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Examining Parental Involvement in an Elementary School's Prekindergarten Program

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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2016

Abstract

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by

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MEd, East Texas State University, 1995

BA, Prairie View A & M University, 1983

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Parental involvement is integral to promoting a high quality school environment. A lack

of parent involvement is a problem that currently exists in an urban, public elementary

school in Texas. This issue is important because once the parents increase their

engagement, the home school relationship can be improved. The purpose of this

qualitative case study was to investigate how pre-kindergarten parents at the study

elementary school perceive parent involvement and how principals and teachers at the

school can help parents improve their involvement. This study is based upon Epstein's

theory of 6 types of parent involvement. This study examined parents' perceptions of the

role of parental involvement in children's education and the strategies that schools may

use to boost parental involvement. Over the course of the 9-month school year, individual

interviews were conducted with 14 parents whose children attended the prekindergarten

program at this school in Texas. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes. Parents

considered their involvement to be important and appreciated receiving school

information through phone conferences, newsletters, and an online portal. Parents also

reported that health issues, time restraints, and busy work schedules were obstacles to

being more involved. Recommendations for improving parental involvement included

parent workshops on academic strategies and programming that is scheduled after school

to accommodate parents' schedules. This study could contribute to positive social change

by encouraging parental involvement at the study site. Additionally, this study could

enhance positive social change by encouraging the educational sector to focus on

building effective school/family partnerships.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Schools should consider parents' differing preferences, abilities, and availabilities when trying to increase parental involvement (PI) in their children's education (Lion, 2010). In so doing, more parents would get involved if schools offered a greater variety of opportunities for involvement (Lion, 2010). However, many parents who are willing to participate in their children's educational setting are unaware of ways and opportunities to provide support. In 2012, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stated that the level of PI would increase if U.S. schools offered a greater variety of ways for parents to participate in their children's schools. Informing parents of the various means of becoming involved could open opportunities for them to become actively engaged. Parents should be able to choose from a variety of ways that will fit their interests and availability, as well as meet the needs of the school and their children.

Researchers have found that PI leads to successful outcomes. For example, in 2013 the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (CCSRI) discovered that schools that foster successful PI believe there is "a shared interest of both school and family, envision parents as partners in the learning process, and then identify concrete ways that partnership can be activated" (para.6). Williams (2010) suggested professionals in the field of education not only encourage parents to become involved but also offer avenues that will assist parents to become partners. Williams further encouraged school personnel to connect with the parents in order to provide them with the necessary strategies to increase their participation. Sutton (2013) stated there are Sutton (2013) stated there are many ways that parents can get involved in their

children's schools, and schools that provide a variety of opportunities can encourage parents to give of their time and talents.

Parents are able to serve more effectively in their children's school when they have the support of teachers. As Comer and Haynes (2013) noted, when parents are connected with supportive teachers, they become more knowledgeable about how to better serve in their children's schools. Parents need to understand what different levels of involvement are available, as well as the possibilities that strong parent-school relationships create. It is crucial that parents feel they are important to their children's schools. Davis (2010) noted that schools can take measures to increase parents' participation in their child's learning environment. With the help of schools, meaningful opportunities can be provided for parents to become engaged in activities (Davis, 2010).

Background

Researchers have found that PI in schooling promotes positive results for children now and for their future aspirations (Glasgow & Whitney, 2009). Butler, Uline, and Notar (2008) found the success of PI depends on schools and educators being proactive in using strategies to gain and maintain parental participation. Researchers confirm that schools exercising best practices for PI (a) create a welcoming environment; (b) provide families with information related to developing supportive learning environments; (c) establish effective school/home communication; and (d) engage families in school planning, leadership, and volunteer opportunities (Ohio Department of Education, 2013). Additionally, researchers revealed parents who partner with their children's schools have the opportunity to interact with school personnel, become familiar with school activities, and learn first-hand about the social cultures of schools

(Gurian, n.d.). Berger (2008) reported parent-school connections bring the strengths of the home and the expertise of the school into a working partnership.

Through the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2003), state legislators have passed laws which require schools to have an active PI program that will promote effective parent-school partnerships. In order to meet this goal, school administrators and teachers need to investigate how parents perceive PI and what influences their participation.

Researchers found that various means of communication from teachers influence PI. Researchers found that invitations from the teacher to participate in school activities have a significant influence on PI (Hiatt-Michael, 2010). Teachers who communicate frequently with parents and value parental input, greatly influence parents' decisions to become involved (Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Hindman, Grant, & Stronge, 2013). In this study, the researcher sought to contribute additional knowledge regarding parents' perceptions and experiences with PI. My research may help these practitioners build stronger and more effective partnerships between schools and parents.

Problem Statement

Teachers and administrators in an urban, public elementary school in Dallas, Texas are confronted with a problem that currently exists: PI is lacking in their children's educational setting schoolwide. This school's *2014 Action Report* calls for an increase in PI via various strategies that parents can use on a daily basis. The school's PI metrics have been lower than desired since 2011-2012. According to the PTA president of this school, the PTA membership, attendance, and participation have been low for 4 consecutive years (personal communication,

January 8, 2014). For example, in 2011-2012, the student database and the PTA membership roster consecutively showed a student enrollment of 741, with 46 parents registered as PTA members. Less than 50% of the registered PTA members participated in PTA meetings each month. Also, in 2012-2013, 673 students were enrolled, with 60 parents registered as PTA members. Less than 25% of the registered members participated in PTA meetings each month. Additionally, in 2013-2014, with 668 students enrolled, 18 parents registered as PTA members, and less than 50% participated in PTA meetings every month. In 2014-2015, 715 students were enrolled at the school; however, according to PTA records, 22 parents were registered as PTA members with nearly 100% of them participating in the PTA meetings during the months of September 2014 and December 2014 (PTA president, personal communication, January 8, 2014). It would seem that parents are interested enough to attend PTA meetings, but very few wish to become involved in their children's school activities.

The school principal confirmed there is a need for improved PI. Through her conversation with parents, she concluded this lack of involvement may stem from the fact that parents are not knowledgeable about what constitutes positive PI. She also mentioned that parents are too concerned about issues that are irrelevant to school-wide improvement or academic achievement. These issues consist of concerns about the carline and not being able to eat with their children every day. The principal voiced a desire for parents to become more involved in the school setting in various ways, which she viewed as a more positive approach (personal communication, January 8, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

U.S. schools can and do influence the level of parent participation on campus. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how parents perceive their PI role at the school of study and how principals and teachers can help parents improve their role. The researcher also sought to examine parents' perceptions of the PTA within the urban elementary school in this study. The findings from this study may help administrators implement research-based PI initiatives in U.S. schools. These initiatives may encourage parents to be active participants in their children's school. The implementation of various creative strategies would increase parental engagement, would help parents become more active in their child's educational setting, giving parents more opportunities to be supportive. Examining the strategies and sharing the benefits could help increase parent/school relationships in other schools and communities.

Research Questions

This researcher used the following research questions as part of my study investigation:

1. How do parents perceive their role and involvement in their children's elementary school?

2. How can school administrators help parents to improve their involvement in their children's education?

3. How do parents perceive the school PTA's manner of communication between school and home to encourage PI?

Conceptual Framework (Qualitative)

The guiding framework for this project was written by Joyce Epstein et al. (2009) and was based on school, family, and community partnerships. This framework overlaps spheres of influence in examining and understanding how parents perceive and experience PI in the prekindergarten program at a chosen local school. Epstein's framework (2008) is a model designed for increasing parents' engagement in their children's education by supporting the collaboration of three spheres of influence: school, family, and community. Epstein's model is used to describe the connections of these three dimensions in terms of the overlapping responsibilities of family and school life.

Epstein's (2008) framework examines patterns of collaboration and seeks to identify this prekindergarten program's most common types of collaborative efforts that promote PI. Epstein's approach provides a logical method for research and improvement of practice and serves as a tool to highlight strengths and to identify problematic areas.

Epstein and Voorhis (2010) described how this six-part framework can be used to categorize varied strategies for activities that schools can implement in order to provide a comprehensive PI program. These activities include different approaches that encourage parents and schools to work collaboratively. By studying each activity, the determination can be made as to which practices are being utilized by the parents and which practices need to be developed in order to gain a higher level of PI. Epstein and Voorhis explained how this theory can be used to assist in various activities:

- Type 1 activities help families meet the needs of their children by strengthening parent's skills (i.e., workshops that are offered to parents to build skills in parenting).

- Type 2 activities reach out to families through two-way communication (i.e., any form of communication from school to home that all families can understand).

- Type 3 activities promote volunteerism at school (i.e., encouraging parents to participate in workshops so they will be more inclined to volunteer in the classroom and to help in other parts of the school).

- Type 4 activities assist families with school activities at home (i.e., guidelines are set by the school that can help parents provide support at home to help their children with specific skills and concepts).

- Type 5 activities empower parents to voice their opinions for improving school policies and for becoming leaders/advocates in the school and district (i.e., parents involved in PTA/PTO, committees, and other decision-making groups).

- Type 6 activities collaborate with community organizations to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning.

This framework provides a foundation for increasing PI by engaging parents, which is a contributing factor for improving school environment. Additionally, with this framework, Epstein provides information to parents about the various avenues of effective and efficient ways to become active in their child's education.

Nature of the Study

This study examined parents' perception of PI. In order to answer my research questions, a case study design was used. Case studies are a qualitative approach in which the researcher investigates a phenomenon within its natural setting (Creswell, 2009). Researchers conducting case studies usually analyze multiple forms of evidence. The setting for this case study design was a prekindergarten program of an urban, public elementary school located in Texas.

Face-to-face interviews were the sole source of data for this study. This method was used because the researcher felt this was the best way to gather authentic information about the participant's perspective on PI and to develop a working relationship with the participant. The responses from interviews were used to identify parents' perceptions concerning PI in their children's school and at home. Section 3 of this study will include a detailed description of the interview questions and the participants: how the questions were used, how the participants were invited to be involved in the study, and how the participants were chosen.

Definitions

Parent: One who acts in a parental role as a primary caregiver such as mother or father and is responsible for the overall care of a child whether they are the biological parent, a relative, adoptive parent, foster parent, or an unrelated caregiver (Berger, 2008).

Parental involvement: Activity that begins when a parent instills the value of education in his child by introducing reading and social behavior at birth. The parent becomes involved in his child's school life by attending school functions and communicating with teachers and administrators. Also, the parent supports, respects, and enforces the school's policies and procedures (Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013).

Perception: The process of attaining awareness or understanding of information that has been gained from experiences from the world around us (Cherry, 2012).

Prekindergarten: A learning environment for young children that is designed to prepare preschoolers for kindergarten (National Association of Education for Young Children [NAEYC], (2008).

Strategy: Activities that can be executed in order to achieve the goal of parental participation (Renn, 2010).

Home/school relationship: Rapport between families and educators who are working collaboratively, actively, and equally, sharing responsibility for the success of the students (National Association of School Psychology Position Statement, 2012).

Assumptions

This researcher assumed that parents who participated in this study would understand the importance of this study. I further assumed that parents' responses would be honest and accurate. Additionally, I assumed the participants would understand each question that would be answered. With parents gaining a better understanding of the various PI strategies, I believed they would eventually realize why involvement is so important. Knowing there was a lack of PI, I felt the parents would be open to discuss their true feelings with me, so that they would have an opportunity to freely express their opinion in a nonthreatening environment. I posed the questions in simple terms, which I thought would help the parents understand what was being asked. These assumptions will make for a truthful study that will encourage readers to feel confident about the information gained from this study.

Scope and Delimitations

This qualitative case study was limited to the prekindergarten program of an elementary school located in an urban school district. Participants involved in this study and data collection results were not representative of other elementary schools. The results represent the perceptions of the parents of prekindergarten students who participated in this study; therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to other populations. Yet, the insights of these participants may be helpful to professionals in other early childhood programs in the educational spectrum. The research was restricted only to the parents of the prekindergarten students at one urban public elementary school located in the district. The study was conducted during the 2015/2016 school year. Therefore, the findings may not be generalized to other elementary schools or parents in subsequent years.

Limitations

This study is limited to 14 parents of prekindergarten students at a single elementary school. Therefore, the sample at this school may not be the same as the sample of parents at another elementary school. This study is also limited to parent interviews only, in which prolonged interaction was not the goal of this study. Therefore, the understanding of PI and the factors that promote PI on a daily basis were limited.

Significance

Although this school district may offer many opportunities for parents to get involved in their child's school, the focus of this study was to obtain an understanding of how parents perceive PI and to inform parents of various ways they can get involved at this particular school. This study added various methods to the body of knowledge in which parents can engage

themselves in the learning environment of their child. Focused PI within their child's educational surroundings may bridge the gap of how parents view participation. The results of this study aided in developing a stronger parent-school partnership through the utilization of parent involvement strategies. Establishing partnerships gives families an opportunity to (a) participate in the wide range of school involvement activities, (b) take part in the school's decision-making process, and (c) be active in the roles and responsibilities of school-improvement efforts (CDC, 2012). Strong parent-school partnerships contribute to social change by creating a positive school environment and empowering parents to become effective in their child's education (Berger, 2008). Research shows effective parent/school collaboration models can only be implemented by effective people (Parent Information Center of NH, 2012).

Summary

The first section of this study included an introduction to the study, the problem statement, the purpose statement, nature of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, definitions, assumptions, limitations, scope and delimitations, and significance of the study. Section 2 will provide a literature review which will cover research pertaining to parent involvement. The literature in Section 2 aligns with the problem statement and research questions. Section 3 will provide an explanation of the research design methods and procedures used in this qualitative case study including the data collection instruments, how the data were analyzed, and steps taken to ensure that participants' rights are protected. Section 4 will present results pertaining to the research questions, and Section 5 will provide the interpretation of the results, the implications for social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is a profound lack of PI in the children's educational setting at this school of study. As a matter of fact, for the past 4 consecutive years, PI has declined significantly. The purpose of this doctoral study was to understand how parents perceive PI. This study also examined strategies that could increase parents' knowledge of PI which would eventually improve the home-school relationship.

Literature Search Strategy

The basis of this section's research is found in books, journals, dissertations, and studies in which peer reviewed articles were used. Primary sources were examined to gain the latest information in educational research. Concentration was placed on exploring the body of knowledge pertaining to how PI is viewed in various aspects: an explanation of what PI is and the importance and benefits of PI, home involvement and PI; PI in urban schools; legislative guidelines for PI; effectiveness of PI; studies on positive effects of PI; ways to promote PI; teachers' and parents' perceptions of PI; and barriers to PI. Terms used in the search included *parent involvement*, *actively engaged parents*, *getting parents involved*, and *strategies to get parents involved at home and school*. The researcher used databases, such as ProQuest, EBSCCO Host, and ERIC to reveal relevant information on PI. The libraries used for this research included the university online library, the city public library, and the online public library. The search was limited to articles published in English between 2006 and 2016. Of the more than 200 references screened, 120 were assessed as eligible.

The Concept of Parent Involvement

Parents want to be involved in their child's educational setting, but often they do not know how to get involved. Some U.S. educational leaders and policy makers have campaigned for parents to become more actively involved in their children's educational setting (Public Agenda, 2013). According to Staples and Diliberto (2010), schools that have successful parent-school relationships are those which build rapport with parents, have a well-structured communication system, and create various opportunities for PI. PI can include the participation of parents and guardians by attending school events on a regular basis and/or responding to other school commitments (Staples & Diliberto, 2010). Ideally, parents should have ample opportunities to (a) communicate with their children's teachers and administrators, (b) help with homework, (c) attend school events, and (d) volunteer.

In order for PI to be successful, parents and teachers must work together as a team. In PI, parents take on a wide variety of roles that require commitment to their children's education by serving as mentors, office assistants, lunchroom mentors, and teacher assistants (Comer & Haynes, 2013). Although parents play various roles in PI, Benner (2010) stressed the most effective method of PI is reinforcing the message at home that teaching and learning at school are important. Jeynes (2010) noted teachers also play important roles in PI when working as a team with parents. Jeynes discovered two important actions that teachers can implement to influence parental participation in their children's school. First, teachers can help parents to realize how important high expectations and communication are to PI. Additionally, teachers can educate school staff on the significance of demonstrating love and respect for parents. Jeynes stressed these actions could be more successful in engaging parents in PI than instructing parents

on how to apply involvement strategies like helping children with homework and frequently attending school functions.

When teachers show parents they care, parents can become more encouraged to participate. Parents that struggle with the English language could sense that the teachers cared for them if the teachers shared with compassion how it makes them feel to be unable to communicate properly. A level of respect would be shown to the parents if teachers observed various cultures being displayed throughout the school during the school year. Establishing the trust of parents can be done through the teacher having constant communication with the parent. Building relationships with parents can be accomplished by encouraging them to participate in school events and routines. Increasing PI can begin with the smallest caring gesture and can have a huge impact on parents and their roles in the PI process.

PI affects students, teachers, schools, and communities. For children to live and prosper in the world that surrounds them, they must be able to appreciate both the intellectual and social roles of the school staff. What better way is there to achieve this goal than through the partnering of teachers, parents, schools, and communities? The United States Department of Education (USDE) (2010) found by increasing parental participation with their children and children's teachers that parents need to be more actively engaged in their learning activities. Researchers continue to affirm that PI not only builds the child's educational foundation, but also builds partnerships with families by developing a school culture that supports all students and sustains school improvement (McAlister, 2013). Olsen and Fuller (2012) affirmed that parents are encouraged to become more involved in the work of the school and in the education of their children when they see students, parents, and staff working collaboratively. This form of

collaboration gradually generates respect and creates a level of trust that allows parents to feel welcome and willing to contribute something of value (Olsen & Fuller, 2012). In 2013, the National Education Association (NEA) posited that schools are able to maintain connections with families when they build partnerships that focus on parental concerns by honoring contributions parents have made and allowing parents to be engaged in decision-making responsibilities. The NEA stated that student achievement improves when there is a connection between home and school. The partnership must be one where schools engage families in ways that improve learning and support PI both at home and school.

Legislative Guidelines for Parent Involvement

Being faced with the challenge of increasing the amount of PI that exists, policy makers have established guidelines that can improve collaboration between home and school. Helping parents understand the need for home-school connection, and actually engaging parents in their child's learning environment, school systems can organize themselves to gain higher participation rates. Schools, teachers, and administrators believe that PI in school activities is essential to students' educational success. Therefore, in an attempt to strengthen parent participation, policymakers have deemed it important to set policies that can assist school districts in promoting parent-school partnerships that will encourage involvement. These same policies establish the expectation that strategies be implemented to enhance involvement. I have described three policies that require meaningful PI: (a) Goals 2000: Educate America Act, (b) the No Child Left behind Act (NCLB), and (c) Section 1118 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). These policies clearly delineate practices that can lead to success and high-quality PI.

Goals 2000: Educate America Act

The Goals 2000: Educate America Act, signed into law on March 31, 1994, suggests that parents and communities make a concentrated effort to become engaged more in school involvement ("Goals 2000", 2011). With such involvement, all children in America would start school ready to learn by the year 2000. One of the stated objectives for this Act is that every parent in the United States will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping their preschool child learn, while parents will have access to the training and support their need. The Act also discusses parental participation and recommends that every school will promote partnerships that will increase involvement. One of the stated objectives for this goal is that every school will actively engage parents and families in a partnership which supports the academic work of children at home and shared educational decision-making at school ("Goals 2000", 2011).

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001

The No Child Left Behind Act NCLB of 2001 aids in the assurance that all children receive a high quality education and holds schools responsible for ensuring that all children are learning (Maleyko & Gawlik, 2011). NCLB stipulates if the child's school is continuously performing poorly, parents have options to ensure that their child receives the high-quality education to which he or she is entitled by transferring to a higher performing school. NCLB requires that parents receive important information about the attending school in a timely manner (Maleyko & Gawlik, 2001). This information enlightens the parent regarding whether the school is performing well for all children, regardless of their background. NCLB also requires that schools measure every public school student's progress, and in turn, parents receive information

about their child's progress in reading, math, and science as well as overall performance of the child's school on state tests in these subjects (Maleyko & Gawlik, 2001). The school is also responsible for providing parents with objective data on where their child stands academically. NCLB mandates PI. The serious importance of PI is shown throughout this policy (Appleseed, 2012).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Title I, Part A, Section 1118 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Act contains the primary PI requirements for state education agencies, local education agencies, and schools, as related to involving parents in their children's education (State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [SOW, n.d.). Section 1118 identifies critical points in the process of improving teaching and learning where parents and the community can intervene and assist in school improvement. Although Section 1118 is extensive in scope and has many requirements for local education agencies (LEA) and schools, the intent is not to be burdensome. These provisions reflect good practice in engaging families in helping to educate their children, because students do better when parents are actively involved in the education process, both at home and at school (SOW, n.d.). Through these policies, the educational system can stress its strong commitment to the role of parents as valued partners in their children's education. The education system can also promote effective, comprehensive PI.

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The Importance of Parent Involvement

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Researchers understand the importance of PI. They also understand that barriers are factors that affect parental engagement, and parents will not participate if they do not understand the importance of PI at school and at home. Politis (2013) noted that parents sometimes choose

not to involve themselves in their children's education; however, extensive research has

indicated that students' educational experiences are increased when parents are involved (PTO

Today, 2013). Parental input and participation is imperative. Throughout a student's school

experience, the educator's goal is to continue increasing collaboration between parents and

schools (Edwards & Da Fonte, 2012). Phillips (2009) explored the research on parents who

participate in their children's education and found these parents are laying the foundations for a

better educated child. These children will be better adjusted to school which can lead to a life

filled with learning. In addition, parents are sending a message to their children that education is

important (Phillips, 2009). Therefore, it becomes evident that PI is a necessary component of

future achievement. The NEA (2013) stated, "When schools, families, and community groups

work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and

like school more" (para. 1). The NEA reported that a synthesis of research over the past decade

found students with involved parents are more likely to perform in the following ways:

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs.

- Be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits.

- Attend school regularly.

- Have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school.

- Graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

Many agencies and researchers are aware of the impact of PI on children's academic

successes, attitudes toward school, and classroom behaviours. According to the American

Federation of Teachers (2013), children whose parents are involved during prekindergarten and

the early school years often experience academic success. Barth (2011 found PI at school and at

home improves the effectiveness of a prekindergarten program and promotes characteristics of

school readiness, including math, language, and social skills. Lahaie (2008) found that PI in

children's education at school and home significantly increases children's school achievements.

Chen (2008) noted when parents are intensely involved in their children's education, the

academic performance heightens and positively leads to a greater impact on academic

achievement. Additionally, Chen discovered the interest and encouragement shown by a parent

can positively affect his child's classroom behavior, attitude about education, self-esteem,

absenteeism, and motivation to excel. Comer and Haynes (2013) posited that positive

relationships can be created when parents participate in the parent-teacher organization, attend

school events, and assist with school tasks. Turney and Kao (2009) recommended schools seek

numerous ways to entice parents as partners in an effort to generate positive outcomes for their

children at school.

Benefits of Parent Involvement

Parental participation is a critical aspect of student success. Even though research does

prove that any amount of parental support of students is helpful, research also confirms that PI in

which parents are actively engaged produces better results for the student, parents, and schools

(Ferlazza & Hammond, 2009). Ferguson (2009) stated, "When schools collaborate with parents

to help their child learn and when parents participate in school activities and decision-making

about their child's education, children achieve at higher levels and schools improve" (p. 1).

Research has proven parental school involvement positively affects children socially. Children

whose parents are involved with school are characterized by better attendance rates, higher test

scores, and positive attitudes toward school (Davis, 2010). Parental engagement is a significant component that desirably affects the overall school environment.

Additionally, research shows how PI influences families. LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) examined the effect that PI has on the family. Their study noted that, through PI, families became more aware of teachers' expectations and the needs of the children, and families had better attitudes towards the teachers. Additionally, LaRocque et al. found that the increase of PI was connected to the educational aspirations for themselves and their children. LaRocque et al. posited that benefits for teachers were connected to PI. The teachers developed a better understanding of how to meet the students' needs. As parents began to feel more comfortable with the teachers, the parents were encouraged to become involved in planning activities and setting appropriate goals for the students. This study reaffirms how beneficial it is for parents to participate in their children's educational development.

Chen (2008) found another benefit from parental engagement: it boosts the morale of teachers. Chen reported when a parent is involved in his child's education, his appreciation widens for the many challenges the child's teacher faces each day in the classroom. Parent awareness improves teacher morale. Teacher and parent communication allows the teacher to gain insight in knowing that particular student better and enables the teacher to successfully educate that student (Chen, 2008).

Both the school and the parent have a common goal to work together within the school setting. Reeves and Rodriguez (2011) reported when teachers make an effort to know parents and to understand their lives, parents are more likely to engage with their children's education and interact positively with teachers. This effort will provide teachers with valuable insight,

heightening parents' participation (Reeves & Rodrizuez, 2011). Therefore, parents should be made to feel welcomed by the teacher to share information about their child in order to bridge the relationship. Parents who feel welcomed and connected to the school environment will be inclined to become active participants of the school environment, therefore reinforcing the school's and teacher's techniques and approaches at home (Padak & Rasinski, 2010).

Home Environment and Parent Involvement

Vandenberg (2008) posited that education begins at birth. Wherry (2009) noted that almost every study confirms PI is extremely beneficial in the education of children of all ages, from newborns through higher levels of education and beyond. As parents teach their children during the earlier years of life, they exercise the advocacy of Goal 1 of Goals 2000: Educate America Act. This legislation affirms approval that parents are to become actively engaged in their child's education (Russakoff, 2009). With parental assistance, the child continues to develop and can later transfer what has been learned early in life to school. The effects parents have on their child's development during the early years have a valuable lasting impact. According to Barth (2011), the state is set for school success when schools encourage parents to engage in promoting readiness skills by providing books, printed material, and ways to participate in learning activities at home with their children. Parents and teachers agree that parents who help their children to read at home can make a significant difference in student performance ("An investment", 2013). Albrecht (2011) noted that children learn to adjust to life at school due to consistent routines established at home through positive interactions with parents, thereby creating and allowing the child to have a better school experience. A positive relationship between children and parents must exist to promote the continual academic

development of students. Albrecht further noted that the cognitive development of children stems from everyday experiences with the people they love and trust. Rodriguez and Tamis-LeMonda (2011) confirmed parents are children's initial teachers, as they are the ones who help develop an understanding of their environment and encourage their children's learning through literacy activities and parental support. Parents play influential roles in their children's learning experiences.

When considering education during the early childhood years, Olsen and Fuller (2012) explained a basic belief is that parents are their children's first and most influential teachers. With such influences, avenues are readily made available in which parents can become involved in their child's learning at home. Goldberg (n.d.) discovered parental creation of an atmosphere for learning at home is a great way for engaging in their child's education and improving their chances for success at school. Parents can become tutors as they assist their child with homework. In many cases, if this form of tutoring is expected to be successful, parents need to learn how to serve as an academic support provider for their child. Therefore, schools and districts must provide opportunities to train parents. In 2011, the California Department of Education (CDE) reported how implementing various training opportunities offered by schools and districts allows parents to become more involved in their child's education. The CDE stated that PI is about how parents can be lifelong tutors. It is not simply about parents purchasing everything their child asks for, joining schools' PTAs, or attending extracurricular activities. Rather, PI is a long-term commitment.

A child's home environment has an impact on the success of a child's education. In 2009, the NAEYC noted families who (a) structured the home environment to encourage

children's learning, (b) stimulated learning at home, and (c) strongly communicated with their children about their school-based activities were more likely to have children with higher academic success. There are many ways in which parents can become engaged in their child's early education at home. Olsen and Fuller (2012) outlined a variety of PI activities that could occur at home and positively impact student performance at school: (a) actively organizing and monitoring the child's time spent studying, (b) helping with homework, (c) setting goals and discussing school matters with the child, and (d) assisting in areas of specific skills such as reading. Parental beliefs, children's activities, and family routines can impact children's academic achievement in school.

Daulta (2008) confirmed that children who are considered great achievers and well-adjusted come from homes which (a) established patterns for the child's attitude toward people and society, (b) stimulate intellectual growth in the child, and (c) promote aspirations and achievements. A supportive home environment can enhance a child's academic progress. Daulta's study found that home is the fundamental support system for all human beings, and no other care system can replace multiple bonding provided by the family system. Teachers benefit from learning what students have received educationally from home (Daulta, 2008). The NEA (2013) found that children perform better in school when parents communicate with them about school, expect them to perform well, participate in their after-school activities, and talk to them about the future and college plans.

Promoting Parent Involvement

PI is a highly recommended and encouraged asset to the school setting. Pushor (2011) advised educators to examine how they currently seek ways to reach out to families, and then

seek new possibilities of how they can contribute to helping parents increase their involvement.

Pushor highlighted the following activities as ways to engage parents and to promote PI:

participate in meet-the-teacher nights, parent meetings, volunteer programs, fundraising

campaigns, and attending field trips. Pushor considered these activities as school-oriented,

because it is the school that has decided how the parents will get involved. Furthermore, Pushor

noted that schools are trying to improve PI by becoming more welcoming, translating newsletters

into multiple languages, providing translators at open houses and conferences, serving meals,

providing babysitting, and offering transportation between home and school; however, these

ideas remain as those that are powered by the school. In order to change how families get

involved, Pushor recommended schools must enable the parents to work alongside the teachers

in educating their children, as parents and teachers combine their knowledge of children and

embark upon a relationship that is mutually determined and mutually beneficial. Parental

participation can maximize young children's educational progress. Children who efficaciously

feel they are in control of their education are apt to be motivated to learn and to perform better in

school (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2011). The NEA (2013) found the following:

> When schools build partnerships with families that respond to parent concerns, honor
>
> their contributions, and share decision-making responsibilities, they are able to sustain
>
> connections that are aimed at improving student achievement. When schools engage
>
> families in ways that improve learning and support parent involvement at home and
>
> school, students make greater gains. (para. 5)

PI raises children's perceived competence and control. A child's control over his learning

motivates him to study and work harder to have success in school.

Although parents must trust the best practices of educators, educators expect high levels of participation from parents. A child's parents are his most important teachers. The CCSRI (2013) regards parental support to schools as a tremendous benefit not only to the school but also to the child's education. Relationships of this nature require work by both educators and parents (CCSRI, 2013). This action will lead educators and parents to believe they are making every effort to ascertain most the proficient learning environment for children; in turn, they will reach another milestone to add to the growing list of traits for encouraging PI.

Kim (2008) also affirmed PI as having a strong influence on children's academic success. Kim listed those influences as (a) monitoring activities outside home and school, (b) setting rules, (c) having conversations about and helping children with school work and school-related issues as well as future plans, (d) having high educational expectations, (e) participating in school-related activities, (f) volunteering in the classroom, and (g) engaging in enrichment or leisure activities together.

Additionally, researchers find higher levels of PI may positively affect student achievement ("Afterschool", 2012). The research revealed that PI can be diverse by creating a positive learning environment at home, getting involved by volunteering, becoming more interactive with teachers and parents, and fostering a stronger relationship by conveying the importance of education now and in the future ("Afterschool", 2012).
Epstein et al. (2009) developed a framework of six types of PI that are as crucial today as they were when she first created them. Each of these types of involvement promotes a higher level of PI and can be very effective in schools today. These involvement techniques help to connect the family-school partnership. Epstein and Voorhis (2010) summarized this framework as being put

in place to give parents and teachers multiple ideas of avenues in which parents can get involved

inside and outside the school setting. These six types of involvement can include many activities

that increase positive interactions of parents, educators and students. If schools maximize the

use of each of these involvement techniques, children can become more academically successful.

The framework of Epstein et al. (2009) offers various measures of how parents can get involved

in influencing their child's success. The first means of involvement that will assist the

promotion of PI is parenting. Parenting focuses on helping families develop parenting skills that

support schools and encourage learning (Epstein, 2010). Martin (2009) indicated that parents

need direction in order to participate effectively in their child's learning experiences. Through

this initiative, educational systems can be better prepared to meet the needs of parents in

supporting their children.

The second means of involvement that will assist with promoting PI is communication

(Epstein et al., 2009). Schools are to communicate consistently with families about school

programs and student progress in clear and productive ways (Epstein, 2010). This form of

involvement enables effective communication with clear understanding and clear expectations in

all areas. Epstein and Voodrhis (2010) affirmed that creating a two-way communication system

between home and school will help families easily keep in touch with all school personnel and

other families and keep abreast of school information and events.

The third measure of involvement described by Epstein et al. (2009) is volunteering.

This facet of involvement encourages schools to acknowledge the importance of time. Epstein

and her cohorts realized that parents would become more involved if the scheduling of various

school events had flexible timing. A challenge for public schools would be to create flexible

schedules for volunteers, trainings, activities, and events. This flexibility would make it possible

for parents to participate (Project Appleseed, 2010). To assure schools that parents value their

time and talent, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (n.d.) suggested the creation

of available time schedules that match the volunteers' time and talents to the needs of the

teachers, students, and administration.

The fourth type of involvement is providing instruction for a child at home (Epstein et al.,

2009). Hayes (2011) found that involvements in which parents are directly engaged in learning

activities at home with their children are most effective. According to Epstein et al. (2009),

schools must present information, ideas, and a plan of action to parents on how to help their

children at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities. Parents are encouraged

to talk to their child's teacher about the child's learning styles and to become familiar with their

child's study habits and how they prefer to study (Project Appleseed, 2010). Consistency with

the developed preferences will both support and encourage the child's achievement (Project

Appleseed, 2010).

Epstein et al. (2009) discussed the findings of involvement that promote PI as decision-

making, in which schools are asked to include parents in various activities that involve decision-

making. In decision-making, Epstein's (2010) emphasis is on including families as participants

in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school committees and parent

organizations. Lunenburg (2011) revealed a strategy known as "The Comer Process" strategy,

which focuses on the importance of PI and recognizes the crucial role that parents play. This

strategy enables the parents and schools to close the gap between each other by working

together, respecting each other, and ultimately viewing themselves as a team of participants

within the school community. Student success is derived from educational personnel and parents

working collaboratively in an effort to improve the educational system.

The last aspect of Epstein et al.'s (2009) framework focuses on collaborating with the

community. Even though collaborating with the community is a means of involving parents, this

study only focuses on the family-school relationship. Working with the community distinctly

entails identifying, coordinating, and integrating resources and services from the community to

support schools, strengthen family practices, and improve student learning and development

(Epstein, 2011). Participation of all parties involved in this process is important to the academic

achievements of the school and students. Schools engaging in this aspect of involvement will

provide a community of learning and academic achievement. The theory of Epstein et al. (2009)

consists of overlapping spheres which are interactive activities that can be practiced throughout

the home-school-community spectrum. These spheres can be developed and improved upon to

fit into the scheme of any educational program, producing an effective parent involvement

system that enables parents to get more involved in varied activities. This framework highlights

the collaboration of parents, teachers, and community members. The strategies formed by

Epstein's theory are interrelated and influence the role of all participants involved. The theory

suggests that parents and schools communicate what their expectations are of one another. The

theory clearly demonstrates that parents have a variety of activities in which they can become

engaged as it relates to increasing their parental participation.

Using the research of Epstein et al. (2009) on the framework of the types of PI will increase

parental participation and students' success. Epstein's framework will aid schools in identifying

and implementing these guidelines so that the family can be involved at school as well as away

from school. With these guidelines, schools can create successful PI programs that allow parents to remain engaged with their children and their schools (Epstein, 2008). Parents who involve themselves in their child's school setting and engage in learning activities at home can help their children develop feelings of competence and positive attitudes about a variety of school outcomes. Through the use of Epstein's framework strategies, parents will become more involved in their children's education.

Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of Parent Involvement

Parents and teachers have varying perceptions about PI. Mann's (2006) study found that parents' understanding of their involvement in their children's education differs from teachers' understanding of parents' involvement. Mann suggested that teachers acknowledge the need to communicate with parents regarding their perceptions of involvement. Communication would allow teachers to utilize this knowledge when creating opportunities for parents to get involved, while recognizing the ways that parents are currently involved. Historically, as the educational system began to evolve during the nineteenth century, PI was also impacted, and the educational system began to understand the need for positive outcomes associated with PI (Loughlin, 2008). Parents have long engaged in and have easily accepted traditional forms of PI such as fund-raising, attending PTA meetings, and providing voluntary help in the classroom which deem to be of more benefit to teachers and schools than they are to parents (Hornby, 2011). Hornby (2011) stated for PI to be optimally effective, it is important to also emphasize other aspects that are part of a true parent/school partnership, such as productive parent-teacher meetings and effective two-way communication.

Stetson, R., Stetson, E., Sinclair, and Nix (2012) noted building a positive relationship between teachers and parents may be the responsibility of the teacher and may not be easy. However, the end result would have a positive effect on future outcomes. Kauchak and Eggen (2011) stated that teachers view parental participation as having a positive effect within the school. Kauchak and Eggen weighed the impact PI has on the effectiveness of the student's homework and achievement, which showed improvement in both areas. Their study confirms that teachers perceive PI as a critical element in student achievement. Stetson et al. (2012) found teachers realize when they educate parents about ways to help their child, strategic ideas must be focused and specific to meet the needs of the individual child; generalized information that can be given to all will not suffice. Teachers seem to be more supportive when they try to understand the parent's needs of what they should do to help their child succeed.

Mann (2006) studied the discernment of parents and teachers on PI in elementary schools and found that the teachers and parents who participated in the study had varying perceptions of parental engagement. Mann determined that the teachers conveyed the importance of PI, but they were not pleased with the level of parental participation that already existed. Also, the results of Mann's study revealed that the parents in the study did not understand the importance of PI and did not realize the teachers were unhappy with their level of participation.

According to Benner (2010), parents perceive PI as positive. Church and Dollins (2010) posited that schools perceive PI to be imperative to student's academic success. Benner (2010) stated parents had positive attitudes about the different types of PI activities. However, Benner also suggested parents do not participate in activities due to barriers such as scheduling conflicts, lack of transportation or feeling not welcomed.

Additionally, Church and Dollins (2010) stated that schools perceive PI as crucial. Church and Dollins also affirmed that schools must offer family friendly invitations to encourage parents to get involved. According to Hornby (2011), teachers indicate that interaction with parents can be a source of stress on the job. However, Hornby affirmed that parents reported communication with teachers was also equally as stressful.

Developing a positive relationship can be the starting point for teachers to opening doors for PI. Knorf and Swick (2007) noted that professionals within the educational field frequently think they understand parental perspectives and believe they have good relationships with their students' families. The process of establishing positive relationships can be produced by developing positive perceptions. These perceptions can be built through communication. McKenna and Millen (2013) reported open lines of communication allow parents to examine a better understanding of any preconceived thoughts they might have about teachers. Positive perceptions are built when parents recognize that the teacher is willing to form a positive parent-teacher relationship. Knopf and Swick (2007) determined when a teacher shares any meaningful accomplishments by a student with his parents, the parents recognize the educator knows, cares, and is focused on their child's individual development. Positive perceptions can be built by pursuing meaningful and constructive relationships between teachers and parents. Opportunities for interaction can help parents feel positive about the child's teacher and become active in their child's educational process. Hoxhallari Bezati (2011) determined when teachers consistently practice the inclusion of PI in a child's educational setting, parental interaction is increased at home, parents are more confident with helping their children at home, parents are more comfortable with their child's teacher, and students are known to have a better attitude and

improved academic achievement. Parents who support learning at home help create learning environments and educational resources that indirectly support teachers (Hirsto, 2010). LaRocque et al. (2011) posited that educational professionals and parents are encouraged to work collaboratively to develop an effective partnership. Arnold, Zelijo, Doctoroff, and Ortiz (2008) posited it is not solely the parent's responsibility to reach out to the schools. Teachers and other school personnel must create a welcoming environment that comforts parents and invites them to want to contribute in their children's academic development. Arnold et al. reaffirmed schools and families work together as active partners in children's education to strengthen the family-school relationship, allowing schools to be held responsible for engaging parents.

Barriers to Parent Involvement

Along with many possible factors that contribute to parent involvement, challenges exist as well. Chen (2008) found the greatest barrier to PI was time constraints. Lack of time on the part of parents and school personnel is the main reason given for lack of parental participation. Working parents find it difficult to engage in their child's education, and teachers cite time constraints as well, for not actively seeking parent involvement (Chen, 2008). Chen summarized this situation by stating, "Effective solutions to enhanced parent involvement require freeing up time of parents and teachers or finding ways to work around their schedules" (para. 9). A number of parents are challenged with work schedules. Some parents may easily take off from work and participate in their child's school activities, but that's not the case for everyone. If parents are unable to meet their job requirements, financial problems may occur. Nelson (n.d.) stated, "Financial obligations render many parents unable to attend school functions, volunteer in classrooms, or join the PTO on a regular basis" (p.1). Many parents feel that their primary

purpose is to support the family, which caused them to be negligent in engaging in their child's educational activities.

Summary and Conclusions

In reviewing the literature, this researcher realized that PI contributes significantly in children's academic successes. By assessing the knowledge on PI, policy makers, stakeholders, and all involved in the educational process can continue working to adapt ideas that will encourage and generate change. I found considerable data concerning the vital need for parents to engage in PI in schools today. By taking advantage of this research and using involvement strategies, school personnel will improve and increase PI. Hornby (2011) explained the significance of PI for children, parents, and teachers. For children, PI improves children's attitudes, behavior, school attendance, and mental health. For teachers, PI improves parent-teacher relationships and boosts the morale of teachers. For parents, PI increases parental confidence and satisfaction with parenting. The PI section of the "No Child Left Behind" Act specifically noted several local and state responsibilities empowering the child-school relationships (TEA, 2009). In conclusion, the data in the reviewed literature confirms that the collaboration of parents and teachers can make a difference in the education of children. Therefore, in order for students to improve academically, PI must increase. My research will provide the educational arena with insight that will contribute to the advancement of finding informative techniques to improve PI.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In a prekindergarten program in an urban Texas public school, there are many effective avenues in which parents can be supportive of their children's formal education experiences. Parents of students in this age group seem to display a wide array of feelings about being involved at school. The literature review in Section 2 indicated an apparent correlation between PI and successful outcomes for students as well as overall school environment.

The intent of this study was to gain a better understanding of how parents within an urban elementary school prekindergarten program perceive PI. This study also provided research-based methods that encourage schools and parents to develop a strong partnership. This was done by using a qualitative case study approach in which the primary research tool consisted of individual interviews with 14 parents who have children enrolled in this urban school prekindergarten program. The interview information was used to inform school personnel about parents' feelings and thoughts on PI. By exploring parent beliefs and knowledge, school staff will gain the ability to help build a strong parent-school partnership that will increase and sustain participation between school and home. Section 2 described the research design and approach for gathering information with a discussion of the sample selection process. This section also included research questions, ethical protection, the role of the researcher, data collection procedures, data analysis, and validity.

Bower and Griffin (2011) accomplished their doctoral study on a similar topic but used a different method. The purpose of these authors' qualitative study was to "assess the effectiveness of the Epstein model in a high-minority, high-poverty school by exploring parental involvement strategies in an urban elementary school that has identified PI as one strategy to

increase student achievement" (Bower & Griffin, 2011, pp. 79, 80). Bower and Griffin's methodology was effective. There was enough information gained to give a valid understanding of the need for this school to develop new strategies that will work best to enhance involvement of its population of parents.

In Anthony's (2008) doctoral dissertation, he chose a quantitative study utilizing a descriptive survey research design. The purpose of Anthony's study was to "examine parent or guardian perceptions of PI, to develop strategies that could improve PI, and to create a partnership between parents and school" (p. 44). Anthony used a quantitative method research design because it provided a numeric description of that particular population which the researcher could use with other data sources. Even though questionnaires do not probe deeply, Anthony's research questions were addressed using the quantitative method.

In his dissertation, Hernandez (2010) examined the perception about PI from parents and teachers. His study focused on "lack of collaboration in the parent-teacher relationship" (Hernandez, 2010, p. 35). Hernandez chose a mixed methods approach for his study which eliminates any biases of a single method.

Research Methodology and Design

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because it provided multifaceted descriptions of how people perceive a particular research issue, based on the person's beliefs, opinions, or values (Lichtman, 2013). The qualitative approach further allowed for in-depth information to be gained from the parent participants and allowed the researcher to understand factors that influence their perspectives on PI.

Examination of the qualitative research methodology indicated a case study design would be most appropriate to gain an understanding of PI in schools. Yin (2009) described case studies as a method that allows the researcher to examine real-life situations in order to get a better understanding. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2012) stated that a case study focuses on smaller groups or individuals and attempts to answer questions about relationships and practices. A researcher conducting a case study investigates a single issue while using several individuals in a bounded setting (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2012). The case study design was chosen over other available qualitative approaches, which were considered less suitable for completing the goals of the proposed study.

Creswell (2013) defined various qualitative approaches: case study, phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory. The phenomenological approach is described as a method in which the researcher seeks to understand the experience by seeking meaning from several individuals of a lived experience (Yin, 2009). The goal to using a phenomenological approach is to describe "what" and "how" the phenomenon was experienced. This study focused on parent's perceptions of PI, not the experience itself.

Another method considered was the ethnography approach which is more rooted in understanding an entire cultural group and its behaviors; observations would be the main data source (Creswell, 2013). I discovered that ethnography would be less effective than case study for accomplishing the goal for this study because Leedy and Ormrod (2014) noted that ethnography is used when the researcher wants to describe behavioral patterns or conditions within the boundaries of a culture.

Another method that could have been used is grounded theory. Grounded theory involves an attempt to generate a theory from information gathered from the participants (Birks & Mills, 2011). Creswell (2013) indicated the grounded theory approach as effective when developing a theory to explain why certain events occur for individuals. The grounded theory approach is not appropriate for this study because its intent is focused on generating a theory rather than examining parents' perceptions about PI. After examining each of these approaches, the case study design was found to be most appropriate for this study in order to enrich my understanding and interpretation of how parents perceive PI. A case study design was also most appropriate because the researcher will use the data collection technique of face-to-face interviews and recordings of the interviews to gather in-depth information (Creswell, 2009). The goal was to gather data from the participants to understand how knowledgeable they were about PI in their child's education. The participants were expected to provide rich data for this study.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How do parents perceive their PI roles for their children in elementary school?

2. How can the school help parents improve the role they play in their children's education while addressing the issues of communication and participation?

3. What are parent perceptions of the PTA within this urban elementary school with regard to its impact on the frequency, quality, and length of the communication between school and home to encourage PI?

Context of the Study

Due to the lack of PI of prekindergarten parents, there was a need to gain an in-depth understanding of parents' perceptions and experiences pertaining to PI. Consequently, based on that understanding, this author pinpointed exactly what motivates parents to get involved and examined the manner in which they choose to get involved. The problem this author addressed for this study was the need to gain a better understanding of how parents perceive their PI role, how schools can help parents improve their role, and what parent perceptions are of the PTA within this urban elementary school. Throughout the years, parent participation has been very low in this school. As part of the school action plan and the district's efforts to improve the school-parent relationship, I investigated the perceived problem of their lack of involvement and what measures should be taken in order to improve PI.

This study was conducted at a Title 1 urban, public elementary school in Dallas, TX. The school is 8 years old and is located in a socioeconomically disadvantaged community. The students at this school are classified as at-risk and the entire school qualifies for free lunch. It is a pre-k through fifth grade school with an enrolment of 715 students. Eighty of the students enrolled are prekindergarten.

Ethical Protection

The process for ensuring ethical protection of participants began with approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of this researcher's university followed by approval from the principal of the school where this researcher conducted the study. The principal's approval came in the form of a letter of cooperation (Appendix A). H. J. Rubin and Rubin (2012) assured the participants of the study that their rights would be protected. After receiving IRB approval, the

researcher made initial contact by distributing invitation letters (Appendix B) to all parents

meeting the inclusion criteria, as approved by the principal. Next, this researcher purposefully

selected 14 parents to be interviewed for this study from those who accepted the invitation to

participate. These potential participants (PPs) were chosen from parents who had not had an

opportunity to be involved because they had not met the registration requirements to become a

volunteer and had not been approved to be volunteers for the school. Also, these PPs could not

be parents of students in this researcher's class. Once the PPs were chosen, the researcher

contacted them by phone or in-person and extended an invitation and explanation of the study to

them. The researcher asked these PPs to read and sign an informed consent form (Appendix C)

that explained in detail their participation in the study. The PPs were informed that their

participation in this study was voluntary; they were free to dismiss themselves from the study if

they felt uncomfortable, and they had the right to refuse to answer any questions for any reason.

PPs were also informed that if they withdrew, the parent-school relationship would not be

impacted by the study. The consent form stated there were no foreseen risks in participating in

this study, and there was no compensation for their efforts. Additionally, the PPs were informed

that once they agreed with the given statements from the interviews, all data for the study would

be collected and only the researcher and peer reviewer would have access to the data. The peer

reviewer was the instructional coach who works on the campus of this urban elementary school.

The researcher notified the PPs that once they agreed to participate in the study, the researcher

and participant would begin a working relationship, therefore cultivating trust. The researcher

also notified the PPs that she intended to maintain an open and honest dialogue with the

participants and would look forward to an exchange of honest opinions that would reflect their

true beliefs of PI. Interviews were conducted in a private area on the selected school campus, where questions and meetings were confidential. The researcher reminded the PPs that they would remain anonymous, and their names would not be connected to their responses. Audio-taped interviews were kept locked in a secure cabinet in which only the researcher had the key. All other information gathered from the study was secured in the researcher's private computer with password protection. After 5 years, all information would be destroyed to protect participant anonymity.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher, who currently teaches at the selected school site, has 23 years of experience with teaching prekindergarten students. Nine of these years have been at this selected school in Texas, and the researcher has built a rapport with many of the parents. She has served as teacher curriculum developer, new teacher mentor, a member on the Site-Based Decision-Making (SBDM) Team and on the Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC), and is presently serving as team leader. She is a lifelong member of the Parent-Teacher-Association, chairperson of several on-campus committees, founder of the prekindergarten bell choir, and is concerned about the lack of participation, sustainability, and the support from the parents. Over the years, she has seen particular issues that parents face: partnering with their child's school for the first time and letting go of the "that's the schools job" attitude, and becoming more involved in their child's education by becoming partners with the school.

Having taught in the field of early childhood for 22 years, the researcher has seen the importance of encouraging parents in becoming partners in the education of their children starting at an early age. Her perceptions on PI have come from her experiences with the

students' parents throughout the years. She has experienced both positive and negative aspects of PI and has seen the effects of support and lack of support of PI. Having participated in many parent-teacher conferences throughout the years, she has taken an active role of informing parents of the importance of being involved in their children's educational setting. She also consults with parents about the various opportunities available at the school in which they can engage.

Due to the researcher's previous teaching experiences and relationships with parents, she brought certain biases to the study. She remained objective by transcribing the participant's information as clearly as possible. Given the compassion she has about PI as a teacher, one who wants to promote PI, the interpretation of the data she collected may have evidence of bias. She feels that PI is needed in the education of all students, starting at an early age. Parents of students as young as Pre-K have knowledge and skills that can be utilized to enrich the learning environment. She views PI as a powerful tool that enhances the school environment. Acknowledging she had certain biases on this topic, she was careful to set aside those biases while conducting this study by having the participants review the transcripts of their interview (member checking). The participants were allowed to notify the researcher of any statements that were improperly reported. Allowing participants to review the transcript and clarify any opinions that were not accurately stated is called member checking (Creswell, 2009). Member checking is a strategy used for checking the validity and accuracy of the findings in a study. The peer reviewer also examined the data to see if it was easily comprehended by others. Hughes and Hayhoe (2008) stated the "researcher allows others to examine the data and the findings to determine whether they interpret them the same way as the researcher does" (p. 82). The peer

reviewer helped the researcher to eliminate her own biases because the data was viewed by someone other than herself and was seen through different lenses. A detailed discussion of credibility measures was discussed in the validity section of this study.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

The targeted sample for this study was 14 purposefully selected parents. Creswell (2009) recommended using 5-25 individuals who were able to share information about the topic under study. Lichtman (2010) affirmed "most qualitative research studies use a small number of individuals and cover material in-depth" (p. 142). The researcher was responsible for recruiting the participants of this study and was sure not to recruit parents of students who were in the researcher's class. The researcher recruited the participants by distributing an invitation letter to new incoming Pre-K parents. The distribution of letters occurred at the beginning of the school year. These participants were not acquainted with the researcher, due to the fact that it was the beginning of the school year. There are four Pre-K sections, and only the parents of the other three Pre-K sections received the invitation letter, eliminating the researcher's classroom. Using criteria approved by the principal, the researcher selected 14 parents to be interviewed for this study from those who accepted the invitation to participate. The participants met the following criteria: (a) must have a pre-kindergarten child enrolled at this Title I urban elementary school during the 2015/2016 school year, (b) must not have completed the parent volunteer requirements for the school, (c) must not be an employee at the school, (d) must not have a child in the researcher's class, and (e) may be of any ethnicity. Once the participants were chosen, the researcher contacted each participant in-person to explain in more detail their participation in the study. These criteria provided a wide range of participants to choose from which would allow

for a variety of thoughts and opinions to be shared. As the study took place over the course of a

the 9 month school year, and even though the participants were initially selected on those

criteria, they were making efforts to be involved in their child's school.

The primary purpose for selecting these parents for this study was to understand

participant's thoughts and feelings on the issue of PI. Selecting these parents for this study

enabled the researcher to obtain authentic information about the topic. As Merriam (2009)

affirmed, a sample should consist of participants from whom the most knowledge can be gained

and who also fit the criteria.

Data Collection Procedures

The research method chosen for this study dictated the approach used to collect data for

the study. A qualitative case study approach allowed the researcher to be responsible for

collecting data. The primary data source for this study was face-to-face interviews. Yin (2011),

noted with qualitative interviews, researchers try to understand the participants world by

concentrating on efforts to master the meanings of the participants' words and phrases. H. J.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) described qualitative interviews as "conversations in which a researcher

gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion and the researcher elicits depth

and detail about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during

the discussion" (p. 4). Researchers use qualitative interviews to explore a participant's

experiences and to uncover and understand the meaning of the participant's experiences in order

to make sense of their world (Hatch, 2010). There were 14 participants being interviewed.

H. J. Rubin and Rubin (2012) stated,

You do not need a vast number of interviews to increase the credibility of your findings; instead, you have to be able to convince readers that you have interviewed to obtain different points of views and that when brought together these understandings provide a complete picture (p. 68).

The interviews took place in the Fall of 2015. The interviews were conducted during this time in an attempt to catch the parents before they became familiar with how this particular school's PI program operated. Conducting the interviews in the Fall afforded parents time to form their own opinions about opportunities for PI at this school without being persuaded by others.

To guide these interviews and gain rich data, 7 open-ended questions were used (Appendix D). Lichtman (2010) noted the researcher should identify 5-10 topic areas to be covered in the interview process that would guide the conversation. During the interview process, the participant was not expected to complete a list of questions. Therefore, questions to each of the participants would vary according to the context of the interview (Yin, 2011).

In order to be consistent with all participants, a set procedure was established and followed throughout the data collection phase. After first receiving approval of the study from IRB and then receiving principal approval, initial contact with the participants was used to establish rapport, explain what the study was about, and explain why they were selected to participate. The participants would then be asked to read, sign, and submit the appropriate consent forms (Appendix C) for this study. To remain in compliance with IRB, after all the consent forms were submitted by each of the participants, the researcher began face-to-face interviews. The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes during after-school hours. Interviews were conducted individually in a private room off the school campus. The interview guide (Appendix

D) would follow a standard format. A recording device and a journal for field notes were used to record information from the interviews. The journal was used during interviews to record body language cues and follow-up questions that arose during the interviews. The journal provided helpful information during the coding process.

After each individual interview, the researcher asked follow-up questions about the participants' responses in order to gain more information or clarity. After the interviews were conducted, the audio-tapes and field notes were transcribed. As a means of identifying how the interview transcripts were transcribed, the researcher closely observed the data through repeated careful listening and writing in detail the information gained from the participant. Becoming familiar with the data can facilitate realizations and ideas that may emerge. As part of the transcription process, an unidentifiable variable, which in this case was a number, was given to each participant's interview. The participant's name, as well as any other identifiable variables, was removed from the document. Transcribing took about an hour for each interview. Summaries of the transcripts were shared with the participants. Sharing a summary of the transcripts with the participants gave them an opportunity to respond to the information that was included in the written summary.

A master list of the participants' names and assigned numbers was kept in a location that is different from where the data are kept to avoid breach of confidentiality. After the researcher received approval of the contents, all raw data were collected, remained confidential, and were properly stored in a secured locked area at the selected school and in the researcher's computer with secured password protection.

Data Analysis

In this qualitative case study, data were collected from individual face-to-face interviews, recorded, analyzed, and interpreted to depict parents' perceptions about PI. Coding was used in this qualitative case study to help organize the data for later in-depth interpretation (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2014). Richards (2009) affirmed coding generates new ideas, brings the parts of documents about a topic together so thoughts about the topic can be developed, and allows the researcher to see and understand patterns and themes. Once she collected the raw data, the researcher sorted and coded information and began the process of identifying similar patterns and themes (Creswell, 2013). These themes included each of the six types of PI as listed by Joyce Epstein: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating. From the responses, six categories were created that corresponded with Epstein's the six categories. Responses not fitting into these categories were put into residual categories for analysis.

The interview data were coded according to the questions in each of the six types of PI. Interview questions, adapted from the six types of the PI framework developed by Joyce Epstein (2011), were administered to explore parental perceptions and what motivates parents to get involved in their child's school. The researcher reviewed the responses from these questions and identified similarities and differences between the responses. Patterns were identified and themes were extracted from the data. The researcher investigated each of the six categories of PI in-depth through the interview questions.

The researcher became more familiar with the data by reviewing the interview transcripts from all participants in the study. This review helped the researcher in her data analytic effort.

Following this process, the researcher recognized similarities and differences in the statements

by the participants, and the researcher was able to sort and code patterns and themes.

Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey (2011) explained that during the analysis process in various

studies, some researchers encounter a concern: how to input information gained from the data

that shows a contradiction to the findings. This contradiction is classified as discrepant data

which might suggest an error in the research. If an error occurs, the researcher will first try to

determine why the discrepancy exists (Hennink et al., 2011). If she is unable to determine the

cause, she will need to present the findings, note the differences, and offer the opportunity for

future researchers to examine the issues (Hennink et al., 2011). After the coding process of this

study, the researcher gave an explanation of the findings, and she formulated the interview

responses and interpreted them to gain an authentic sense of how parents perceive PI.

Validity

To verify data, more than one method to assess validity was used in supporting this study.

Briggs et al. (2012) stated that validity reveals whether an item ascertains or illustrates what it is

supposed to ascertain or illustrate. The questions for this study were validated by Joyce

Epstein's six types of PI. Her framework emphasized the importance of schools and families

working together. To further ensure each question would be a valid measurement of parent

perception, the researcher presented the interview questions to a team of parents to analyze the

validity of the questions. These parents included persons who are not in the study. To establish

more credibility to this study, transcripts of the interview were provided to each of the

participants to review. This is a form of member checking. Hallett (2013) explained member

checking "allows the participants the ability to review findings and limits the threat of

researchers' bias through collaborative interaction with the participants" (p. 31). Creswell (2009) stated member checking allows participants to read transcripts of their interviews to correct any inaccuracies. Each of the aforementioned strategies was used in assuring accuracy of the findings. To assure there were no threats to the validity of the study, the interview information was kept confidential and parents were not obligated to participate in the interviews.

Conclusion

This qualitative case study attempted to gain an in-depth understanding of parents' perceptions and experiences pertaining to PI and what motivates parents to get involved in an urban public elementary school. The researcher believes that this strong conscious effort of the school to implement Epstein's six types of involvement will provide a solid foundation for parents to follow in other schools if there is someone to lead them in this effort.

The participants of this study were parents within the selected school. The effectiveness of the practices was measured by responses to interviews. After data were collected and analyzed, conclusions were drawn and discussed. Then suggestions were made for future studies. This study conformed to the ethical standards. The results of the study were analyzed and described in Section 4 followed by Section 5 with the conclusion and recommendations.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this case study was to explore perceptions of prekindergarten parents at an urban elementary school in Texas concerning PI. The administration of this school was facing the problem of having a low percentage of PI in their children's educational setting. A qualitative case study enabled the researcher to investigate parent's beliefs about PI at this school where the study was conducted. The researcher collected data from face-to-face interviews. The purpose of data collection was to investigate parents' perceptions of their involvement with their child's educational endeavors. In a comprehensive examination of PI, the researcher described the perception of 14 parents about their opinions of being involved in their children's educational setting.

In conducting this study, 14 parents were specifically chosen because they could provide accurate information concerning this study. They were parents who met the participant criteria: (a) must have a pre-kindergarten child enrolled at this Title I urban elementary school during the 2015/2016 school year, (b) must not have completed the parent volunteer requirements for the school, (c) must not be an employee at the school, (d) must not have a child in the researcher's class, and (e) may be of any ethnicity.

Data Collection Process

Initially the researcher contacted sixty prospective participants and gave each one an invitation letter. After returning the invitation letters stating their interest to participate, the participants were then given the consent form and were asked to sign and return it in a timely manner. They were given an opportunity to ask any questions they might have had. Out of the sixty, sixteen accepted the invitation, but fourteen were chosen. This researcher collected data

after approval from her university IRB (# 09-02-15-0071032). These participants were

purposefully selected because they were parents who met the criteria. These parents were

interviewed in order to gain rich data, strengthen trustworthiness, and provide different

viewpoints to the study. The data collection process began after all consent forms were

collected. The interviews were held in a private room at a public library at the participants'

requested time. The scheduled time for each interview was approximately 30–45 minutes. Each

interview was audio recorded, and each response was transcribed. Open-ended interview

questions (Appendix D) which were used as a guide, were in alignment with the research

questions.

Each of the participants was interviewed once on an individual basis. The purpose of the

interviews was to probe the minds of the participants about PI. The researcher used member

checking in this study. Member checking is "an approach in which the investigator takes

summaries of the findings back to key participants in the study and asks them whether the

findings are an accurate reflection of their experiences" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Therefore, as a means of determining the accuracy of the qualitative findings, six participants

were given back their descriptions to check the data for accuracy. These six participants

reviewed the transcripts and stated that the responses were accurate. The other participants

chose not to review the transcripts. However; there is reasonable assurance that the transcripts

and findings were accurate based on the statements of the six parents who reviewed the

transcripts and considered them to be accurate. The data from the face-to-face interviews of the

14 different participants, as well as member checking, ensured trustworthiness of the study.

Using these two approaches, the researcher was assured of sufficient accuracy for the results of this study after the data were collected.

Organization of Data

This case study included collecting data from 14 participants. After data was collected, it was closely analyzed and systematically organized through the use of coding, themes, and patterns. The researcher developed an open-ended interview guide that was aligned with the research questions. The face-to-face interviews were guided by the interview guide (Appendix D) designed by the researcher for the study. After completing the recorded interviews, she listened intensely to each response and transcribed the responses. Then, she examined each response from the interviews about parents' perceptions of PI in the educational setting, and she compiled and analyzed the data from the face-to-face interviews.

The researcher used the coding process to address each of the questions. A number system and color schemes were used to code the findings that corresponded to the research questions and interview questions. She used the number system to code responses for each research question. The use of a color scheme was used to code responses from the interview questions which related to Epstein's six types of PI. After thoroughly reviewing the data, various themes emerged, and she categorized them. Three major themes emerged from the findings. First of all, all participants expressed that PI meant some form of engagement in their child's life. Next, parents welcomed preschool outreach about how they could be more engaged in their child's education. Lastly, parents who had a desire to volunteer had multiple obligations that prevented them from volunteering. The overarching theme was that parents want to be involved and expressed they wanted to be involved in their child's education. These themes

were developed from the data this researcher received from the interview questions which were related to Joyce Epstein's (2011) six types of involvement developed into these themes. During the interview process, the interviewer asked the participants to reiterate their responses for clarification. This step was taken in order to get the most accurate responses from those we interviewed. The purpose of these 14 interviews was to collect rich data in order to obtain a clear understanding of parents' perceptions about PI. Participants reviewed the transcripts, which were stored in a file cabinet with a security lock. Because identities were concealed, the researcher gave pseudonyms to each participant.

The Findings

Each participant provided information on how parents perceive PI. All responses were kept confidential in the presentation of the transcripts. None of the actual names were used during the transcription of the interviews. Pseudonyms (P1-P14) were used to conceal identities for each participant. The findings for each research question are included in the following information.

Research Question 1

How do parents perceive their PI roles for their children in elementary school?

In reference to the above research question, the participants were asked the following questions:

- What does PI mean to you?
- Briefly explain how you have volunteered at your child's school? If you have not, explain why.

- What would you like to learn more about in terms of ways to get
  involved?

P1 stated, "PI means helping out whenever it is needed whether it is with school activities, homework, or helping out in other areas at the school." P1 also asserted, "I would like to help out with programs, and when students have field trips, I could go along to help with any items they need for the special events." P1 expressed, "I would like to know how parents can help out with students in any kind of way in classrooms no matter how small the need is."

P2 stated, "PI means helping with a student and helping with homework so the child can get a better understanding, and parents can be on the same page." P2 further stated, "It means training a child the same way as the school or teacher would." P2 affirmed, "I help out in the cafeteria, on field trips, and with any outing the class may have. I would like to know how I could get involved with the school, even if the only opportunities are doing things during my work hours."

P3 stated, "PI means visiting the school, having one-on-one conversations with the teacher, joining the PTA, volunteering when time allows and attending parent conferences." P3 explained, "This is my child's first year at school and when there is a need to volunteer I will be more than happy to do so. I would like to learn more about events that the school has planned."

P4 affirmed, "PI means parent engagement and dedication to the children's life and a commitment of true intention to do or take the extra steps to their children's success. P4 confessed, "I have not volunteered at my child's school because I work full-time." However, she did affirm, "The school does provide parents with volunteer opportunities at home such as cutting materials or other activities. I would like to learn how the school could take action on

getting more parents out for parent conferences or family night programs and finding ways the administration staff can become more flexible and allow parents to participate and enter the school more."

P5 asserted, "PI is the participation of parents in school activities, volunteering for the school, helping out with school projects and chaperoning some students." P5 admitted, "I have been behind the scenes helping out at dances, serving the food, counting flyers for the sections, helping out with programs and putting together stuff for the teachers. I would like to see the teacher outside the workplace like out in our community."

P6 stated, "PI is volunteering and helping our children supplement what the school tries to do." She admitted, "I want to volunteer because my parents never did even though I wanted them too." She went on to say, "I don't trust the administration at this school because my child was lost twice. I desire to volunteer in my son's class, the readers club, the library, and at book fair so I can be around my kids." She confessed that she wants to volunteer for what directly affects her kids. P6 emphasized, "It would be good to learn about what needs to be done for the school administration to treat the parents better. For example, we can't have lunch with our children except on Friday, and during the last six weeks we cannot come to school at all. Being at school is what has helped me. I'm at the point of not complaining because I am helping and I can see my child whenever I like in the class setting because I am around – THEY CAN'T KICK ME OUT!" P6 continued to express, "Demonstrate that this is an open door and LET US IN! If they actually let us in, they will have more involvement. I am different. I break through. I do not take no for an answer. I will be in-I will be in."

P7 confirmed, "PI means getting involved at my child's school with whatever they need help with, by helping the teacher to know what it is the child needs help with. So when they come home, you can help them with what's slowing them up." She stated, "I think it's good for the parents to get involved so kids will know they are not in it alone. Spending 20-30 minutes there lets the kids know that the parents care about them." She also said, "I volunteer by helping make copies of assignments for teachers, decorating hallways, and receiving books for the book club." She further explained, "The book club has been started where parents are being asked to donate Spanish books and with this being a dual school, the school needs more Spanish books because we already have a lot of English books for the students to read. I read to the students and will begin volunteering more when the teachers need help and call me because they have my number." P7 would like for the teachers or the school to call if they need help. She stated the school is doing well and she likes the way the school sends letters out which is one of her means of learning about current events.

P8 stated, "PI means that you as a parent participate in the growth and success of your child." She stated that with her help, her child will participate in anything that is going on in the school that allows her child to grow mentally, physically and academically. P8 said, "I try volunteering by participating with the PTA for campus activities and with the music teacher when she takes the children on weekends to the Arts Magnet High School." She told how she sends items to her son's class to use on special projects. P8 declared, "Ways to strengthen parent/community involvement is to allow the children to continue to observe or participate in activities at the school that cross racial boundaries, such as: Black History Month, Hispanic Awareness Month and other cultural events and holidays to develop a sense of pride."

P9 related, "PI involves parents making a conscience decision to be active when their children carry a ton of weight in the developmental stages of their lives." She admitted, "Due to my full-time commitment at work, I am unable to come into the school and physically volunteer." However, she expressed that she told the teacher to contact her when there are projects she can do at home like making phone calls for field trips, passing along pertinent information to book a field trip, and cutting out materials for the class. P9 also expressed, "I would like to learn more about how I can get involved with summer activities to keep my children motivated in the summer." She explained that her children have a lot of down time in the summer. They don't qualify for summer school, and she is working a full-time job.

P10 emphasized, "PI means to be communicating more with your kid's teacher, knowing the lows and highs so you can work with them and be involved in the community." She added, "It's for me to be more aware of my child's education and whatever he needs help in. I will make a way for him to get that help." She also mentioned that she helps for PTA sign-up and will be signing up for Fall Festival in hopes of having her husband sign up to be the DJ. P10 stated, "I will most likely volunteer to be in the booth in charge of the games for the kids. For working parents, we get out late and I would like to know if there is a way to talk to parents after hours and find out what it is parents can do after hours. Parents need to learn more about that website for parents to start looking on so that parents can find out how the kids behaved that day."

P11 stated, "PI means getting involved during and after school, doing my part as a parent and going over what the teacher needs." She explained that she has older children and there is a large gap between the older children and the pre-k son. P11 confessed, "I did better with my

older kids, but I am getting better with him. He is barely learning so I must start back getting

more involved with him and his school." She admitted that mainly she thinks she puts other

things first with the pre-k son, whereas with her first child, she stated that she did participate, but

that child was an only child at the time. She said, "I wouldn't mind volunteering, but I had a

different job back then." P11 stated she was unable to answer the next part of the question

because she did not know what she wanted to learn more about since she has not been

volunteering.

P12 confirmed, "PI is a commitment of parents to work with the school and to meet the

needs of the students. She also confessed, "I have not volunteered at the school because I don't

have the time, and I have a very busy schedule." P12 confirmed she wants to learn about how

parents can be made to feel more welcomed in the school "because if parents don't, the chances of

becoming involved are minimal."

P13 stated, "PI means to participate, to be involved, and to have some input. For me, it

means like… to feel you are part of the whole process of scholar, teacher, and parent working to

be a team." P13 admitted right now she has not participated in Pre K because she has been more

involved with the 5th grade Lego team, but she emphasized that she has participated in PTA

meetings, she was able to be of some assistance, and she plans to keep participating. She further

explained, "For right now my health issues have slowed me down and when I get through all this,

I plan to be at the school as much as possible." P13 asserted she would like to learn how parents

can start committees. She stated maybe it would help if the school allowed parents to start a

committee that could print out a list of what help would possibly be needed every month. She

suggested, "Maybe have a committee that could help pick up trash around the school inside or out."

P14 stated, "PI means being knowledgeable of what is going on in the school and classroom so that you can properly help and support in roles needed." She expressed she is not able to volunteer because she is a stay-at-home mom with a small child, and the baby is not allowed in the school activities. P14 also stressed she would like to learn more about how she can get involved since she is unable to make PTA meetings. She then asserted, "If PTA minutes and goals are sent home, I can still be informed about the meetings and have a chance to make informed decisions."

Research Question 2

How can the school help improve the role parents play in their child's education while addressing the issues of communication and participation?

- How does the school provide families with information on developing home environments that support learning?

- What are the various forms of communication utilized by the school to inform the parents about student progress and school events?

- How does the school provide information on how parents can assist their children with skills they need to improve on in relation to homework and curriculum related activities?

- What can be done by the school to strengthen parent and community involvement?

P1 emphasized the school provides families with information on developing home environments that support learning through hand-outs and flyers. She then stated, "The forms of communication I am aware of that the school utilizes are phone calls, setting up meetings, and parent conferences. The school provides information on how parents can assist their children through calls, print outs that come home with her child and parent conferences." She then affirmed, "I would like for teachers to send out something or call as soon as they need parents to do something, if they want to strengthen parent and community involvement."

P2 emphasized meeting with parents, phone calls, and sending memos home is how information is provided. P2 said that the forms of communication she is familiar with are usually through a parent conference and the teacher calling to meet with the parent. P2 stated, "Through newsletters and flyers is usually how the school provides information on how parents can assist their children with skills they need to improve on. P2 added, "The school could send newsletters home once a month on information about the upcoming events."

P3 expressed that information is provided by newsletters, homework, folders, and with Parent Portal through D.I.S.D. She emphasized her forms of communication are phone calls, newsletters, hand-outs, information on the marquee, and through conversations held with her child about what is going on. P3 stated, "Newsletters and handouts are sent home every week" to provide information on how parents can help their child. To strengthen parent and community involvement, P3 shared, "The school should have community meetings on a regular bases and invite parents and do workshops that involve parents and children."

P4 expressed, "My school exceeds my expectations when it comes to support information on different types of learning tips." She further emphasized, "Teachers try to enhance learning

through home-work activities by giving parents tips on how they can use their home environment with simple learning activities found in the home." P4 stated, "There are several parent teacher conferences and also parent meeting conferences" that are used as forms of communication. She also stated, "The principal is very flexible to meet with parents to inform them on school progress and that flyers are distributed all around the school." P4 added she gets information on how to help her child at parent teacher conferences because this is the only opportunity where parents can get information on important activities. P4 concluded, "The school could provide more volunteer opportunities and school interaction opportunities."

P5 indicated a flyer was sent home once, and she used resources from the counselor. P5 explained the school will "send home an example of websites for parents to go to." She also confirmed, "The teacher sends home a weekly newsletter and the school sends home a weekly folder with a lot of information." P5 also suggested, "The school could have a meet and greet party" to help strengthen PI.

P6 explained "I believe last year (not this year yet) a couple of parent workshop meetings discussing what we could do at home with homework were provided...a couple of workshops and one flyer that detailed what we can do." P6 affirmed the school has parent portal which she has not accessed this year because she does not think it is necessary yet. She confirmed, "Other means of communication are parent-teacher conferences every semester and e-mailing the teacher to make sure my boys are in check." She expressed a personal experience and stated that she understands that teachers are busy in the morning but she only needed 2 minutes of the teacher's time. She further expressed, "If we had more of a face-to-face it would be much better, but we have to call and make an appointment and wait for 45 minutes. Administration wants

parents involved on their own terms, but it can't be a give and take only when administrators want to deal with parents; it must be equal." P6 confessed she feels that she has only received one type of assistance on how to help with homework which is to read every day, but she does not let that stop her. She reiterated, "My parents did not get involved with me, but I wanted them to." She feels the school has not provided much information on how parents can assist their children with skills they need to improve on in relation to homework and curriculum-related activities. P6 stated, "My biggest thing is that the administration will state they have an open door policy but they do not demonstrate it. They do not show that they actually want parents involved. She explained, "I wanted to say two sentences to my son this morning, but for whatever reason, they did not allow me -that is not an open door. I am having a birthday party and I brought invitations and bags and wanted to give it to the teachers, but administration stopped me from explaining to the teacher and she (the teacher) was only five steps in front of me. Administration said No- but I walked in right behind her anyway."

P7 confirmed, "Every Thursday the teacher sends paper work from the school and every Friday we get work from the teacher." She further explained, "I'm not sure exactly what they are doing at school, but I practice what I saw on the newsletter." P7 stated that the teacher uses different forms and methods to inform parents about student progress, and P7 tries to use them, but if she feels she has missed something she will ask the teacher when she sees her. P7 also stated, "The school sends out forms in weekly folders, I get phone calls, have weekly meetings, the school sends a paper so we can find out what's going on, and sends e-mails out with attachment letters or a voice mail." She asserted, "Logging into parent portal also communicates the progress on your kid." P7 admitted, "I have learned a lot of what they need to learn on the

newsletters which gives what they need to practice and learn. Teachers have great communication with the parents." P7 added, "The last PTA I came to, I did not see that many parents. Parents say they don't come because it's going to be English and the Spanish speakers don't know English."   P7 suggested that Spanish parents sit on one side and have translators translate as a means of helping parents get more involved with everything.

P8 confirmed, "Information that can be used to support the learning can be found online at the school or passed out through Thursday folders." She continued, "This information is also shared by word of mouth from the teachers and at conference meetings at the school." P8 emphasized, "Communication from the school is sent home in the weekly folders, through newsletters created by my son's teacher, and on the sign outside the school building which is updated weekly." P8 stressed, "The teachers at the school send various handouts that include resources that can help with homework, building stronger readers, and activities to participate in at the local library. The campus has offered parent meetings during the school year that families can attend to heighten their skills." P8 included, "When the school is continually offering ways for families to come together to voice their opinions, this helps the school as well as the children."

P9 confirmed, "The school provides families with opportunities to develop a home environment that supports learning by providing take-home family projects every 6 weeks." She further stated, "The school also has family literacy and math nights where families come together and learn creative ways to make and take ideas for a variety of strategies." P9 simply admitted, "Class newsletters, daily communication folders, occasional e-mails, text messages and phone calls are the various means of communication used at the school. P9 mentioned the school

communicates by giving homework on skills that have been introduced in class. She also

admitted, "There are times the teacher will make a comment on the homework." She further

admitted she is not familiar with the school's curriculum or any related activities. P9

emphasized "Parent and community involvement can be strengthened by continuing to enhance

parent and school communication. Although there are certain things in place at this time, we can

always find better ways to enhance what is currently being done."

P10 asserted, "I guess like for example, they send you the little ads about what's going on

at the school and I get calls every week when the school provides information on developing

home environments that support learning." She added, "They also have that chat page which is

awesome." P10 stressed, "The school has so many websites. On the website there is a way to

check the student's grades to see what help they can get from home." She mentioned she likes

that the teachers send memos of what they are working on all week which will help prepare

children at home. P10 stated, "I feel that this school has everything to get involved but the

parents are always having an excuse for being lazy." She then emphasized, "Being involved is

for all of our benefits; it helps our children, and there is no excuse not to get involved."

P11 confessed she thinks the whole school is good on communicating on how to get

involved, about better ways to help Pre-K, and how to get involved all around. She realizes that

"The school gets the message out there." P11 confirmed, "The school communicates by papers

in the children's weekly folders they take home, through phone calls (sometimes too much),

which is pretty good because if you didn't get it one way you get it another way." P11 stated,

"My Pre K teacher is good at communicating with her weekly folder to let me know what my

son needs to work on and how he is doing." P11 emphasized that in her opinion, most parents

work an 8 to 5 job, and they try to do activities and attend parent teacher conferences. She offered, "It would be nice to do things after school, but teachers want to go home, too." P11 also revealed, "It's hard to work around everybody's schedules; having more flexible hours would be more helpful with getting more people involved."

P12 stated she didn't know if the school provides information on developing a home environment that supports learning, but if it does it will be through the parent liaison. P12 confirmed that forms of communication utilized by the school about student progress and school events would be through weekly newsletters, phone calls, and progress reports. She stated, "The school, well the teachers too, well yeah it's the school too that sends out weekly newsletters in which different information is given." P12 stressed, "Strengthening parent involvement starts with the principal, and I feel the principal needs to build a strong relationship with parents and the community from the very first day of school."

P13 confirmed that information that supports how to have a learning environment at home is provided through flyers, through messaging, and sending a lot of information with the kids every Thursday in the school-wide folder. She further explained, "The school has meetings and parent workshops so the kids' parents can be involved." She mentioned she also thinks PTA has a lot of information along with the principal who is also involved and helps and gives out a lot of information. P13 affirmed she receives communication through newsletters, through school messaging, and reading it on the billboard outside the school. And at every PTA the principal comes out and puts out school information." She affirmed, "My Pre K gets a letter on Mondays explaining the process of what they will be learning, and it lets parents know the skills they can work on at home that will help them at school and that's throughout the newsletter."

She confirmed that right now the school has not started with meet-the-teacher or parent teacher conferences, but she believes when it does come, the teacher will have plenty of information to come out. She further explained, "The teachers always have given us the information because the teachers have always been very open and have shared personal numbers and e-mails in case parents need them at any time." P13 stated, "It would help a lot if parents do more and if the SBDM Committee would open up to the public and have more public meetings." P13 suggested, "Maybe coffee with the principal would help out a lot too."

P14 affirmed she hasn't seen any information on developing home environments that support learning. She further affirmed she hasn't seen any forms of communication that are great. She said, "I would like to see weekly or bi-weekly progress charts and goal charts for every 6-week term so that I could help at home to make sure the goals are met." P14 confirmed, If the school is able to send home information about upcoming activities, then I will join in wherever I can to help the school strengthen parent and community involvement."

Research Question 3

What are parent perceptions of the PTA within this urban elementary school with regard to its impact on the frequency, quality, and length of the communication between school and home to encourage parental involvement?

- Briefly describe how the school includes parents in the decision-making process as it relates to being represented on committees and in leadership roles.

P1 affirmed the school includes parents in the decision-making process when they "ask the parents if they would like to be a part of any committees." She also added, "They also ask parents to help out with PTA, field trips, and programs."

P2 stated, "Parents are included in the decision-making through PTA meetings and conferences with teachers."

P3 agreed that in order to get involved in the decision-making, one needs to be an active member of the P.T.A. and join other committees.

P4 stated, "I believe there is a committee form at the school to feel out in order to have parents involved in school activities." She also stated, "I believe it's the PTA group that relates to and participates on school leadership committees and decision-making situations."

P5 affirmed, "The school has a site-based decision team that meets so we all can make decisions together." She added, "Plus the school has the PTA."

P6 stated, "This question lost me because I don't think this school provides an opportunity for the parents to make decisions."

P7 stated, "At the last PTA meeting, the PTA explained to parents about upcoming events, and they asked parents for their ideas about what they can contribute."

P8 explained, "The district offers various opportunities, but the only opportunity I have noticed through the school is with the PTA." She added that the district opportunities were sent to her from the music teacher. She asserted she was able to contribute advice concerning giving ACP (final exams) to the younger grade students in Fine Arts.

P9 conveyed that parents are included in various areas such as the SBDM Committee, Parent Portal, and PTA throughout the district, but she was not sure if the school has all these options.

P10 explained, "I guess with the PTA, they let parents become more involved in decision-making, but it has to get approved by the principal, and getting it approved would be helpful because it is for the school's benefit." She emphasized, "I believe when parents are actually involved, it's for the parents' and students' benefit, not for the school's benefit." She included, "It could work for both as well but it allows the school to mainly see things from the parent's perspective because the school lets parents share their opinions."

P11 simply stated she hasn't been placed in a situation to answer this one.

P12 stated, "Probably through the Parent Teacher Association, but I really don't know since I haven't participated."

P13 expressed, "I have been part of the SBDM Team, and I believe that's the way parents have part of the decision-making process as it relates to us having a role."

P14 was asked how the school staff involves parents in the decision-making process as it relates to being represented on committees and in leadership roles. She simply stated, "I don't know."

Discrepancies

When analyzing interview data, the researcher found differing views in some areas pertaining to the parent/school relationship. Yet, when parents defined PI, all 14 participants agreed that it meant some kind of avenue for helping, volunteering, and participating in their child's life at school and at home. When participants were asked to contribute views on how the

school provides families with information on developing home environments that support learning, three participants were not aware of this information.

One participant stated she was not sure of exactly what they are doing at the school, even though she tries to practice what is on the newsletter. One participant asserted that she did not know if the school provides this type of information. Another participant stated she had not seen any information on this.

When expressing views about the various forms of communication the school uses to inform parents about school progress and school events, most parents agreed on newsletters, handouts, parent meetings, conferences, and phone calls were the best ways to convey information. Two parents had differing views. One participant stated face-to-face communication would be better. However, in order for that to happen, parents have to call and make an appointment and wait 45 minutes before a response. She continued by stating that administration wants parents involved on administration's terms. It cannot be a give and take situation but rather only when administrators want to deal with parents at administration's convenience. She said it must be equal. Another parent affirmed she has not seen any forms of communication that are great. She expressed she would like to see weekly or bi-weekly progress charts and goals charts for every 6-week term so she can help at home to make sure the goals are met.

The participants expressed differing thoughts about volunteering at their child's school. Even though several of them do participate in volunteering, seven participants confessed they do not volunteer for various reasons. One participant stated this is her child's first year in school, and when there is a need to volunteer she will be more than happy to do that. Three participants

confessed they do not volunteer at the school due to a full-time work schedule. Also, one of these three honestly admitted she puts other things first. Another participant explained her reason for not volunteering is due to her being more involved with her older child's after-school, extracurricular activities. She also stated that recent health issues have hindered her participation, but she plans to be more active once her health improves. One parent stressed she does not have time to volunteer because of her very busy schedule, and another parent stated she has not volunteered because she is a stay-at-home mom with a small child at home, and the baby is not allowed to attend the school activities. One other parent who does volunteer stated that her reason for volunteering is because she does not trust the administration at the school because her child was lost twice; she volunteers in everything her children are directly related to.

When participants were asked to express their views on how the school provides information about ways they can assist their child with skills, most parents agreed this type of information is received through handouts, homework, newsletters, and flyers. One participant stated she can only receive this information at parent-teacher conferences. Another parent feels the school has not provided this kind of information to her, and the one time she received assistance on how to help with homework she was told to read everyday.

When participants communicated their thoughts on how the school includes parents in the decision-making process, the majority of them agreed it was through the PTA and SBDM Committee. One participant shared she does not think this school provides an opportunity for the parents to make decisions. Three participants stressed they did not know. One of these three participants added she thinks it may be through the PTA; however, since she has never participated in PTA, she really did not know.

When offering advice about what could be done to strengthen parent and community involvement, several participants gave valuable advice. Three participants had differing views. One participant stressed that the administration of the school claims to have an open door policy, but they do not demonstrate that. She stated that school administration actions show they do not really want parents involved. This participant gave an example of why she feels that administration does not exhibit an open door policy. She explained "I wanted to say two sentences to my son this morning, but for whatever reason, they did not allow me to do that. That is not an open door policy. I am having a birthday party, and I brought invitations and bags and wanted to give them to the teacher. Administration stopped me from explaining to the teacher, and she (the teacher) was only five steps in front of me. Administration said No, but I walked in right behind her anyway." Another parent stated that she comes to PTA, but she does not see many parents at the PTA. She affirmed parents have told her they do not come because it's going to be in English, and the Spanish parents do not know English. One parent stated that she feels the school has everything for parents to get involved, but the parents are always having an excuse for being lazy. When parents were asserting their opinions about what they would like to learn in terms of ways to get involved, twelve out of fourteen participants shared what they would like to learn more about. Those two who did not share what they would like to learn about simply admitted that they really did not know.

Themes

To discover emerging themes (Creswell, 2013), the researcher used face-to-face interviews and compared the data to Epstein's (2011) framework. Various themes emerged from the collected data to answer the research questions for this study. Each theme is provided below.

Themes Related to the Definition of Parent Involvement

The interviews revealed that all participants had very similar definitions of the meaning of PI. P4 expressed "parent involvement means parent engagement and dedication to the children's lives and a commitment of true intention to do or take the extra steps for the children's success." Some participants expressed their belief that PI meant several forms of engagement as it relates to their child's educational setting. This engagement would include, but was not limited to, helping children at home, chaperoning for school functions on or off campus, conversing with the teachers, helping the teachers, and attending PTA. Hornsby (2011) defined PI as the educational processes and experiences of children which include listening to children read, monitoring homework, and attending parent workshops and parent-teacher meetings. It is judicious that parents get involved because involvement can create a desire for the parents to become increasingly engaged with the child's educational setting as a whole. According to P13, PI means the parents feel as though they share in the whole process of scholar, teacher, and parent, working to be a team.

One participant indicated that PI entails the parent participating in the growth and success of the child. She implied that when anything is going on at the school that allows her child to grow mentally, physically and academically, her child will participate in it with her help. "Parents' decisions to be involved are shaped by their beliefs; by invitations and opportunities for involvement from the school and child; and by their perceptions of available time, energy, and skills (Hiatt-Michael, 2010, p. 13). Another parent stated PI is parents making a conscience decision that being involved with their child carries a ton of weight in the developmental stages

of their lives. The information acquired from the participants showed that PI means offering

purposeful, concrete parental support in the child's educational environment.

Themes Related to Parenting

The interviews with participants revealed how the school provides families with

information on developing home environments that support learning. The common theme that

emerged from the interviews was that the most popular means of getting information to the

parents is through written communication. Nine out of fourteen participants stated they receive

handouts, flyers, newsletters, homework folders from the teachers, and school wide Thursday

folders. Three of the parents who participated in this study stated they receive information

online on how they can develop home environments that support learning at home. Three of the

participants indicated that parent workshops are offered to address the need of supporting

learning at home. Three of the participants stated they receive this information by meeting one-

on-one with the teacher through phone conferences and/or face-to-face meetings. Adversely,

two of the fourteen participants indicated the school does not provide information on developing

home environments that support learning. A few of the parents fall into more than one category.

Themes Related to Communication

Data collected from the interviews indicated that parents are aware of a variety of

communication avenues that communicate information. A common theme that emerged was that

all 14 participants appreciated receiving information through multiple means of communication.

This theme indicated that parents did not prefer one way over another when receiving

information on how the school informs parents about student progress and school events. The

theme that emerged most from the interviews was that every participant stated they received written communication to notify them about their child's progress and school events.

These written forms of communication included newsletters, handouts, flyers, weekly folders, and progress reports. All fourteen participants also stated they received communication through conferences whether by phone or face-to-face; this was the second most noted theme that emerged from the data. The third theme that emerged from the data that is noteworthy was receiving communication online. Half of the participants indicated that they have gained information about student progress and school events through parent portal and e-mail.

Themes Related to Volunteering

A recurring theme was multiple obligations that prevented parents from volunteering at their child's school. Half of the fourteen participants stated they had other obligations such as: work schedules, busy schedules, health-related issues, and a stay-at-home mom with an infant, and she claimed if she were able to volunteer she would not be allowed to bring the baby. However, there were three common themes that appeared to exhibit positive factors for volunteering. Three participants stated they desired to volunteer to help the teachers on field trips with their child's class. Two participants indicated they have helped with PTA special events. Two other participants revealed they would like to volunteer in their child's class and help monitor the book club which was a club initiated by the parents.

Themes Related to Learning at Home

In regards to how the school could provide information on how parents can assist their children with skills that need improvement, two notable common themes emerged. Thirteen parents stated there was some form of written communication that would provide information on

how they could assist they child at home. This written communication included: print outs, flyers, newsletters, handouts, homework, memos, and weekly folders. Another common theme that emerged from the data was conferences. Seven of these participants also confirmed they are able to receive information on how to help their child through personal conferences with the teacher. These conferences were by phone and face-to-face.

Themes Related to Decision-Making

Data were gained from the subject on how the school includes parents in the decision-making process and how they are represented on committees and in leadership roles. This data showed an overwhelming response of parents being in agreement with each other. There were two common themes that emerged from this subject. Those two themes were PTA and the SBDM Team. Eight out of fourteen participants stated PTA as the main source of being informed and given an opportunity to be represented on committees and in leadership roles. Two of the participants indicated both the PTA and the SBDM Team is how the parents make decisions together with the school. One participant stated she believes the SBDM Team is the way parents play a part in the decision-making process as it relates to parents having a role. However, there were four out of the fourteen participants who stated they had no knowledge of this subject of how parents are included in the decision-making process.

Themes Related to Collaboration

The emerging themes from this topic were that participants believed the school could be strengthened by improving its communication process, having more interaction activities, and through administration playing a more positive role consecutively. Six of the fourteen participants indicated there are other forms of communication that would strengthen parent and

community involvement. Those forms of communication were (a) to have the school call parents whenever anything is needed, (b) to continue the existing forms of parent school communication with minor improvements, (c) to have families come together to voice their opinions on topics, and (d) to have a Spanish translator to attend the PTA meetings. Another communication technique suggested within this theme was for the school to begin having community meetings.

An additional theme that emerged was to offer more opportunities for parents to interact with the school. Five participants spoke about a variety of events the school could provide. The following events that would help with interaction are having workshops, meet and greet parties, and more volunteer opportunities for parents to interact after school when parents get off work.

One last theme that emerged which two participants felt very passionate about was administration. One of these two participants felt the school could help strengthen parent and community involvement if the school would demonstrate an open door policy. She stated that the school says there is an open door policy, but she felt it is not demonstrated. The other parent indicated parent and community involvement would be strengthened if the principal built a strong relationship with the parents and community from the very first day of school. The participants desire to work more collaboratively to meet the needs of the school within the community.

Participants were also asked what they would like to learn more about in regards to ways of getting involved. The theme that emerged most often from the data obtained by the participants was involvement ideas and opportunities. The participants want to be more knowledgeable about involvement opportunities and how these opportunities can be

implemented within this school setting. Six of the fourteen participants wanted to know what could be done to get more parents out for family night and workshops. They also wanted to gain more information on how they could be more helpful around the school. One of the six participants emphasized she would like to know if any parents could help the students in the classroom, no matter how small the job. Another of the six participants stated she wanted to know how the parents could start a committee that would help with keeping the campus clean inside and out.

Another recurring theme was work obligations and busy schedules. Three of the fourteen participants indicated their work obligations and busy schedules prevented them from participating in school activities. One of these three participants expressed she would like to know how she could get involved if her work hours were the same as the school hours. She also wanted to know if these were the only hours of opportunity to get involved.

One last common theme that recurred was that school had an unwelcome environment. Three participants felt that administration makes the environment of the school uncomfortable. These three participants are interested in learning about what administration needs to do in order to make the school environment more welcoming. One of these three participants stated she wants administration to become more flexible with parents who want to participate and allow them to enter the school more. Another one of these three participants stated she wants to learn about how "the parents can feel more welcomed because if parents do not feel welcomed, the chances of becoming involved are minimal."

This qualitative case study was designed to gain an understanding of parents' perceptions of parental involvement as it relates to Epstein's (2011) six types of involvement. It was

essential that this study should be done to determine the various ways parents view PI at this school. Through the research information and data gained in this research study, the researcher perceived that while there are involvement measures in place at this school, parents are still lacking and there is more room for improvement in their involvement obligations.

Evidence of Quality

Creswell (2013) stated researchers must disclose measures taken in their study that check for accuracy and credibility of the findings. Researchers use various sources to prove trustworthiness in a qualitative research study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The evidence of the quality of this study was strengthened by using accurate descriptions of fourteen different parent's perceptions of their understanding of PI. The context was precisely described so that readers can easily transfer the results to similar contexts.

A peer reviewer was assigned tasks to review, ask questions, and provide feedback to help strengthen the research (Yin, 2011). Prior to peer reviewing, participants were previously assigned a pseudonym to assure the participants' identification remained anonymous. Mrs. H, an instructional coach and certified educator, served as the peer reviewer for this study. She works at the study site but she is unable to identify any of the participants.

The peer reviewer reviewed the interviews and documents. She and the researcher discussed the study, and she asked me questions. She also offered valuable feedback to ensure credibility and validity. Mrs. H. reviewed the interview question guide. We discussed why the questions were pertinent to the study, and she read each interview transcript. After the data was reviewed, all fourteen interviews were compared. Mrs. H. reviewed coding procedures and coding of the data. She analyzed the data and agreed with the process of how the key emerging

themes were determined. She also agreed with the interpretation of the data. Knowing that the interview guide reflected questions adopted from Epstein's (2011) six types of improvement, Mrs. H. agreed with the key common themes which emerged from each of the six types of involvement. After surveying the process, she was in agreement that the data was aligned with the themes and the conclusions were valid.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how parents perceive PI. Through face-to-face interviews, this single qualitative case study examined fourteen pre-kindergarten parents' perceptions of PI and how their understanding of PI relates to this school. Data gathered from this source provided information to answer the following questions:

1. How do parents perceive their PI roles for their children in elementary school?

2. How can the school help parents improve the role they play in their child's education while addressing the issues of communication and participation?

3. What are parental perceptions of the PTA within this urban, elementary school with regard to its impact on the frequency, quality, and length of the communication between school and home to encourage PI?

Based on the participants' responses, PI is considered important. Data revealed that participants received information from the school about their children and school events through a variety of methods. Data also revealed there is a lack of participation in school activities due to certain restraints. The participants offered recommendations to help the school to improve PI. Their recommendations included having more parent workshops, offering after-school volunteer

opportunities to parents who have work schedules the same as the school hours, having public

meetings for the community to get involved, and having administration work on how to make the

school a welcoming environment. Overall, even though the school is lacking parent

participation, the participants feel the school is using a variety of communication methods to

build and sustain an effective home and school partnership. This section presented an

introduction, a review of the data collection process, and a review of the data collection tool.

This section also included the organization of data, findings, explanation of discrepant data, and

an explanation of evidence of quality.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Officials in the state of Texas have emphasized the importance of PI in public school settings (TEA, 2009). TEA officials have adopted a plan to ensure that all Texas children receive quality education. As part of the plan, parents, educators, and communities will work together as partners to succeed in achieving this goal for all students. There is a lack of PI in Texas schools, and these officials have established initiatives to address the need of improving parental participation (TEA, 2009). Based on the conversations that the researcher had with staff at this school, this problem is apparent at the study site, and this situation compels the educators and parents at this school to find ways of getting other parents involved.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how parents perceive their parent involvement (PI) role at the school of study and how principals and teachers can help parents improve their role. The first research question focused on parents' perception of their involvement roles for their children in elementary school. The researcher interviewed fourteen prekindergarten parents in order to collect relevant data on their perceptions of their PI roles. The researcher explored the participant's responses to gain a deeper understanding of how they viewed involvement. Data provided the researcher with information that the parents have their own definitions of what PI means and how well they understood the importance of PI. The parents' answers revealed several themes. The findings indicated that parents have a desire to become involved within their children's school setting. The participants also offered an array of advice on how to get more parents involved.

It is my opinion that even though some parents desire to become involved in their child's school setting, there are many parents who choose not to get involved. The opportunities being

offered at the study site are visible, but the self-motivation of some parents to put forth the effort is low. Several of the parents that I interviewed seemed willing to get more involved; however, their excuses or reasons took preference. Some parents suggested great ideas of ways to get involved, but I sensed they felt belittled by the school staff. Parents have experiences and abilities that they can offer to the school environment, but staff must be receptive of those experiences and open the door, allowing parents to feel welcomed in offering their experiences and skills.

From the second research question, the researcher gained information on communication, participation and how the school educators and PTA could help improve parents' roles in their children's educational setting. The researcher learned from this data that implementing various forms of communication were essential to getting out information that parents needed to know regarding engagement opportunities. This included having teachers call parents whenever anything was needed, having a Spanish translator attend PTA meetings to help Spanish parents understand what was being said, and having families come together to voice their opinions on various topics.

The third research question involved parents' perceptions of the PTA within the school. The participants believed that the PTA communicates opportunities for the parents to become involved. However, the participants felt that parents were not involved enough in the decision-making process, and they felt this kind of input was imperative in strengthening the home/school partnership. Successful school relationships are developed when parents, teachers, and principals are engaged in the decision-making process for the school environment.

Participants exercised some form of engagement found in the six types of parental involvement identified by Epstein (2010). Participants indicated that the school does use various forms of written communication to notify parents of school events and class assignments. Parents welcomed this feedback and information from this school. From the findings, the researcher learned that the school offers multiple opportunities for parents to get involved. Participants realized that the PTA and the SBDM Committee were good resources used at the study site to get parents involved.

Another finding was that several parents were not involved in the educational setting of their child for various reasons. These reasons consisted of parents having the same work hours as the time when school events occurred, parents having busy schedules, having younger children to care for, having health issues, being already involved with older siblings, and not feeling welcomed. These participants indicated that they do not participate because they do not receive information that notified them of school events. These participants also stated they do not know how they can help their children at home. An additional finding showed that parents do not get involved because they do not feel welcomed in the school. See Table 1 for participant responses to the research questions that illustrate Epstein's (2010) six types of PI categories.

Table 1

Participant Responses That Illustrate Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement Categories

Joyce Epstein's Six Types of Involvement	Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3
Type 1 Parenting	P9- "PI involvement means parents making a conscience decision that being involved with my child carried a ton of weight in the development stages of their lives."	P1- "The school provides families with information on developing home environments that support learning through handouts and flyers."	None of the participants made reference to parenting for this research question.
Type 2 Communicating	P7- "I would like for the teachers or the school to call if they need help." "The school is doing well and I like the way the school sends letters out. This is one way I learn about events going on at school."	P13- "Information that supports how to have a learning environment at home is provided through flyers, through messaging, and sending information home with the kids every Thursday in the school-wide folder."	P2- "Parents are included in the decision-making through PTA meetings and conferences with parents."
Type 3 Volunteering	P5-"PI is the participation of parents in school activities, volunteering for the school, helping out with school projects and chaperoning for some students."	P13- "The school has meetings and parent workshops so the kids' parents can be involved."	P7- "At the last PTA meeting the pres. outlined upcoming events and asked parents for their ideas about what they can contribute."

Table 1 (continued)

Participant Responses That Illustrate Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement Categories

Joyce Epstein's Six Types of Involvement	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3
Type 4 Learning at Home	P7- PI means getting involved at your child's school with whatever they need help with, by helping the teacher to know what it is the child needs help with so when they get home you can help with what is slowing them up."	P4- "Teachers try to enhance learning through homework activities by giving parents tips on how they can use their home environment with simple learning activities found in the home."	None of the participants referred to learning at home for this research question.
Type 5 Decision-Making	P14- "I would like to learn more about how I can get involved if I am unable to attend PTA meetings." "If PTA minutes and goals are sent home, I can still be informed about the meetings and have a chance to make informed decisions."	None of the participants made reference to decision-making for this research question.	P5- "The school has a SBDM team that meets so we all can make decisions together, plus the school has the PTA."
Type 6 Collaborating With the Community	P6- "PI means to be communicating with your kid's teacher, knowing the lows and highs so you can work with them and be involved in the community."	P8- "The teachers at the school send various handouts that include resources that can help with homework building stronger readers and activities to participate in at the local library, and the campus has offered parent meetings during the school year."	None of the participants made reference to collaboration for this research question.

Interpretation of the Findings

From the findings, the researcher concluded that the parents believed PI is very important. Data were collected through a qualitative approach by face-to-face interviews. Epstein's (2010) six types of PI were found to be essential to parents becoming engaged in their child's educational venue during the early stages of the child's education.

Research Question 1

How do parents perceive their parent involvement roles for their children in elementary school?

Based on the data, parents want to be able to participate on a more consistent basis. The researcher found common themes from the data that described the perceptions of the participants concerning PI. All participants were able to give a well-defined definition of what they felt PI to be. Even though each participant had their own definition, all of them were not performing in the capacity of the definition. Yet, each of these participants indicated that they understand the importance of being involved in their child's educational venue.

Parents have varied opinions about how parental involvement looks and how they can play various roles in their child's educational setting. It is important for schools to create alternative methods to ensure parents will have ample opportunities to volunteer and play an active role in their child's educational environment. Jeynes (2011) stated, "We need to identify what creative actions are most likely to attract parents to become involved" (p. 172). Participants indicated there are various avenues in which parents can assist at their child's school. Yet the school continues to have a lack of PI. There were barriers that hindered PI. Participants indicated the

most common barriers were work schedules and busy schedules. Added to that were health issues and a stay-at-home mom with an infant.

Participants also indicate they would like to know more about other ways they can volunteer. There should be other involvement opportunities created so they would be able to volunteer after their work hours. They also indicated that a plan to get more family members out for family night and workshops should be devised. Parents desire to be more helpful throughout the school. Even though parents understand their role is very important as a school volunteer, they indicated they were uncomfortable with volunteering. Parents felt uncomfortable and intimidated by administration. School personnel and parents need to be involved in the learning experiences of the child, but if school personnel do not engage in a more aggressive approach to accept the willingness of parents to participate, school personnel may risk appearing untrustworthy (Jeynes, 2011). It is the school's responsibility as a whole to build the parent/school relationship by establishing trust. The success of efficient involvement through various measures of volunteer opportunities can be appreciated when schools work with parents to increase understanding of parents' roles in the educational sector.

Research Question 2

How can the school help parents improve the role they play in their child's education while addressing the issues of communication and participation?

From the results, the researcher found frequent and varied forms of communication are a means in which school help improve the roles parents play. Parents understand communication to be vital. "When it comes to relationships between schools and home, parents rate the need for communication highly, but in practice the extent and effectiveness of communication varies

greatly" (Lee and Finger, 2010). The school and the individual teachers provide information that is easily accessible for developing home environments that support learning. The parents from the school site received the following forms of written communication: flyers, handouts, homework folders that are sent out every week, and school-wide folders that are sent home every Thursday. Parents indicated that these forms of communication help them with knowing what they can focus on at home in order to help their child. Parents also indicated that workshops would be helpful when they want to learn about things they can do at home with their child. Parents found face-to-face conferences and phone conferences were an imperative asset for gaining information on how to support learning at home. Parents specified that the school uses various forms of communication to inform parents. Using various forms of communication is beneficial for the parents because they will have multiple opportunities to receive and retrieve information. Parents overwhelmingly agreed that the information sent home allows them the opportunity to improve the roles they play in their child's education.

Participants recognized communication between home and school as a means to improve PI in the child's educational setting. They wanted the school to feel free to call them if any help was needed. Parents who are physically present indicates to the child and the staff that parents care, and participating in the child's education is priority (Brown, 2012). The participants indicated the schools should continue the communication processes. However, they felt that the communication process could improve if the school would get Spanish translators to come out to the various meetings. Participants also indicated that parents want the school to have more engagement opportunities for parents who get off work late. The participants also indicated that they feel that the school could help parents improve the roles they play if administration could be

more welcoming. The parents want to feel welcomed at the school and comfortable when they arrive. There should be a stronger connection between the administration and parents if the parent and school community hope to be strengthened.

In summary, major findings include that the school should consider using other means of communication in order to help parents improve the role parents play in their child's life. Even though the various means of written communication have been beneficial to some parents, there is still an abundance of parents who do not respond to the wealth of information that is given to them. One recommendation to help parents improve the role they play in their child's education is to have a parent liaison, and parents who do play roles in their child's educational setting should act as greeters to the parents in the afternoon carline. While the parents are waiting for their children, face-to-face contact can be made with the parents as a means of encouraging them to become active. Another recommendation would be the use of automated group phone calls from the school. These automated calls would offer parent-friendly information tips on various activities or events that the school would need assistance with. One last recommendation would be for the administration to be friendlier while still maintaining professionalism. Administration can show parents that they are welcomed by allowing them time to come and visit the school without making them feel uncomfortable. Administration could have special times set aside to meet and greet parents. Parents want to feel that they are welcomed by administration. As P12 stated, "I want to learn how parents can feel more welcomed because if parents don't feel welcome, the chances of becoming involved are minimal."

Research Question 3

What are parent perceptions of the PTA within this urban elementary school with regard to its impact on the frequency, quality, and length of the communication between school and home to encourage parental involvement?

Based on the data, parents indicated that the school had an active PTA that meets on a regular basis, once a month. SBDM was also noted to have regular scheduled meetings which is twice a semester. Data was retrieved from asking the participants how the school includes parents in the decision-making process as a means of encouraging parental involvement. The participants indicated PTA to be the main piece that gave parents an opportunity to be in leadership roles, to voice their opinions, and make decisions that will enhance the school. Seeing that SBDM only meets four times a year, the parents felt this committee also allowed parents an opportunity to be part of the decision-making process, but they were not very sure. Participants specified that both of these factors were means by which PI could be encouraged.

To summarize, the PTA is a pertinent organization within any school. Schools can be highly effective if there is a strong functioning PTA. To improve the PTA at this school there could be drawings held to boost the morale of participation. Also for each PTA meeting, programs can be held in which the students perform by grade level. Parents will be in attendance to gain information from the PTA meeting as well as support their child. PTA can also do parent recruitment after school by passing out incentives to encourage parents to become more participatory. As participation begins to increase, the PTA should keep in mind to maintain an orderly meeting. Timeliness and conducting the meeting in a business manner is a very important key. A set routine and schedule should be followed so that parents know the meetings will

follow a set agenda. These are recommendations that can positively impact the improvement of parents' participation within the PTA.

Through this research study, administrators can use these findings to enhance the understanding of their role of helping parents feel comfortable within school environments. At the same time, administrators must support parents in building their knowledge of becoming proficient at engaging in their child's academic endeavors. This research study may be used to serve as a guide to parents who are uncertain about how to develop their volunteer roles. Also, this study may be used by school administrators as a valuable asset to warrant effective PI programs so new teachers will know how to strengthen the parent/teacher relationship at the onset of their career. The use of this study will also enable teachers to improve, encourage, and enhance PI opportunities and utilize effective strategies needed to increase parental engagement.

Implication for Social Change

The findings of this study provided significant information about how PI is perceived at this study site. This study is important to parents so they be knowledgeable of the measures that can be taken to become actively involved in their child's school setting. This school administration can do self examination to see how they can improve their actions to help enhance the school climate. They can also explore ways they can become better involved with the parents. School administration can lead efforts towards improving the home/school relationship by creating opportunities for them and the parents to engage in joint activities. These activities can include administration dialoging with parents, lending parents an opportunity to learn and understand each other's different perspectives up close and personal and seek ways to align each other's ideas. Administration can also have a question and answer session with parents.

Feedback from administration can be given to the parents about how this school administration can change themselves and school concerns and explain to the parents why or why not specific changes can be made. By allowing opportunities for both administration and parents to closely connect to each other, the chances for administration to understand the thoughts of parents and vice versa will be enhanced.

Even though it appears there is a functioning PTA at this school of study, implementing more varied meetings on a consistent basis other than the once a month PTA meeting can be applied. The PTA could include other meetings like workshops, special classes, and informative sessions for parents to engage those parents who really want to connect with the school, but are unable to due to time constraints and scheduling. The PTA can offer any adult who plays an important role in the child's family life opportunities to participate in active roles of the child's educational setting as well. The PTA can also create and conduct a survey to identify interests and availability of parents. The survey could be used as a tool to focus on parental concerns and issues regarding the school in terms of getting ideas of what's important to the parents. If the PTA implements varied means of helping parents and offers more time for parents to become more involved, enriched opportunities for interaction with other families within the community can be promoted.

Educators can benefit from the findings of this study by taking note of the information this study provided and be willing to help build a strong partnership. As new teachers embark upon the profession of education, they may be enlightened as this study may enhance their knowledge of how parents feel about their roles within the school setting. Administrators can increase their understanding of how to be supportive of parents who desire to be active

supporters of the school. Because of this study, parents may have the opportunity to work together and make decisions for the betterment of the school. Officials of higher learning institutions will benefit from this study by preparing its students to face the world of education and teaching them that PI is a very important key to the success of schools. This research study can be used productively to help communities, because as school personnel and families collaborate, interaction will become evident, bringing about a respectful collaborative community within the educational settings.

Recommendation for Action

Recommendation for action should include researching more creative ways to incorporate parents into the school's pre-existing PI programs. A guideline using Epstein's (2010) six types of involvement should be purposefully incorporated and used to help this school in developing a more effective and efficient home/school partnership. The school's current action plan should then be reviewed. Al stake holders should examine the findings of this study, allowing an action plan to be developed in order to meet the needs of the home/school partnership. Then the school personnel and parents can compare the school's current action plan to the action plan derived from the study to form an annual action plan as a guide for the PI program. It is vital that the action plan be a working document to be reviewed and used on a consistent basis to evaluate how the current PI program is functioning so immediate improvements can be made. The parent liaison should also create a plan to involve more parents. If the parent liaison could devise a plan to entice more parents to get involved, communication could be improved and relationships could be built and made stronger throughout the school. Even though the liaison serves as the primary contact for the parents at the school site, the liaison should inquire with

other liaisons that have very strong PI to develop ideas on how to increase PI at this school of study.

The researcher listed some of the findings from this study. Parents understand PI to entail a variety of meanings. Their views included several examples of the parent being involved with the child's school setting. Yet, the majority of the school parents are not visibly active within the school setting. Those few parents who are active should devise a plan to recruit other parents to become active. Parents, teachers, and administration need to work together so that they can offer more opportunities for PI and develop creative ways to overcome barriers. In this way, teachers and active parents could reach out to the community personally by inviting parents to participate in their child's schools.

The researcher revealed from the data that the school helps parents improve the roles they play through multiple means of communication. The parents are given information that enables them to assist their child with school assignments, projects, and homework. Even though the staff from this particular school informs parents on how they can improve their roles, the lack of PI throughout the school as a whole is still apparent. To meet the needs of families at the selected school site, school officials must find other measures to ensure the success of PI efforts. Possibilities include the following:

- School officials making every effort to reach out and communicate to parents clearly, but also listening to what parents have to say.

- School officials developing an improvement plan in which family input is included.

- Parents and other members of the community becoming involved in a shared responsibility of bringing new ideas to ensure PI efforts.

- Giving the teachers tools they need to help parents understand the benefits of PI.

- Giving parents a more effective voice by involving them in the decision-making process.

From the findings, the researcher indicated a need for the school to increase the number of PTA participant's. The SBDM team could take on this duty and join the PTA and encourage parents to be part of the decision-making process of important school related issues. These organizations can provide multiple opportunities for families and teachers to work collaboratively to discuss concerns, issues, and ideas that will ultimately lead to increasing PI. Even though the members of these organizations meet regularly, parent participation continues to be low. Communication is essential when pursuing the success of a PI program. Officers of these organizations need to employ and maintain an open line of communication between home and school. School officials need to work together collaboratively with parents to devise an action plan that could provide training and resources to enhance parents' knowledge of leadership roles. Consistent training can boost the parent's confidence and empower them to become active leaders in the school.

Recommendation for Further Study

This study was limited to one school and fourteen participants. One recommendation for future study is to expand the sample size to include more than one school and to engage a larger number of participants. Additionally, through this study, it was revealed that some parents found

it difficult to get involved in school activities due to lack of time, ability, and work schedules. Therefore, the second recommendation is that further research could be helpful by investigating ways the school staff could offer monthly parent workshops to promote ideas and give those unable but willing parents creative opportunities to become engaged in the school. Through the study, it was also revealed that administration needs to improve in the area of making parents feel more comfortable. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers could examine professional development and how administration could implement positive support of PI initiatives and encourage parents to become engaged without causing them to feel not welcome.

Reflections

Many schools are faced with finding innovative strategies to get more parents interested in becoming involved in their child's educational setting. The purpose for this qualitative case study was to gain a better understanding of parents' perceptions of PI. This study was conducted at an urban elementary school in Dallas Texas. After researching the different views of parents, this researcher had a greater vision of the importance of how PI is a very effective tool within the school.

For this study, research questions were formulated and the framework was defined. The participants were selected using set criteria and data were collected. Then, the researcher collected and analyzed the data. The researcher collected the data using face-to-face interview questions. To eliminate probable biases, the process of member checking was employed, as well as a peer reviewer. Conducting this study gave me a sense of gratification. My comprehension has grown deeper, and I am assured that my new insight will help others develop a greater understanding of parents' behaviors toward PI. I further believe this study will assist school staff

in developing, maintaining and sustaining effective involvement programs to benefit all involvement efforts.

Conclusions

This quote from Hiatt-Michael and Hands (2010) sums it up beautifully: "One of the most powerful forces in education is the quality of the relationships between the child's family and the school personnel" (p. 1). School personnel should be held accountable for encouraging parents to become actively engaged in their child's educational sector. The receptivity of school staff to parents who are involved throughout the school is vital to the success of the home/school partnership. Using Epstein's 6 types of involvement allows school staff to envision how they can build upon their involvement program and create a comprehensive approach to family involvement that promotes school success. Positive results for home/school partnerships will come from changes in the knowledge and behavior of the school personnel as well as the parents. Staff and family must be given the opportunity to work together to make decisions for the betterment of the students. This study has revealed that the school staff used various forms of communication to keep parents informed of diverse activities and events. The findings of this study have further shown that staff and parents take notice of the information revealed as it can increase awareness of PI problems and various solutions to offset the problems. The researcher is persuaded through the accumulated data in this study that parents must put forth more effort to work together as a team with teachers in order to have a strong parent program.

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Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation

 Elementary School

August 28, 2015

Dear Ms. Smith,

I give permission for you to recruit participants for your study entitled "Examining Parental Involvement in an Elementary School's Pre-Kindergarten Program". Recruitment may be done after school hours and on school parking lot. As part of this study, I authorize you to invite parents from your local campus, to participate in the study as interview subjects. Their participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

I understand that our organization is not obligated and is not responsible for making any provisions to the researcher. We reserve the right to discontinue this recruitment process for this study at any time if circumstances change.

The student will be responsible for complying with our site's research policies and requirements.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research recruitment at this setting and that this plan complies with district policies.

I also authorize permission for you to publish your findings of this study.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Elementary School

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

Dear Pre-Kindergarten Parent of ██████████████Elementary School,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study that I will be conducting. I am

a doctoral student in leadership teaching at _____ University. I will be conducting a

study of how parents perceive parental involvement in their child's educational setting.

I am seeking your participation to assist in this study by requesting to interview you. The

topics will solely pertain to how you perceive parental involvement within your child's

educational setting. Your responses will be anonymous and held in strict confidence. You

are not obligated to participate. You may choose to discontinue your participation at any

time, but your participation will be very beneficial to this study. This study will help to

enlighten and give insight to future parents and fellow educators as to how parents

perceive parental involvement in their child's educational setting.

Appendix C: Consent Form

You have been invited to participate in a research study entitled "Examining Parental Involvement in an Elementary School Pre-Kindergarten Program". This case study will be conducted by Stephanie Smith, a doctoral student at Walden University. I am a teacher at the school, but this study is separate from that role. You are being asked because you are a parent of a prekindergarten student who attends Jimmie Tyler Brashear Elementary School in which the study is being conducted.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of how parents perceive parental involvement. This study will also expose ways to increase parents' knowledge of becoming more involved. The results of the study will aid in developing a stronger parent- school partnership.

Procedures

Participants will be asked to participate in a one-on-one face-to-face interview. The interview will take place in a private location off the school campus and may last approximately 30-45 minutes. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. To check for accuracy, after the interview has been transcribed, the participant will be given an estimated time of 30 minutes to review the statements that were given during the interview session. Once the participant is in agreement with the given statements, the data will be collected in which only the researcher and peer reviewer will have access to the data.

Participation

You have been asked to participate because your child is a prekindergarten child enrolled at this Title I urban elementary school during the 2015/2016 school year. You are invited to participate because your child must not be in the researcher's class, you are not registered as a volunteer for the school year, you are not an employee at the school, and all Ethnic groups are included. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. It is to your discretion if you decide to participate or not. If you choose to participate you will have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Your withdrawal will not affect your current relationship with your child's school. You also have the right to refuse to answer any questions for any reason.

Risks and Benefits

There are no foreseen risks in participating in this research. There are also no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, the findings of this study are expected to increase parent's knowledge of parental involvement in order to improve parent participation.

Compensation

If you choose to participate in this study you will not be compensated.

Confidentiality

Any information you provide will be kept completely confidential. As a participant in this study, you will be kept anonymous. Your information will not be used for any purposes outside of this study. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study. You have the option of keeping a copy of this consent form.

Contacts and Questions

If you have any questions, concerns or would like additional information

pertaining to this study, please contact me at ███████████. You may also e-mail me at

my e-mail, ████████████████████. If you have any questions about your rights

as a participant you may contact Dr. Leilani Endicott, ███████████. Walden

University's approval number for this study is 09-02-15-0071032 and it expires

September 1, 2016.

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____
Date of Consent

_____
Signature of Participant

_____
Signature of Researcher

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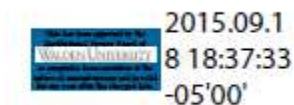
Appendix D: Interview Questions

What does parental involvement mean to you?

Parenting:

How does the school provide families with information on developing home

environments that support learning?

Communication:

What are the various forms of communication utilized by the school to inform parents

about student progress and school events?

Volunteering:

Briefly explain how you have volunteered at your child's school? If you have not

volunteered, explain why?

Learning at home:

How does the school provide information on how parents can assist their children with

skills they need to improve on in relation to homework and curriculum related activities?

Decision-Making:

Briefly describe how the school includes parents in the decision-making process as it

relates to being represented on committees and in leadership roles.

Collaborating With Community:

What can be done by the school to strengthen parent and community involvement?

What would you like to learn more about in terms of ways to get involved?