformability. In conducting the research, I achieved this by being flexible to change and instability. In order to be able to promote transferability Creswell states thick rich description is necessary. I implemented the use of thick rich description in my research which thus enabled me to provide a snapshot of each individual student participant.

Ethical Considerations

Each student, teacher, and parent participants signed a consent form. All participants were informed they could withdraw from the study at any time. Because this study looked at highly achieving students despite lack of parental involvement, covert classroom observations were conducted. Pseudonyms were used for all participants who were involved in the study. Respect and care was implemented when working with this population of parents. Data security was employed during all phases of the research collection. All electronic files were password protected. Paper records, notes, interview transcripts, and other documents were double locked both inside a filing cabinet and within my office.

After successful completion of the research proposal, I applied for IRB approval. Prior to conducting the actual research study, IRB approval was applied for as outlined in the Liberty University School of Education Doctorate of Education Handbook (2012). Once IRB approval was granted, I conducted the research portion of the dissertation. The IRB approval for study is included in the Appendix section as Appendix F.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to take an in-depth look at the results and findings of the study. The original intent for the study was to identify what attributes and characteristics were held by highly achieving students that lacked parental involvement. This study aimed at focusing on the habits, attributes, and characteristics these students possessed. This chapter is devoted to focusing on the participants of the study, including observations and interviews which were conducted as part of the study. In analyzing the data from the study, various themes were identified that explained the phenomenon being studied. As these themes were identified, specific answers to the research questions were identified. This chapter focuses on the emergent themes and how these themes helped answer the original research questions first presented in chapter one.

Data Analysis

In the previous chapter, the methodology was presented. Within this methodology, I aimed to code, bracket, and identify themes. Data analysis was conducted according to plans provided in the methodology section. During the methodology, I did not stray from the methods presented. I implemented the use of selective coding in order to identify codes. The frequency of these codes was measured. Finally, the open codes were reduced into identified themes. These codes and themes are represented in Table 1 within the "Themes" section found later in this chapter.

Findings

The purpose of this study was dedicated to better understanding the phenomenon of highly achieving elementary students despite lack of parental involvement. Specifically, this

study looked at student behaviors within the academic classroom setting as well as employing the use of interviews to gain information and insight. The primary focus of this study was to ascertain what habits and characteristics highly achieving students exhibited. During the course of the data collection, student participants were observed three times in various academic settings. In an attempt to answer the research questions, the student participants were interviewed. Furthermore, the teachers and parents of the students were also interviewed. All quotes from the interview process were maintained in a manner that would capture the voice or perspective of the participant. By design, incorrect spelling and grammatical errors were included in order to convey the speech and sentiment of the participants being interviewed.

Research Questions

The following research questions formed the basis of this study:

1. What is it about highly achieving students' personality, work ethic, and habits that make them achieve despite the lack of parental involvement?

2. What habits do these highly achieving students possess?

3. What attitudes do these highly achieving students exhibit?

4. What motivates these students to succeed?

5. What obstacles do these students overcome?

Participants

The participants for this study were selected by the use of purposeful sampling. First, the superintendent of the participating school was contacted in order to seek permission to conduct the research study within the school and school system. At the time of the research study, I was the principal of the school. The first step in identifying research participants involved sending a letter and consent forms to students grades four through six. This was approximately 350

students. As consent forms were returned, the students were administered the POPs survey to determine if they were qualified for the study. Initially, eleven students were identified through the use of the POPs survey. After verifying their academic standing, it was determined that three of these students did not meet the grade qualifications for the study. Ultimately, eight students were identified as qualified participants for the study. Consequently, dates and times were set up for observations, student interviews, teacher interviews, and parent interviews.

Individual Participant Descriptions

Methods were employed in order to maintain anonymity for the research participants. In maintaining anonymity of the research participants, all participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Robert is a fourth grade African-American male. He is ten years old. He lives with his father and his grandmother in a government assisted apartment. He has no other siblings, but sometimes a cousin stays with them during the week. During this past year his father divorced his mother and moved to Riverton from across the state. Robert's father works numerous jobs and is rarely at home. Both his father and his grandmother have had little to no additional schooling beyond high school. Robert is a social individual who seeks the attention and approval of teachers and classmates. During this past school year, he has encountered a transformation. At the beginning of the school year, he sought negative attention from others. He experienced a change of heart and decided he would much rather have positive attention from peers and teachers. He has made numerous friends in his classes and is well liked by his classmates and teachers.

Sawyer is a fourth grade Caucasian male. He is ten years old. He lives with his mother and has no other siblings. His parents are divorced. His father was recently in prison and has

another pending charge for which he will likely return to prison. Sawyer's mother is the breadwinner of the family and works long hours. She employs the use of an afternoon babysitter to help meet Sawyer's needs. When Sawyer was a toddler, he was diagnosed with diabetes. While he is in good health, he is still at an age where he is learning to regulate his health needs. His health issues can affect his academics. He loves sports and particularly excels in basketball. Sawyer is seen as a leader in the classroom. Students look up to him and value his input and friendship.

Grayson is a fourth grade Caucasian male. He is ten years old yet he is small for his age. He lives in a family with two parents, three siblings, and his grandmother. While he has an interest in sports, his size limits him in his athletic abilities. He tries to fit in with others and acts out to seek their approval and attention. Grayson is identified gifted but also struggles with issues related to Attention Deficit Disorder. He responds well to redirection and other refocusing strategies. Grayson enjoys Science and Mathematics and hopes to be one day be an engineer. While he does well in school, he often appears bored and perhaps unchallenged by the material.

Sterling is an eleven year old female African-American student in the fifth grade. Her parents are divorced and she lives with her mother and two sisters. During this past year, they were homeless. At a certain point, they were living with other family members and also at one point they were living in a shelter. She qualifies for free lunch. Recently, her mother was able to acquire a place of their own. Sterling is both friendly and shy. She exhibits shy behaviors in class but is rather outgoing and social in other settings. She is a dedicated and hardworking student. Good grades do not come easy for her.

Jaime is an eleven year old African-American female student in the fifth grade. She lives with her mother and her sister. Her parents have recently divorced and she and her sister split

time between her mother's home and her father's home. During this past year she lived in temporary shelter housing while her parents were going through the divorce. Jaime qualifies for free lunch. Jaime is an outgoing and hardworking student. She is dedicated to fashion and cosmetology. This is a continuous talking point for her and she is always ready and willing to help any of her classmates or teachers with fashion advice. She is a bright student and is able to get good grades by working hard and creating good habits.

Joan is a twelve year old female student in the sixth grade. She is African-American. She lives at home with her mother, father, and two siblings. The family struggles financially. During this past year, her father lost his job. Prior to losing his job, her father worked as a truck driver and was on the road for weeks at a time. Joan is an avid art and design student. She has a diagnosed learning disability and struggles academically. Nonetheless, through hard work and dedication she is able to excel in her classes. Joan is committed and dedicated to her academic career. She perseveres and tries her best at everything she does. Joan is friendly to everyone and does not get involved in tense or dramatic situations. Joan has entered numerous art contests and has won various awards.

Ralph is a twelve year old African-American male sixth grade student. Ralph is identified as gifted and excels in all of his classes. He lives with his mother and two younger sisters. His parents are divorced. Ralph qualifies for free lunch. His mother works long hours to provide for the family. When Ralph was younger, his father sexually abused him and his sisters. He has received extensive counseling. He applies himself in school and takes pride in his work. Ralph is friendly to all around him. He is well liked and well respected by his classmates and his teachers.

Finn is a thirteen year old African-American male sixth grade student. He lives with his mother, brother, uncle, and grandmother. His biological father passed away in a car accident two

years ago. Finn is identified gifted and excels academically. Finn is somewhat quiet, but friendly and kind to all around him. Finn is especially interested in Math and Science. Finn is socially mature for his age. He is kind, thoughtful, and considerate to others. He interacts well with his teachers and his classmates. He is well liked and respected by his classmates. He is a quiet leader.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations of the student participants were conducted as part of the study in order to examine the habits, characteristics, and attributes of highly achieving students. Each student was observed on three different occasions and notes were taken describing the activities being observed including the behavior and habits of the participants. During the observations, multiple behaviors were observed and recorded, including:

1. Personality traits
2. Work ethic
3. Classroom habits
4. Participant attitude
5. Participant motivation

Throughout the observations, numerous categories were identified. The observations provided insights into the behavior and habits of the participants. The data was coded and concrete themes were identified. These themes will be discussed later in the chapter. By breaking down the data into themes, this allowed the information to be organized into meaningful units thus facilitating meaning for readers and researchers.

Interviews

All interviews were conducted and recorded digitally to enable transcription (See Appendix C, D, and E). Interviews were conducted with the student participants, the participant's teachers, and the participant's parent or guardian. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis. During the data analysis, various themes were identified from the interviews.

Themes

While this study was being conducted, several useful themes were identified that identified characteristics, attitudes, and habits of highly achieving students despite lack of parental involvement. Specifically, the personality traits of student participants, class participation, and work habits related to school and homework. Other common themes included the way in which the participants approached homework, chores, and their daily routines. Another theme consistent among the participants was the setting of short-term and long-term goals. More themes also were identified regarding positive attitudes, perseverance, teacher relationships, and overcoming individual challenges. While some of these were anticipated, other unanticipated themes were identified as well. All of the themes identified in this study were deemed useful for the study regarding the characteristics of highly achieving elementary school students despite lack of parental involvement.

While analyzing the data, coding methods were used which helped to identify specific themes. Saldana (2009) explains that coding is a method used in identifying themes related to qualitative inquiry. Saldana continues, "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). In this study key words and

phrases were identified by using a variety of different colored highlighters. The words and phrases were marked in similar ways. As words and phrases were categorized by color they were then organized in the same category. Items were determined relevant based on patterns that related to similarities, differences, and frequency (Saldana, 2009). Some items were initially identified during the analysis but because they did not occur repeatedly enough, they were not determined to be relevant themes related to the study. A representation of the open codes and themes can be found below in Table 1.

Table 1

Identified Themes from Observations and Interviews

Open-Codes	Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets	Themes
Friendliness	28	Ability to Make Friends
Sense of Humor	27	
Interaction with Classmates	11	
Respect of Peers	36	
Friends in Class	35	
Social	40	
Leader	32	
Upbeat	26	
Friends outside Class	31	
Outgoing	22	
Pays Attention	20	Class Participation and Completion of Classwork and Homework
Raises Hand	15	
Provides Oral Answers	22	
On Task	18	
Turned in Classwork	15	
Interacts with Teacher	12	
Outgoing	17	
Clear Morning Routine	17	Before and After School Routines
After School Clubs	4	
After School Programs	9	
Playtime	18	
Afternoon Routine	21	
Recreation Center After School	6	

Homework First Thing	22	Homework Habits
Specific Time	12	
Specific Place	9	
Asks for Help	11	
Completes Before School Ends	7	
Turns in Homework Regularly	16	
Parent Expectations	28	Chores and Home Responsibilities
Daily Chores	14	
Weekly Chores	13	
Student Positivity	18	Positive Attitudes
Smiling	21	
Cheerful	26	
Upbeat	22	
Remains Focused	23	Perseverance
Never Gives Up	28	
Moves at a Steady Pace	15	
Asks for Help	25	
Confident	22	
Long-term Goals	20	The Use of Long-term and Short-term Goal Setting
Short-term Goals	17	
Written Down	6	
Specific	17	
High Standards	32	Teacher Relationship and Support
One-on-one Help	44	
Teacher Friendliness	20	
Redirection	19	
Student Seated Near Front	12	
Caring Behavior	34	
Encouraging	26	
Firm	28	
Struggles Academically	29	Overcoming Challenges and Resilience
Learning Disabled	6	
Compensates in other Areas	12	
Positive Attitude	10	
Confidence	15	
Family Problems	20	
Absent Parent(s)	19	
Health Problems	6	
Incarcerated Parent	4	
Social Problems	5	

Research Question One Themes

The first research question looked at the personality, work ethic, and habits of the research participants. This question looked at how and why these students were able to achieve despite lack of parental involvement.

Ability to Make Friends

A major theme that was identified during the course of this study that addressed research question one was related to the personality trait of friendliness. Within the context of the interviews and the observations it was readily evident all the student participants exhibited the quality of friendliness. Students identified themselves as friendly to everyone and their teachers and parents echoed the same sentiment. The theme of friendliness was regularly identified in the interview process.

During the interview process, students were asked to describe themselves. During the process of answering the interview questions, all of the students exhibited friendly and outgoing attributes. Some of the students even described themselves as being friendly to others. When asked if they had friends in class, all of them answered they did. All of them were also able to state they had friends outside of class as well. Robert stated, "I am friends with all the boys in my class and I am friends with almost all of the girls in my class" (Robert Interview, 2014). Jaime identified as having a "medium" amount of friends in class balanced with "a lot of friends" outside of class as well. Joan explained she has multiple friends in all of her classes. She also bragged stating, "I think I know almost every sixth grader" (Jaime Interview, 2014). Ralph also agreed that he was friends with the majority of his classmates. He stated, "I am pretty much friends with everybody. I get along well with everybody" (Ralph Interview, 2014). Finn also

identified as having multiple friends. He stated, "I definitely have a lot of friends in class" (Finn Interview, 2014). He continued, "I have some friends outside of class. I have twenty friends out of class and almost twenty friends in class. I would say that I have about the same amount of friends both in class and out of class".

Robert's grandmother noted, "He is very friendly and he gets along with just about anyone" (Robert Guardian Interview, 2014). Grayson's mother described him by explaining, "Honestly, he seems to get along with just about anyone that he sets his mind to. He is friendly with everyone" (Grayson Parent Interview, 2014). Many parents described their children as being outgoing and having open personalities. Sterling's mother described her as a "people person" with a "sweet personality". She further explained, "She will give to somebody else before thinking about herself" (Sterling Parent Interview, 2014).

Jaime's mother described her daughter as "outgoing" and "a social butterfly". When asked to describe Jaime's friends, her mother expounded,

> They are all outspoken and they are very bubbly. They are all outspoken and they are all very friendly. They are typical preteens so there is a sense that one minute they like each other and the next minute they are fighting. They always seem to make up though. They match, but they are so close in personality. They get along so well. I am amazed at how well they get along. They are thick as thieves and they are like sisters (Jaime Parent Interview, 2014).

Joan's mother was extremely moved by her daughter's ability to connect and make friends. She became emotional when discussing the impact friends had on her daughter's life. She described Joan as "outgoing and caring" once she opened up. Her comments regarding Joan's friends were especially telling. She explained,

She seems to make good friends. She has had a lot of good influences in her life. I can honestly say that she is a really good influence to her friends too. So many kids these days, especially girls, seem to be into drama and always trying to tear each other down. She never really seems to be mixed up with this though. She likes to take the higher road and she usually attracts good influences (Joan Parent Interview, 2014).

Finn's mother described him as a child that "is friendly with almost anyone". Finn's mother elaborated he does not have a hard time making friends. She described his friends, "Most of his friends are really smart too. They are good friends to him. I think he doesn't have a hard time making friends. He is a good influence and he is not a follower. He is more of a leader" (Finn Parent Interview, 2014).

During the interviews, the theme of friendliness was also prevalent among the teacher responses. Multiple teachers described the student participants as "outgoing" and able to make friends easily. Many teachers also described these students regularly smiled a lot and appeared happy. Robert's teacher described a poignant experience during the school year in the following manner,

Half way through the year, he realized that he was not making the friends that he wanted so he changed his approach. So then he began to be kind and caring by doing extra special things for classmates like picking up dropped pencils. His grade greatly improved during this time as well. He found that this was much more beneficial for making friends (Robert Teacher Interview, 2014).

Other teachers also noticed the importance of being a good friend and how this can influence student performance and outcomes. Sawyer's teacher noted while Sawyer did have many friends within the class, his interaction was different than most. She noted he was a little

more shy and reserved when it came to social interaction. She stated he would regularly watch his friends in class and see what they were doing. Once he saw them being successful, he wanted to follow their example. The teacher stated the positive examples of his classmates encouraged him to try harder and work harder so he could keep the same pace of his peers.

Jaime's teacher described Jaime as being "likeable" and also having a lot of friends both inside and outside the classroom. The teacher described her as being very social and friendly. It was mentioned at times she would gravitate towards cliques based on her race, but she was indeed friendly and social with everyone she encountered on a daily basis.

Some students forged successful friendships because of their high level of manners, kindness, and respect for those around them. When describing Ralph, his teacher noted, "He has manners. He is well liked. He kind of raises the bar a little bit" (Ralph Teacher Interview, 2014). Finn also demonstrated similar behaviors of kindness and respect for others. His mother described him in the following manner, "He is very loving and very respectful to adults and to other people's feelings. He is not going to say anything mean about anyone else. He is an excellent friend to all people" (Finn Parent Interview, 2014). His mother also stated he is a good influence to others and a leader to them. Finn's teacher reiterated these same observations. He described Finn as "very friendly" and "outgoing". He also explained Finn was never a part of any conflict or drama due to his easy going personality.

Not every teacher noted there was a strong connection to other friends within the classroom. Grayson's teacher reflected at times he had trouble fitting in because he saw himself differently than others. This is likely contributed to his smaller stature and his desire to be more physically comparable to his peers. His teacher explained he did not match his classmates in regard to athletic ability. Nonetheless, he would still try and reach out to others and be friendly

with them. His teacher described him as "very open" and he likes to talk. She also described him as having a "good amount" of friends.

Other students also exhibited shy and reserved behaviors. Sterling's teacher explained while she did not have a lot of friends in class, Sterling did have two or three people she was close with and could rely on for help and social interaction. Sterling's teacher labeled her as "sweet" and willing to listen to anyone. She did comment that outside of class Sterling was a much more social person. Sterling's teacher also commented even though Sterling demonstrated shy behaviors, the fact that she was kind and giving to others helped her have more confidence in the classroom. Sawyer's teacher also noted shy and reserved behaviors. She described him as, "Loving, fun, funny, somewhat shy, reserved in a social setting, but truly a happy kid" (Sawyer Teacher Interview, 2014).

Similar behaviors observed by teachers identified some students as being reserved or laid back. Joan's teacher identified her as this type of student. He stated, "She is very laid back. With friends, she is funny and outgoing. She is very easy to get along with. She likes pleasing other people. Her attitude in general is very pleasing" (Joan Teacher Interview, 2014). He continued that she has an ability to make other classmates around her feel welcomed and comfortable. She never had any issues working with other students in her classes and she never complained about any student in any of her classes.

Class Participation and Completion of Schoolwork and Homework

Another theme that was identified during the interview also related to research question one was the importance of class participation and the completion of schoolwork and homework. This theme is directly related to the first research question because it identifies habits and

attitudes which the student participants possessed. During the interview process, high levels of participation and completion of work were noted.

All of the students, with the exception of one, explained they were dutiful in completing homework on a consistent basis. These students explained in regards to homework, they were in the habit of completing homework every day and turning it in. Finn explained even though he turned his homework in regularly, he did not have a consistent routine and approach to homework. Sometimes he would remember to do it and sometimes he would forget. When he forgot to do his homework however, he would try and complete it late at night or early the next morning. He simply would try and get it done when he remembered or when it was most convenient.

This is in direct contrast to the seven other student participants. All of the other seven students explained homework is a top priority for them. They also had similar routines when it came to completing homework. Many of the students actually tried to complete homework at school before the end of the day. If they were unable to complete their homework at school, they would complete it first thing at home or in their after school daycare programs.

Parents also corroborated the importance of a strong work ethic as it related to homework. Most of the parents interviewed also explained their children either completed their homework at school or worked on their homework as soon as they got home. One parent noted her daughter struggled with issues of procrastination but was still able to complete her homework regularly. She was grateful to the after school program because it helped her daughter stay focused on completing her homework. She commented, "If she goes to the after school program then I don't have a problem because the teachers there make sure she gets all of her homework done there so that really helps" (Jaime Parent Interview, 2014).

When interviewed regarding completion of homework, all of the teachers felt encouraged that the student participants completed and turned in their homework on a regular basis. The teacher responses regarding homework habits ranged from students turning in their homework most of the time, almost always, or always. With one exception, Robert's teacher explained at the beginning of the year he usually did not turn in his homework. However, having gone through a transformation, through the second half of the year he started completing his homework regularly and turning it in on time.

The school's after school program was vital in promoting the completion of student homework. Sterling's teacher observed while Sterling was a hard working student, she did not receive a lot of help at home with her homework. The after school program provided her the opportunity to be able to complete her homework and receive help and assistance as well. Joan's teacher also noted Joan was slow to get started on her homework. Students were regularly given time in class to start their homework. Regarding homework he said, "She gets it done with reminders. If we had class time to start on it, she would be slow in the process to get it started. She needs some direction as to when it is a good time to start her homework and how to go about doing it" (Joan Teacher Interview, 2014). Her slow habits regarding her homework may indeed have more to do with her learning challenges rather than being an issue of procrastination.

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Research Question Two Themes

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Research question number two looked specifically at the habits that the participants possessed.

Before and After School Routines

An emergent theme tied to research question two related to students' routines as a regular element in students' daily lives. The majority of students interviewed had regularly established

routines and schedules they implemented before and after school. A few students were haphazard in their approach to their regular daily routines. However, it was clear many of the students had a particular and precise schedule or routine they followed each day.

The majority of student routines consisted of expected morning procedures necessary to get ready for the school day. Also, the majority of students typically woke themselves each morning and took care of getting ready without much prodding or assistance. Robert wakes up each day and gets ready in enough time to sit down and watch some television before school. Sawyer gets up and checks his blood sugar levels before doing anything else. This will help him know what foods to eat for breakfast. After getting ready for school, Grayson takes his dog on a leash to the bus stop and his mother walks the dog back home. Sterling likes to get up and get ready with enough time to get her hair ready for school. As an African-American student she prefers extra time to wear certain styles or hairdos to school. Jaime explained her mother wakes her up every morning and she gets ready for school. Joan gets up for school every morning in time to get ready to ride the bus. She explained, "In the morning, I have to be ready by 8:00 because my bus comes around that time. I wake up at 7:20 and I'll get ready and by the time I am done getting ready it is time that I need to catch the bus" (Joan Interview, 2014). Ralph described his morning routine as getting ready while watching television. He likes watching Sports Center while getting ready at the same time. Ralph has a great interest in all types of sports and this fuels that interest. Finn took a similar approach when getting ready each morning. The difference for him is he liked listening to music while getting ready.

All of the parents, with the exception of one, stated their child typically wakes up without assistance from a parent or sibling. Robert's grandmother explained, "He usually gets up on his own. Sometimes I have to wake him up though. He likes to get ready quickly in the mornings so

that he can have a little bit of time to watch TV before he goes to school" (Robert Parent Interview, 2014). Speaking of television, other parents also identified their children liked watching television after having gotten ready for school each morning.

The parent interviews overwhelmingly showed students readily had established daily routines of getting up and getting ready. While not readily apparent from the student responses, the parents explained many of the students preferred to shower the night before or each morning. Grayson's mother explained he gets up each morning and takes a quick shower. Sterling took a shower first thing each morning unless she had showered the night previous. Joan got up and showered each morning. She also would sometimes help her sister get ready by helping her pick out her clothes. Ralph would also take a bath each morning as part of his routine.

While all students showed responsibility for their individual morning routines, one student in particular had to focus on a higher level of responsibility. Due to diabetes, Sawyer must check his blood sugar first thing each morning. This is necessary to regulate his insulin levels and make any necessary adjustments. Of important note, Sawyer is vigilant about checking his levels and takes his personal health very seriously.

While Finn had a clear routine, his adherence to a timed schedule was not always as regimented as the other students. Upon waking up, he would take a shower and get ready. His mother described him as a "clean freak" and personal hygiene was very important to him. She said, "He runs a little late sometimes because he thinks the bus is supposed to wait for him. Some days he makes his bed before school. Some days he eats breakfast at home and other days he eats breakfast at school" (Finn Parent Interview, 2014). All of the others reported their children got ready for school each day without incident or issue.

After school procedures were similar except some students went home directly while other students attended an after school program or visited the local recreation center. Five students reported they went home straight after school while the three other students participated in the after school program. Of the students who went directly home, all of them mentioned they do homework as part of their afternoon routine. Many of the students used the phrase "first thing" to describe when they did their homework. They also mentioned they used this time for chores and for free time. The students who reported going home first appeared to be self-starters when it came to getting their homework done. Grayson had an interesting perspective related to homework reporting, "I mean I don't really like homework, but I just try to do it. I try and get it done when I get home from school so it's out of the way" (Grayson Interview, 2014). Even though he did not favor homework, he still felt obligated to get it done. This same attitude was prevalent among the other students as well.

Three students in the study did not report home first thing after school. These students participated in an after school program run by the school and sometimes spent time at the recreation center after school. The after school program provided day care, homework help, and other academic and social activities. While the after school program provided a more structured setting, the recreation center was more relaxed in its structure. While there, students could play basketball, walk on an indoor track, or simply just "hang out" with friends. The environment at the recreation center was not conducive to completing homework. These students still reported when they returned home, they followed a certain structure and routine.

Homework Habits

Another theme addressed in research question two was that homework completion is an essential aspect of student success. All of the students that were interviewed had clear routines

and structure when it came to their commitment regarding homework. While not all of the students exhibited positive attitudes about homework, they all had good habits when it came to actually completing their homework assignments and turning it in. Repeated during the interview process, multiple students explained they prefer to do "homework first". This was true if a student returned straight home after school or attended an after school program.

Many students reported they tried to get as much homework done as possible even before leaving school. Ralph, a gifted 6th grader, reported,

> Most of the time I have it done before I get home. We usually have time to work on it while we are waiting for the bus. If I don't get it done at school, I get it done just as soon as I get in the door at home (Ralph Interview, 2014).

When his mother was asked about his attitude towards homework, she also reported she never had to ask him about his homework because it was always done before he got home from school. The ease with which he completed his homework could likely be attributed to his gifted identification. While other students did not necessarily share the same gifted identification, they also had clear habits where they prioritized the completion of homework. Sterling stated, "I do my homework first and then I have time to play" (Sterling Interview, 2014). Jaime explained she usually got her homework done during the after school program. Joan also got started on her homework during the after school program but would make sure to complete it once she got home. Robert also liked doing his homework "first thing" so he had more free time for later. Grayson and Finn, while not enthusiastic about homework, both agreed it was important to get it done in a timely manner and took necessary steps to see it was always done each day after returning home.

During the parent interviews, the theme of completing homework in a timely manner was reiterated. Many of the parents or guardians interviewed reported their children made homework a priority. Robert's grandmother stated he always tries to get his homework done first so he has time for other activities and free time. Sawyer's mother agreed as well saying, "He knows that if he gets his homework done first, then he will have time for other things after that" (Sawyer Parent Interview, 2014). Grayson's mother stated he comes home, does his homework, and then likes to play videogames. Sterling's mom explained she is always on top of her homework and she turns her work in on time.

Some parents explained their children try to get their homework done, or at least started, at school. Joan's mother stated she starts her homework at school and continues working on it while attending the after school program. Ralph's mother reported he has the same habit of starting his homework while still at school. She too reported the theme of homework first. She stated, "Sometimes he has math homework and when he gets home it's the first thing he does". Finn's mother explained he had similar habits as well. He too liked completing his homework before arriving home whenever possible. She said, "You know he usually has all of his homework completed by the time he gets home and he rarely asks for help. Unless it's a bigger project that he needs help on, he doesn't even ask for help" (Finn Parent Interview, 2014). These comments were especially revealing about the attitude surrounding homework. This was yet another example of students showing self-sufficiency and resolve regarding homework completion and responsibility.

Among the parents interviewed, only one reported issues of procrastination regarding homework. Jaime's mother lamented she often struggled with delaying getting her homework started. She claimed the after school program was the best motivator to helping her daughter

complete her homework. The after school program appeared integral in Jaime's success regarding homework completion. Jaime's mother explained,

> If she goes to the after school program then I don't have a problem because the teachers there make sure that she gets all of her homework done there so that really helps. When she gets home without doing it she doesn't want to get it done. Her biggest problem is procrastination (Jaime Parent Interview, 2014).

It is relevant to note Jaime's mother experienced problems motivating her daughter, yet the teachers and other staff members at the after school program were able to successfully motivate her. On numerous occasions during the interview process, the after school program appeared beneficial to helping students develop good study skills and other habits.

When interviewed, the teachers were also able to provide important insight regarding the completion of homework and study habits. All of the teachers interviewed, reported their students turned in homework on a regular and steady basis. These responses matched the response of both the students and the parents. While it was reported all student participants turned in their homework regularly, there were varying degrees of commitment among the students. Particularly, the students fell into one of three categories. The first category includes students who always completed and turned in homework on a regular and timely basis. Ralph and Finn were the only two students who fell into this first category. It is especially telling to note both of these students are identified gifted. Ralph's teacher explained he always completes his homework and always turns it in. Finn's teacher reported the same attitude but added he goes above and beyond expectations often completing more than is required of him. The next category of students involves those that almost always turned their homework in on time. The three students in this category included Jaime, Sawyer, and Grayson. Jaime's teacher reported in

Jaime's case she struggled with some assignments because she doesn't have internet access at home. To compensate for this lack of resources, Jaime's teacher always allowed her extra time in class or in the computer lab to complete web-based activities. Robert, Sterling, and Joan fell into the final category. Their teachers reported they would sometimes struggle with homework. Robert's teacher reported at the beginning of the year he usually did not turn in his homework but his habit regarding homework had turned in a positive direction during the second half of the year. Sterling's teacher reiterated comments her mother had reported as well. Sterling was most successful with her homework regimen when she was able to receive assistance through the after school program. Her teacher still reported, "There have been a few times this year where she did not turn in homework. For the most part, she is a really hard worker and she tries to do her best" (Sterling Teacher Interview, 2014). Joan's teacher explained due to Joan's learning challenges, she was sometimes slow to complete homework during allotted class time. He explained, "When it comes to homework, she will get it done, but she is slow to do it" (Joan Teacher Interview, 2014). He further explained however that even though she was slow to get started on homework at school she was fairly consistent in completing it at home.

Even though the teachers reported that students exhibited varying degrees of commitment to homework, they all reported the students still showed dedication and success to the homework process. While some students were faster and more dedicated, all students were described as being successful in their homework habits. This can likely be attributed to individual drive for some and assistance from the after school program for others.

Chores and Home Responsibilities

The final theme related to research question two related to chores and other home responsibilities. When interviewing the students, it was evident all of them had regular chores

and responsibilities at home. Of the students interviewed, five of them reported they had chores they completed on a daily basis. The remaining three students also reported they had regular chores, however, they were expected to complete these chores a couple of days throughout the week instead of on a daily basis. One student reported while he did have chores he was expected to do, he sometimes did not have to complete them.

In regard to chores and other home responsibilities, the student participants prioritized these tasks in a similar manner to how they approached homework. Chores and other home responsibilities were a high priority for the participants. Many of the participants echoed the sentiment they preferred to complete these tasks so they had more free time for later. The chores reported included tasks such as taking out the trash, sweeping the kitchen, taking care of pets, laundry, dishes, cleaning bedrooms, vacuuming, and other household cleaning. Some of the participants also explained they either worked with siblings on chore duty or they take turns being responsible for different tasks.

Parent responses regarding chores and other responsibilities did not exactly echo the same sentiments the students shared. While indeed the parents did attest their children regularly completed their chores, half of the parents reported their children completed their chores without incident. The other half of the parents explained while their children did eventually complete daily chores, it was often met with resistance and procrastination.

According to the parents, the students that exhibited behaviors of procrastination and resistance did not complete their chores with the same dedication and attitude they put towards their homework and other studies. Jaime's mother described her daughter's attitude in the following manner, "She usually doesn't want to do it and asks if she can do it after her show is over. She also asks if her sister can do it instead" (Jaime Parent Interview, 2014). Finn's mother

used humor when explaining his attitude about chores. She said, "He hates it with a passion" (Finn Parent Interview, 2014). Even though some students were resistant about chores, two parents did explain their children still exhibited somewhat positive attitudes about chores in general. Ralph's mother stated, "Sometimes it is hard to get him to do it but afterwards if you stay on him he will usually turn things around and do a good job" (Ralph Parent Interview, 2014). Grayson's mother reported he experienced issues with procrastination stating, "He resists it sometimes. He feels that things can get overwhelming. He thinks that some things are harder than they really are" (Grayson Parent Interview, 2014).

The parents of the other four participants reported their children mostly exhibited positive attitudes and timeliness when it came to completing chores. Sawyer's mother reported his attitude is good. She continued, "He will do just about anything that is asked of him. There are times when he doesn't have anything to do that he will ask if I need help with anything" (Sawyer Parent Interview, 2014). Joan's mother mentioned while her daughter does tend to complain a little she exhibited a good attitude about chores. Sterling's mother was the only parent to report little to no attitude was encountered when it came to completing chores. She stated, "She has a good attitude because I try and reward her when I can" (Sterling Parent Interview, 2014). Robert's grandmother reported he liked getting his chores done quickly so he would have more free time to play or watch television.

Research Question Three Themes

Research question number three asked what attitudes do the highly achieving students exhibit.

Positive Attitudes

The first major theme to be identified tied to research question three relates to students exhibiting positive attitudes. As a researcher, I found the student responses to be both encouraging and enlightening. Repeatedly, students exhibited positive attitudes and behaviors when interviewed. Five students in particular showed positive attitudes as it related to their academic behaviors. Sterling explained reading and studying really helped her be more successful in school. Joan's attitude in general was overwhelmingly positive. When asked about her teachers she responded, "My teachers are awesome. I like to have a really positive attitude about everything. I like to see the glass half full" (Joan Student Interview, 2014). She modeled this attitude throughout the interview process. She readily smiled and was engaging and interactive during the interview process. Ralph mirrored similar sentiments. Much of his success can be contributed to the positive attitude with which he approaches his academic progress. He puts in extra time of his own volition. He explained,

> A lot of the books that I read are non-fiction and that helps me with pre-knowledge
> before I get to what I am doing. Like this year I knew a lot of stuff in history because I
> read a lot of history books last year (Ralph Interview, 2014).

As Ralph reported his interests, his confidence and positive attitude were readily apparent. Jaime reported a positive attitude by just trying to get good grades. She attributed her success to her positive attitude. Robert presented another angle in which he demonstrated a positive attitude regarding school. When asked what contributes to his academic success he replied, "I can help the library by helping the librarian with the books or like be a school store helper and help them with that. I want to run for Student Council and look for ways to help out at school" (Robert Interview, 2014). Robert's responses provided a deeper level of positive attitudes. His responses

showed a deeper connection to his school and academic setting through service and dedication to others.

Five of the eight parents interviewed reported specific examples of how their children exhibited positive attitudes related to their academic progress. When asked about homework Sterling's mother responded, "Actually she has always liked it. She has had a positive attitude toward schoolwork. I can't really say that she has a bad attitude towards it. It's basically like a positive attitude towards it" (Sterling Parent Interview, 2014). She continued, stating Sterling put in extra time when it came to preparing for tests. She explained she would study at least a week prior to a test in preparation. Grayson's mother reported he had a positive attitude when she said,

> He tries to overcompensate for any of his shortcomings. He holds himself to a high
> standard. The fact that he is so smart helps. When he puts his mind to things he gets it
> done. He is responsible for his own success and he works hard (Grayson Parent
> Interview, 2014).

Robert's grandmother explained Robert has been trying to be more positive this year when it comes to school. As he has tried to work harder and get better grades, he has increased in his ability to exhibit positive behaviors. Finn's mother explained over the last couple years of school he has come out of his shell more. When questioned about his success she explained,

> I think really one thing that's big is just he is determined to do well in school. We don't
> have to push him too much. I know this is good for his self-esteem. It is hard for people
> to bring down his self-confidence because he is so successful in school. I don't ever really
> see him doing homework but when the report card comes he is always getting good
> grades. If I come home and he is not doing schoolwork I know that he is putting forth a
> lot of effort on his own. His success comes from his own work ethic (Finn Parent

Interview, 2014).

Teacher responses regarding positive attitudes were very similar to parent responses. When interviewed, all of the teachers reported the student participants exhibited positive behaviors and attitudes. Ralph's teacher described him as confident in his abilities and very outgoing. She also mentioned he has confidence, drive, and intelligence and these attributes help foster his success. Finn's teacher reported a similar attitude when he explained,

> I think just his motivation and his ability to learn information quickly and accurately. Like I said, I would give him more challenging work. In sixth grade a lot students still come up to me and ask if their answers are right instead of being willing to take that jump and leap and just do something. They have to know it's the right way to do something they don't want to fail. He wasn't like that. He was confident enough within himself to take a leap (Finn Teacher Interview, 2014).

Jaime's teacher reported Jaime exhibited a positive attitude much above the majority of other students. She stated she always had a very good attitude in class. She further explained, "She has a very good attitude about life. She is not afraid of challenges. She takes pride in her work" (Jaime Teacher Interview, 2014). Finally, Robert's teacher reiterated he had made extensive progress this year to improve his attitude toward his academics. She explained he wanted to learn and he wanted to be one of the best students in the class. She theorized about this change of heart when she said, "I think he realized that having negativity was not rewarded. The positive behavior was rewarded and he recognized that he was going to get more attention for positive behaviors than with negative behaviors" (Robert Teacher Interview, 2014).

Perseverance

The final theme to be identified that addresses research question number four is perseverance. Throughout the interview process, the theme of perseverance became prevalent. Many of the students interviewed showed signs related to perseverance and their willingness to remain to push through various situations and not give up. Sawyer identified with this characteristic as a student with diabetes. Even though it was challenging for him to deal with this issue, he remained dedicated to checking his blood sugar levels daily and taking responsibility for his own health. Jaime also showed perseverance when it came to her desire to get better with her individual interest of hair and cosmetology. When speaking about overcoming challenges she stated, "I like to keep working on it. Like with people's hair, if I don't know how to do something then I will keep trying until I can figure out how to do it" (Jaime Interview, 2014). This same attitude when applied to her academics can be attributed to her success in school as well. Ralph exhibited a deep attitude of perseverance when he explained, "I just believe that I can do it and I work hard to overcome my challenges (Ralph Interview, 2014)".

Parents offered more insight regarding the issue of perseverance. Joan's mother described her daughter's deep level of commitment when she stated, "She is not one to quit or give up. She always tries and keeps going even when something gets challenging. I think her attitude has helped her quite a bit in her life. She is not a quitter" (Joan Parent Interview, 2014). Sterling's mother also described her daughter as someone that never gives up. She explained she is a fighter that doesn't like to quit. Grayson's mother explained even though he deals with issues of Attention Deficit Disorder that he likes to persevere. She said when he puts his mind to something he won't give up until he accomplishes it. She further explained he is responsible for his success and he works hard for it. Finn's mother related a couple of years ago he was held

back in school. While some students may have gotten discouraged with this situation he grew immensely. She stated he worked harder at his own academic success and this helped his confidence to grow and increase.

<div align="center">**Research Question Four Themes**</div>

Research question number four addressed the question of what motivates the students to succeed.

Setting Short-term and Long-term Goals

The theme of goal setting was identified during the interview process as an important theme to the participants of this study. The majority of the participants identified how short-term and long-term goals were a standard part of their lives. The majority of the students when asked about goal setting reported using short-term and long-term goals. These goals typically related to success in school or other aspects of their daily lives. Ralph explained that this year he wanted to meet the qualifications to be able to take Algebra the following year. He explained,

> Like this year I wanted to score really high in math so that I could get into Algebra. So what I did most of the time instead of everyone else was not giving the teacher a hard time and trying to get away with things. I would try and be more laid back and not try to give the teacher a hard time (Ralph Interview, 2014).

Sterling explained she used a daily system to work toward short-term goals. She explained, "Well I have a paper like from the first grade in guidance. They have a little chart that you can check off each day. I use that every day to make sure that I am working hard" (Sterling Interview, 2014). She further explained she would like to go to college and that goal was the most important to her. When speaking about goals, Grayson explained he writes some goals down while other goals he just remembers. He had one long-term goal of keeping fit and one

short-term goal of saving up money so he could buy things he wanted. While Finn's goals were presented as short-term in nature, they also had a connection to long-term results. He stated he was working hard to get all 'A's on his report card for this school year.

Some students presented goals that extended well beyond their schooling and academics. Jaime explained she wanted to pursue a degree in cosmetology one day. She was enthusiastic when she expressed,

> Well, I love hair and I play with hair a lot. There are girls in my class that let me do the braids in their hair like fishtail and French braids and stuff like that. That's what I want to be when I get older. I want to go to cosmetology school. The most important goal to me is to one day be able to open up my own salon (Jaime Interview, 2014).

Robert reiterated he wanted to do better in school this year and to be more successful in school. He stated, "My goal right now is finishing my education and passing my end of year tests and going on to the fifth grade" (Robert Interview, 2014). Joan also had a desire to set goals that would help her get into college. She explained, "I want to try and get a lot of good grades so that I can get into a good college" (Joan Interview, 2014). Sawyer's goals, while long term related more specifically to his health and diabetes. He explained he wanted to get better control of his health and manage his diabetes better.

Parent responses regarding the use of goal setting reiterated what students had already reported. Every parent identified goals his or her child was currently pursuing. Once again, these goals ranged from both long-term and short-term goals. Ralph's mother echoed the same response regarding his mathematics progress. She stated he was working hard this year to qualify to take Algebra the following year. Robert's grandmother also noticed Robert had a goal to do better in school this year.

The majority of the parents were able to identify more profound, long-term goals their children worked towards. Ralph's mother described his dedication and drive when she said,

> He wants to play basketball and he wants to attend Duke University. He also wants to be a surgeon. That's why he strives to keep his grades up. He cries if he gets a 'B'. This year he got straight 'A's and he was identified for the gifted program last year (Ralph Parent Interview, 2014).

Finn's mother shared that her son had an extensive list of goals he was working towards. She explained his process of goal setting and achievement by saying,

> If he sets a goal he really likes to accomplish it. He gets upset if he is not able to successfully reach a goal. Right now he is trying to learn how to play the piano, He gets on his keyboard and on YouTube videos and is really learning how to play. With school work he has done excellent. He set a hard goal by trying to help his brother improve in school. He set a goal to be a tutor in school and that has really helped him be successful (Finn Parent Interview, 2014).

Grayson's mother also reported he had strong long-term goals as well. She stated he has always wanted to attend MIT explaining he enjoys engineering and learning about computers. Sterling's mother stated she wanted to finish school and go to college. Her main goals were to get good grades and play college basketball. Joan's mother explained her daughter wanted to attend a school for art or design and she had already won numerous art contests.

> Sawyer's mother explained he struggles a lot with managing his diabetes. She stated he worries about being able to be independent and to manage his own health. She explains,

> He was diagnosed with diabetes when he was four. The fact that I work second shift has made it so that he is very much aware of what he needs to manage his diabetes. I can tell

that in the last year or so he has gotten to a point where he is able to manage it much better. He has gotten a lot more responsible (Sawyer Parent Interview, 2014).

In speaking about his career goal she also stated that one day he would like to join the Armed Forces, Secret Service, or FBI.

Jaime's mother reported Jaime's goal of wanting to go to cosmetology school. She also explained how her short-term goals build upon her long-term goals. She stated,

Her goals are to strive to do better with her grades. She wants to go to cosmetology school so she is very into fashion. Her priorities are getting good grade because she wants to be successful in life. She wants to be a fashion star. She wants to be that person that everybody is going to remember (Jaime Parent Interview, 2014).

Teachers were also able to identify goals students set. Teachers also worked with the students to set academic goals pertinent to the classroom and their academic future. While some teachers were able to identify long-term goals their students had set, the majority of teachers paid mention to short-term goals related to current academic situations. Robert's teacher noticed he had made goals related to academics and behavior. She worked with him extensively throughout the school year. She stated,

He did set some goals at the beginning of the year. And I would bring him over and I would talk about those goals and at times he worked very hard. At times I could tell that he was frustrated. He would say that he wasn't getting help at home that he said he needed. He seemed to respond well to praise from me when I provided it for him (Robert Teacher Interview, 2014).

Sterling's teacher also described a similar interaction when she stated,

She would often check in with me to see what her grade was. She was constantly asking

what she could do to improve her grade and was constantly asking if certain assignments had brought her grade up. I think she knew she wanted to do better this year and she kept a pretty good eye on things (Sterling Teacher Interview, 2014).

Many teachers reported their students were good at working hard toward short-term goals. Joan's teacher reported she worked hard every day to make the honor roll. Ralph's teacher also noted he wanted to do his best and receive all 'A's this year. Joan's teacher also reported she had a short-term goal to be on the honor roll each six weeks. Grayson's teacher agreed he was satisfactory in working towards his goals, but he could definitely put more effort into his work. She explained, "He will set goals and achieve them. He will achieve any goal that he sets out to achieve. I think that many if his goals should be higher because he doesn't always set goals that are challenging for himself" (Grayson Teacher Interview, 2014). Sawyer's teacher also noted he didn't work very hard towards the goals she set for him but he did strive for long-term goals he had set for himself. She continued,

> He will usually try and achieve goals that I set for him. But even then, he still only works at a minimum standard. Any goal that he sets probably has to do with athletics. He probably wouldn't set any academic goals (Sawyer Teacher Interview, 2014).

Three teachers of the student participants recognized their students had set extremely high goals for themselves and had a strong work ethic when it came to working toward these goals. Finn's teacher explained how he worked towards his goals by stating,

> I know that he intends to go to college. I do know that whatever goals he has he works hard to attain those. This was evident in the time that I spent with him each day. I could tell that by the way he paid attention in class that learning was a goal of his. He would leave the room knowing the new material. I just know that he is determined enough to

achieve those goals (Finn Teacher Interview, 2014).

Ralph's teacher noted working towards achieving goals was perhaps a way to break the cycle of poverty. She reported,

> In obtaining goals, he comes from a low socioeconomic background. If he works hard he can break the chain of poverty. So, when it comes to setting goals, he has an expectation that he wants to do well. So, he works hard to obtain these goals (Ralph Teacher Interview, 2014).

Joan's future career aspirations also helped her work toward her long-term goals. Her teacher reported,

> With long-term goals she is focused on becoming an artist or designer. She is focused on that and knows what she wants to do out of high school. We had a long conversation about this recently and we discussed whether or not her work goals would require a college education. She thought that she could probably do it without, but she wants to get a college degree. She has that as a goal for herself (Joan Teacher Interview, 2014).

Teacher Relationship and Support

A major theme that answers research question number four is the relationship students have with their teachers and the level of support teachers provide. Of particular interest, this was much more evident among the parent and teacher responses than it was among the students as they responded to the interview questions. Of the eight students interviewed, only three students explicitly recognized the degree to which the teacher relationship played a part in his classroom. Finn identified one of his teachers in particular helped him to be successful in school. In describing the relationship he had with his teacher Finn explained,

> Uh, he will tell you something that happens in class because a lot of drama happens in

our three classrooms. He explains to us what not to do because it may cause us to fail. He

will tell us motivational things so that we will not make the same mistakes that our peers

have made (Finn Interview, 2014).

Joan was enthusiastic about her teachers. She identified how teachers help her to be successful

when she said, "My teachers are awesome" (Joan Interview, 2014). Ralph also noted, "My

teacher is excellent. She has helped me a lot this year" (Ralph Interview, 2014).

The parent interviews were even more of an indication of the importance of the teacher

and student relationship. Ralph's mother appreciated the teachers for all of the extra help they

provided for him. She also noted his teachers had encouraged him by recognizing him for being

smart and working hard. Robert's grandmother stated his teacher had taken a deep interest in him

and his success this year. She commented, "As the year has gone on though he has really

changed his mind about his teacher. I think he knows that she really cares for him and wants him

to do well" (Robert Parent Interview, 2014). Finn's mother stated he found it encouraging his

teachers challenged him to do his best. Finn also loved that his English teacher had a doctorate

degree. Grayson's mother referred to his teacher as "fabulous" and he never had any issues or

problems with her. Sterling's mother described this year as being transformative for her

daughter. She explained, "She loves her teacher. This has been the best year for her. I can tell

that because when I don't see a smile on my child's face it makes a difference" (Sterling Parent

Interview, 2014). The parent added this school year has been especially encouraging for her

daughter. She credited the positive influence of her peers, the school guidance counselor, and the

school principal as well. Joan's mother credited her daughter's success this year to the positive

environment of school and the classroom. She stated her teachers really helped her to succeed.

Sawyer's teacher also exhibited a positive relationship that promoted his success. When asked

how he felt about his teacher, Sawyer's mother replied, "He loves his teacher. I think he is a little intimidated by her because she sometimes lays the smack down if children need to be reminded to step it up. But he needs that. He needs someone to push him" (Sawyer Parent Interview, 2014). She continued to say by having a teacher that pushed him, Sawyer was able to be more successful this year than previous years.

A particular moving moment came when Jaime's mother shared her feelings about her daughter's teacher. She became emotional and spoke through her tears saying,

She loves her teacher. Oh gosh, she thinks the world of her teacher. She is an awesome teacher. There have been times when she has said that her teacher would get on her about certain things. But this year I have seen a lot of improvement because she had a teacher that held a high standard. She would also be available to talk to her about her problems. She had a teacher that stayed on her. She could confide in her and talk about problems about her life. It was a teacher that was more like a second mom that she could go to (Jaime Parent Interview, 2014).

In addition to parents, the majority of the teachers were also able to recognize and identify the importance of having a strong and supportive relationship between teacher and student. Ralph's Math teacher noted common ground between the two of them helped solidify this relationship. She remarked,

We are both gifted in Math. He knows I am a sports fan too so we always talk about sports. It is very easy and natural for us to banter back and forth and what was sweet is that he got called by another student that he smelled like goat piss. He came crying to me. I knew that I had a relationship with him where he trusted me and he saw me as someone that could help him. I took the opportunity to hug him in plain view in the hallway. I

think he knows that we love him and that he can come to us when he needs help" (Ralph Teacher Interview, 2014).

Sawyer's teacher described how she used a tough approach to express love and support for her student. She described this as follows, "I have a strong relationship with him. He will work very hard for me and he will do what I need him to do to get things accomplished. I would say that I have a positive relationship with him" (Sawyer Teacher Interview, 2014). She continued that she provided as much support for him as possible. She would often help him after school a couple of times a week to brush up on basic skills. She mentioned an important conversation she had with the student and parent helped improve his work ethic. She stated,

After I had a conversation with him and his mother about where he needed to be, he wanted to work harder and achieve more. I think this success can mostly be attributed to my conversation and my initiating this with him and his mother (Sawyer Teacher Interview, 2014).

Jaime's teacher also recognized the importance of a strong relationship between student and teacher. She explained,

Her father told me in one instance after school that she would come home and always talk about how she wanted to please the teacher and do well in school. This made me feel good to hear it from him. I feel like we had a very good relationship (Jaime Teacher Interview, 2014).

Jaime's teacher continued by explaining she holds high standards for all of her students. She expounded on this stating, "I want them to have every opportunity in life to succeed and I want them to have a better life if they want to work for it. I also make sure that she gets extra help whenever she needs it" (Jaime Teacher Interview, 2014).

Other teachers provided a strong relationship and support in a variety of ways. Grayson's teacher recognized he needed extra attention and support. She made sure she was always available for him when he needed help. She further explained, "I think that Grayson respects me and I respect him. There were several times throughout the year that I expected more from him and asked him to deliver more than he did with particular assignments and things like that" (Grayson Teacher Interview, 2014). Finn's teacher noted that they had a strong relationship as well. He noted,

> Given his personality, we were quick to be able to make a connection and form a relationship. I was able to quickly get to a point where I was able to joke with him and cut on him after we had established that relationship and like I said that relationship was established pretty quickly. It was very respectful but playful too. And he never lost sight of that respect. He understands what the roles of student and teacher are (Finn Teacher Interview, 2014).

Sterling's teacher described a level of commitment and care was above and beyond the normal expected requirements. The teacher made herself available for help before school each morning. She also made sure she received extra assistance within the classroom and through outside resources as well. Often she would work one on one with Sterling to help make necessary progress. The teacher explained,

> If she didn't do well on an assignment or a test, I would pull her and reteach and she could take the average of the two grades. She had a chance to bring her grades up. It's not really about the grade, it's about whether you have learned it. I would tell her to show me that she has learned it (Sterling Teacher Interview, 2014).

The teacher described an interesting interaction between Sterling and herself one day. One day Sterling asked the teacher if she could use the phone. She told her she wanted to call her mother and ask that she buy her teacher a special gift. The teacher beamed with pride when she related the following,

> At the end of the year Sterling gave me a locket with her picture in it. She is a really sweet girl. At the end of the day she would make sure that she made eye contact with me to say goodbye. Every morning she would walk in and say hi and hugged me a lot (Sterling Teacher Interview, 2014).

Research Question Five Themes

Research question number five addressed the question of what obstacles do the student participants have to overcome.

Individual Challenges

A dominant theme that was identified related to research question five was the fact that all of the student participants had experienced challenges in their lives. During the student interviews, some of these challenges were recognized and expressed. However, it seemed apparent at times some of the students were not readily willing to express or identify the specific challenges they faced. Jaime's parent had recently gone through a divorce. Finn had experienced a tragedy over a year ago when his biological father was killed in a car accident. Robert also experienced a divorce between his parents and struggled with the challenges of moving to a new school. Joan recounted her father had recently lost his job and was in the process of looking for another job for quite some time. Sawyer faced health problems associated with diabetes. Grayson struggled with the transition of moving to a new school and trying to find new friends and acceptance among his peers. Sterling and her family had been homeless earlier in the year. Ralph

was sexually abused by his father when he was younger. While the problems ranged in various degrees of severity, all of the student participants had experienced struggles and challenges they were working to overcome.

The parents of the student participants were able to more deeply express some of the challenges their children had faced. Ralph's mother expressed the following, "The biggest and main challenge that he has ever had is what he went through with his dad. When he was younger his dad sexually abused him. Sometimes that still resurfaces and he has to deal with those issues" (Ralph Parent Interview, 2014). Robert's grandmother explained because his father has to work extra jobs, Robert is often left without the option to see his father much during the week. Finn's mother explained when he was younger he exhibited significant emotional problems, but he has since been able to overcome these for the most part. Grayson's mother reiterated his need to feel accepted by his peers while transitioning to a new school. She explained, "Most of his challenges are physical. He is petite and scrawny so he has a tendency to be bullied a little bit sometimes" (Grayson Parent Interview, 2014). Joan's mother explained her daughter struggles with a learning disability and this makes school more challenging for her. While Sawyer has the challenge of diabetes, his mother also mentioned more issues he faced. She explained his father has been in and out of jail and was likely going to be returning soon. She referred to his problems as diverse and complex when she explained,

> He has also struggled a lot with our divorce. He doesn't blame himself but I think that it hurts him quite a bit. Balancing and managing his diabetes has been a huge challenge for him as well. His father is probably his biggest challenge. He also has a hard time saying that he is angry about his father. He fears that he might go away forever (Sawyer Parent Interview, 2014).

Jaime's mother explained she still struggles with anger regarding her parent's divorce. This has now become an anger issue for her. He mother remarked,

> Her biggest challenge is her temper and controlling it and not lashing out. She sometimes speaks before she thinks. She doesn't realize the magnitude of her words and how they can hurt people. I am trying to help her learn to control her temper and not lash out. She can hurt her sister and her friends sometimes (Jaime Parent Interview, 2014).

While teachers did not know the student participants as closely as the parents, they too were able to identify and recognize the challenges their students encountered in their lives. Robert's teacher explained his parents had recently divorced. She also noted his father struggled with making enough money to afford a place of their own. Joan's teacher explained, "She is economically disadvantaged. She is identified as a student with disabilities pertaining to Reading. Her reading, fluency, and comprehension are a struggle for her and she is below grade level" (Joan Teacher Interview, 2014). Ralph's teacher also commented on the past sexual abuse he had endured earlier in his life. She also explained at times students would make fun of him and try and pick on him, although most of the time he tried to shrug off their comments. Sawyer's teacher also identified his diabetes and his father's legal issues as major problems he faced.

Jaime's teacher was especially tuned into her struggles. She explained in the wake of her parent's divorce, Jaime and her mother and sister had spent some time living in a women's shelter. Her mother could not make ends meet and they were forced to receive this type of assistance. Sterling's teacher also recognized similar struggles in Sterling's family dynamic. She too noted at times during the year, the family was homeless or doubled up with friends or other family members. She also noted life at home was not ideal and very transitional for Sterling.

Grayson's teacher recognized the same struggles his mother had identified. His teacher noted he had trouble fitting in with others sometimes and he longed for acceptance. She mentioned he saw himself different from the others and did not always fit in. Finn's struggle was unique to that of his peers. While Finn is identified gifted, he has a younger brother who struggles academically. His teacher mentioned this often weighs heavily on his. Because support at home is limited, Finn feels he is best equipped to help his brother overcome his academic struggles.

Resilience

Another theme that was identified regarding research question number five was resilience and how students overcame their challenges. While some of the students had specific strategies they could identify for overcoming challenges, others were only able to identify surface-level type strategies. When asked about overcoming academic challenges, Grayson responded he just tries to remember how to do certain things and ask for help if he needs it. Joan recognized sometimes she encounters social problems among her friendships and relationships. She explained she overcomes challenges by trying to avoid certain situations. If they cannot be avoided then she works to resolve the problems. Jaime recognized one of her life's challenges was to graduate and attend cosmetology school. When asked how she overcomes her challenges she simply replied, "I work on it" (Jaime Student Interview, 2014).

Other students were able to identify more significant challenges and attributed specific strategies to overcome them. Ralph explained his father had moved away six years previously and he has now had to fill in as the man of the house. When faced with challenge he stated, "I just believe that I can do it and I work hard to overcome my challenges" (Ralph Student Interview, 2014). Sterling identified a challenge of not getting along with her sisters. She

explained she worked through her problems by talking things out and working hard to get along better with her sisters. Finn took a mature and responsible approach to overcoming his challenges. He stated, "I have to say that sometimes I would have to be patient and other times I would have to think over the problem and how to get through it" (Finn Student Interview, 2014). As the researcher I asked, "Tell me more about how you are patient". He responded, "I will try and wait and see if the problem stays the same. I will try and do something new with the problem and see if that helps" (Finn Student Interview, 2014).

Throughout the course of the interviews, parents also identified strategies and ways in which their children worked to overcome various challenges. Both Ralph and Sawyer have lost the presence of a father due to criminal activity. Both receive counseling and this has helped them in their resilience. Sawyer's mother noted he uses humor to get through tough situations. Ralph's therapy has helped him to learn how to deal with anger issues and how to process certain feelings. Jaime's mother noted her daughter was also working through anger issues related to a recent divorce. She explained she overcomes her challenges by working hard and trying to come out of her shell more.

Other parents recognized the power of a positive attitude. Robert's grandmother noted while his parents' breakup has been a struggle, he has been able to get through it by having a good attitude about everything. Sterling's mother also recognized this in her daughter. She explained, "She doesn't give up. If she doesn't do something good the first time she does it, she will try harder the next time. She doesn't give up. She's not a quitter, she's a fighter" (Sterling Parent Interview, 2014). Joan's mother recognized this as well and stated, "I think the fact she has to work harder has helped her to overcome her challenges. She is not one to quit or give up. I think this has made her even stronger" (Joan Parent Interview, 2014).

Only one parent identified negative ways in which a student tries to establish resilience. She explained Grayson struggled with issues of ADD and trying to fit in with other people. He would often try and overcompensate by being daring and adventurous. She further explained,

> He will try and take things to a higher level by doing daring and dangerous things. He has multiple injuries, but hasn't broken any bones. He tends to be the loudest and tries to be bigger than life because physically he is not (Grayson Parent Interview, 2014).

Even though Grayson would exhibit questionable behaviors, these strategies also helped him to grow in his resilience and overcome his challenges.

Many of the teachers interviewed recognized their students took initiative and exhibited a drive to succeed. Robert's teacher explained he showed initiative by coming in early before school to receive extra help. Joan's teacher also recognized this in her student by noting she was willing to ask for help whenever she needed it. Also, she was open to receiving assistance from the Reading teacher. This trait was also recognized in Sterling. Her teacher reported,

> I think she pushes herself internally. I don't think anyone on the outside was pushing her. She wanted to do it herself. She would come up in the mornings early especially if she didn't understand Math. She always wanted to go to the after school program so that she could get help with her homework. She always made sure she had everything she needed so she could get the right help after school. The way she would overcome her challenges is that she would figure who could best help her and then go to those people (Sterling Teacher Interview, 2014).

In a similar manner, Jaime's teacher recognized Jaime demonstrated an inner strength. She asked for help from others and she regularly attended the after school program so she could receive the extra help she needed.

Finn's teacher recognized that he demonstrated resilience when he would take responsibility for issues and challenges he faced. Finn helped his brother with his academic struggles. His teacher noted this spoke to his maturity and willingness to help others in need. Grayson's teacher remarked he showed resilience by using creativity to overcome problems and challenges. She remarked, "He usually finds a creative way to do something else. He takes an approach to try and meet his expectations but just solves things in the best way that he can" (Grayson Teacher Interview, 2014). Ralph's teacher recognized he used his intelligence to grow in his resilience. The more he focused on his academics the more he was able to rise above the challenges and struggles of his home life and past abuse.

Free and Reduced Lunch

While it was not an initial factor to be studied through this research project, it became readily apparent that nearly all of the student participants qualified for free or reduced lunch. Of the eight student participants used in this study, seven of them qualified for free lunch. This was of great interest to myself as the researcher. Because almost all of the participants qualified for free lunch it brought up other questions for possible future research. These questions will be addressed in the next chapter.

Single Parent Families

While also not an initial factor to be reviewed in this study, it was relevant to note many of the student participants came from single parent homes. In fact, the divorcing of parents was often recognized as a great source of strife and challenges for the student participants. Of the eight participants, six of them came from families where there was only one parent in the home. While most of these situations were the result of divorce, two students came from homes where a father had been incarcerated. This too was of great interest to me as a researcher. This factor also

brought up more questions about the success of students from single parent homes. These questions will be further addressed in the next chapter.

Observation Themes

As a result of conducting the observations, similar themes were identified congruent with themes previously identified with the interviews. Although multiple themes were identified from the interviews, only two main themes were identified as a result of the observation process. These themes addressed research question number one and research question number three. Specifically, the two major themes emerging from student observations were class participation and the positive attitudes of the student participants.

Class Participation

One major theme that was identified from the classroom observations that addressed research question number one is class participation. All eight of the student participants at various times during the observations were observed demonstrating high levels of classroom participation. This was evident in the way they paid attention and also by their interaction within the educational environment. On repeated occasions the student participants shared a commonality because they were eager and willing to participate and interact within the classroom. This was evident through paying attention, raising hands, offering comments, staying on task, and other actions.

Sterling was seated near the front of the classroom and would look eager and earnest during the observations. Although she was quiet and shy, she did raise her hand and give answers to questions. In small group settings, and one-on-one with the teacher, she opened up more and was eager to interact and give answers as well as ask questions. Also during observations, Sterling would keep an eye on the teacher and make sure the teacher was aware Sterling was on

task. It appeared she wanted to please the teacher. At times it appeared Sterling struggled with Reading content. Nonetheless, she persevered and stayed on task.

Grayson also sat near the front of the room. This may have been because he was distractible at times. Even though he was distractible, he was still able to successfully participate in classroom activities and complete tasks and assignments. The teacher was able to redirect him and these strategies were effective in helping him remain on task. During the observations, Grayson was able to interact socially with his classmates and still complete assignments and tasks. During one observation, he was able to attend to the task at hand much better than the previous observations. This was likely due to it being about a historical topic that interested him.

Sawyer was observed to be on task and involved with educational objectives. His teacher had to redirect him at times, but he remained on task and was able to complete all tasks and assignments ahead of many of his peers. Due to his diabetes, there were times when he appeared tired or sluggish. A couple of times he would place his head down on his desk. Nonetheless, he would interact and converse from this position. Even when feeling sluggish, he would push along and make sure that he participated in the discussion or classwork.

Jaime was definitely a student that gravitated toward various social settings. During her classroom observations, she was observed as being highly social. Even though she liked to interact with her classmates, she remained highly attentive to the teacher and on task with all classroom activities. Jaime liked to talk and work at the same time. Sometimes the teacher would check on her progress to make sure she was always on task. Even though she liked to interact with her peers, she was always on target. Jaime also liked to answer questions when the teacher was conducting discussions. Finally, she also liked to assist the teacher when passing out books and other materials.

Finn was a great example on being on task and organized during the classroom observations. He was ready and willing to give input and answers when the teacher presented different problems to the class. He was very organized as well. His notebook and study area were well organized and he always turned his assignments in class on time. He participated in class by demonstrating leadership skills during group work. Finn was regularly on task and participated in all classroom activities.

Joan was a great example of participation and perseverance. As stated previously, Joan struggles with learning due to a disability. However, this never once did deter her from success within the classroom. Compared to her peers, Joan appeared to work harder and strive for success when compared to the majority of her classmates. Even though she worked at a slower pace than many of her peers, she was able to remain focused on completing her assignments and tasks. Interaction and assistance from the teacher and teacher assistant was also helpful to promote her success. Joan was especially adept at the use of technology, which seemed to benefit her learning disability.

Robert had set a goal to work harder this year in school and this was evident as he was observed in the classroom setting. He was always eager to come to the SmartBoard to provide an answer. He also appeared confident in giving answers and his actions gave the appearance he wanted to impress the teacher. During the observations, he mostly used his time wisely and he was always on task. His interactive notebook was always complete and he often would raise his hand when the teacher asked questions. In one instance, Robert appeared to struggle slightly with participation. This was during an assignment where students had to work by themselves. However, once he got into the activity, he was able to remain focused and on task.

Ralph was observed to be a fast and confident worker during the classroom observations. Sometimes in the sixth grade classroom, many students like to get off track. Ralph was always on target and on task. Ralph was able to navigate the social world of the classroom while remaining completely involved with the work at hand. Especially during History, Ralph was both on task and highly interested in the subject matter. His background knowledge was impressive. He paid more attention than most of the other students and he was always a great participant. He worked quickly and confidently and always completed assignments and remained on task.

Positive Attitudes

Sterling was observed to be a dedicated and hard-working student who exhibited a positive attitude during the classroom observations. Repeatedly, she focused on what the teacher was doing and appeared earnest and engaged. She would repeatedly take her time to complete assignments. Even when faced with challenging work, she did not give up. During one mathematics assignment, her eyes got big and she appeared intimidated by the task in front of her. After taking a deep breath, she smiled and kept working. Sterling would also regularly raise her hand and was always smiling and engaged. Even though she lacked confidence while reading aloud, she did not appear discouraged. She showed pride in her work and in trying her best.

Although Grayson demonstrated distractible behaviors, he too showed he could work in a positive way to complete his classwork. Of the student participants in this study, Grayson was the least positive in his attitude. He showed the most positivity when the teacher redirected and intervened with his behavior. Interestingly, when a history topic was presented, he took great interest and his positive attitude increased. When a topic was more interesting to him, his positive attitude increased.

Sawyer's teacher also provided him with motivation and helped redirect him at certain times. Sawyer was apparently affected by his blood sugar levels and the teacher needed to redirect and intervene at various times during the observations. He seemed extremely motivated by the teacher and recognized she was there to help him. Even when he was sluggish, he still smiled and interacted with other students in positive ways. Sawyer is a very likeable student and the other classmates look up to him.

Jaime exemplified the epitome of a positive attitude. During the observations she was always smiling and often socializing with her classmates and sometimes the teacher. Jaime has a magnetic personality and she is kind and friendly to all around her. Jaime liked to work and talk at the same time. Jaime was very engaged in the classroom conversations and was very enthusiastic about sharing her input during classroom discussions. Jaime always had fun while she was working and learning at the same time. She was able to show mastery of the material while having fun at the same time.

Finn, while also competent and intelligent, demonstrated a more focused and serious approach in his attitude. He enjoyed interacting with the teacher and other students. Finn's positive attitude was evident in his confidence and content knowledge. Finn is not shy. There were times when he dominated the classroom discussion and other times he allowed his classmates to interject. Finn is very academically minded and he appeared stimulated by the learning environment. During the observations, Finn was eager to make sure he had collected all of the necessary information provided by the classroom discussion.

While Joan struggled academically at times, during all of the observations she was always smiling and upbeat. She was a little social at times, but most of the time appeared introspective and quiet. During some of her Reading assignments, she appeared to struggle.

Nonetheless, she still was determined and dedicated to completing the challenge. She did not seem affected by her slower pace. She was always cheerful and happy.

Robert was always happy, cheerful, and positive during the observations. He smiled a lot and had a great attitude during the observations. He spoke a little to his classmates and seemed like a happy child. While not impulsive, he did appear very energetic at times. He was excited about the classroom topics and he was always eager to share answers. Robert is a very social person and craves the attention of both his classmates and his teacher. He enjoyed reading whenever given the opportunity.

Ralph has a magnetic and inviting personality. He is truly a leader among his classmates and peers. Ralph leads by example. He was very encouraging and other students liked following his lead. Ralph is both well-liked and respected among his peers. He was very confident in his content knowledge and he took great satisfaction in demonstrating his knowledge. Ralph appeared focused and determined to do his very best. He is very mature and atypical of other students his age. During the observations, he showed the best example of a positive attitude while compared to his peers.

Summary

Research question number one looked to identify personality traits, work ethic, and habits that helped the study participants achieve. The results from the observations and interviews revealed the student participants were friendly and outgoing. They exhibited friendships and relationships both in and out of the classroom. They also demonstrated friendliness to all around them. They exhibited a solid work ethic when it came to completion of classwork and homework.

Research question number two looked at habits associated with the daily routines of the student participants. One major theme to be identified from the research was the students followed regular routines both before and after school. The majority of the student participants also demonstrated good habits when it came to completing homework and turning it in. Furthermore, another major theme to be identified is how the students prioritized homework. Finally, many of the student participants participated in chores that were completed either daily or a multiple times throughout the week.

Research question number three addressed the attitudes of the student participants. Overwhelmingly, the attitudes of the student participants were extremely positive. The participants also demonstrated examples of perseverance. All of the students had encountered difficulty and challenges in their lives. Nonetheless, they were able to overcome these challenges through positive attitudes and perseverance. Another key aspect to this research question was related to teacher and student relationships.

Research question number four looked at aspects that led to students being able to succeed. Specifically, the research was able to identify attributes which motivated the students. The main theme to be identified from the research was centered on the use of goal setting. Students were able to remain motivated through the use of both short-term and long-term goals. Many of these goals were focused on the current academic year. Some goals however, were focused on the long-term.

Research question number five addressed the issue of obstacles. All of the student participants had obstacles, both large and small, which they needed to overcome. Some of these challenges were significant. These individual challenges did not discourage them. Instead, they

showed strength to overcome them. One theme to be identified from the research was resilience among the students. All of the students demonstrated various levels of resilience.

This research study identified various themes and topics that were identified directly from the student participants and also from their teachers and parents. Also, themes were identified from classroom observations that were conducted as well. This chapter presented multiple themes which gave direction and guidance to the study. Multiple quotations were used and descriptions were provided in order to capture the essence of the phenomenon as it was observed by the researcher.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to learn and understand why some students succeed at high academic levels even when they lack parental involvement. The study learned from the perceptions of the student participants. Eight elementary school students in grades four through six were identified for the study. The student participants were observed during three different academic settings. They were also interviewed in order to gain an understanding of their success. While not directly participants of the study, a parent and a teacher of the student participants were also interviewed.

Summary of the Findings

The research methods used for this phenomenological study included classroom observations and open-ended interviews. The original interview questions were developed and submitted as part of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application prior to the research study being conducted (see Appendix F). Throughout the interview process, some of the questions led to further discussion and explanation from the student participants, their parents, and their teachers. Responses and perceptions from those being interviewed provided various pieces of data which created a backdrop for a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Information from the classroom observations and interviews was extrapolated and thus analyzed. After transcribing the interviews, I was able to review the transcriptions and begin to look for commonalities among the research participants. Originally, five research questions were developed. These questions were the focus of the study during the analyzing of the data obtained from the classroom observations and the interviews. From the observations and interviews, I was able to discover ten distinct themes the majority of the participants, or sometimes all of the participants, had in common. This chapter will discuss each of these ten themes with

interpretation of the data. The findings of the study will be discussed in correlation with the theoretical framework. Limitations of the study will be addressed and identified. Furthermore, recommendations for future research will be addressed as well. Finally, Biblical principles related to this study will be discussed.

Discussion of the Findings

Various themes were identified from the data collected in this study. The key issues that were identified were greatly tied to relationships, work ethic, habits, and intrinsic motivation. Specifically, the themes identified were the ability to make friends, participation and completion of homework and schoolwork, before and after school routines, homework habits, chores and home responsibilities, positive attitudes, perseverance, setting short-term and long-term goals, teacher relationship and support, and individual challenges and resilience. The literature addresses these themes, however there is a lack of consensus as to how these attributes are achieved or acquired among students. During the course of this study, the majority of the students exhibited all of these behaviors and characteristics. Furthermore, there were times when the entire group of student participants exhibited all of one or more attributes related to the individual findings.

Finding #1: Ability to Make Friends

The first finding identified from the data analysis was the student participants' ability to make friends. All of the participants in the study had friends within the classroom and outside of the classroom as well. Some of the participants were more socially engaged than others. However, all of the participants self-identified as having friends both within and outside the classroom. Parents and teachers of the participants also recognized that their children had meaningful friendships in and out of school.

This finding correlates with the theoretical framework of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory because students reported that it was important that they have friends in and out of the classroom. Bandura stated learners observe and learn from one another and from their environment. The classroom environment, for the student participants, was considered to be a warm and friendly environment. One key factor that contributed to this environment was the student participants themselves. The student participants were observed both in the classroom observations and interviews to be very friendly and outgoing. Furthermore, the teachers and parents also remarked that the participants were very friendly and outgoing and had social support within school and other social settings.

This finding also correlates to Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory. This theory states that all individuals grow and progress at different points and rates along a continuum of development. The student participants in this study were further along the social continuum than the majority of their peers and classmates. While it is difficult to identify the reasons behind the student participants' social maturity, it is clear that this social maturity helped them navigate friendships and relationships perpetuating their success in the academic classroom.

One conclusion that can be reached regarding this finding is that the ability to make friends both within the classroom and outside the classroom promotes individual student success. This helps students to connect to other classmates and to be excited and connected to their learning environment.

Throughout the course of the research study, 100% of the student participants agreed that they have friends within the classroom setting and outside of the classroom as well. While some of the students identified that they had a certain handful of friends within the classroom, others maintained that they were friends will all or most within the classroom. Some even identified

that they were friends with many students within their grade level as well. Parents and teachers agreed that the student participants were both friendly and had friends in the classroom. Many teachers also expressed that the student participants exhibited leadership skills where many of the other students looked up to or emulated the actions of the student participant. The research of Self-Determination Theory relates to this finding (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1991). The participants in this study exhibited friendliness to their peers around them. This directly relates to connection or relatedness. The participants were acting on the need to belong and feel part of a group. The research participants exhibited a higher level of connection or relatedness. Each participant would go out of his or her way in order to make friends and be a friend to others. These relationships were symbiotic because they served to meet the needs of both the research participant and the other classmates. This finding makes sense in light of the literature review. This also correlates with Darner's (2014) research that concluded that self-determination grows within positive social environments.

Some of the participants were more outgoing than others and some had more friends than others. However, all of the participants had clear self-perceptions of feeling like they belonged within the academic setting as well as being a positive and contributing member of the classroom. One reason that some students may have been more outgoing than others could have to do with individual personality differences. Also, this could also be attributed to students being on a different place along Piaget's continuum as it relates to individual student progress and growth.

Finding #2: Class Participation and Completion of Schoolwork and Homework

The student participants were observed in the classrooms, as well as demonstrating through information gathered from the interviews, to show high levels of classroom

participation. Regarding schoolwork, 100% of the research participants showed behaviors that contributed to effective levels of class participation and regular completion and submission of classwork. Data gathered from the teacher interviews also showed that the participants were effective in their classroom habits and completing classwork. Also, all of the students maintained a high priority in completing and turning in homework. Once again, teachers and parents of the participants reiterated that the student participants made homework a top priority. Also, 100% of the teachers interviewed reported that the student participants were responsible in completing and turning in their homework on a daily basis.

Even though 100% of the students completed their homework on a daily basis, this can likely be attributed to different factors depending on the individual circumstances. A few of the students reported that they lived in a home where there was an expectation that homework would be completed before other activities could be done. Even though parents may not have been in the home when the student arrived home, there was still an environment and expectation that homework would be completed. This relates to the theoretical framework of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory due to these expectations. Also, all of the teachers had high expectations that homework would be completed and returned as well. The teacher attitudes likely contributed to students being shaped by the classroom environment.

A few of the students reported having negative or indifferent attitudes regarding homework. Nonetheless, they recognized the importance of homework and made it a top priority anyway. This is an example of students showing great maturity and completing assignments even when they didn't want to. These students were again higher on the continuum of Piaget's Cognitive Development. Even when some students did not care about homework or want to complete it, they showed responsibility and did it anyway. This is definitely a higher level skill.

The participants completed their homework assignments on a daily basis, many times without the prompting or direction of their parents. The majority of the students reported coming home to a house without a parent present. Sometimes parents were not home because of work or other responsibilities and sometimes their parents were simply disengaged. The participants regularly exercised and demonstrated individual autonomy (Desforges, 2003). In the research reviewed by Desforges, students were able to show academic success despite the lack of parental involvement. There was a lack of research that showed a connection as to how and why these students were successful. This finding was a surprise as a result from the study. This also correlated with the research of Oguz (2013) and Annear and Yates (2010) which studied the effects of student autonomy. From the students at Riverton Elementary it could be theorized that these students were able to show high levels of success because of their intrinsic ability to complete homework on a daily basis. Aligned with the findings of Coleman and McNeese (2009) it can be concluded that parental involvement is important only to a limited degree. As students grow in age and maturity, student autonomy increases.

Further discussion of autonomy relates to the literature review involving the work of Grolnick, Deci, and Ryan (1991). A key correlation to Self-Determination Theory is that individuals seek to grow in autonomous ways. This is tied to behavior, goals, and growth. The student participants at Riverton may have completed their homework regularly because they wanted to show good behavior, move closer toward their goals, and seek individual growth. The Riverton students demonstrated that making homework a priority promoted their academic success.

Finding #3: Before and After School Routines

The third finding in this research study was that all of the student participants had clear and concise before and after school routines. All of the students, with the exception of one, even demonstrated enough initiative to wake themselves up each morning. All of the students also reported that they made homework a priority and part of their afternoon routine. Many of the students even completed or started homework at school or during an after-school program. Homework habits will be discussed in further detail in the next section. While some students went straight home after school, others attended an after school program, and some even went to the local recreation center.

This finding correlates to the theoretical framework of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory because the environments in which the student participants are able to establish and maintain their regular routines and structure are likely promoted in part by the adults at home and at school. This finding was not an anticipated outcome of the study and came as a surprise. Key research indicates that the workplace should seek to offer after school programs and work more closely to accommodate parent schedules as they relate to academic calendars (Christensen, Schneider, & Butler, 2011). The participants, while greatly showing self-sufficiency in establishing routines and schedules were responding to environments and possible expectations that are modeled by adults either at school or at home.

This finding also correlates to Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory. These students clearly worked to develop routine and structure in their daily lives in order to promote their own academic success. These students were not greatly pushed by their parents or teachers. Instead, the students themselves showed initiative to promote daily routines that promoted their success

academically. The student participants showed initiative on their own to make sure that they were ready each day with whatever their routine required.

The participants in this study were identified due to their perceptions of limited parental involvement. The review of literature found that there are types of parental involvement that are useful in promoting student achievement. Even though the student participants showed initiative in implementing their daily routines, perhaps the parents had influence on them and helped promote these routines. While the students implemented their own routines, parental involvement and influence may have contributed to these routines (Jacobs & Harvey, 2005). As students exercised autonomy in implementing and developing their own habits and routines parents were helping promulgate individual student autonomy (Wong, 2008). The more ingrained the students became in their daily routines and habits, the more self-sufficient they became.

Establishing clear routines before and after school helped to promote student success in the academic setting (Vera et al., 2012). Students were able to start each day with a clear routine and structure which then prepared them for good habits and performance while at school. After school routines also helped to further promote their academic success. Homework was an essential element to after school routines. The habits and attitudes that they possessed at home perpetuated their habits and attitudes during the day in the classroom setting. As students arrived at school ready for the day with homework in hand, they entered with an advantage over their classmates. By being ready and prepared, students were able to minimize distraction and remain focused for learning to occur. Once in the classroom, the cycle of effectiveness continued. As students, entered school ready for the day's instruction, they also left school ready to prepare for the next day of instruction.

Finding #4: Homework Habits

Another important finding in this study related to homework habits and how students both completed their homework and turned it in each day. 100% of the students reported that they made homework a daily priority. This is once again related to the theoretical theory of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. This finding makes sense in light of the literature review. Children are shaped by their environments and by models that they observe within these environments. Because the majority of the participants did not have a parent present while homework was being completed, why then were they successful in completing their homework on a daily basis? Perhaps homework habits were a result of teacher expectations, school expectations, or modeled through other student behavior.

Attitudes toward homework can often be negative in any school setting. This can result in homework not being completed or even ignored altogether. The participants of this study however, made homework a top priority. This relates to Piaget's Cognitive Development. The student participants recognized the importance of homework. They routinely responded that homework was a means by which they could be successful in school. It is possible the student participants achieved at higher levels when completing homework because they possessed a better understanding that completing homework would help promote their academic success.

The student participants were conscientious and responsible for completing their homework assignments. 100% of the student participants completed and turned in their homework on a daily basis. While every student did not possess a positive attitude regarding homework, all of the participants treated homework as a priority and made sure it was completed each day. Many of the participants started their homework assignments while still at school, while others made sure that homework was started as soon as they arrived home. Other

participants explained that they used time during the after school program to receive help with their homework. Regardless of where the students went after school each day, there was a resounding similarity in the way that they treated homework. Whenever students returned home, they made sure that they did their homework first. This relates to the literature regarding student autonomy and success. The participants were able to prioritize and complete homework through means of autonomy (Desforges, 2003). Even though parents were often missing from the homework routine and schedule, the participants were still able to be motivated and successful (Coleman & McNeese, 2009). Many parents did report in the interviews that even though their children possessed individual homework habits, these habits were reinforced at times by parental expectations (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Schools can also play an important role by teaching parents how to reinforce certain habits (Marshall & Swan, 2010).

Teachers also reported that they held high expectations for their students to complete and turn in homework on a daily basis. The participants of this study had effective habits regarding homework, while many of their peers did not. What did the student participants possess that separated them from the rest of their peers? Consistently, all of the student participants treated homework as a necessary part of their daily routine and structure. A couple of the participants expressed that they did not like homework. Regardless, they made sure that homework was completed anyway. All of the student participants reported their teachers gave them the opportunity to start their homework while still at school. Many of the participants also reported that they used daily homework time to focus on school projects that were due as well.

One conclusion that can be drawn regarding homework, is that students can promote academic success by prioritizing homework on a daily basis. As the student participants prepared each day to have their homework completed, they were better prepared for the next day of class.

This in turn perpetuated academic success in the classroom. The student participants were prepared and ready for the next day's instruction because of the practice that their homework provided. As evident from this study, the first step regarding homework is making sure it gets done and turned in each day. The results from this study can conclude that homework is an integral part of student academic success.

Finding #5: Chores and Home Responsibilities

The next finding from this research study was related to chores and other responsibilities at home. This finding was not directly related to the literature review. This finding was also surprising because it was able to show that parents can still have influence over their children even when they are not present in the home at all times (Bennet-Conroy, 2012). All of the student participants reported that they had chores that they were expected to complete on a regular or weekly basis. Five of the student participants were expected to complete chores on a daily basis. The other three participants also had to complete chores throughout various days of the week, but not every day. The student participants treated chores in a similar manner to homework. Whether they exhibited positive, negative, or indifferent attitudes regarding chores they all took the responsibility seriously. The participants preferred to get chores and other home responsibilities completed first in order to have more free time for themselves later. This attribute also relates to the theoretical framework of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. The participants responded to their environment and were shaped by the models that they saw. Out of the eight participants, there were two students who exhibited behaviors of procrastination and resistance. Even though they tried to avoid the chores, they still completed the chores without too much avoidance.

When students reported to their homes each afternoon or evening, many of them came home to an empty house void of parental involvement. However, the participants still had a propensity for completing chores. What could be the cause for this? One possibility is that even though the parents were not present at the time, they still exhibited an expectation that their child would complete chores and other responsibilities. This relates to the literature that states that when parental involvement is meaningful and calculated it is more effective (Boncana & Lopez, 2010). Furthermore, parental relationships and expectations that are reinforced in the home have a lasting effect on student outcomes (Woolly & Bowen, 2007). Even though parents were often not present during afternoon and evening schedules, their presence and influence was still felt by their children.

Even though this study looked at highly achieving students despite lack of parental involvement, it was evident parental influence had an effect on student outcomes. The participants may have reported their parents were uninvolved or unavailable. However, parental influence was observed when related to expectations surrounding chores and other home responsibilities (Mahmood, 2013). Harris and Goodall (2008) reported when parents understood the importance of their roles, they became more engaged in the parenting process. Parents can still have influence over their children's actions even though they are not present in the home. Parents can still offer structure and assistance through other means (Suleyman & Oquz, 2013). Some parents were participatory in unorthodox ways but still added to student achievement (Poza, Brooks, & Valdes, 2014).

Chores and other home responsibilities were an integral component of the student participant's daily structure. Just as homework was necessary to prepare students for academic success, chores were necessary to promote familial success in the home. This relates specifically

to all three components of Self-Determination Theory (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1991) namely: Competence, connection, and autonomous behavior. As students completed daily chores, they became more competent in the home environment. They also felt a connection and a responsibility for the success of the home. Finally, they demonstrated autonomy by realizing even though chores were expected, they were also a choice. Oftentimes there were no parents or other adults to monitor whether or not the jobs were completed. The participants themselves ultimately showed responsibility and initiative in completing the tasks in a timely manner.

In conclusion, chores and other home responsibilities are important in the growth and progress of students. When students learn to be responsible with chores, this perpetuates responsible attitudes as it relates to homework and classwork as well. The student participants that demonstrated effective work habits regarding chores, also demonstrated effective work habits in the academic setting.

Finding #6: Positive Attitudes

Another major finding in this research study addressed the importance of positive attitudes among the research participants. Many of the participants experienced negativity and challenging situations in their lives. However, a prevailing attitude among all student participants showed the importance of having a positive attitude and demonstrating this positivity in their daily lives (Ocak & Yamak, 2013). This finding was an expected outcome of the research study and relates to the literature review. Demonstrating a positive attitude can certainly be tied once again to the theoretical framework of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. Either through observations, student interviews, or parent and teacher interviews, 100% of the research participants demonstrated positive attitudes. What was unclear during the study is whether these positive attitudes were derived from the home, school environment, or simply intrinsic in nature.

Being able to demonstrate a positive attitude, particularly within negative circumstances or surroundings, shows considerable growth on the spectrum of Piaget's Cognitive Development. The participants ranged from grades four through six. Many students at this age are not yet fully developed in social and emotional maturity. Consistently, the students identified the importance of demonstrating positive attitudes and behaviors. A clear example of a participant that had made a clear transition toward exhibiting positive behaviors was Robert. He had made a conscience decision to work harder in school and to practice positive behaviors. In Robert's case especially, but in regard to all the participants, the students demonstrated positive attitudes and behaviors as a conscious choice.

Within the observation and interview process, there were varying degrees of positive attitudes reported and observed. The students themselves were the best indicator of positive attitudes. Their words and actions demonstrated high levels of motivation and positive attitudes. Some of the parents reported that their children showed signs of negativity at times, however this was counterbalanced by reports from teachers and the actions of the students themselves. In many cases, students showed more positive behaviors than perhaps their parents were aware of. This could be contributed to the notion that children demonstrate different behaviors at home than they do at school.

The role of positive attitudes relates to the literature regarding Self-Determination Theory. The students made a conscious effort to exercise autonomous behavior (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1991). They developed ownership of their own actions and academic success. While responding to the positive environment of the classroom, coupled with teacher expectations, the students developed autonomy. As observed within the classroom setting, the students also experienced connection or relatedness. They had a sense of belonging to the classroom and the

educational process. What is difficult to conclude is why these student participants possessed more positive attitudes than of their peers? What did these students possess that some of their classmates did not? One conclusion may be that the student participants had a propensity among their individual personalities to demonstrate positive behaviors and attitudes. Another conclusion is that the research participants had made conscious choice and effort to respond to positive environments and influences afforded to them.

A clear conclusion that can be drawn regarding the findings of this study is that students that possessed positive attitudes were also academically successful. It is not clear if one component caused the other or vice versa. Regardless, this study shows that students that possess positive attitudes can capitalize on this positivity and use it as a mechanism for further academic success. By maintaining positive attitudes throughout different facets of their daily lives, students can have greater results in the classroom as well as other aspects of their lives.

Finding #7: Perseverance

The research participants in this study all had a commonality of experiencing regular challenges in their daily lives. Further discussion will take place regarding more serious challenges in the section on resilience. This finding relates to the literature reviews because of its direct connection to Self-Determination Theory. This finding was surprising because it was not evident at the start of the research study that perseverance would play such a key role in the lives of the participants. For this section, the focus will be on situations that are indeed challenging for students but not serious enough to jeopardize the emotional or social development of the students. Some of the students struggled with learning disabilities, some were challenged by physical disability or limitations, and others simply faced the daily challenge of being an adolescent. In this study, 100% of the students reported that they faced difficulty and challenges

on a regular basis. While some students showed greater ability to persevere, all of the students showed the ability to rise above their daily challenges.

This relates to Piaget's Cognitive Development because students were able to show emotional maturity and persevere while faced with challenges at school or at home. One explanation for the participants being able to show this perseverance is perhaps they were further along Piaget's continuum and had developed the ability to persevere. While innate in some individuals, perseverance is a learned trait by others. It is also a trait that is typically associated with students and individuals that are much older and mature than the student participants in this study. This also relates to the theoretical framework of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory because the students may have learned this behavior from their environment. This behavior may have been learned from a parent, family member, teacher, or peer.

The trait of perseverance relates to the literature study and research related to resilience. Perseverance is a trait that can be passed down from one generation to another through oral methods and other examples (West-Olatunji, Sanders, Meta, Behar-Horenstein, 2010). Even when parents were not regularly involved in their child's academics, these students still showed signs of perseverance. This is certainly a hard trait to measure and it is even harder to determine the origin of the trait. Perhaps this is a trait learned from a parent, grandparent, or other family member. Furthermore, an individual may have learned this trait from a family member that is no longer present in the home. Furthermore, this trait is something that can be learned or promoted within the school setting as well. Teachers, staff, students, and other peers may in fact model this behavior for students to mirror.

One conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that students that show signs of perseverance are able to achieve academic success as well. All students face issues and

challenges that affect their daily lives. While some succumb to discouragement and negativity, others show signs of perseverance and are able to overcome these challenges. While it is not entirely clear why some students are able to persevere when others are not, it is evident that those that are able to persevere show greater signs of academic success.

Finding #8: Setting Short-term and Long-term Goals

Another finding that was important to this research study was the ability to use goal setting to progress academically and in other aspects of student life. While not all of the students used goal setting on a regular basis, the majority reported that they used both short-term and long-term goals to work toward their progress. Some students focused only on working to achieve short-term goals, while other students focused on achieving both short-term and long-term goals. This directly relates to the theoretical framework of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory specifically regarding self-regulation. This also correlates to the literature review regarding Self-Determination Theory. This was not an anticipated outcome of the research study and these results provided surprising evidence. The students were able to demonstrate self-efficacy through the use of personal agency as evident in their methods of individual goal setting (Kover & Worrell, 2010). Piaget's Cognitive Development also addresses the importance of goal setting for individuals. Piaget identified the importance of attaining cognitive development and being able to set appropriate goals for growth and progress.

Through the interview process it was learned that some situations involving goal setting were initiated by parents and teachers. However, a prevailing theme was discovered to show that the student participants themselves used both short-term and long-term setting. Many of the students focused on short-term goals related to academic or physical progress for the given school year. Other participants shared long-term goals related to post-secondary education,

workforce goals, sports goals, and other aspirations. Some of the student goals were general in nature such as increasing in athletic ability, behaving better in school, and getting good grades. Other goals were very specific and lofty in nature. Some students expressed goals to reach certain mathematical prerequisite levels for their grade next year. Others communicated goals related to which colleges they would attend and professions they would have. The participants expressed vision that they had for the future.

The importance of using goal setting is reiterated in research from the literature study. Again, aspects related to Self-Determination Theory are applicable. Specifically, when students exercise the ability to set goals they are increasing in their autonomous growth (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1991). The participants in this study that used goal setting, were able to speak about specific goals that they had set themselves and how they were working to achieve those goals. Many of these goals were student initiated without input from teachers or parents (Desforges, 2003). Some of the student created goals were loftier goals than what parents or teachers might have suggested. Parents and teachers can also be instrumental in helping students set and reach various goals (Kyle, 2011). When goal setting is implemented, students are more apt to work towards goals. Whether the students set the goals themselves or if they are done with guidance, it is vital that students take ownership of their goals. The more input and ownership that students possess when setting goals, the more likely they may be to work toward achieving these goals.

Goal setting was an important finding in this research study. The ability and willingness that students possessed related to goal setting also was reflective of their ability to work towards the goals that they had set. The participants were earnest, dedicated, and focused on their goals. This promoted more success in academic settings as they worked towards these goals. The ability to use goal setting also promoted an awareness among the student participants. By setting

short-term and long-term goals, students are able to focus on current and future success. They are able to see themselves beyond the walls of the classroom.

In conclusion, the use of goal setting is important for students and their academic success. These can be goals students set for themselves or can also be goals students set with input from a teacher, parent, or other source. When students are able to set both short-term and long-term goals, they can be motivated to focus on behaviors that help them reach their goals. When they revisit their goals on a regular basis, they are motivated to work and develop current and future behaviors promoting student success.

Finding #9: Teacher Relationship and Support

The teacher relationship and support that the student participants experienced was another important finding in this research study. While this was not an anticipated finding, the more the research study progressed, it became evident that all of the student participants had meaningful relationships and support from their classroom teacher or teachers. This was revealed during the process of the interviews. Some of the students reported they had meaningful support from a caring teacher. Parents strengthened this finding when they unanimously praised the classroom teacher(s) for all that they do for the students. Some parents were even emotional when describing the degree to which the teachers cared for their children. Finally, while being interviewed, the teachers themselves shared thoughts and insight regarding the level and degree to which they cared and provided for their students academically and socially. Teacher praise is an effective tool in which to build student confidence and ability (Burnett & Mandel, 2010). Also, as teachers built string relationships, students grew in their intrinsic attitudes (Crow 2011). This correlates to the literature that states that schools can increase student achievement by developing caring and lasting relationships with students (Payne, 2005). Also, when studying

what best determines student success, the number one factor is teacher efficacy (Marzano, 2007). In this research study, the teachers created an environment in which their students could thrive and grow.

Strong student and teacher relationships also correlate with the theoretical framework of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. By creating a positive, warm, and caring learning environment teachers promote an environment in which students can thrive. Students have the opportunity of whether or not to respond and react to their environment. The participants in this study responded well to their educational environment. Bandura stated that individuals respond to their environment and models that are presented to them. As evident in the observations and interviews, the teachers of the student participants operated at high levels of kindness, care, and nurture.

As teachers strive to better understand their students and their needs, student performance increases (Bartel, 2009). Teachers should be methodical about this approach. The more effort that they place in creating an effective learning environment the more likely their students are to respond in positive ways. Also, as teachers create positive learning environments, students have a greater desire to be a part of the learning process (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1991). Students feel connected to positive environments and work harder to rise to the challenges and expectations of their environment. The students in this research study had responded positively to the challenging and caring academic environment that their teachers had prepared for them.

One conclusion from this study is that classroom teachers have notable power and influence when it comes to engaging and inspiring their students. It is not enough to focus on curriculum only. Effective teachers can promote student achievement by creating a classroom environment in which students are challenged with high expectations and a kind and caring

teacher. Teachers may have great influence when it comes to shaping the life of a child. What is unclear from this study however is the fact that some students respond positively to these expectations while other students seem to not respond at all. It is impossible to know when and how a teacher's influence may be felt by a student. Therefore, it is requisite that all teachers should hold high expectations for all students.

Another conclusion from this study is that when students feel a connection to the teacher and the classroom, they are able to be more successful. They feel connected to the educational process and they feel connected to their learning. When they take a greater stake and responsibility for their learning they will encounter more academic success.

Finding #10: Individual Challenges and Resilience

An overarching finding that became evident throughout the interview process was that the participants in this study all faced significant challenges in their lives. In this study, 100% of the student participants had each experienced significant challenges. Two of the students struggled with learning disabilities that impeded their academic progress. Three of the students had recently experienced divorce of parents. One student who struggled with diabetes also had a father that was incarcerated. Another student was sexually abused when he was younger. Another student had experienced homelessness during the past school year. Many of the students revealed these circumstances during the course of the interviews. Some of the parents and teachers also revealed different challenges that their children had faced or were currently facing.

This finding relates directly to the theoretical framework of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. This theory explains that effective modeling leads to positive outcomes. This finding was especially surprising. This was not an expected outcome of the research study. However, it does relate closely to the literature review regarding resilient behaviors. It was interesting to

discover that nearly all of the student participants had been affected by great challenges. Through resilience, they were able to overcome these challenges. As students are able to cultivate resilience, they are able to better overcome challenges they face (Russo & Boman, 2007). This will also help them to better face future obstacles (Hanewald, 2011). Even though these students had encountered great challenges in their lives, they were not discouraged or beaten down by these events. In many cases, the participants had examples around them that helped them to overcome these challenges. Instead of succumbing to discouragement and giving in to negative behaviors, the participants were able to remain positive and work to overcome their challenges and difficulties.

Once again, the role of student autonomy is an important aspect related to overcoming challenges. As students develop autonomy they are able to grow in their goals and behavior (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1991). One possible conclusion regarding resilience is that when students believe that they can overcome challenges, they no longer act as victims of circumstances beyond their control. They are empowered to forge new futures and outcomes for themselves. Where once they may have lost control and been manipulated by certain situations, they now have greater control of their future. They are not defined by their negative experiences.

Why do some students grow in strength and resilience while others do not? Some students cultivate resilience on their own. They are able to do this through inner strength. Other students learn it from a support system. The participants in this study likely learned resilience from a parent, family member, teacher, or peer. The literature suggests that resilience is a strength and skill that can be handed down from one generation to another (West-Olatunji, Sanders, Meta, & Behar-Horenstein, 2010). This was an interesting finding from the study that

was also confirmed in the literature review. Resilience in students can still be present even when the parent or guardian was not readily involved in the educational process.

In conclusion, all of the participants in this study experienced great challenges and showed high levels of resilience. This was evident in their behavior, academic progress, and attitudes. What can schools and teachers do to help students overcome challenges and demonstrate resilience? First, teachers can model resilient behavior. They can dialogue with students about how to overcome challenges. Some teachers in this study explained that through the use of classroom meetings they modeled how to overcome conflict and challenges. Finally, parents can help students overcome challenges and cultivate resilience through their words and actions. The more that adults can model resilient behaviors, the more students will be apt to mirror this behavior.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was the number of research participants. The limited number of research participants did make the study manageable for the researcher, however, a larger population group could also shed more light on the phenomenon being studied. Another limitation of this study was the age of the participants. More information regarding the phenomenon could have been identified with a larger group of participants of older ages as well, including middle school students and high school students. However, to make the research study manageable, the study was limited to students between grades four and six. This was also an appropriate age to conduct the study as students in this age group begin to show signs of autonomy and self-determination.

Two subsidiary themes to be identified from this study were not directly identified as major themes but nonetheless were found to be prevalent in the observations and interviews. The

first of these subsidiary themes was that the majority of the student participants qualified for free or reduced breakfast and lunch. The second subsidiary theme to be identified from the research was that the majority of the student participants were being raised in single parent families. Exploring the impact of these two themes will be discussed further in the next section as recommendations for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further studies should look at using a bigger sample of student participants. By using a larger pool of research participants, future studies can determine if findings are similar to the findings of this study.

Further studies should be conducted using older students as research participants. By studying the results from older participants, future studies can verify if results are similar to those found in this study.

While not a direct focus of this study, it became evident that seven of the eight student participants qualified for free and reduced lunch. Further studies should look at free and reduced lunch as one of the qualifying factors for the research participants. This information would help to look at reasons why some students that qualify for free and reduced are able to achieve at high academic levels.

Another finding in this study discovered that seven of the eight student participants resided in single-parent families. The finding of single-parent families relates to the literature by explaining that when some parents choose to not stay together, this puts a strain on parental involvement in school (McLanahan & Beck, 2010). Because parents often try to avoid each other, this limits one or both parent's involvement in the educational process. Effective teachers in this study were able to overcome this challenge. Some teachers held multiple conferences for

both parents or made multiple phone calls to both parents regarding a student's progress. When teachers were sensitive to the needs of both parents, this often increased the parental involvement. Future studies should be conducted to look at the single-parent families and student resilience.

Future studies should take a closer look at the academic success of African-American students that are highly achieving despite the lack of parental involvement. Six of the eight participants in this study were African-American. This number represented 75% of the research participants. Future studies should also look at characteristics among African-American students that enable them to achieve at higher levels.

Studies concerning teacher efficacy should be a part of future research. Future studies should also look closely at Marzano's (2007) research as it relates to teacher efficacy and student achievement.

Future studies concerning Self-Determination Theory (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1991) should be addressed relating to student achievement. Particular focus should be given to the main components of this theory which are competence, connection or relatedness, and autonomous behavior.

Practical Applications for Stakeholders

The results of this study suggest key practical applications for stakeholders. The stakeholders related to this study include students, parents, teachers, administrators and other educators.

Students should change their approach to learning in order to better develop attributes associated with self-determination. These traits can be developed through being friendly, establishing good habits, and setting short-term and long-term goals. Students should also

understand that they are responsible for their learning and progress. Parents must understand

their role when helping their children to be academically successful. Even though parents may

have limitations to academic involvement, they can influence their children in other ways.

Specifically, parents should hold high standards and expectations for their children. Also, parents

can promote good habits by holding their children accountable for homework, chores, and other

home responsibilities. Parents can also help their children to establish and maintain daily

structure and routine. Teachers likewise should hold high standards for their students. They

should also provide a learning environment that is engaging, challenging, and caring. Finally,

administrators and other educators should recognize the importance of after school programs.

The main thrust of these programs should focus on increasing academic ability through

meaningful homework and not solely dedicated to child care or social activities.

Biblical Principles Related to this Study

When this study was initiated, I was interested in what schools could do to better equip

students to be academically successful when there was a lack of parental involvement.

Specifically, I was interested in learning how best to support and enable students that were

neglected or lacked support from home and family. There are multiple reasons that can explain

why parents lack involvement in their child's academics. Some parents have work constraints,

others lack basic parenting skills, and others make choices that inhibit their ability to support

their child in the school setting. As an educator, I have a role and responsibility to meet the needs

of my students even when their parents may not be able to do so.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ teaches that all individuals are sons and daughters of a Father

in Heaven. Jesus taught that we must see the potential in others and look upon their hearts.

Romans 8:16 states, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of

God". We are all children of God. This is especially poignant when interacting with students. Educators can apply Gospel principles when interacting with children. Specifically, children that come from homes that lack support can benefit from caring and supportive educators. When educators see students for what they will become, they can provide students encouragement and compassion.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover why certain students achieve at high academic rates even when they lack parental involvement. There is an abundance of literature that speaks to the importance of parental involvement in schools and to aid in the academic progress and success of their children. There is not a clear consensus on what type of parental involvement works best to meet the needs of students. Furthermore, there is a difference in perspectives and opinions between what schools think is best and what parents think is best. There are not many studies relating to students that are able to achieve despite the lack of parental involvement. This research study was developed to gain a better understanding of what specific attributes and habits the research participants possessed. Essential to this study was to hear the voice of the students and learn from their insight and perspectives. Further insight was gained through interviews conducted with the parents and teachers as well.

The participants for this study were selected through the use of a survey which self-identified them as having parents that were not involved in their schooling. Once students were identified by means of the survey, their academic records were reviewed to ascertain if they were highly achieving by earning grades of 'B' or higher in their academic classes. Observations of the students were also conducted. Further data was collected through the use of open-ended

interviews of the students, their teachers, and parents. This data provided multiple examples of student behavior that better helped to explain the phenomenon that was being researched.

The findings of this study answered the research questions that drove the study. This research study addressed the first research question. The student participants had friendly and outgoing personalities. They also exhibited a strong work ethic both within and without the classroom. Finally, their daily habits helped them to be successful.

This study addressed the second research question by revealing what habits the participants possessed. A strong commitment to homework was a key element that was discovered. Students did not need to have positive attitudes regarding homework, they simply needed to make it a daily priority. Chores and other home responsibilities also added to their daily habits. As the students committed to daily chores, this helped them increase in the academic responsibility as well.

The research study addressed the third research question by discovering that many of the participants exhibited strong positive attitudes. The majority of the students remained positive even during negative situations. As students faced challenges and struggles, they did not give up. They also demonstrated components related to Self-Determination Theory (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1991). The students in this study regularly showed optimism when faced with daily challenges.

The findings in this study also answered the fourth research question. All of the student participants were motivated to succeed. A key element that was discovered during the course of this study was related to the use of goal setting. All of the students in this study used either short-term goal setting, long-term goal setting, or both. Some of the students even set high goals for

themselves both for the present and well into the future. Another motivation that these students possessed was intrinsic motivation.

Finally the last research question was answered as it related to the obstacles that these students had to overcome. All of the participants had obstacles that they had overcome in their lives. Many of these obstacles were substantially challenging. The study identified resilience as a key factor in aiding the participants in overcoming their challenges.

This research study found evidence to support that parental involvement is not necessary for student success. Of course, parental involvement is a desired outcome. However, given the challenges and obstacles that we face in our current society, it is not always likely that schools will be able to involve parents in the educational process to the degree that schools see effective. Results from this study are reassuring because this study suggests that there are other ways in which students can still find high levels of academic success. By promoting and perpetuating these traits and characteristics in all students, educators can help all students achieve at higher levels.

This research study provided many important factors related to student achievement and parental involvement. While parental involvement can help increase student achievement, it is unpredictable and difficult to promote. The results from this research helped identify that the single most important factor related to student achievement is the focus and emphasis place on the students themselves. Rather than exhaust time, money, and resources to identify what parental involvement programs to implement, educators should turn their focus to students instead. By implementing and promoting components related to Self-Determination, schools can help students better reach their potential. Because schools have access to students every day, this

is a better use of time and resources. Each day, schools should focus on the positive effects they

can have on each and every student to help them reach their true potential.

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APPENDIX A

PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS SCALES (POPS)

http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/perceptions-of-parents-scales/

APPENDIX B

FIELD NOTES TEMPLATE

Length of Activity:	
Descriptive Notes	**Reflective Notes**

APPENDIX C

Student Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Questions:

1. Please describe your family for me.

2. Which of your family members are most often at home? Describe your interaction with them.

3. Describe for me the involvement of your parent or other family member in regard to your educational progress.

4. How do you approach homework?

5. Tell me about the chores you have at home. How often do you have chores?

6. Tell me about what you do before school each day.

7. Describe for me your personality.

8. Do you set goals? Tell me about how you set goals. What goal is important to you?

9. What challenges do you encounter in your life? How do you overcome challenges?

10. Tell me about friends that you have in class?

11. Tell me about your friends outside of class?

12. How do you feel about the teacher?

13. Tell me about the support that your parents or family provides for you.

14. What else can you tell about things that contribute to your success in school?

15. Thank you for participating in this interview. Please be assured of the confidentiality of

your responses today.

APPENDIX D

Parent Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Questions:

1. What habits does your child have when it comes to homework? What attitude does your child have about homework?

2. What chores or home responsibilities does your child have? What attitude does your child have about chores and other responsibilities?

3. Tell me about your child's habits before and after school each day. What is your child's routine each day after school?

4. Describe for me your child's personality.

5. Tell me about the goals that your child sets.

6. What challenges does your child encounter in life? Explain. How does he or she overcome challenges?

7. Tell me about your child's friends.

8. How does your child feel about the teacher?

9. What kind of support do you provide for your child?

10. What else can you tell about things that contribute to your child's success in school?

11. Thank you for participating in this interview. Please be assured of the confidentiality of

    your responses today.

APPENDIX E

Teacher Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Questions:

1. What habits does your student have when it comes to homework? What attitude does your student possess in the classroom? Can you tell me more about that?

2. Describe for me your student's personality.

3. How does your student approach goal setting and attaining of those goals? What kind of goals would he/she set?

4. What challenges does your student encounter in life? Explain. How does he or she overcome challenges?

5. How does your student go about making friends in class?

6. How does your student approach friendships outside of class?

7. Describe for me the relationship that you have with your student.

8. What kind of support do you provide for your student?

9. What else can you tell about things that contribute to your student's success in school?

10. Thank you for participating in this interview. Please be assured of the confidentiality of your responses today.

APPENDIX F

IRB Approval for Study

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 6, 2014

John Ralph McKinley
IRB Approval 1861.050614: A Phenomenological Study of Highly Achieving
Elementary School Students despite Lack of Parental Involvement

Dear John,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the
Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. 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 were attached to your approval email.

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,
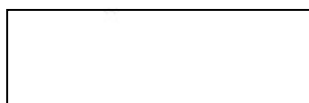
Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

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APPENDIX G

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Date: May 8, 2014

Dear Parent:

As a graduate student in the Education Department at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree to better understand a phenomenon. The purpose of my research is to understand how some students achieve at high academic levels despite lack of parental involvement, and I am writing to invite you and your child to participate in my study.

If you and your child are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in certain aspects of the study. For this study, students in grades 4-6 will be identified through use of the Perceptions of Parents Scale (POPS) survey and the student grade point average report. Participating students will be observed in the classroom setting. Also, interviews will be held with participating students, teachers, and parents. It should take approximately 3-4 weeks for you to complete the procedures listed. The POPS survey will take 10-15 minutes to complete, the observations will take 1-2 hours to complete, and the interviews will take 15-30 minutes to complete. You and your child's participation will not be anonymous. However, during the course of the investigation pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of all participants.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to your child's school/teacher. The teacher will deliver the consent document to the school secretary or your child may also deliver it directly to the school secretary if he or she chooses.
If you choose to participate and your child is found eligible for the study, you will receive a $20 gift card to a Sheetz Gas Station. In order to receive the gift card, all aspects of the data study will need to be completed involving the POPS survey, classroom observations, and interviews.

Sincerely,

Jack McKinley
Doctorate Student
Liberty University

Date: May 8, 2014

Dear Teacher:

As a graduate student in the Education Department at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree to better understand a phenomenon. The purpose of my research is to understand how some students achieve at high academic levels despite lack of parental involvement, and I am writing to invite you and your student to participate in my study.

If your student, (insert name of identified student), and his/her parent are willing to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in certain aspects of the study. Students identified for this study will be those in grades 4-6 that identify as having limited parental involvement as measured on the Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS) survey and have an academic grade point average of 'B' or higher. A minimum of 6 students will be identified for the study. Participating students will be observed in the classroom setting. Also, interviews will be held with participating students, teachers, and parents. As the teacher, you will be asked to participate in an interview regarding your student's habits and achievement. The interview will last approximately 15-30 minutes. Pseudonyms will be used in all aspects of the study and data analysis to protect the identity of the participants. .

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to the school secretary in the main office.

Sincerely,

Jack McKinley
Doctorate Student
Liberty University

Date: May 20, 2014

Dear Parent:

This is a follow-up letter to a previous letter and consent form that was sent to you earlier. As a graduate student in the Education Department at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree to better understand a phenomenon. The purpose of my research is to understand how some students achieve at high academic levels despite lack of parental involvement. I also work in the position of principal at Belle Heth. All study records and any related sensitive family information will be kept separate and have no connection to school records. Any information garnered from the study will not affect the school's perception of and/or treatment of the student/family.

Thank you for your willingness to have you and your child participate in the study. Your child does not qualify for the study because they did not meet the criteria in that they either did not have a suitable GPA for the study or they or you have opted out of the study.

Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Jack McKinley

Doctorate Student

Liberty University

Date: May 20, 2014

Dear Teacher:

This is a follow-up letter to a previous letter and consent form that was sent to you earlier. As a graduate student in the Education Department at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree to better understand a phenomenon. The purpose of my research is to understand how some students achieve at high academic levels despite lack of parental involvement. I also work in the position of principal at Belle Heth. All study records and any related sensitive family information will be kept separate and have no connection to school records. Any information garnered from the study will not affect the school's perception of and/or treatment of the student/family.

Thank you for your willingness to have you and your child participate in the study. This letter is to clarify that your child meets the requirements of the study. Also, as a matter of clarification your child will be administered the Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS) which is a survey used to determine levels of parental involvement.

Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Jack McKinley
Doctorate Student
Liberty University

APPENDIX H

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

PARENTAL VERSION

A Phenomenological Study of Highly Achieving Elementary School Students Despite Lack of Parental Involvement
Mr. Jack McKinley
Liberty University
School of Education

You and your child are invited to be in a research study that intends to identify themes regarding highly achieving elementary school students despite lack of parental involvement. Due to various constraints related to work schedules, educational background, and other factors, many parents are unavailable to be involved in the daily educational experiences of their children. Some students still excel regardless of the lack of parental involvement. This study will provide insight to the perspectives of these students and what they do to achieve academic success. You were selected as a possible participant because your child is enrolled in elementary school. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Principal Investigator: Mr. Jack McKinley, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to code and identify recurring themes regarding highly achieving elementary school students despite lack of parental involvement. This will provide insight to what attitudes and characteristics these students possess, as well as their suggestions for addressing future situations involving other students in similar situations.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
The research study will seek to identify a minimum of six student participants. All consenting parents will allow their child to take the survey the Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS), which determines levels of parental involvement. The POPS will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. All consenting parents will allow the principal investigator to have access to the student's grade point average record to determine that the student has a 'B' average or higher in all academic areas. All consenting parents will allow their child to be observed three times in the classroom setting. The observations will observe student habits and attitudes that contribute to student success. The observations will last between 20-60 minutes. All consenting parents will allow face-to-face interviews to be conducted with their child, themselves, and the child's teacher. These interviews will be voluntary and allowable if the student and the teacher also consent. The interviews will last between 15-30 minutes. The face-to-face interviews will consist of investigator-initiated discussion prompts, which will be recorded using an audio recorder. The interviews will be transcribed and coded. Pseudonyms will be used in all transcriptions and observations.

Transcriptions and observations will be stripped of identifying information, and the text will be coded and analyzed. The duration of your participation in this study will conclude after observations and interviews have been conducted. It is estimated that observation and interviews will be conducted within a two- to three-week time period.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

No more than the risk typically associated with everyday activities is associated with this study. There are no direct benefits to the participants beyond the satisfaction of having contributed their voice and perspective to current research in the field. The possible benefits to society include sharing of perspectives and ideas about highly achieving students. This will be of interest and benefit to current practitioner and administrators at all levels of education.

Compensation:

Students that are identified for the study and successfully complete all aspects of the study including the POPS scale, observations, and student/parent interviews will receive compensation. Qualifying families will receive one gift card, per family, of $20 to a local gas station to compensate for any time or travel associated with the study. The gift cards will be issued once the participants have completed the POPS scale, observations, and interviews.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants within the study will not be known to each other.
- Pseudonyms will be applied to student grade point average reports, classroom observation notes, and face-to-face interview transcriptions.
- Recorded interviews will be erased after transcriptions are produced.
- Transcriptions with non-identifying data/pseudonyms may be retained indefinitely.
- The data may be used for future research projects, but no identifying data will be used in any publication, product, or future research that may extend from this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate or to allow your child to participate will not affect your or your child's current or future relations with Liberty University or Belle Heth Elementary School. If you decide to participate, you and your child are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide to withdraw or to withdraw your child from the study at any time for any reason. In order to withdraw, simply contact the principal investigator. Any research, observation notes, or interview recordings that had thus been collected will be destroyed and not used in any portion of the research study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Mr. Jack McKinley. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at 540-239-6829 or jrmckinley@liberty.edu. His advisor, Dr. Judy Sandlin, may also be contacted at jsandlin@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Please check the following as applicable:

☐ I agree to participate in the audio recorded, face-to-face focus interview.

☐ I agree to allow my child to participate in the audio recorded, face-to-face focus interview.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers:

IRB Expiration Date:

CONSENT FORM

TEACHER VERSION

A Phenomenological Study of Highly Achieving Elementary School Students Despite Lack of Parental Involvement
Mr. Jack McKinley
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study that intends to identify themes regarding highly achieving elementary school students despite lack of parental involvement. Due to various constraints related to work schedules, educational background, and other factors, many parents are unavailable to be involved in the daily educational experiences of their children. Some students still excel regardless of the lack of parental involvement. This study will provide insight to the perspectives of these students and what they do to achieve academic success. You were selected as a possible participant because your student is a participant in the research study. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Principal Investigator: Mr. Jack McKinley, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to code and identify recurring themes regarding highly achieving elementary school students despite lack of parental involvement. This will provide insight to what attitudes and characteristics these students possess, as well as their suggestions for addressing future situations involving other students in similar situations.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
Teachers of students identified for this study will be asked to consent to face-to-face interviews. These interviews will be voluntary. The interviews will last for 15-30 minutes. The face-to-face interviews will consist of investigator-initiated discussion prompts, which will be recorded using an audio recorder. The interviews will be transcribed and coded. Pseudonyms will be used in all transcriptions and observations. Transcriptions and observations will be stripped of identifying information, and the text will be coded and analyzed. The duration of your participation in this study will conclude after observations and interviews have been conducted.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

No more than the risk typically associated with everyday activities is associated with this study. There are no direct benefits to the participants beyond the satisfaction of having contributed their voice and perspective to current research in the field. The possible benefits to society include sharing of

perspectives and ideas about highly achieving students. This will be of interest and benefit to the current practitioner and administrators at all levels of education.

Compensation:

Teachers will not be compensated for the interviews or any portion of the study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants within the study will not be known to each other.
- Pseudonyms will be applied to student grade point average reports, classroom observation notes, and face-to-face interview transcriptions.
- Recorded interviews will be erased after transcriptions are produced.
- Transcriptions with non-identifying data/pseudonyms may be retained indefinitely.
- The data may be used for future research projects, but no identifying data will be used in any publication, product, or future research that may extend from this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Belle Heth Elementary School. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. In order to withdraw, simply contact the principal investigator. Any research, observation notes, or interview recordings that had thus been collected will be destroyed and not used in any portion of the research study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Mr. Jack McKinley. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at 540-239-6829 or jrmckinley@liberty.edu. His advisor, Dr. Judy Sandlin, may also be contacted at jsandlin@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Please check the following as applicable:

☐ I agree to participate in the audio recorded, face-to-face focus interview.

Signature: Date:

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers:

IRB Expiration Date:

Assent (Permission) of Child to Participate in a Research Study

What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?
The title of this study is A Phenomenological Study of Highly Achieving Elementary School Students Despite Lack of Parental Involvement. This study is being conducted by Jack McKinley, a doctoral student at Liberty University.

Why am I doing this study?
I am interested in studying this topic to investigate and identify what characteristics, habits, and attitudes these students possess and how this can be applied to students in similar situations.

Why am I asking you to be in this study?
You are being asked to be in this research study because you are a highly achieving elementary school student despite lack of parental involvement.

If you agree, what will happen?
If you are in this study, you will take a POPS survey that looks at parental involvement. Your grade point average will be reviewed, indicating an academic grade point average of 'B' or higher. You will be observed in the classroom. You will also take part in a face-to-face interview that will be recorded. Your teacher and your parent will also take part in a face-to-face interview that will be recorded. All names used in the study will be changed to protect your identity. The researcher will then look for habits and traits that students in the study possess.

Do you have to be in this study?
No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell the researcher. If you don't want to, it's OK to say no. The researcher will not be angry. You can say yes now and change your mind later. It's up to you.

Do you have any questions?
You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to the researcher. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher to explain it to you again.

Signing your name below means that you want to be in the study.

_____
Signature of Child   Date

Mr. Jack McKinley: jrmckinley@liberty.edu
Advisor, Dr. Judy Sandlin: jsandlin@liberty.edu
Liberty University Institutional Review Board,
1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515
or email at irb@liberty.edu