2015

# Indentifying Effective Communication Practices for Eliciting Parental Involvement at Two K-8 Schools

Karen Lynn Moore
*Walden University*

# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Karen Moore

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Linda Crawford, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Robert Kefferstan, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Andrew Thomas, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2015

Abstract

Identifying Effective Communication Practices for Eliciting Parental Involvement at Two K-8 Schools

by

Karen Lynn Moore

MS, Illinois State University, 1992

BS, Western Illinois University, 1978

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

May 2015

## Abstract

Conventional wisdom suggests effective and timely school communications increase parental involvement. Guided by this wisdom and contemporary parental involvement theory, effective educational institutions have established systems that foster communication and collaboration between school representatives and the local community. Despite such efforts, research has revealed persistent declines in parental involvement within schools. This phenomenological study documented 16 parents' perceptions of communication between teachers and parents at 2 K-8 schools in the American southwest. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore parents' perceptions of the effectiveness of various school-based communication systems and the specific impact these systems had on parental involvement. NVivo software was used to facilitate identification of common themes. Emergent themes addressed (a) communications that elicit parent involvement, (b) effective communications, (c) regular and timely communications, (d) preferred communication mode, and (e) parent communication center. Findings revealed that both schools lacked effective communication tools, inhibiting the ability to reach students' families and negatively impacting participation. Proposed for future consideration was development of a strong foundation for parents' participation in their child's education and enhancement of unrestricted, bidirectional communications. The anticipated social impact of this study is that effective practices could be brought to the forefront, leading to ideas to increase timely communication between home and school and parental involvement.

# Identifying Effective Communication Practices for Eliciting Parental Involvement at Two K-8 Schools

by

Karen Lynn Moore

MS, Illinois State University, 1992

BS, Western Illinois University, 1978

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

May 2015

# Dedication

I dedicate my research to my family and many friends. I offer my distinct sense of gratitude to the memory of my mother, Bessie Mae Moore, and my aunt, Kathryn Anne Parkman, who emphasized the importance of education and guided me with many lessons throughout their lives. I am also thankful to my father, Ulish Moore, Jr., who has been my paragon for hard work, perseverance, and personal sacrifices, and instilled in me the motivation to set high goals, expectations and the courage to achieve them. Above all, I must remember my Creator and Source. To You, Father, goes all the honor and glory.

Acknowledgments

My sincere gratitude goes out to Dr. Linda Crawford, my committee chair, for her countless hours of reflecting, reading, and guidance throughout the entire process. I would like to extend a special thank you to Dr. Robert Kefferstan, a dynamic mentor and committee member. I would also like to thank Dr. Andrew Thomas, my University Research Reviewer. A special thank you goes to Kecia Beasley for providing Spanish translations. I am grateful to the community in the district where my study took place for the opportunity to conduct my research and for imparting needed useful assistance. A sincere sense of gratitude goes out to my colleagues Reynolds Alcéna, Dr. Mary Barry, Mary Ann Craig, Warren Enyart, Donald Johnson, Katie Nance-Mckenzie, Lorraine Newman, Dr. Janette Kotey, Karen Tiggs, and Darlene Wilson for their willingness to provide feedback, guidance, and corrections. My deepest gratitude to everyone for making the achievement of this research project a rewarding experience.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

## Introduction

For decades, parent involvement in education has been a topic of interest among policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders. However, existing research that addressed parental involvement has remained ambiguous. This has obscured report of parents' opinions about their involvement in their children's education. Therefore, this study was designed to specifically facilitate examination of parents' perceptions regarding whether schools that were identified as having increased effective communication with the community and increased parental involvement.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) determined that building trusting and respectful relationships between school and community created sustained connections that support student learning. Several research teams (e.g., Ballen & Moles, 1994; Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Tan & Goldberg, 2009) have studied the communication dynamics between school and community. Ultimately, these research teams purported that parental involvement in schools increases student achievement. When parents are involved in the educational process, students of all socioeconomic levels achieve better (Barge & Loges, 2003; Crew, 2007; Ferrera, 2009). When parents are engaged in their children's scholastic endeavors, their academic achievement and social skills improve (Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004). Furger (2006) reported first-hand evidence of the power of partnering and collaborating with parents from successful endeavors to turn failing schools around.

The study addressed herein facilitated investigation of the parents' perceptions of two schools' endeavors to elicit parental involvement. The content of Chapter One addresses the relevance of community involvement and a summary of the concerns attributed to insufficient parental involvement within contemporary schools. The research problem, purpose statement, and details about the study's scope are presented herein. The chapter content details the parameters of the study, including research questions, theoretical framework, definition of essential terms, as well as the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study.

## Background of the Problem

Parents are the primary influence in their children's motivation for academic success (Chen & Gregory, 2009; Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010). According to Simon (2001), parental involvement that motivates children to focus on their post-high school future, such as attending college, enrolling in trade school, or pursuing other professional training, has fostered higher student grades and test scores. The most valuable aspect of parental involvement is the exchange of ideas, stimulation, and reinforcement of the educational aspirations held for and by their children (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Among children of all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, this aspect of parental support is closely associated with the students' motivation and academic achievement (Fan, 2001).

Davis-Kean, Malanchuk, Peck, and Eccles (2003) found reading to a preschooler on a regular basis and providing reading materials in the home were predictors of the child's subsequent reading motivation and achievement. Entwisle and Alexander (1993)

concluded that parental interactions were likely to influence both the child's academic skill levels and his or her motivation when facing challenging educational activities. Jacobs, Davis-Kean, Bleeker, Eccles, and Malanchuk (2005) suggested that the foundation for the child's academic future was established by the parents' provision of activities and interventions, before school begins. Specifically, Jacobs et al. explained that the foundation for learning success is influenced by a stimulating home environment. The availability of educational toys and stimuli that foster the toddler's inquisitive mind provide opportunities for both structured and unstructured learning experiences (Jacobs et al., 2005). However, the degree to which these learning experiences influence children's motivation relies on the climate established by the parents once the child is engrossed in the learning experience (Jacobs et al., 2005).

Active parental engagement, managing the child's learning experiences, directly influences the child's future academic success (Epstein, 1992; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Richardson, 2009; Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2009; Wong, 2008). Examples of active parental involvement include (a) regularly reading to preschoolers; (b) practicing recitation of identifying information such as first and last name, address, and telephone number; (c) taking the child on meaningful outings in the community; and (d) asking pertinent questions requiring observation of surroundings. Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, and Sameroff (1999) stated that these types of activities are especially relevant in stressful environments, such as those found in impoverished communities.

Miedel and Reynolds (1999) investigated the connection between early childhood parental involvement and children's future school proficiency. The study used data from

704 low-income, metropolitan families with a student enrolled in the eighth grade. The parents participated in the Chicago Longitudinal Study and were required to reflect on and report their educational involvement while the child was in preschool and kindergarten. Miedel and Reynolds evaluated parents' perceptions of their involvement with their children during their formative years and, again, during eighth grade. The effect was statistically assessed to determine significance as a contributor to reading achievement scores, grade-level retention, and special education placement (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). The outcomes suggested that parental involvement during early childhood was significantly linked to greater levels of reading achievement during both kindergarten and eighth grade (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). In addition, parental involvement decreased retention during primary grades (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). While parental involvement might not have prevented special education placement, Miedel and Reynolds found it to be significantly associated with limiting the number of years the child remained in special education programming.

Other studies have documented parental involvement as a vital link between the school's educational goals and the child's eventual academic outcomes (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Melaville, Berg, & Blank, 2006; Walker, Shenker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010). Specifically, Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, and Van Voorhis (2002) identified six aspects of parental involvement that educators should encourage while the child is in the middle grades. Epstein et al. defined the parents' involvement types and provided suggestions regarding the school's role facilitating the desired involvement.

**Type 1: Parenting**. Schools support families in efforts to establish a home environment conducive to student achievement.

**Type 2: Communicating**. Schools implement effective two-way communications with families to address programming and the child's academic progress.

**Type 3: Volunteering**. Schools actively solicit and organize family involvement.

**Type 4: Learning at Home**. Schools provide information and ideas that enable family members to help their children with homework and other school related activities, decisions, and plans.

**Type 5: Decision-Making**. Schools must actively include families in decision-making processes for their student and the school.

**Type 6: Collaborating with Community**. Schools identify and integrate local community resources as a means of strengthening and offering curriculum-related activities.

Epstein's six types of involvement have dynamic interactions. Figure 1 illustrates the impact that the core, effective communication, has on the other five classifications of parent involvement. Two distinct communication efforts, (a) the initial meeting with parents and (b) the teachers' invitation to elicit collaboration, have been found to directly influence parental involvement. Other factors influence the ability to engage and the type of engagement received.

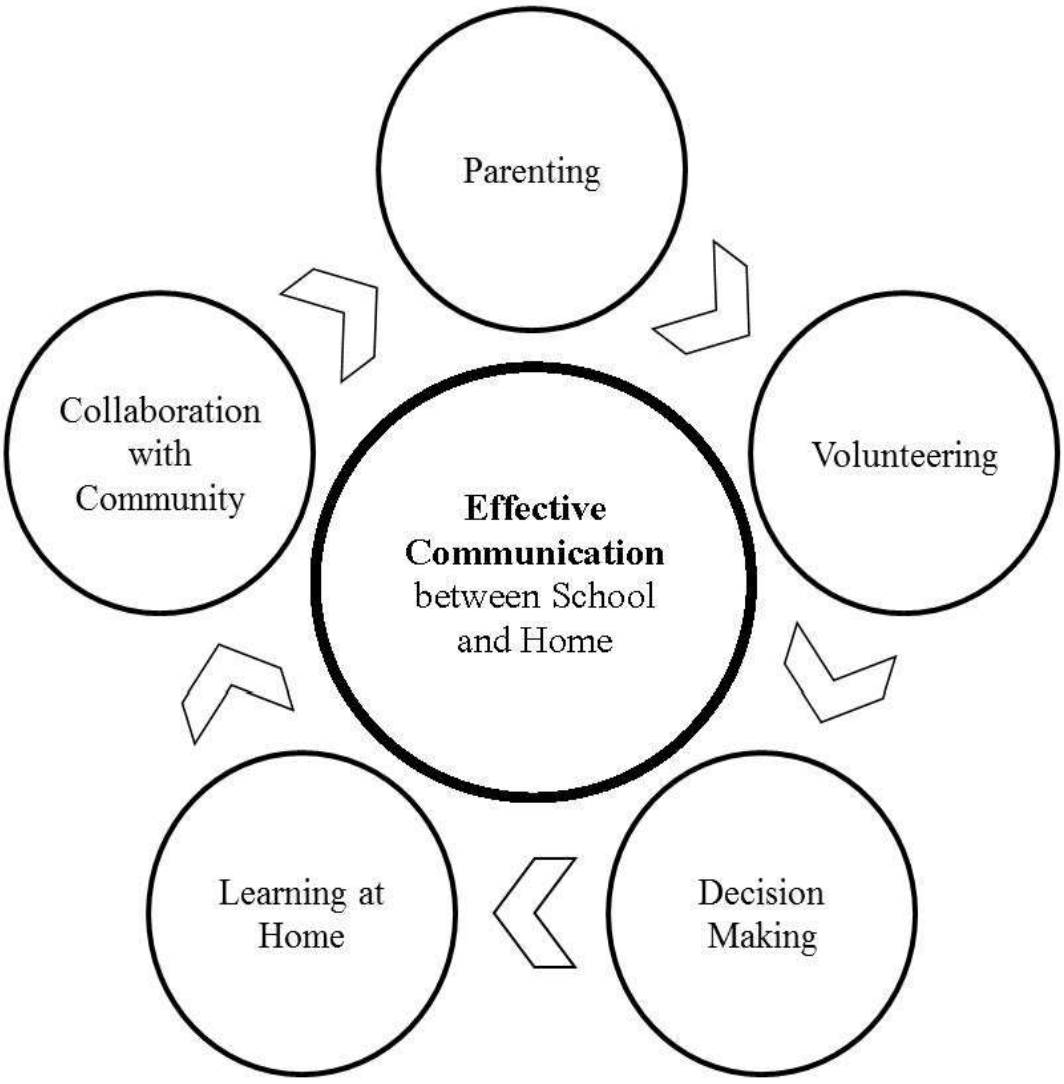



*Figure 1*. Effective communication between school and home enables parents to participate in their child(ren)'s education.

Barrera and Warner (2006) identified climate, collaboration, and communication as three components critical for the creation of a successful parental involvement program. Barrera and Warner explained that it is imperative for educators to focus on the needs of the community's diverse families. Understanding these needs is the foundation for developing a positive school climate that demonstrates trust and partnership (Barrera

& Warner, 2006). School climate policies include collaboration with community agencies that provide family support services (Barrera & Warner, 2006). Teachers and school personnel should be encouraged to learn about the cultural values of the student population (Barrera & Warner, 2006). An additional school climate strategy proposed by Barrera and Warner was the creation of parent focus groups, to obtain parental input and feedback. The focus groups facilitate the second component, communication. Barrera and Warner described communication between home and school as the foundation for a solid partnership. The research highlighted the importance of a two-way exchange of information between parents and schools (Barrera & Warner, 2006). Schools and parents must communicate about discipline codes and learning goals (Barrera & Warner, 2006). The schools were advised to be sensitive to community diversity and mindful of parents' work schedules (Barrera & Warner, 2006). Finally, Barrera and Warner discussed collaboration. These efforts included, but were not limited to, creating opportunities for parents to assist with teaching. Specifically, in the absence of teachers, Barrera and Warner suggested involving parents in reading and writing activities, encouraging involvement of the fathers, and utilizing school technology to offer curriculum for parents.

According to LaBahn (1995), many secondary schools reported that they were unable to deal with nontraditional families. Educational institutions reported that uninvolved parents often perceive themselves as lacking the ability to dialogue with teachers (LaBahn, 1995). Research conducted at the Boston Arts Academy (2002) documented that when parents believe they have nothing to contribute to their child's

learning, it became difficult, if not impossible, to draw them into interacting with the school. This caused a lack of consistent and effective parental involvement (Boston Arts Academy, 2002).

Researchers Henderson and Berla (1994) concluded that parental involvement in the school environment increases when parents recognize gains in their children's academic performance. McDermott and Rothenberg (2004) affirmed that the feeling of efficacy motivates parental involvement within the school and their children's learning. Specifically, McDermott and Rothenberg explained when parents perceive their participation positively contributes to their child's education, they are more prone to engage in the school's activities and services. Conversely, they explained that if parents believe their contribution has little merit, they are less likely to become involved in any manner (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2004).

Thorp (1997) found classrooms and schools that are welcoming reflect the diverse communities from which children and their families originate. Notably, Thorp explained, genuine respect for the family unit and culture is demonstrated by recognizing their function in modern society. This is not intended to be simply a display of traditional dress or past performance; the active exploration of contemporary roles and traditions often elicits increased parental participation (Thorp, 1997).

Adler (2002) suggested that, over time, parental support has steadily declined due to indifference, selfishness, apathy, governmental regulations, and a perceived disconnect between education and development of a productive future. Prior research documents that the educational community is aware of how truly invaluable parental involvement is

for the child's academic achievement (Adler, 2002). However, Adler acknowledged that educators do not yet know how best to communicate with parents to elicit and ensure involvement.

Survey data revealed that 86% of the general public recognized that parental involvement was the most essential means to improve public schools (Rose, Gallup, & Elam, 1997). Parents become involved in their children's education to the extent that they believe their input has value. Further, the data from numerous studies demonstrated that parental involvement increased if they felt welcomed by the school (U.S. Department of Education [US-DOE], 1997). Consistent and timely parental involvement has been shown to positively influence student attendance, self-motivation and self-esteem, decreased violent behavior, and improved academic performance (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Due to the importance of these outcomes, the greatest concern confronting public education is the continued lack of parental participation. Sadly, as demonstrated, over recent decades the instances of parental involvement have steadily decreased (Epstein, 1990; Zill & Nord, 1994). This decline begins at the elementary school level and escalates each year throughout the child's education (Zill & Nord, 1994). Parental involvement is practically nonexistent at the high school level (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Recognizing the importance of parental involvement and understanding these trends, the importance of current research becomes evident.

Summarily, it has become imperative to conduct a contemporary study of the communication between the school and home to identify approaches that effectively elicit parental involvement in the school and in the child's ongoing learning. Such exploration

of parental involvement requires evaluation of current modes of school communication regarding their timeliness and effectiveness specifically for eliciting involvement. It has become equally pertinent to consider methods that revise current forms of communication or introduce new modalities that could facilitate attainment of the desired levels of parental involvement. Ultimately, the schools, local communities, and the children could benefit from these endeavors.

## Problem Statement

The problem addressed within this study was that educators were not communicating with parents in a manner that enticed or ensured their involvement. Although schools have invested in and extended efforts to communicate with parents, surprisingly limited research has been performed to determine which methods were most effective eliciting parental involvement. The technological revolution has birthed a multitude of communication avenues to connect with parents. However, it is still unknown which ways the parents prefer to be contacted by the school. Therefore, the parents' perspectives were recognized as essential as a starting point from which to foster change.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to determine which methods of school communication elicited active parental involvement, as perceived by the parents. Within this study, I interviewed parents who had children enrolled in one of two, kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8), public schools, in a large metropolitan area of a southwestern state. The interview process was intended to facilitate determination of

the modes of school communication that best elicited the participants' involvement in various functions at the school. The findings of this study were compiled for presentation to site and district leaders to initiate dialog regarding the measures needed to bolster communication and involvement to benefit students' achievement.

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews and analyzed using open coding. This analysis process facilitated the examination of the data in the most minute, meaningful units. All data were categorized by meaning and were identified as themes. Finally, the data were processed using selective coding, wherein the identified themes were assigned and related to the categories of school communication that were identified as evoking active parental involvement, from the parents' perspectives.

## Nature of the Study

The study was aligned with a phenomenological approach, involving the use of semi-structured interviews. This study encompassed examination of the parents' reported perceptions and experiences regarding various modes of school communication and their effectiveness soliciting parental involvement. The targeted population in this study was parents who had children enrolled into either of two K-8 public schools in a large metropolitan area of a southwestern, American state. A purposeful sampling method was implemented to draw a pool of volunteers to serve as interview participants. Maximum variation sampling was used to facilitate the selection of the interview groups. The interview candidates were drawn from an initial pool consisting of all parents with children enrolled in any grade at the identified primary schools. No exclusionary criteria were established associated with parent or student gender, age, residence; familial

composition, race/ethnicity, religion, or income; or the student's grade-level, achievement level, attendance, behavior, or other identifiable student sub-populations.

A narrowed pool of eleven candidates was drawn from each site; this included the selected and alternate candidates for the parent interviews. Eight parents from each school participated in the study. The rationale for having this small sample size was to avail the time for detail-oriented interviews. The included participants were required to (a) express a willingness to meet at a mutually convenient and confidential location within the school environment and (b) consent to audio recording of the interview. Sixteen interviews were conducted and transcribed for analysis, presentation of findings, and consideration of implications for future practice and study.

## Research Questions

The study addressed parental experiences of parent-school communications. The following inquiries were the foundation for this research study:

**RQ1.** What school communications are currently utilized for eliciting parental involvement?

**RQ2.** How effective are current school communications for eliciting parental involvement?

**RQ3.** How does regular and timely communication on the part of the schools connect with parental participation?

**RQ4.** With which form of communication with the school do parents feel most comfortable?

**RQ5.** To what degree does a consistent cycle of verbal and written communication between school and community effect parental involvement in the Parent Center?

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research study was combined from the constructs of motivational systems theory (Ford, 1992) and parental involvement theory (Epstein, 1995). A conceptual progression was drawn from previously established motivational and parental involvement theories. First, aligned with the beliefs of Ford (1992), it was accepted that effective school communication equals greater parental motivation to become involved. Second, also aligned with the beliefs of Epstein (1995), it was accepted that greater parental involvement equates to greater student achievement. The role of the motivation and involvement as systemic influences was pertinent within all phases of this study and summative presentation of the findings.

### Motivational System Theory

Motivational systems theory was an essential component of the foundational perspectives of this study. Ford's (1992) theory relied on analyzing the individual through biological, social, and environmental contexts. Each of these was understood to be crucial to human development. Ford developed an academic achievement formula that encompassed variables representing the school, the students, and the family:

$$\text{Achievement} = \frac{[(\text{Motivation} \times \text{Skill}) \times (\text{Responsive Environment})]}{\text{Biological Structure}}$$

*Figure 2.* Ford's (1992) equation of factors influencing academic achievement.

Ford contended that a person's academic achievement and competence stems from inner motivation, innate skills, and his or her capacity to interact with a responsive environment (Figure 2; Ford, 1992, p. 62). The formula highlights Ford's belief that the components for achievement consisted of: (a) the student initiating and sustaining his or her individual learning process, (b) student support system fostering success by generating academic targets, and (c) students' biological structure and intellectual functioning fulfilling their academic goals. Ford also identified four necessary attributes that are prerequisites for developing the goal-directed activity needed for achievement. Specifically, Ford highlighted the individual's (a) motivation, (b) skill, (c) biological structure and functioning, and (d) cooperation within the responsive environment. "In other words, effective functioning requires a motivated, skillful person whose biological and behavioral capabilities support relevant interactions with an environment that has the informational and material properties and resources needed to facilitate (or at least permit) goal attainment" (p. 69). These elements are, mostly, beyond the individual's conscious control.

However, Ford (1992) identified emotions as the primary influence when selecting and pursuing life goals. Ford expounded upon the subjective nature of emotions, which are reflective of the individual's status. Emotions are indicative of the individual's personal perceptions, anticipated complications, and relative levels of success or failure (Ford, 1992). Similarly, emotions influence the experience of all circumstances encountered and subsequent decisions within one's endeavor to attain goals for success (Ford, 1992). Given the pertinence attributed to the individual's

emotional status for the regulation of immediate action, Ford was astonished by the lack of research addressing these emotional processes influencing attainment of success. Ford proposed the dearth of research reflected the conviction that "emotions have little long-term meaning and significance in contemporary motivational theorizing" (p. 146). Further, this suggests attribution of emotions only for individual, short-term regulation of actions or behaviors.

Deci and Ryan (1985) established a self-determination theory that was macro-motivational. This meant human beings were perceived as energetic agents rather than submissive responders. Deci and Ryan (2000) established that people have universal psychological needs that are met or addressed through normative growth and development. Deci and Ryan emphasized that these needs are not satisfied or influenced by environmental conditions.

Few theorists oppose the belief that internal and external motivators are relevant to the level of achievement attained by the individual. One disparate view was proposed by Wentzel (1991, 1993, 2002) who studied children in various academic settings. Wentzel's beliefs about academic achievement differed from goal orientation theorists. The divergence is due to Wentzel's focus on mastery of curriculum, without delving into the students' environmental, socioeconomic, or cultural factors as influences for achievement. However, Wentzel did view academic achievement as a factor necessary for the child's competence in certain situations. Summarily, Wentzel (2002) purported that there was no direct link between students' academic success and their motivation. Wentzel believed the student's motivation did not directly impact his or her academic

success. Wentzel's perspective, attributing no relevance to the interrelationship between motivation and academic achievement, is extremely relevant herein. If this view is accurate, parental involvement would be unnecessary as an external influence fostering students' motivation for achievement. Ultimately, this would mean that parents' involvement in their child's education could be perceived as less pertinent.

This is not the theory ascribed to herein. Rather, motivation is essential for achievement. Further, the parent is a pivotal influence for the child's achievement. Therefore, parental involvement in their child's education is an essential factor for the attainment of academic success.

**Parental Involvement Theory**

Meaningful parent and community involvement contributes substantially to the child's academic achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009). The students' academic success can be adversely impacted by a breakdown in communication. This has been documented by the research teams of Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) and Melaville et al. (2006). The impact at this level of communication, parent to school or school to parent, has the greatest influence on the child. This could become positive or negative for the child. For this reason, the current research is truly crucial for developing communications that positively influence learners' success.

Addison (1992) concluded that the child's need for continuity was not met at home or in the educational environment. This was attributed to parents, teachers, and other stakeholders not being consistently aware of the factors that impact student learning. Contemporary familial composition and work stressors have changed,

impacting support continuity. Similarly, instructional staff members no longer remain at one site for their entire careers. Scholastic Administrator reported that by 2010, the American education system had a shortage of approximately two million teachers; 10% of the teachers leave after four to five years teaching and 20% specifically leave after their fourth year in the profession (Goldberg & Proctor, 2010).

Epstein (1995) uncovered an additional theoretical perspective attributable to the partnerships created between early childhood educators and families. In 2001, after extensive study, Epstein proposed a model that classified six types of parental involvement. Specifically, Epstein defined the role of the parent collaborating within the educational community, contributing to communication, decision-making, and learning at home, by parenting and volunteering. Epstein's categories were particularly relevant for this study due to the clear delineation of discrete modes of familial contribution to the child's learning and sustaining a connection with the school.

This research study was conducted to determine which modes of school-initiated communication the parents perceived as most effective for increasing parental participation. Within the research methodology (i.e., Chapter 3), I explained the use of NVivo8 (QSR International, 2008) for the analysis of the interview data. NVivo was used to elucidate data trends and help identify which modes of school communication elicited the most active parental involvement.

Teachers and parents with established, effective two-way communication have a firm foundation for mutual trust and respect that fosters increases in students' academic achievement (Epstein, 1995). A myriad of interactions must be initiated by the school to

connect with the students' families (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Collaboration between teachers and parents is not easily created (Foster, 2004). Frequent and effective communication, when initiated by the teacher, has been shown to increase academic achievement, in all three domains of learning (i.e., cognitive, affective, psychomotor) based on Bloom's Taxonomy (Christenson, 2001).

Federal guidelines mandated that all schools must encourage parental participation (US-DOE, 1994). Educators receptive to two-way communication initiatives have attained greater parental participation than schools resistant to parent-initiated concepts (Katyal & Evers, 2007). It is pertinent to remember that each stakeholder possesses a distinctive ecology, evident in his or her set of values, beliefs, and expectations (Brofenbrenner, 1979 as cited by Addison, 1992). Recognizing that this ecology is determined by the microsystem (i.e., environment), macrosystems (i.e., laws and customs), and exosystems (i.e., social interactions) it is possible to envision the importance of the two-way communication as a foundational connection for students' learning success (Brofenbrenner, 1979 as cited by Addison, 1992).

The research findings from the National Portrait Study (1997) indicated that active parental involvement has been dramatically declining for more than two decades. The following were documented disconnects between school outreach to parents and subsequent parental involvement:

1. 77% of parents believe teachers need to learn more about encouraging involvement.

2. 38% of parents report they had never been asked by the schools how they might become more involved.
3. 97.6% of public schools reported parental inclusion in site-based decisions; however, 74.8% of parents reported involvement in site-based decisions.
4. 88.0% of public K-8 schools reported that they provided information to parents about community services to help children and families; only 72.2% of parents reported that they received this information.

Another family and school partnerships study, conducted in (1996), found that in K-8 public schools:

1. 35% of the schools had a parent resource center,
2. 12% of the schools were developing one, and
3. 53% of the schools did not have one.
4. 14% of parent resource centers were used by parents frequently:
5. 46% were used somewhat frequently; 37% were used infrequently or not at all, and 3% of the parents did not know a parent center existed.
6. 97.6% of public schools reported parental inclusion while making site based decisions while 74.8% of parents reported site-base decision involvement

(as cited by Education.com, 2006).

Summarily, it is proposed herein that the intersection of personal motivation and the parental influence on their child's motivation yields the desired effective functioning that is necessary to attain academic success. To inspire individual achievement and facilitate the level of success targeted by contemporary public schools, it is necessary to

engage parental involvement in their child's education. Therefore, this study was executed to identify and describe the perceived effectiveness of current school communication strategies utilized in two, primary and middle grade public schools. The measure of effectiveness of communications was the success attained soliciting active parental involvement.

## Definition of Terms

The terms associated with this study were defined as follows:

**Communication**. Communication is the decisive factor in indispensable interactions and relationships including, but not limited to, businesses, between nations, interpersonal, and parental (Olson & Platt, 2004).

**Exosystem**. An exosystem exists when an environment encompasses a large "social system in which a child does not interact or function directly" (Brofenbrenner, 1979 as cited by Addison, 1992, p. 25).

**Home school connection**. This term represents the link between the home and school environment and the contribution each makes to nurturing children's development and learning (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001).

**Lived experience**. Phenomenological studies clarify the real experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

**Macrosystem**. The environment in which a child is "exposed to cultural values, mores, and family customs is a macrosystem" (Brofenbrenner, 1979, as cited by Addison, 1992, p. 25).

**Parental involvement**. Epstein and colleagues defined the components of parental involvement to include "parenting, communicating, volunteering or attending, supporting learning at home, partaking in decision making, and working in partnership with the community or schools" (Epstein & Dauber, 1991, p. 289).

**Perception**. An individual impression toward a certain situation or thing is the meaning of perception (Seidman, 2006).

## Assumptions

The key assumptions of the study were as follows:

1. Parents at the two sites candidly and thoroughly answered the interview questions.
2. The participants earnestly and openly shared their experiences regarding communication with and involvement in the school and its functions for student learning.
3. The interview questions were clearly understood by the participants.
4. The communication efforts adopted by the schools were supported by the teachers and implemented with fidelity.

## Limitations

The following were weaknesses in the study and might have influenced the outcomes of the study. The school settings chosen for this study were public schools in a single, large, metropolitan area in a southwestern state. Private and alternative institutions were not represented. The selected schools served the communities in a lower socioeconomic area of the city.

1. The parental subgroups, based on demographic descriptors (e.g., gender, ethnicity, education level, employment status, family composition), may not have been equivalent. For example, the same number of male and female participants might not have represented each school.
2. Scheduling problems, participation, objectivity, validity, interpretations, and school sampling issues were addressed to minimize potential biases in sampling, data collection, interpretation, and reporting.
3. The participants were not representative of the full population of the schools.

## Delimitations

The sites chosen to solicit volunteers to participate in this study were two primary schools in a sizeable metropolitan area in a southwestern state. The study was conducted during the 2013-2014 academic school year. The delimitations were the parameters of the study established by the researcher. The participants were all parents of students enrolled in one of two K-8 schools located in a single large metropolitan school district. No other exclusionary criteria were established. Therefore, the parental subgroups might not have been equivalent in terms of their demographic variables; likewise, they might not be truly representative of the parents at the schools. A randomized convenience sample was drawn from the pool of volunteers. To advance confidentiality and comfort of the parent participants, the school facilities served as the physical location for the data collection. To advance reliability, the same semi-structured questions were used within each interview. These conditions serve as a reminder that the findings and results cannot be transferred to other subpopulations, locations, or times.

## Significance of the Study

The conception of American public education, dating back to the colonial period, was founded on community control governed by boards comprised of local lay citizens. As public education evolved over time, the nature of parental involvement changed. The emerging perception of parents and society over the past four decades has been one of loss of control over their children's education. This loss of empowerment in public education has been a contributing factor in the dwindling parental involvement in the schools.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education sounded an alarm of urgency sounded in 1983 with the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. This report urged educators to redevelop a connection between the child's home life and the local school's expectations (Hiatt, 1994). Educators have continuously searched for evidence of practices that reliably establish and enhance a partnership between teachers and parents (Hiatt, 1994). This study was used to explore parents' perceptions of the various means of communication utilized when reaching out to the community. This fostered awareness of the way parents perceive and react to teachers and administrators. In addition, the research revealed parents' receptivity to forging a partnership with educators to bolster students' achievement.

## Implications for Social Change

This study was designed to identify the channels of communication utilized at the two selected school sites. Data analysis was focused to identify the effective and ineffective modes of school communication. Effective school communication could

prove to be a platform to foster greater parental involvement. This is believed to be a necessary foundation for advancing student achievement. Various prior studies have yielded this conclusion. The implications of such social change would be vast. Society would be the direct beneficiary, because contemporary youth would be effectively equipped to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

## Summary

This dissertation follows a standard five chapter configuration. Chapter 1 encompasses the background of the study and the research problem. Documented herein were the purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, and an exploration of the nature of the problem. The parameters of the study were defined within the list of terms, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, research scope, and anticipated significance of the study. Chapter 2 encompasses an extensive review of the literature. The review addresses the key constructs and theories necessary for understanding the data gathered, subsequent discourse, and implications for future practice and study.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 encompasses an overview of the literature addressing the essential foundational constructs necessary for understanding the research and the implications of the findings. Topically, the chapter includes segments that define (a) effective communication and (b) the nature of communications between parents (home) and educators (school). The segments address prior research findings regarding (a) identified communication barriers, (b) strategies to enhance school-home communication, (c) ways to develop staff engagement in effective communication, and (d) ways to increase parent engagement. More specifically, the review sections address methods fostering (a) parent engagement in the educational process; (b) innovative methods to foster engagement; and (c) uniting students, parents, and schools. Finally, the review addresses other methodologies considered when designing this research study.

These ten topics assisted with establishing the need for the current study, providing a base of methodologies, and prior findings regarding effective communication. This chapter encompasses a presentation of the literature regarding school communication and its impact on parental involvement. In addition, Epstein's (1995) theoretical typology was embraced to define six aspects of parent involvement. Likewise, the theories of motivational systems (Ford, 1992) and parental involvement (Epstein, 1995) were also detailed. Combined, from the extensive review of these topics and theories, efforts were identified to enhance school communications and engage parental involvement in the school environment. Finally, this chapter also encompasses an overview of the methodological literature that was applied toward eliciting the parent

volunteers' perceptions of effective communication. Literature supporting the use of qualitative phenomenological methodologies was included in this review.

The literature presented in this study was retrieved from the Arizona State University Library, South Mountain Community College Library, and Walden Library catalogues as well as Academic Search Premier, Professional Development Collection, ERIC, Education: A SAGE Full-Text Collection, Education Resource Complete, ProQuest Central, SocINDEX with Full Text, and PsycARTICLES. Additional resources included the Internet sites of universities and organizations whose collection of resources focused on parental involvement. Inputting the terms *parental involvement*, *parental/community involvement*, and *education* into search engines yielded a wide range of topics. Keywords utilized either individually or in combination included the following: *academic achievement, communication, culturally responsive, effective communications, parents, participation, professional learning communities (PLC), secondary schools, socioeconomic status (SES), stakeholder, student services, teachers, supports, minority, goal, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), teacher training and achievement, partnership, participation,* and *urban*. The search for literature produced more than 300 articles and research studies dealing with these connected topics.

## Defining Effective Communication

Weise, Caspe, and Lopez (2006) indicated that effective communication is essential in a school setting and the core of family and school relationships. Effective school communication (mission, values and importance of parental involvement) is the foundation for increased student achievement (Weise et al., 2006). Student academic and

future fulfillment revolves around effective school and classroom communication. According to Weise et al., instruction must be delivered in culturally relevant modes and communication from the school to home must be delivered in a like manner. In order for knowledge to be internalized and applied, instruction must be communicated and delivered through a variety of modes including lectures, body gestures, audio and visual aids (Weise et al., 2006). Behavior problems and the effectiveness of knowledge deteriorates when communication breaks down. The breach of the communicational chain rests on both parties (Weise et al., 2006).

On the instructors' behalf, a lack of efficacy and preparedness, oneness of instructional delivery, and a lack of listening and reaching out to his or her students rupture this chain (Enderlin-Lampe, 2002). The students likewise have a responsibility in the instructional process. Children's academic growth suffers from a lack of focus, preoccupation with extracurricular activities, lack of preparedness, lack of sleep, proper nutrition, and emotional burdens that result in a communication breakdown between school and home (Taylor, 1988). Maximum student achievement will only occur if the chain of communication between student, home, and school remains vibrant and unbroken (Taylor, 1988). Educators must develop positive communication proficiency with parents, colleagues, and, most significantly, the students. Parental communications should focus on positive communication, not just negative interactions such as underperforming or mischievous students (Ramirez, 2001; Stouffer, 1992).

Belenardo (2001) collected data from nine elementary schools that had incorporated a parent involvement program for approximately two years to analyze the

process, framework, and organizational components of family involvement programs. Five hundred and ninety-five parents and 227 teachers participated in the study. The study suggested parents experienced an increased sense of connectedness and community when the school extended itself by regularly providing student progress reports, information of scheduled school events, providing volunteer opportunities, and collaborating with community businesses (Belenardo, 2001). Belenardo explained that a feeling of unity is critical in increasing positive communications between families and schools. Epstein's (2009) framework of overlapping spheres validated that positive communication between the school and families is more likely to produce greater parental involvement.

According to Taylor (1988), communication is culturally bound; communication may take on different meanings from culture to culture. Examples of culturally bound communication include a handshake, hand gestures, or, in the Middle East, a greeting of a kiss on each cheek (Taylor, 1988). A person might well be immersed in a variety of cultural settings in this era of blended cultures, resulting in a multiplicity of communication interactions. One must be adept in communicating within a variety of cultural settings (Taylor, 1988). Hence, the basic truism prevails that communication originates from one's ethnic background. This is not to say that one's communication background cannot be altered, modified, and indeed enhanced by one's life experiences and interactions with other cultures.

Keyes (1995), as well as Greenberg (1989), indicated that, from the parent's viewpoint, some cultural issues manipulated the intent of the school communication.

There are four communication issues indicative of this view: (a) cultural viewpoints related to the authoritative role of teachers; (b) a parent's lack of self-worth in initiating contact with the school; (c) language divergences that impede effective communication between parent and school; and (d) diverse socioeconomic factors between school and home.

Lawson (2003) proposed that when there is a relationship between the teacher's and the family's culture and values, the possibilities are heightened for developing practical skills in working with parents and students over time. The more effort needed to increase communication with parents of limited resources, the greater the discontinuities between home and school. Kushman (1999) warned educators not to think of socioeconomically impoverished parents as poor parents or infer they do not have something to contribute. Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) explained that although communities may lack financial resources, there are an abundance of human and social sources or a wealth of knowledge that the neighborhood and school district can access. Anderson and Minke (2007) concluded that the ability for parents to follow or abide by teacher expectations changes due to various degrees of resources. Middle class families have a greater dialogue with the schools than do lower socioeconomic families due to their experience with the American school values (Jung-Sook & Bowen, 2006). Boethel (2003) stated that time limitations, lack of assistance, and transportation restrictions appeared to discourage parental involvement in minority and low-income populations.

When comparing the spectrum socioeconomic environments, Hill and Taylor (2004) found parents from the lower socioeconomic spectrum experienced greater time

constraints due to inflexible work schedules, lack of resources, and transportation problems, thus making it more difficult for these families to participate in school functions. Weise et al. (2006) affirmed that effective communication is the crux of all human interaction. The academic success of each student hinges upon effective interchange of ideas and concepts between student, instructor, and community (Epstein et al, 2009). The exchange of ideas is the breadth of one's everyday existence. The world is attuned to and influenced by effective interdependent communication between all living things and one's technical ability to utilize available instantaneous communication (Epstein et al, 2009). Educators in society can ill afford to be ineffective communicators with parents. Effective school communication will lead to greater parental involvement and increased student achievement.

Dettmer, Thurston, and Dyck (2005) defined communication as the ability to express ideas; the exchange of information or opinions via the written word or verbal communication or symbols. Interpersonal communication is the critical factor in interactions and relationships between parent and child (Olson & Platt, 2004; Rice, 2006). Positive initial contact between parent and teacher will not negate the initial impression despite future negative instances (Million, 2003).

According to DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007) a majority of parents are discouraged from becoming involved in their child's education due to a lack of effective school communication. Barge and Loge (2003) established that both parents and teachers agreed "effective parental involvement required school and home communication" (p. 142). Harniss, Epstein, Bursuck, Nelson, and Jayanthi (2001) and

Hawes (2008) found that parents consider it is the school's responsibility to initiate home contact.

Quigley (2000) concluded that outreach, communication, and relationships with families were essential elements of effective programs for students from culturally diverse backgrounds. A multitude of approaches must be used when communicating. One must determine which approach works best with individual parents and students. Preferably, schools will be able to establish various ways of communicating to have the greatest impact to reach the educational community. Effective communication begins with a common denominator. A foundation of jointly held values, beliefs, and expectations can serve as a springboard for establishing a baseline level of communication. Some have a keen understanding of Standard English yet, may not be able to communicate effectively with those within the local culture who have limited knowledge of Standard English. One must take into account the factors of culture, language and economic and educational divergences that can hinder productive communication, especially with parents whose native language is other than English (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004).

The school eliminates a significant barrier to productive communication by providing bi-lingual personnel. Bridging the language entails looking at the totality of the problem. Schools need to empower parents to understand the educational environment while striving to empathize with the parents' perspective. Schools must seek out and train people to carry out and implement the above-mentioned objectives. In addition to seeking ways to help parents feel comfortable to learn, schools must guard against isolating

parents and not feel that this is so foreign to their culture and upbringing that they just quit and will not engage in the restructuring process (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Howe, 2005). Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, and Bloom (1993) suggested that an embracing learning home environment include high parental ambitions and expectations for their children, rich language atmosphere, academic support and guidance and motivation opportunities for students to explore further.

Knopf and Swick (2007) concluded that teachers have a direct impact on parental involvement via the amount of school and home communication they employ. Frequent communication, however, does not necessarily translate into increased parental involvement. Feelings of inadequacy, failure, poor self-worth, self-efficacy, and anger at the school can create such obstacles. Effective communication must be timely, a variety of modes utilized, frequently incorporating the personal contact between parent and teacher. Olson and Platt (2004) suggested that increased school communication will have a positive influence on future parental involvement. Montgomery (2005) affirmed that the frequency of school communication must be consistent so that parents are adequately informed in order to enable greater parental participation.

According to Henderson and Mapp (2002), the communication the school sends must fit the needs and culture of the family. The crucial role of the parent has been to monitor their child's secondary education. The parent must have knowledge of what the school's expectations are and make sure that their child follows through on these requirements. The school communicates the requirements, and the parents make sure the child abides by the requisites. The student is a vital link in this communication chain. By

placing this responsibility on the student and including him or her in the communication chain, his or her interdependence is being nurtured and fostered. There is a consensus that a new social bond between schools and family, one where students, family units, peers, and educators positioned themselves in a chain link to one another and to the student's education is essential. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley (1996) fittingly stated, "Parents are the essential link to improving American education, and schools have to do a better job of reaching out to them."

## Nature of Home Communication

Bemak and Cornely (2002) suggested, "Parent teacher contact tends to be a function of academic or behavioral concerns rather than helpful hints or invitations to become involved in the educational procedure" (p. 323). In certain cases, correspondence from instructors may become equated with negativity rather than perceived as a true effort toward increasing involvement and cooperation (Katyal & Evers, 2007). When interacting with parents that work, schools can generate positive outcomes that come from a sincere partnership.

## Identifying Specific Communication Barriers

The stereotypical family of the fifties and early sixties is now over. Presently, family units consist of one of diversified family units including; single parent families, blended families, and individuals who are cohabitating. The increase in the divorce rate and a rise in out of wedlock births imply that this development will continue. In the present day, culture does not simply include the traditional two-parent home. Two-parent households can refer to the foster parents, grandparents, guardians, parents with learning

difficulties, parents with limited income, parents with disabilities, parents who do not speak English and couples who are living together. The statistics drive home that the majority of school communication will involve female head of households. School communication must be structured to reach single moms because they make up the majority of the stakeholders.

Halle, Kurtz, and Mahoney (1997) uncovered that numerous families in certain areas are unable to provide their children with additional curricular motivation and academic preparation that is normal and more customary among students of middle and upper-class upbringing. The core of this is the one Abraham Lincoln described over a century ago, which is the inspiration that this nation should provide an open area and adequate chance so that all can compete in the race of existence (Dart, J. A., Political Platform for the 21st Century, 2002, 2004). President William Jefferson Clinton later stated:

> Increasingly, our schools are critical to bringing our communities together. We want them to serve the public, not just during school hours, but after hours: to function as vital community centers; places for recreation and learning, positive places where children can be when they cannot be at home, and school is no longer going on; gather places for young people and adult alike. Bringing our schools into the 21st century is a national challenge that deserves a national commitment. (as cited by Halfon, 2008, p. 1)

Jesse (1995) identified several barriers to effective parental involvement. Specifically, Jesse listed: a disconnect between teachers and parents, lack of teacher

preparedness, ethnicity and class impediments, and limited understanding of the roles of school and parents in the child's education. These barriers can stem from belief systems, opinions, and attitudes of teachers and administrators. The lack of effective communication is the greatest barrier to increasing parental involvement (Jesse, 1995).

Schools assume an inactive focus when not welcoming parents, utilizing an abundance of negative communication and lowering teacher academic expectations of lower socioeconomic children, succeeding only in establishing more negative than positive barriers to parental participation (Ramirez, 2001). Feelings of incompetence, poor self-worth, self-efficacy, and anger at the school can create such obstacles. Olivos (2004) implied that parents may want to possess the skills to participate in their children's education; they may not understand how to gain access to information about the educational system and their civil rights as parents. The teacher and parent expect the other to be liable for commencing and sustaining contact (Halsey, 2005).

Ramirez (2001) discovered that parents and teachers held each other accountable for the academic achievement of the child. The lesson learned is the parent and teacher should feel comfortable and trust one another. Brandon (2007) suggested when educators develop a disconnection in their relationship with parents; negative attitudes from the parent and teacher result in poor parental involvement. Communication, that embrace this insight, can go far to foster the development of these initial associations.

Liontos (1992) affirmed that there are cultural and language barriers to parental involvement. Some minority parents also may feel uncomfortable when approaching school personnel due to their confidence level and their inability to communicate with

staff (Jung-Sook & Bowen, 2006). Repeatedly, minority parents are not invited to take part in school reform planning. Trials and tribulations between teachers and students are inescapable. Lindle (1989) implied that when parents become aware of these disagreements between student and teacher without substantiation from the teacher, they become angry and are disinclined to forgive and forget. Certain behaviors on the part of the school personnel may have a negative impact on the teacher-parent relationship (Frances, 2009).

It is essential to remember when making an effort to increase the effectiveness of home and school communication that parents must not be viewed as being deficient (Davies, 1993). In many cases, there is a label attached to parents of low social, economic status (such as illiterate or poor) or (no follow-up on teacher request) as identified by the school's plan. One focal point on status variables (e.g., level of education, revenue, family makeup) rather than individuals and action often lead to typecasting and biased judiciousness.

In a small qualitative study of limited-English speaking Hispanic parents and their children, Worthy (2006) examined the impact of the English proficiency level of the parents. Specifically, Worthy studied 16 Latino parents of fifth grade students enrolled in a Texas elementary school. Ninety percent of this Texas community were Latino immigrants; thirty percent of the residents identified Spanish as their primary language. Worthy (2006) determined that parents' linguistic ability impacted their involvement in their child's education, despite their desire to be involved. Parents perceived inadequate English skills as a barrier to school involvement resulting in the absence of engagement

in their child's schooling. Parents also conveyed feelings of disconnectedness from the school due to their limited expressive and receptive vocabularies. However, schools that took deliberate actions that engaged family involvement reported; that socioeconomic status and educational level of parents were no longer barriers to their involvement (Benson & Martin, 2003; Huang & Mason, 2008).

The following discourse outlines various barriers that disrupt and muddle communication. This is especially critical at the school level where communication drives parental involvement. The first is the wall of communication inundation President Obama stated in a speech delivered at Hampton University, "we are living in an ubiquitous "media environment" where information has become "a distraction, a diversion, a form of entertainment, rather than a tool of empowerment, rather than the means of emancipation" (CNN Student News, 2010, "Information or Distraction," para. 1). Parents are flooded with a barrage of communications including, but not limited to; the media, internet, cell phones and printed materials. The problem parents must overcome are in determining the priority of communications to establish which one needs his or hers immediate attention and response.

Liontos (1992) proposed non-English speaking parents fail to see an advantage in communicating with school personnel. When the school and stakeholders identify that their initial point of contact with parents will involve someone who speaks their language, then one barrier to seeking assistance is already gone. Loughlin (2008) discovered that ESL parents felt the language barrier was unreasonable to parental involvement. English speaking parents rejected the issue of a language barrier stating that

ESL parents wanted to become skilled in the language and convert their culture to mainstream American culture. Mann (2006) revealed parents have different perceptions of parental involvement, recommending an enhanced discussion needs to occur between home and school if parents and teachers are to be in harmony with one another.

## Strategies to Enhance Student Achievement and Communication

Earlier educational studies have revealed there is a link between student achievement and parental involvement (Dearing, Krieder, & Weiss, 2008; Halsey, 2005; Hill, 2009; Lee, 2006; Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg, 2001). Fan and Chen (2001) showed the standard relationship between achievement and parental involvement in their studies was 0.25; which suggested a medium effect, demonstrating a sizable correlation. This relationship indicates that parent involvement does make a difference in regards to academic outcomes. Raising (2008) indicated that parents are a part of the equation in closing the achievement gap. According to an examination of test scores from students whose parents were actively engaged in a Family and Child Education program, the study implied that the academic achievement scores increased among students whose parents played a major part in the program.

Brown and Malholmes (2004) indicated that one means of enhancing communication skills with parents is by having staff sponsor ongoing family nights. These events should emphasize literacy, content areas or means or methods of increasing parental involvement in their child's education, as well as offering parenting classes and continual adult education classes. While preparing and presenting these events, the channels of communication will naturally deepen, and new avenues will present

themselves. These events will lend themselves to opportunities for staff and parent to explore new approaches in working together. This is critical in ensuring the child's educational development. Brown and Malholmes (2004) identified five methods to begin the deepening of the channels of communication.

1. Prepare a listing of when, where, and how various staff members can be reached via phone, voicemail, or email.
2. All stakeholders conduct ongoing dialogues with parents, allowing them a voice in the decision making through expressing their concerns, thoughts, and suggestions on how to improve communication between school and family.
3. Interview parents concerning their personal involvement in their child's education. Findings will be incorporated in modifying current interventions.
4. Institute quarterly "surveys" to determine which methods of communication are succeeding and which ones need to be modified. Parents will complete the surveys indicating which methods of communication best suits their needs. The school will utilize the results of the survey to modify and enhance communication.
5. Effective Communication: Once the school has deepened the channels of communication with parents, the staff is on the road to developing and nurturing a trusting relationship. Educators like most professionals have developed their unique lingo.

(Brown & Malholmes, 2004, pp. 1-2)

Lavoie (2008) explained that, for five years, countless media channels and government organizations have been focusing on surveying American schools. This severe inspection has led to improved public school systems in the United States. This research was originally geared toward what failing and low performing schools are wrongly doing. Hence, researchers are now taking a different perspective on what these failing schools are doing wrong; they are now centering their attention on what performing schools are doing right.

Lavoie (2008) affirmed that highly performing schools both made a concerted effort in encouraging parental involvement and actively consulting parents so that they can express their concerns. Parents actively made to feel welcomed and cherished as partners in the children's academic program. In the preceding years, the slogan "no news is good news" and parents' communication from teachers only existed when a crisis was brewing, or the student was struggling is null and void. The school/home contact in the past consisted of stiff and traditional parent/teacher nights and traditional ten-minute conferences with the child's classroom teacher. After the child reached the secondary level, communication with the teacher appeared limited (Dornbush & Glasgow, 1996; Simon, 2004).

Eccles and Harold (1996) concluded that parents are more involved in their children's academic lives in elementary school then they are in middle and secondary school. School transitions assess times when parental involvement changes in volume. Schools may be more or less inviting; parents may feel better or less efficacious about their involvement. Hill and Taylor (2004) proposed that parental involvement in

education remains positively linked with learning outcomes. Hill and Taylor concluded that parental involvement did not decrease during secondary school but changes shape and form. The majority of parents are demanding that they be kept informed of their child's progress and yearn to be a part of their child's education and have a contribution worthy of making (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002). Chavkin (1989) indicated that the minority parents feel uncomfortable when conversing with school staff, especially when they have had an unpleasant encounter with the school.

Epstein (1992, 1995) presents six components of parent involvement: parenting, communicating with school, volunteering, home and school support, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Epstein suggests that these can be facilitated by the local education agency as a means of assembling different ways that exhibit parental involvement in their child's academic lives. Numerous research teams have studied Epstein's parental involvement and communication constructs.

Prior research documented the similarities and differences of parental involvement that exists between ethnic and racial minority groupings. Specifically, in 1997, Catasambis and Garland not only differentiated between the various components of parental involvement, but also documented how these distinctions fluctuated along ethnic and cultural lines. Further, this study presented evidence of how the components of parental involvement scaffold and how the degree of parent involvement was an intricate relationship of interconnections between participants.

Catasambis and Garland (1997) found that all ethnic groups diminished their communications with the schools throughout the intermediate and high school years;

African-American parents demonstrated the greatest decrease followed by Latinos. In addition, Latino parents displayed depressed levels of involvement in parent-teacher organizations and community teams. African-American parents demonstrated the maximum degrees of participation in parent organizations at school whereas Caucasian parents exhibited foremost frequent communications with the schools such as volunteering and extra-curricular activities, which reveal a major amount of customary parental involvement. Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, and Apostoleris (1997) found that mothers with a higher socioeconomic status had a higher rate of participation at school as compared to mothers of lower socio-economic status. Moreover, the researchers (Grolnik et al., 1997) also reported single mothers had a lower rate of participation compared to mothers in two-parent families.

The longitudinal nature of the data and the scaffolding of Epstein's (1992) typologies provided an all-inclusive examination of parent involvement. This awareness echoes an opposing viewpoint from the vast amount of research that indicates parent involvement decreases as the student advances through middle school and high school. The study denotes the parent's paradigm shift from one of being the sole supervisor of their children to one of actively seeking a dialogue with the school. Studies indicate that minority parents have maintained parental involvement through their child's primary, middle school and high school years.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) expanded a conceptualization of parent involvement that reiterates the parent's point of view. They found three factors that have an effect on parental involvement:

1. Parents' beliefs on why they participate in their children's educational opportunities.
2. The parents' adoption of involvement in association to the kinds of salutation the school conveys.
3. The degree to which parents sense they will have a particular impact on their children's learning results.

Unlike the typology of Epstein (1992), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model made an attempt to specialize in the explanations behind why parents become involved and to acknowledge what methods might bring to bear positive changes on students' instructional outcomes. Located next to Epstein's paragon, this framework directly mirrors the attitude of the parent within the structure of involvement in affiliation to their call to act with and participate within the school setting.

Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1997) explained three forms of parental involvement in children's education:

1. Parental involvement behavior involves parent participation in home and school (e.g., attending school activities, assisting with homework).
2. Cognitive intellectual involvement includes activities that address cognitive, intellectual involvement such as exposing a child to stimulating critical thinking activities like going to the library to access literature and/or discussing current events.
3. Personal involvement consists of parents keeping abreast with what is going on with their child in the learning environment.

Within each of these three frameworks reflects the multidimensional design of the parental involvement theory; yet, there is a mutual strand which unites all three structures.

Baker and Snoden (1997) suggested there is no straightforward definition that delineates parental involvement; however, school sites have traditionally determined the amount of parental involvement in the school setting by the number of parents that attend general meetings with teachers, participate in school events and volunteer on committees. Abiding by the school guidelines mentioned above, the number of parents who participated in school functions grew dramatically between 1999 and 2003. During the year of 2003 schools' reported 88% of students from kindergarten through the 12th grade had parents in attendance at a general meeting as compared to 78% in 1999, attendance of parents attending a teacher conference rose to 77% (US-DOE, 2003; 2001). Seventy percent of students had parents who came to a school function, and 42% of the students had parents who participated and served on school wide committees and events in 2003, as compared with 73%, 65%, and 37% (US-DOE, 2003; 2001). Parents were more likely to attend conferences events and volunteer for school activities when their children were in the primary grades. In the year 2003, 90% of students in kindergarten through fifth grade had 90% of parents attending at least one meeting with their child's teacher, whereas students in middle school had 75% of their parents' attending. Students in the ninth and 10th grade had a 59% turnout rate of parents at school-sponsored meetings. This rate tumbled to 53% by the time students reached their junior and senior years in high school (US-DOE, 2003; 2001).

The US-DOE (2002, 2003) reported minority students (Hispanic and Blacks) were less likely to have parents actively engaged in school functions or volunteer time at school sites as compared to white students. Specifically, the data trends based on ethnicity revealed:

> Sixty-one percent of the Hispanic students and 63 percent of black students had parents who attended school events while 74 percent of white students had parents who had done so. Twenty-eight percent of Hispanic students and 32 percent of black students had parents volunteering their time, compared with 48 percent of parents of white students. (Child Trends Data Bank, 2013, pp. 4-5)

The degree of parental involvement in a child's academic life is dependent upon the level of the parents' education (Child Trends, 2013). Parents having a higher degree of education and in a higher income bracket had a greater participation rate in their child's education: parents with minimal education and in a low social income bracket exhibited lower rates of participation in their child's academics. For example, in the year 2003, 80% of parents holding a Bachelor's or advanced degree attended a school event at their child's school, compare to 42% of parents who graduated from high school (Child Trends, 2013).

Both parents, regardless of their residential circumstances or ethnicity, can have a positive impact if they are involved in their child's education (Child Trends, 2013). However, the parent's socioeconomic status and competency with the English language have a powerful bearing upon their amount of participation at the school site (Child Trends, 2013). Students living with parents in households above the poverty level are

more apt to participate in school events than parents of children dwelling in households at or below the poverty line (Child Trends, 2013). Specifically, in 2011-2012 school year, "45 percent of parents living above the poverty line volunteered time at their child's school compared with a volunteer rate of 27 percent for parents living below the poverty line" (Child Trends, 2013, p. 6). Parents who demonstrate limited English speaking skills are less likely to attend a school event or school gathering or to offer their time to serve on a committee than those who are proficient in the English language. In 2012, 50% of parents not understanding English attended a school event; 62% attended when one parent was fluent in English (Child Trends, 2013). Participation in school events rose to 72% when both parents were literate in English (Child Trends, 2013). The US-DOE and Child Trends concluded that language barriers do not impede parent teacher conferences; however, they do create barriers that impede non-English speaking parents from participating on school committees.

The National Association of School Psychologists (2008) indicated that well-designed school communication promotes the following positive outcomes:

1. Improvement of overall grades and test scores,
2. More encouraging student attributes,
3. Fewer special education recommendations,
4. Lower dropout ratio,
5. A lesser amount of high-risk behaviors and greater staff self-worth,
6. A rise of parental support for school's initiatives and agendas,
7. Expansion of donation of commodities, supplies, and assistance to the school,

8. Positive parents' viewpoint and respect for the school.

One should take note that the above listing fails to link increased student achievement with increased parental involvement. Dornbusch and Ritter (1988) and Epstein (1995; 2009), among others, have proven there is a link amongst effective communication, increased parental participation, and increased student achievement.

Effective communication and strategies constitute the basis for all other modes of family involvement in education (American Federation of Teachers, 2007). Research confirmed that school involvement with parents can and does open lines of communication freeing teachers to concentrate on the task of empowering students' skills. Cochran and Dean (1991) revealed that empowerment is a means, not an end. Moreover, increased contact with parents places teachers in a position of gleaning more information about the students' needs and home setting, which is invaluable information that can be utilized toward meeting students' necessities.

Involved parents have a tendency to have a positive outlook toward teachers and the value of education, which results in improved teacher self-respect and self-efficacy (American Federation of Teachers, 2007). Involvement is most effective when communication can be initiated by either party. Opportunities for two-way school parent communication include (a) parent teacher conferences, (b) parent teacher organizations and school site councils, (c) daily or monthly compilation of student work sent home for parents to examine and acknowledge, (d) phone conversations, and (e) email or a school website (American Federation of Teachers, 2007). Shatkin and Gershberg (2007) discovered the relationship between having a strong school and community. Parental

involvement in school governance, such as school site councils, leads itself to an intensified commitment that positively affects schools and public relations. These constructs refer back to Epstein's constructs about communication with parents, the elicited types of involvement, and the benefits received by the school from involvement.

Olby (2004) concluded that the school's instructional program will improve student achievement with strong relationships and input from parents. This implies that schools make every effort and utilize all avenues to reach out to the parents in order to increase their participation in school activities. Four tactics achieve this result: reaching out to parents, creating a family center, providing a multitude of opportunities for parental participation and utilizing creative communication between school and home.

Ferguson (2008) outlined four ways schools can improve the involvement of parents: a) Reach Out: Parents are frequently uninvolved because it is inconvenient to their work schedule. Ferguson suggested several strategies to reach out to parents. Specifically, Ferguson proposed holding conferences and informational sessions in ideal locales such as community centers or churches. Using various means of school communication such as sending information home with students or using media-like newspapers, cable TV, and websites help to reach the maximum audience (Ferguson, 2008). Alternatively, creating a Parent Center was also proposed (Ferguson, 2008). The schools could create a functional parent center, which gives parents greater access and avails opportunities to ask questions or provide input regarding the school's instructional programs, policies, and events. Ferguson also suggested that schools use a family coordinator to serve as a facilitator between the school and home. This individual's job

description, as family coordinator, would include working in conjunction with parents in creating a program that would be relevant to the needs of the community (Ferguson, 2008). This would be accomplished through various activities and workshops. Parents would be encouraged to evaluate and provide feedback for such programs.

Ferguson (2008) suggests that schools must provide opportunities. The school must consider expanding existing programs in order to maximize and provide as many divergent opportunities for parental involvement as possible (Ferguson, 2008). Opportunities to create new venues for parental participation should be explored and implemented. Providing parents with various times and opportunities to connect would accommodate individual schedules (Ferguson, 2008). Likewise, accessing parents' interests and talents are essential approaches to maximize their impact on school programs and their child's academic success. Using creative communication is also proposed. Ferguson (2008) maintained that the employment of technology for school communication is important. The modes must be suitable for the goal of the communication. Further, a wide assortment of communication modes need to be incorporated as a regular component of the schools' outreach program. The objective of using numerous diverse strategies to communicate and forge a partnership with parents and the community is to engage as many parents and families as possible (Ferguson, 2008).

Olby (2004) indicated that society tends to point its finger at parents for their lack of involvement, but affirming that the schools need to reach out and meet parents half way is a justifiable idea. Parents are often blamed for their lack of communication with

the schools. Equally, the school and its educators must take upon themselves to embrace and initiate responsibility to communicate.

## Training and Engaging Staff Effectively

According to DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2004), professional learning communities (PLCs) require a systematic approach to education and rely upon the educational professionals coming to a consensus regarding three fundamental questions created by DuFour et al. Instructors in PLCs welcome the concept that the primary purpose of school is maximizing each student's learning potential; however, increasingly administrative protocol, discipline, and other time constraints create havoc upon classroom instruction. This emphasis on learning must be brought to the forefront once again. Schools must refocus their time, effort, and energy on three critical questions:

1. What competencies do educators want students to ascertain at each grade level, by course, and by a unit of instruction?
2. How will educators recognize when each student has obtained the intended knowledge and skills?
3. How will educators react when students encounter early stages of difficulty, so educators can expand upon current levels of learning?

PLCs required all educators to evaluate the effectiveness of their school's instructional program with the intent of formulating and revising their school improvement plans (SIP). This cannot be accomplished without the input of all stakeholders. It is not a teacher's job or an administrator's job to institute reform. It is the responsibility of the collective effort of all site stakeholders. The ultimate focus is to

assist students in maximizing their learning potential as per the mission purpose of the school's existence (McIntosh & White, 2006).

Administrators that created educational environments by sustaining academic, social, and emotional success allowed each student to achieve his or her potential (McIntosh & White, 2006). The question challenging every school site has always been how to achieve these goals within the realities of our profession's resources. What must we do to make a difference? Some schools have turned to the idea of creating schools within schools in order to increase the chances of reaching these goals. McIntosh and White (2006) looked at transitional programs in Findlay, Ohio, created to help increase student retention and ensure that freshmen students received support for the crucial year of transition between junior and senior high schools. McIntosh and White documented that

> Teaming has opened doors for teachers to have meaningful discussions regarding pedagogy, as well as, student behavior and academic performance. Meetings allow for reflection and dialogue that support best practices. This time can also support a team approach to alleviate feelings of isolation in the teaching profession. Time, during the school year, is set aside for teacher meetings and retreats. Training is also implemented to support collaboration. (p. 45)

Maximizing student achievement depends on the total commitment of each and every stakeholder. A number of schools have increased student achievement through implementing creative strategies. McIntosh and White (2006) reported the ideas of PLCs in Findlay's schools had a significant decrease in the number of freshmen students failing

classes and expelled from school while seeing an increase in student attendance and achievement.

Walsh, Kenny, Wieneke, and Harrington (2008) emphasized the role of the student support personnel in the Boston Connect program, which is a partnership between the schools, the community, and the university. This platform asks everyone to work together as colleagues to create a system that provides student support and services (Walsh et al., 2008). The school counselor plays a key role that is influenced by public schools. "The Boston Connects schools' model shifted direction from one of which the majority of referrals constituted those linked to remedial needs to those incorporating a strength-based focus on all students" (Walsh et al. 2008, p. 169). The system that Walsh et al. (2008) described takes the best ideas from PLCs and applies it in a conventional school environment.

Accordingly, counselors must never serve as schedulers or enforce administrative policies at the expense of guiding students. School counselors are critical in ensuring the students achieve not only their academic potential but also receive timely and career guidance. Counselors are not on the front line but serve as a support service for students, staff, and parents. Counselors can make inroads to the parent like providing periodical updates on their child's progress. Students who have counselors supporting them along the secondary education journey tend to have parents involved in their academic progress.

Wickwire (2002) indicated that, within the context of a PLC, the counselor will have equivalent status and influence with other educators. Management support services,

curriculum and instructional support services, as well as student support services must have equivalent responsibility and authority; each of these three structural components will, in turn, have its own management, curriculum, instructional, and student services. Schools exhibiting open and fluid communication with their stakeholders, schools that have taken responsibility for seamless, informal and formal education, have reaped the benefits of an enhanced educational program shared by the learner, home, business and industry, community, and school.

According to DuFour, Guidice, Magee, Martin, and Zivkovic (2002), PLCs need a detailed inventory of all resources extended by stakeholders. They consider stakeholders as vital and valued components of the overall educational program. Support personnel have clearly defined roles and buy-in of the district and school's mission and vision. Future goal development in counseling is crucial to being prepared for what lies ahead. In a preferred future for the year 2021, the counseling profession will operate from planned systems, programs and policies, as opposed to operating on a situational basis.

Wickwire (2002) concluded that counseling will first determine desired results, outcomes or outputs, and then determine content, process, and structure. This reinforces the idea that student services are a vital part of the PLC. The student services department of the future will realize that no one staff member can or should aspire to meet the entire complex needs of students through isolated, individual efforts. Therefore, the department should be organized into collaborative work teams that might include counselors, social workers, and deans. DuFour et al. (2002) suggested that PLC teams engage in ongoing collaborative inquiry in at least three areas. Specifically, DuFour et al. explains that the

PLC addresses the effectiveness or adaptation of the existing instructional programs for (a) the success and wellbeing of individual students, (b) meeting individual students' learning needs, and (c) the effectiveness of the instructional team, itself. It is necessary for student personnel services to monitor their belief systems as well as how they operate. This ensures that students' learning needs are met and that they have been given the opportunity to succeed.

Kanold, Toncheff, and Douglass (2008) highlighted the experiences of two high schools that adopted the concept of PLCs to enhance student success. Kanold et al. started with the creation of teams of high school educators, counselors, principals, central office leaders, and curriculum specialists. These specialized teams all collaborate to overcome the impediments caused by having lowered academic standards for the socioeconomically disadvantaged, caused by cultural biases. Ideally, Kanold et al. expects the staff and all stakeholders in these schools work collaboratively to design and implement a plan resulting in higher student achievement. DuFour et al. (2002) stressed the idea of all stakeholders working towards the same mission and vision is fundamental and provides the basis of the PLC. A consensus of the school's policies and goals coupled with steadfast involvement on the part of all stakeholders is required to increase student achievement.

Kanold et al. (2008) identified the components of the three ABCs embedded in the PLC as being attacking private practice, building adult learning capacity, and creating a result orientated focus. PLCs require specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time sensitive (SMART) goals from every team that regularly relates to the shared

purpose and goal of the school. PLCs are a proven means in achieving effective parental involvement.

## Increasing Parental Engagement

Rutherford and Billig (1995) focused on various means schools and districts utilize to involve families and the public as coworkers in education reform, and the methods employed to create partnerships. The family, school, and community collectively establish their roles. The development of curriculum and programs hinges upon all stakeholders full cooperation and input. They concluded that interpersonal relationships are the heart and soul of family and community involvement. The collaborative communication between families and teachers, the inclusion of school staff to deal with family concerns, and community relations with students in their positions as consumers and workers help to create support. Stakeholders including the child share accountability and decision making. Sustained parental involvement by the parent, family, and community rest on engaging support by trailblazers. A system of support for teachers is vital to parent and family connection. Families require connections to the curriculum.

According to Valencia (2002), when interacting with parents, principals and teachers are to work with the motivation model rather than a deficit model. Teachers and parents will form true and productive connections with students and each other. The school must do more than simply verbalize the necessity of increased parental involvement; rather, it must commit to actively setting goals, objectives, and expectations in order to achieve a united front in dealing with students (Staples & Dilberto, 2010).

Engaging and involving parents in the learning process through a thorough analysis of a student's home environment and collecting additional relevant information is essential in developing a communication network between school, parent, and child. It is vital for administrators and staff to make a concerted effort to engage parents in two-way communication, particularly if parents have a different primary language or experience difficulty comprehending school communication.

Halsey (2005) concluded a majority of parents preferred face-to-face interactions with instructors; however, staff tended to rely upon impersonal communications such as newsletters and websites. Teachers and parents may become disgruntled over the divergence of communication preferences. The highly motivated teachers inquire of parents as to the timeliness and adequacy of school communication concerning opportunities for involvement. A majority of educators believe that the schools' open door policies are adequate enough to form an environment whereby parents feel secure in visiting the classroom environment (Griffith, 1996). The school may affirm that there is an open-door policy, but parents might not experience the welcoming climate (Allen, 2007).

## Parental Engagement in the Educational Process

Parental involvement remains a key indicator of student achievement in the school setting (Hoover-Dempsey1995; Stewart 2008). The researchers also concluded from educational surveys that increased parental involvement in student learning is critical: educators have identified it as an area that needs to be addressed in public education policy. Reinforcing parental roles between the parent and student concerning

student academic progress exists by teachers. Teachers sense that this problem must receive the highest priority in public education during this millennium. However, the mission for effective parental involvement could be a daunting task to attain while not understanding barriers and the way to seize them. It's essential to explain parental involvement, establish methods of effective involvement, and confirm hurdles to parental involvement. Solely then will we thrust forward in prevailing over those obstacles and increase the criterion of parental involvement.

Hester (1989) suggested that there is a formidable link that exists between strong schools and parental involvement that is rooted and grounded in student academic achievement. However, a definition of "effective parental involvement" does not mean the equivalent thing for everyone. Parental involvement in a number of schools existed on the pages of the school improvement plan, but in actuality proved non-existent except to meet a perceived site need (Hester, 1989). Typically parental involvement in these schools sites are defined and directed by staff members. Parents embody an additional side when they desire to control the school: including, adjusting all disbursements, hiring and firing of employees and coordinating curricular activities.

According to the Parent Institute (2005), administrators, teachers and parents have their views on the inclusion of parent involvement and its place in the school setting. Parents and teachers do not measure the importance of parental involvement decisions in the same way. When asked to categorize the methods parents can use to assist their child at home to perform at school, teachers and parents have divergent viewpoints.

Wherry (2005) indicated that teachers felt that the main undertaking with their child was to read with them often, whereas parents felt that talking to their children was extremely significant. On the other hand, the outcome is that parents honestly want their children to make progress and behave in schools, and educators want to provide these academic atmospheres. As a society, we can see that parental involvement is shifting perspectives and constantly changing. The transformation of parental involvement occurs as society restructures itself, communities reorganize, and schools traverse renovation.

Vandergrift and Greene (1992) suggested parental involvement lies within one of the two camps; supportive or active parents. Active parents exhibit a continual involvement in their child's education, whereas they decline to support the education process. Ideally parents need to be both functional and supportive. Active and supportive parental involvement entails reading to children and allowing the children to read to them, volunteering at the school site, serving on collaborative and advisory committees, performing by way of an advocate, and lobbying legislature.

Figure 3 shows the significance of school communication and efforts to establish parent-teacher relationships. Maintaining effective communication serves students by advancing Epstein's six types of parent involvement. Further, the effects or outcomes of the parents' involvement can reach multiple areas of the school and several aspects of the child's life. Increased involvement in the school and the child's education equates with increased involvement in the child's life and daily learning experience. This is essential for empowering students to achieve their academic potential. For this reason alone, it is easy to envision the pertinence of encouraging greater parental involvement.

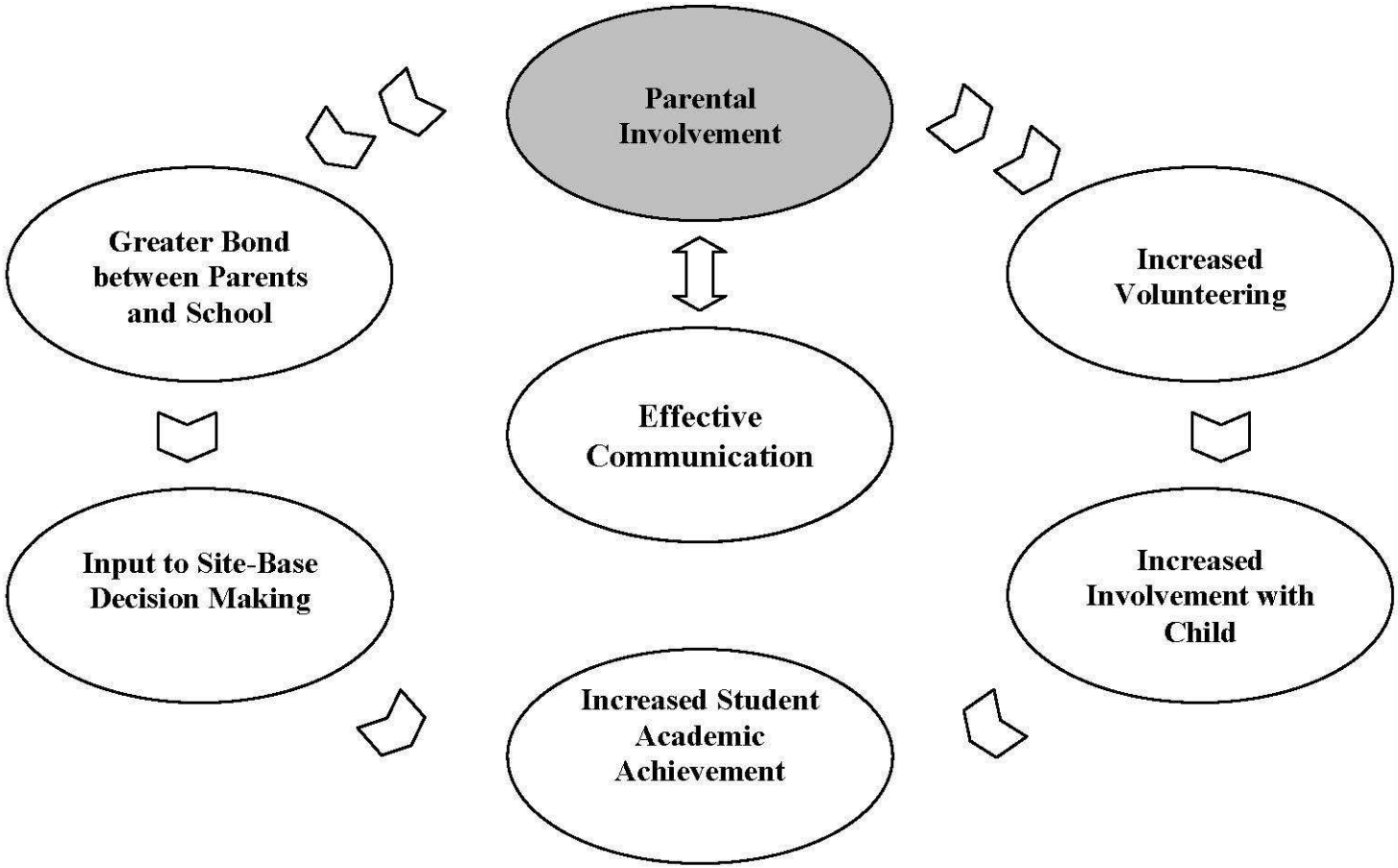



*Figure 3.* Maintaining effective communication serves students by advancing six types of involvement and the impact or outcomes of this involvement.

Involving parents in their children's education is vital to their offspring's academic success (Epstein, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Davies (1991) identified three common themes of parent involvement: providing success for all youngsters, serving the complete child and sharing joint obligations. Research shows that cognitive and behavioral development, attitudes towards school, interactions with others, school climate and community relationships are all impacted by the communications that elicit parental involvement. The National PTA held symposiums to summarize and reinforce the perceived importance of parental involvement. National meetings were assembled to provide a clear-cut definition of parental involvement (PTA, 1992). Interestingly, the National PTA Board endorsed three types of parental involvement: (a) Partners with the schools, (b) Advocates for children, and (c) First educators of their children in the home.

While existing research affirmed that there is a significant correlation between homework supervision, home learning activities, and high academic achievement for children, many parents require assistance to execute these tasks. The collective endeavors of the school infrastructure and individual teachers enabled this to come to fruition.

The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL, 1999) deduced that schools should carefully examine and modify their communication, and increase the degree of inclusiveness to which they interact with the stakeholders and community. NCREL helped establish guidelines to assess the effectiveness of the school's efforts to partner with the parents and community. While a great deal of information is available addressing the importance of parental involvement and how to augment it, schools are in turmoil regarding how to assess their success maximizing parental involvement and

commitment. Schools must communicate with stakeholders in a timely fashion in order to ensure total buy-in and support for proposed changes, improvements, and subsequent demands upon the site's infrastructure and system. The school site must initiate change. It is useless to prepare the next generation regarding ways not to make errors, if educators cannot first make that change internally. By re-educating ourselves, rather than postponing change, we can establish new meaning for the concept of an empowered and enriched educational society.

**Innovative Methods Bridging Students, Parents, and Schools**

Davern (2004) established that face-to-face communication between schools and parents is an effective technique of communication. There were several advantages in having personal contact between teacher and parents; when discussing substantive issues, both groups had a chance to analyze the intangibles (e.g. eye contact, body language, strength of a handshake and sincerity). The downsides were the time and effort teacher must expound to arrange and conduct such conferences, and parents must rearrange their personal and work schedules to accommodate such meetings.

Chen and Dym (2003) determined technology is a proven and powerful social tool that bridges the communication chasm between schools and community. Technology expands and enhances communication within the school, as well as improving communication with external stakeholders, resulting in the creation and strengthening of the bond between teacher and parent. For example, the tele-messenger system has proven to be a highly effective method in communicating with the school's community.

Brewer and Kallick (1996) concluded that technology is a critical system for increasing communication "not limited by school hour or location" (p.181). Constantino (2003) additionally purported that one of the most effective means of communication schools can utilize with parents is the telephone. Advantages included elimination of wasted time when face-to-face encounters were unable to be scheduled, and there were more instantaneous responses forthcoming than via email.

Educators and families strived to learn how to utilize email and websites in order to collaborate and communicate with the school system (National School Board Association, 2000). Few studies have documented the utilization and benefits to the family unit of these methods. Gates (1997) stressed the significance of the relationship when he affirmed: "The vision here is of a connected learning community. The connection between school and the home is extremely valuable" (p. 7). Walberg (1984) highlighted the significance of home and school communication in his review of twenty-nine school and parent programs. Walberg alleged that family involvement within the academic setting was twofold the predictor of educational success and socioeconomic standing. Once parents and educators have high quality contact, they will begin to cultivate the partnerships that bring into existence enhanced academic achievement. Effective communication between home and school is timely, frequent, and comprehensible.

Kantor and Harrington (1997) suggested that a surge of information can be achieved through current and future connectivity, and the materialization of integrated approaches can only improve the way parents and teachers collaborate with one another.

All stakeholders were open to examining technological strategies that would enrich the home and school connection. Bauch (1997) identified a multitude of technological innovations that assist communication between school and home:

1. School software licensed for home use facilitating parental involvement.
2. Teacher electronic planning and grade reporting programs providing timely updates on students' academic progress.
3. Free Internet linkages; and exchanges between teacher and parents.
4. Home designed learning experiences performed on laptop computers.

## Other Methodologies Considered in Designing this Study

The following research methodologies were considered for this study: biographical, ethnographic, grounded theory, and phenomenological theory. The research utilized two school sites; thus, a biographical methodology is inappropriate. Ethnography was deemed inappropriate for this study because I was not a resident of the community. A grounded theory was considered but it was deemed unsuitable for this research as the goal of the study was to evaluate, not build, new theories. A phenomenological study was a philosophical approach with no prior assumptions and required the suspension of all judgments. This research study was premised upon the assumption that enhanced, timely, and effective school communication will produce a significant increase in parental involvement.

## Transition and Summary

The findings from prior research and literature indicated that parental involvement was an essential factor for motivating students to achieve, academically. Research

specifically indicated the existence of a positive relationship between effective communication and parental involvement. Further, when the academic community exerts a concerted effort to involve parents, studies indicated that there were positive outcomes evident within students' academic achievement. Concerns arose when school representatives failed to reach out to parents in a meaningful fashion; depriving themselves of knowledge regarding how families, of different ethnicities, perceived school and staff. Regardless, prior findings substantiated the belief that when educators extend themselves, beyond the call of duty, making a truly valiant effort to understand the families' needs, meaningful parental involvement will ensue. With such meaningful parental involvement, the students experienced increased academic success and personal satisfaction.

Emerging issues identified within the literature included concerns about the ways to increase effective parental involvement. Current research requires awareness of the most appropriate means by which to attain this goal. Although parental involvement is essential at the early phases of child development and learning, it was identified as equally critical throughout each stage of child development. Numerous, developmentally appropriate methods must be used to motivate parents to become involved. School leaders must develop plans for motivating parents to become engaged based on the unique needs and concerns of their community.

This chapter provided an overview of the literature that addressed the issues associated with increasing parental involvement through effective communication. Therein, significant emphasis was directed towards endeavors to increase parental

involvement. This research project was conducted to ascertain what the parents believed were effective modes of school communication that overcome barriers to their involvement. Chapter 3 provides a detailed review of the methods selected and their propriety within this specific study.

# Chapter 3: Research Method

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology selected for this study. Documented within this chapter are the procedures that were used for organizing the research. This includes descriptions of the instruments employed, the sampling and consent processes, and the methods used to execute reliable data collection and impartial analysis. A series of semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2006), driven by the guiding research questions, was completed. A major component of any qualitative research study involves researchers' face-to-face encounters with the study participants to observe their behaviors and corroborate the verbal reports from the interviews (Creswell, 2007).

Conceptually, it was understood that growing and sustaining parental involvement requires effective communication between the schools, via the teachers, and the students' homes, via their parents or guardians. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to research and identify reliable and effective communicative means that elicit parental participation in two diverse schools in an urban region of a southwestern state. The data extracted from the research were used to identify the communication modes that were perceived as effective and ineffective for the promotion and sustainability of parental involvement. The findings of this study were used to document and describe the parents' perceptions of the effectiveness of various modes of school communication, for the specific purposes of eliciting meaningful parental involvement.

## Research Design

To accomplish the stated research objectives, a qualitative approach of phenomenological design was implemented. This facilitated the exploration of parental experiences and perceptions of their communications with school. Possible barriers that were perceived as impacting communication were also explored. The data from the interviews were categorized by common meaning and were named as themes. The emergent themes were used to identify the communication modes that were perceived as either effective or ineffective. Specifically, effectiveness for promoting and sustaining parental involvement were addressed.

Qualitative research, as utilized in this study, required comprehension of processes and connections that were viewed from social and cultural perspectives (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is based on direct information gathered from individual people and social communities, within specific, relevant surroundings (Sociology, 2003). Creswell (2007) suggested that a qualitative research design enables the researcher to collect data that is based on the experiences and understandings relayed by the participants within a natural setting. I chose the qualitative research method due to the natural alignment with the tenets of interviewing. Parental feedback was explored to understand their perceptions of the school communications and the communication modes' specific timeliness and effectiveness eliciting parental participation.

While it would have been possible to measure the levels of effectiveness of the communications, a quantitative research approach was not selected. According to Proctor (2005), quantitative researchers investigate the natural science perspective that

focuses on the existence of a single, true, measurable reality. Proctor explains that this could be achieved through hypothetical prediction and quantification of the laws and causes measured within experimental designs. Quantitative research is often completed via mail, telephone, or computer technology. While quantitative research would have been is conducted on a larger scale (i.e., larger sample), it did would not have provided the depth of information acquired through qualitative methods. Likewise, while numerical data would have provided evidence to support or refute the research hypothesis, the data would not have explained how or why the phenomenon of parental involvement occurred. Instead, the semi-structured interviews conducted with the small sample, elicited in-depth details and insights, based on the participants' experiences and perspectives. A quantitative researcher's purpose is to calculate an amount. A qualitative researcher's purpose is to explain and identify the relative importance of each issue. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) affirmed that quantitative researchers endeavor to delineate the study's variables with firm constraints and statistical analyses. In contrast, Leedy and Ormrod noted that qualitative researchers observe and ask questions to extract answers or theories about the conditions or phenomenon of interest.

Several qualitative research methodologies were considered for this study. Specifically, biographical, grounded theory, case study, epistemology, and ethnographic approaches were considered before identifying the propriety of the phenomenological approach. The research involved two school sites; thus, biographical methodology was inappropriate. A grounded theory approach would have been appropriate to develop a theory about a defined population (Maxwell, 2005). This method was not chosen

because it did not align with the objectives of this study; it was not necessary to develop a theory about the parents or their communication and involvement with the schools. A case study was inappropriate because it would have involved analysis of the convergences of one or more cases (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). While the intrinsic case study has been used to explore little-known phenomena by studying a single case, in depth (Stake, 1995), it was inappropriate for this study due to the importance of gathering multiple perspectives herein. Epistemological studies have been used to address the roots of knowledge and correlation with accepted understandings (Creswell, 2009). This study did not pertain to the foundation of knowledge; thus, epistemology methodology was discarded. The final research method explored was an ethnographic approach.

Ethnography focuses on the importance of actions, communications, and relations among a "culture-sharing group" (Creswell, 2007, p. 68). Harris (1968) suggested that ethnographic research focuses on the entire cultural group. The researcher would use qualitative methods to describe and interpret cultural patterns of values and behaviors (Harris, 1968). Ethnography "involves extended observation of the group, the majority of the time through participant observation in which the researcher engages in the daily lives of the people" (Creswell, 2007, p. 68). The time factor of an ethnographic design did not suit the timeframe for this study. I rejected this approach because it was not the intent to examine the actions or culture of the parents.

The purpose of this research was to obtain the attitudes and feelings they have regarding the communication methodology they believe is timely and effective. The phenomenological design enabled the data collection to focus on the specific experiences

and insights of the participant group. Understanding the phenomenon of communications between school and home, from the perspectives of the parents, was the primary goal.

**Restatement of Study Purpose**

The focus of the study was to determine which methods of school communication elicited active parental involvement; a phenomenological approach was selected to achieve this goal. Through in-depth interviews, parents were empowered to share their lived experiences regarding both the communications and elicited parental involvement with the school. It was through development of an understanding of the parents' lived experiences that it became possible to compile recommendations for procedures for effective communication between the home (i.e., parents) and the school (i.e., educators).

**Selected Research Process**

This research study was divided into multiple phases. The first phase served as the foundation for the research. The review of literature and archived district data enabled me to delve into the concepts associated with effective school communication. During this phase, I briefed the parents about the impending study and conducted an informal, focus group interview, to solicit general feedback about the core concepts. The second phase of the study involved my generation of in-depth queries that were used in the interviews to address the research questions. This was followed by my use of an open coding process for the analysis of the data. The third phase of this research involved presentation of the data and dissemination of findings in a manner that was meaningful for all stakeholders. The conclusions and implications from this study were distributed

with the hope of stimulating professional discourse about developing procedures and policies for effective communication and involvement practices.

A phenomenological research design was selected because of its suitability for the study's purpose. The perspective of this qualitative phenomenological research aided in the delineation of the single critical research question, about communication with the school, as experienced by the participants. The phenomenological research design was used to develop an understanding of the parents' perspectives regarding (a) effective communications with their child's teachers and (b) engaging their involvement in their child's education. Phenomenological research was used herein to explore the patterns and themes documented within the interview transcripts (Creswell, 2007). The *emergent themes* became evident when exploring the interview content, specifically searching for the commonalities used in explaining the meaning, as assigned by the participants, based on their lived experiences of the identified phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The phenomenological approach was selected because it was feasible to gather individual responses from interviews to explore the parents' perceptions of effective school communications and the elicited parental involvement (Sociology, 2003).

## The Role of the Researcher

My responsibility, as the researcher in this study, required awareness of and responsibility for my possible responses to personal values, assumptions, and biases. These potential influences from my personal and professional perspectives were relevant throughout the study, from the inception to the final presentation of the implications of the research findings. Because the parents at the two K-8 public schools were the most

pertinent stakeholders, I selected a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews to elicit detailed insights. This approach enabled me to document the parents' perspectives of the communications with school representatives and elicited parental involvement.

For this type of research, it was not feasible for me to remain a distant observer. Rather, it was my responsibility to participate in the study, as the interviewer, to facilitate the parents' report of their perspectives. It was my obligation to enable the parents to feel comfortable enough to candidly volunteer this confidential information. I interviewed all of the parents, ensuring the consistency of the experience for each of the participants. Several data collection phases were executed. General feedback was solicited during the aforementioned, unstructured, focus group interview, conducted at each school. This provided an opportunity to document field notes, which included both direct observations and impressions from my interactions with the parents. This enabled me to solicit volunteers and form a candidate pool, from which I later drew the research participants. Secondary sources of data were also gathered to collect information about the school-home communications. These data sources included school newsletters, calendars, and notes exchanged between parents and teachers (Halsey, 2005). When combined, the subjectivist approaches described herein fostered the appropriate interactions that enabled me to explore the participants' perspectives of the researched phenomenon.

The methods used for data collection and analysis were facilitated by maintaining an appropriate social distance between me, as the interviewer, and the parents, as the interviewees (Sociology, 2003). This helped me comprehend the participants' point-of-

view, without imposing my perspectives. There was no need to have a personal or professional relationship with the research participants. The semi-structured interviews required no use of authority. Concerns regarding respondent bias did not arise; I was able to eliminate any concerns related to the environment, conflicts of interest, or power differentials because I am no longer a member of the communities studied. I recognized the need for me to remain opened to the reflections and opinions of the participants. Suspending my beliefs to avoid biases was also pertinent in this phase of the study. This required me to set aside my preconceived notions, based on my personal and professional experiences as well as the theories and constructs within the literature reviewed. This was critically pertinent for enabling me to understand the views held by the participants in the study.

Between data collection (i.e., interviews) and data analysis, it was necessary for me to transcribe all of the audio-recorded interview data. As this information guided an understanding of the lived experiences of parents, it was critical for all of the information be transcribed accurately. To facilitate analysis, I utilized the NVivo8 software to reveal the common themes from the recorded data (QSR International, 2008). NVivo's tools for exploration of word counts, language trees, and conceptual associations enabled me to examine the interview data, based solely on the language used by the participants. Ongoing, repetitive, and recursive review of the interview content helped me to identify common language patterns. This led to identifying connections and possible themes addressing each of the interview queries and the guiding research questions. This enabled me to begin to document the parents' perceptions of the communication

approaches that they believed provided the most timely and effective communication. Further, this yielded information about the communications between school and home as well as the procurement of parental involvement.

During the review of the available literature, several prior studies were found to be valid and reliable sources of information about the interrelationship of home-school and school-home communications and parental involvement. Specifically, the US-DOE released multiple publications based on the data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) regarding reliable and authentic sources of parental involvement in public schools (US-DOE & NCES, 1997). The publications included several books. Specifically, one book entitled, *Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools* was intended to help local education agencies (LEAs) develop appropriate communication strategies (US-DOE & NCES, 1997). Another book, entitled *Strong Families and Strong Schools Building Community Partnerships for Learning*, addressed connecting families to the learning process (US-DOE & NCES, 1997). Similarly, the pamphlet *Team Up for Kids! How Schools Can Support Family Involvement in Education*, provided guidance for developing strategies within schools that were expected to encourage parental involvement (US-DOE & NCES, 1997). This pamphlet recognized the importance of the parents not only during the school-building process, but engaging parents in ongoing decision and policy making, technology usage, and forming direct connections between parents and their child's classroom (US-DOE & NCES, 1997). These resources spurred many states and LEAs to initiate their own studies, distribute publications, and embrace philosophies targeting parental involvement as a source for

stimulating school success. Arizona was one state that had outdated research and resources for its LEA.

The available research dated back to 1989 when the Arizona State Department of Education (ADE) wrote a handbook addressing parent-teacher communication. The rationale behind the state-sponsored effort was to examine ways to incorporate the support of the most essential stakeholders, the parents (ADE, 1989). The publication focused on engaging parents in their child's performance (ADE, 1989). The ADE examined initiatives that engaged parents through various means of school-home communications. The approaches included communication such as notes, telephone calls, letters, and meetings (ADE, 1989). The booklet included recommendations for the teachers to use to motivate parents to become involved in the educational process of their progenies (ADE, 1989). The booklet also detailed various oral and written modes of communication, including parent-teacher conferences, and the desired outcomes of these efforts (ADE, 1989).

This qualitative phenomenological research was focused to address the need for updated exploration. Among the changes over the past quarter-century was the evident need for research to encompass technology-driven modes of communication. Therefore, this study was focused on exploration and evaluation of the parents' perceptions of the communication systems used at two different K-8 schools in one, large, urban, school district in the southwestern United States.

## Research Questions

The research purpose and the methodologies selected were determined by the primary, guiding research question. The research focus addressed parental experiences and perceptions of parent-school communication patterns. Following the main question to address the purpose of the research, multiple sub-questions were developed to be used as interview queries. Combined, the research questions were framed to include:

**RQ1.** What school communications are currently utilized for eliciting parental involvement?

**RQ2.** How effective are current school communications for eliciting parental involvement?

**RQ3.** How does regular and timely communication on the part of the schools connect with parental participation?

**RQ4.** With which form of communication with the school do parents feel most comfortable?

**RQ5.** To what degree does a consistent cycle of verbal and written communication between school and community effect parental involvement in the Parent Center?

The central concept of the study was the exploration of the critical role played by school communications in the endeavor to elicit parental involvement in their children's education. Therefore, this qualitative phenomenological research was focused to analyze and evaluate the communication systems used at two different schools in one, urban Phoenix public school district, serving students in kindergarten through eighth grades.

## Methodology

As explained, qualitative research of phenomenological design was chosen. The methodologies selected encompassed solicitation and selection of participants, necessary consent processes, data collection, data analysis, and data presentation. The methods were documented herein in sequence for potential replication.

### Consent

Several types of consent were required to conduct this study. The school district and site administrators needed to approve access to the parents and consent for facility use, for the interviews. The university's Institutional Review Board needed to confirm the study methods and approve conducting the interviews without risk or harm. The consent of all three entities were required before I was permitted to communicate with the parents.

The interview process commenced with participants receiving the requisite invitation and informed consent documents. These explained the title, purpose, nature, procedures, risks, benefits, of the research study in both English and Spanish. These forms also reviewed the parameters of voluntary participation. The parents were given opportunity to address all questions and concerns, prior to signing the consent forms and participating in the interview. The participants were given the option to refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The participants were informed about the terms of their participation, precisely what they would be asked to do, as well as the proposed use of the information gleaned from the interviews. The interviewees were given a copy of the results at the conclusion of this study.

**Participant Selection**

**Solicitation**. The participants of this study were selected because of their unique relationship with one of the two selected urban public schools, serving K-8 students in a southwestern state. An invitation was sent to the potential participants inviting them to take part in a research study about modes of effective communication between the school and home. A candidate pool, of approximately 75 individuals, was formed from the group of parents who attended this initial meeting. An informal question process was used to garner general feedback about the existing communications between the educators and the parents. Every respondent who indicated interest and willingness to participate in an interview about this topic was contacted via email and phone calls to organize a participant group. Refer to Appendices A and B for the English and Spanish invitations to participate.

**Sampling.** The parents were notified when I was ready to begin the interviews. Sixteen parents representing each school were contacted directly to be invited to participate in the study. The parents who responded became the sample group for the study. The parents were contacted to schedule the interview. A suitable location and time was agreed upon for the formal interviews. The interviews were conducted in three phases, to address the different research questions in as brief a session as possible (i.e., 20-30 minutes). Before the interviews started, it was required to procure the participants signature on an informed consent document. Informed consent documents, provided in English and Spanish (Appendices C & D), reiterated the purpose and requirements of voluntary and confidential participation in this study as well as the process for

withdrawal without any penalty from the research process. If the sample size was too small, the findings and implications drawn would not have been considered reliable. The sampling process was outlined prior to participant selection. The recruitment of participants was vigorous enough to ensure a large enough sample to derive meaningful data. This was necessary to consider the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data and subsequent implications.

Purposeful sampling was utilized to secure participants for this study. This sampling focused on the group of participants whose experiences revealed an understanding of the phenomena in question. Determination of understanding was based on the individual's interest and communicative participation in the informal focus group session. These candidates' feedback was considered highly valuable. This was one positive quality of purposive sampling. The selection criteria for inclusion addressed two pertinent factors. First, the candidates were parents who had students enrolled in one of the two selected K-8 schools in the large metropolitan area of a southwestern state. Second, these parents were required to be willing to and capable of expressing their experiences regarding the phenomena studied; specifically, how parents perceive school communication. As previously stated, maximum variation sampling was used in the selection of the interview groups. As such, no demographic variables were considered as either exclusionary or inclusionary criteria. The assembled participant groups consisted of both involved and uninvolved parents from both communities. The included group was also ethnically diverse. This inclusionary process did not guarantee a representative sample for the district or either school site.

The interviews engaged an equal number of students' parents from each school. The pool of interviewees was multicultural (Gaetano, 2007). The pool of interviewees was twice the number of needed participants, to ensure a solution for potential declines, withdrawals, or other encountered problems when scheduling the interviews. The final selection of 16 parents, eight from each school, was deemed acceptable due to time constraints of the interviewing process and the subsequent analysis of the data. A sample size of 16 participants from the two K-8 schools remained within the saturation point; it was neither too large nor too small a number to achieve positive outcomes. Eight parents from each school who were available for the interviews were included in the study. The 16 parent participants represented both school's K-8 classes.

**Instrumentation**

I utilized the following data collection instruments: observation sheets, interview queries (Appendices E, F, G and H, I, J), and audiotapes. These instruments were developed using queries proposed by prior researchers, direct correlates of the guiding research questions, and other concepts that arose during the review of literature. An expert panel was asked to review and provide feedback prior to the data collection. Specifically, the reviewers addressed the relevance and propriety of the data collecting tools. They checked the language for conformity and understandability for use within the current situation and with respect to the potential language barriers. The content validity of the transcripts and the derived themes were verified from the parents' perspective in order to eliminate any non-relevant questions. Gaetano (2007) used a similar approach within a minority community (i.e., Latino) to explore the parents' perceptions of their

involvement. Gaetano specifically focused on answering a research question pertaining to the way Latino parents perceived their children's education.

**Data Collection**

There were several distinct phases of data collection. First, the background research was conducted through the review of literature to explore the various types of school communication available and their perceived effectiveness eliciting parental involvement. In addition, archived data were explored from the district's site improvement plans and related parent surveys. Both the literature and the archival resources provided the necessary background information about the various types of school communication and identified approaches that have elicited parental response. The review was completed prior to the contacting the primary stakeholders, the parents. Next, two focus group sessions, one at each school, were held with informal discussions that served as unstructured interviews. Subsequently, the three-part semi-structured interview process was initiated involving individual parents representing each of the identified schools. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with each parent participant to retrieve the data. Finally, secondary data sources, respondent verification, and member checking were used to triangulate and verify the data analysis outcomes.

I utilized a non-directive design for the interviews; this relied on the use of open-ended questions. This enabled the participants to pace themselves and reveal the content they desired within the interview. A directive style of questioning was utilized as needed, to serve as a probe or prompt, when I required additional explanation of or details about the information that the participants provided. This process was used for both prompting

and verifying the details elicited within the interviews. The additional sub-questions were utilized as deemed necessary. I also documented information and observations from the semi-structured interviews by making hand-written notations. School communications were categorized as paper, electronic, verbal, or face-to-face. Each interview was audio-recorded and accompanied by my additional handwritten notes and observations.

All participants were informed that the interviews were audio-recorded in order to accurately capture their perceptions. I transcribed the recordings. Each series of interview questions was designed to unearth the parents' insights regarding school communications. Aliases and a random numbering system were used in order to eliminate all individually identifiable information about the participants from the documentation. All potentially identifiable information discovered within the audio-recorded interviews and initial emails from participants were deleted. All signed consent forms from participants were kept in a locked file. All recordings were transcribed to a password protected external digital storage device, checked for accuracy, and then deleted. The recorded interviews were kept in a secured file cabinet. All digital storage drives and transcriptions will be destroyed after the prescribed five-year period.

Recommendations concerning the scheduling of parental interviews and the use of the schools' facilities were left to the discretion of the researcher. The previously prepared research questions were submitted to parents. The topics were drawn from the review of literature and specifically included (a) regularity and timeliness of school communications, (b) other parental perceptions of school communications, (c)

communications that engage parental involvement, and (d) possible relationships between parental participation and various modes of communication. The data gathering events were recurrent. One event was conducted each month until all the data were collected. Audio-recordings of the data were utilized to ensure authenticity and accuracy in data reporting.

**Data Processing and Analysis**

Stating the individual participants' experiences required the researcher to be a keen listener and observer to explain their experiences interacting with the teachers representing the urban elementary schools. In quantitative research, there are clear-cut hypotheses; in this qualitative research, there were open-ended queries aligned with the five guiding research questions. There remained the possibility that the researcher's skills or biases or the participants' perspectives would alter the nature of the discussion, or individual queries, as the data gathering was conducted (Sociology, 2003). Parental feedback regarding the schools' means of communication was elicited. Additionally, the interview questions were used to examine the impact electronic media has upon the current and future projected parental involvement at the schools.

Thorough interviewing generated a pool of recorded data. To interpret this data, the transcriptions were abridged to the pieces that were the most significant and of direct relevance to the phenomenon being studied (Wolcott, 1990). Using an inductive research strategy, the researcher remained open-minded to ascertain significant trends or common attributes that emerged within the transcribed copy (Seidman, 2006). To sift the

interview data into significant themes and topics dealing with effective modes of communication, the NVivo8 (QSR International, 2008) software was employed.

Steered by Patton's (2002) qualitative analysis procedures, I transcribed the interviews, coded the transcriptions, classified the coding, and identified key patterns in the data. After the transcription from the semi-structured interviews was interpreted and the thematic trends were verified, the NVivo software was utilized to organize the information accumulated. Word count assessment and related word threads was the start of the analysis process. In this phase of the research, I independently analyzed the transcripts by deriving themes through a constant comparative process that enabled me to identify the similarities and dissimilarities in the transcripts. The data from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed into the NVivo8 (QSR International, 2008) software in order to identify salient themes. NVivo8 enabled me to code and thoroughly process the data. The ongoing analysis of the responses to the interview queries ensured that all the information that could fit into common themes was identified.

Three phases of thematic coding were executed (open, axial, and selective). Throughout open coding, the data were conceptualized so that connections and relationships were recognized, and patterns and themes emerged. Open coding facilitated deciphering of the content in the most minute, meaningful segments. This was often a single word or phrase. Each segment of the data was sorted based on the original categories and themes present in the content. During axial coding, the codes that were recognized, examined, and reduced to further categories and decreased to another form were explored for possible relationships between each grouping/subcategory. Finally,

selective coding involved the merging of all the recognized categories, using a higher level of generalization. The data were transmuted by selective coding, wherein it was possible for me to identify and assign a subtopic associated with the modes of communication and the parents' perceptions or response to each approach.

Secondary documentation (e.g., notes, memos journals, tape recordings, observations) were used to triangulate and verify the data drawn from the transcripts. The documentation aided in guiding the setting and framework of the research. Additionally, these sources served as examples of the communications the parents found to be meaningful or problematic, impacting their involvement in their child's education.

Seidman (2006) recommended creating profiles for the collected data. Using NVivo, a profile for each participant and for each communication mode was created (QSR International, 2008). The NVivo software was used to assist with the extraction of data segments from each profile to be aligned or paired with a category, based on thematic associations. Through this content analysis, themes related to the effectiveness of school communications became evident. It was through these identified themes that the modes of effective communication began to emerge. The findings were presented in tabular and graphic formats (Chapter 4). Summative reports with recommendations were prepared for the site and district administrators.

## Ethical Issues

Creswell (2009) explained that researchers should anticipate ethical concerns that could occur during the qualitative research process. Punch (2005) affirmed that research entails gathering data from people, about people. The aforementioned potentials for

researcher biases must be tactically avoided throughout the study. In addition, researchers need to protect their research participants by cultivating a trusting relationship with them, promoting the reliability of the research, guarding against misconduct, and any indiscretion that might reflect a negative report on their institutions or organization, and they need to cope with or new challenging problems (Creswell, 2009).

The researcher had a responsibility to respect the desires, needs, rights, values, and opinions of the participants. Phenomenological research solicits sensitive and occasionally unfavorable answers to questions, unearthing meaning from opinion and casual commentary. Additionally, the reputation and position of the participants needed to be clear, especially since the findings of the study could be shared with other institutions, people, and organizations.

In examining the potential participants for the described study, several factors were identified that could influence the results of the research. The limitations and delimitations were documented. Participant variables were also relevant. The parents were not selected based on any demographic variables. Therefore, they were anticipated to vary in age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational background, medical condition, and convictions. Each participant came to the interview session with a unique background and experiences that impacted his or her individual mindset. The settings for the interviews did not create ethical risks, confidentiality was ensured. Parents were not deterred from responding truthfully; regardless of the Hawthorne effect, wherein interviewees may not express their natural feelings due to their awareness that responses

are being recorded (Sociology, 2003). This was determined not to be problematic in this study because none of the questions broached emotion-laden or challenging topics.

## Validity and Reliability

Reliability is an essential concept for qualitative research and the application of the findings in practice and future study. In phenomenological study, the objective includes the provision of a trustworthy interpretation of a central phenomenon, based on the participants' experiences. The transcripts from the face-to-face interviews, my field notes, and secondary sources were used to triangulate and verify the findings. Member checking was utilized to establish the credibility of the identified themes and trends (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). To ensure the credibility of the study, to minimize researcher bias and advance the plausibility of findings, a peer review of the themes was conducted. The review involved a colleague who was unfamiliar with the research study and unaffiliated with the university or schools studied. The identification of limitations, delimitations, and assumptions helped minimize other potential threats to the reliability of the data collected and the derived findings. Techniques utilized to establish reliability in quantitative studies diverge from the methods utilized in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2007).

Researcher reflexivity, audit trails, and data triangulation were the instruments utilized to advance the reliability within this study. Researcher reflexivity references the ability to reflect on his or her values while the research is being conducted and after it is completed (Lichtman, 2010). Dedicating the time to reflect on the answers given by each parent and how it impacted or reflected their personal values, enabled the data to be

understood and reported without researcher bias. The audit trail involved careful documentation of data collected during the interviews. The recordings and transcriptions were compared to assess accuracy. The data were authenticated by comparing these two. Member checking and respondent verification methods were adopted to advance accuracy. Triangulation was achieved by examining the secondary data sources, and conducting the comparison or contrasts of the different interviewees' responses. In addition, some questions were repeated or asked in slightly different forms in more than one interview session. In addition, the responses from each of the interviews were assessed for consistency. The NVivo8 software was utilized to assist in finding common themes and reliably analyze the data (QSR International, 2008).

The data provided vivid insights regarding the feelings and attitudes expressed by the parents. The subjective nature of phenomenology revealed the parents' perceptions and feelings regarding the effective modes of school communication and the impact on parental involvement. The purpose of all phenomenological studies involve extracting a detailed picture of the perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and lived experiences of the participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). This outcome was attained in this study.

## Chapter Summary

The content of this chapter introduced and provided a detailed description of the methodologies selected for this study. The phenomenological research approach was inspired by the objectives of the research. Restatement of the research purpose emphasized the significance of effective school communication and the impact the communications have upon parental involvement. The chapter content addressed the

critical parts of the study and the research design. Specifically, detailed are the consent processes, participant solicitation and selection, data collection, and data analysis.

The study incorporated a three-phase data collection strategy. This encompassed 16 individual interviews, conducted on multiple occasions to address the five guiding research questions. Data collection involved applying the observation-participant attributes of phenomenological research. The critical role assigned to the researcher for both data collection and analysis were explored herein. This justified the use of constant comparative analysis. The suitability of the selected research design was affirmed. The methodology section concluded with a discussion of the way the data were gathered and interpreted. Finally, addressed in this chapter was the prospect of ethical concerns.

Chapter 4 encompasses documentation of the complete analysis, synthesis, and implications of the transcribed interviews. The patterns, relationships, and themes emerging from the data were fully explored. Documented in Chapter 4 were the parents' perceptions of the school communication systems and their impact on parent involvement in their child's education. This facilitated the development of professional discourse, conclusions, and implications, presented in Chapter 5.

# Chapter 4: Results

The intent of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to determine which modes of school communication elicited parental involvement, as perceived by parents of K-8 students in a southwestern state. This chapter focuses on answers of participants to interview questions that served as a tool to obtain data for this phenomenological study. In this section, the foundation was established for qualitative analysis and interpretation of data obtained from each participant. The participants described their experiences thoroughly during interviews. Common themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews of each participant have been highlighted. A composite thematic analysis based on the combined responses of the overall group of participants concludes this chapter.

## Research Questions

The goal of this study was to present the data analysis and findings gathered from the semi-structured interviews with 16 parents. The interviews were organized to answer the research questions that guided this study:

1. What school communications are currently utilized in eliciting parental involvement?
2. How effective are current school communications in eliciting parental involvement?
3. How does regular and timely communication on the part of the schools connect with parental participation?

4. With which form of communication with the school do parents feel most comfortable?
5. To what degree does a consistent cycle of verbal and written communication between school and community effect parental involvement in the Parent Center?

## Location and Demographics

The study took place at two K-8 schools in a large metropolitan area of a southwestern state. The two schools had population demographics aligned with the other comprehensive elementary schools in the district, which includes predominantly minority students. District publications (i.e., annual SIP) described the community historically and presently. The district boundaries include students from two distinct municipalities, serving five different cultures: Hispanic, African American, Native American, White, and Pacific Islanders. Both schools were located in socioeconomically depressed areas. The SIP indicated that at one time, modest housing, cotton fields, and orchards characterized these areas. However, at the time of this research, the communities consisted of a substantial number of low-income dwellings, numerous trash-laden vacant lots, and several commercial buildings that housed light manufacturing businesses.

The SIP revealed that both schools served a low- to middle-income population that lacked academic preparation in language arts, reading, and math. The majority of the students walked to school, rode the school bus, or were transported by family. Breakfast was provided for students at each school. All (100%) of the students at both schools qualified for the federal free/reduced lunch program. Additionally, the schools had high

mobility rates, attributed to the large transient population, mostly from Mexico and other low-income families that moved for financial reasons. The Spanish-speaking population, particularly students who used only Spanish outside of school, was at a distinct disadvantage obtaining an education. For these learners, parental support was severely hindered by language and cultural barriers. The parent survey data in the SIP indicated that both schools encountered a fundamental challenge updating school-to-home and home-to-school communications. The educational programs adopted at both schools were geared to benefit the academic achievement of all students. The instructional programs were differentiated or modified to accommodate the academic challenges experienced by the diverse student population.

Schools A and B primarily served a minority student population; as of January 2014 minority and multiracial students comprised 91% of the enrollment. Hispanic students accounted for more than 80% of the total enrollment at both schools. The remaining student population at each school was comprised of a mixture of four other cultures (Figures 4 and 5).

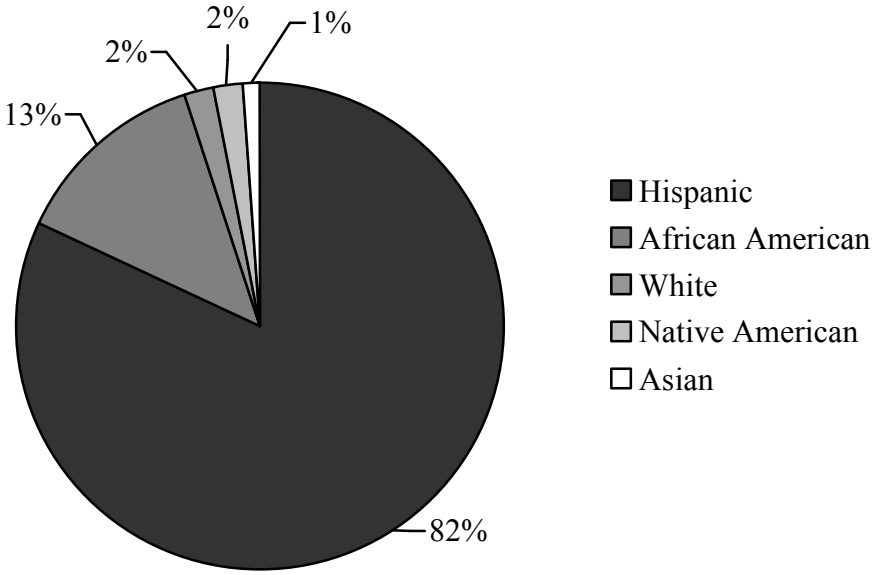



*Figure 4.* The demographic distribution of students attending School A.

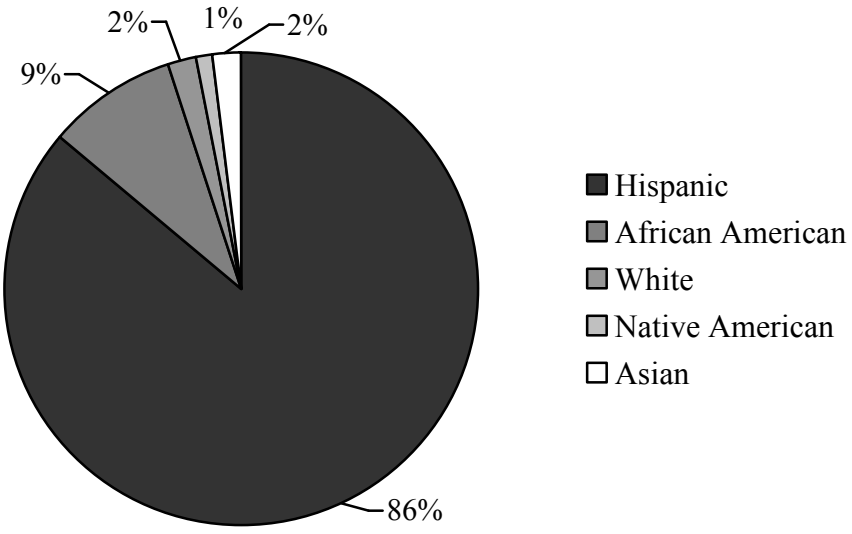



*Figure 5.* The demographic distribution of students attending School B.

## Interviews and Interviewees

According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), "In the first phase of the interview process, the researcher introduces him or her[self] and the topic and makes an avid effort to build the confidence of the interviewee and establish some trust" (p. 114). For this study, all formal documents, directions, and queries were available for the participants in both English and Spanish. The protocol for the interviews and the informed consent documents were translated to Spanish by a competently educated translator who spoke and wrote exceptionally well in both languages. A bilingual educator translated the interview questions to Spanish. The translators had no affiliation with either School A or B and had no association with the university or the dissertation research. The translator was selected based solely on bilingual fluency.

The participants were interviewed to determine which modes of school communication elicited parental involvement. I ensured that the recording equipment functioned well at all times. The interviews occurred in offices located on each campus. The offices were free from background noise and interruptions. Field notes were taken during each interview to strengthen the transcribed dialogue. These notes focused on verbal expression, body gestures, and visual cues. Once I completed the semi-structured interviews, the data were transcribed to a Microsoft Word document and then uploaded to the NVivo program for analysis.

This qualitative phenomenological study was small in nature. Boyd (2001) stated that data rich information can be obtained by utilizing a tiny sample size of participants. The sample was compiled of 12 female and 4 male parents and represented a variety of

ethnic groups. The participants were interviewed about which modes of effective communication elicited parental involvement in their child's school. I ensured that recording equipment functioned well at all times. Field annotations were taken throughout each interview to strengthen the transcribed dialogue. These notes focused on verbal expression, body gestures, and visual cues. The interviews took place throughout the month of February in 2014 (Table 1).

Table 1

*Schedule of Semi-Structured Interviews*

| Schools | Interview 1 | Interview 2 | Interview 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| School A | February 4 | February 11 | February 25 |
| School B | February 6 | February 13 | February 27 |

The interview session with each participant began with a formal greeting and introduction to develop a sense of ease. Before the interview session and audio-taping commenced, each participant was required to read, review, and sign the informed consent letter to ensure they understood the purpose of the study and felt comfortable with the impending interview process. Interviewees were asked questions that would support the data being collected. Questions focused on the parents' perception of the (a) current modes of communication used in their child(ren)'s school, (b) parental involvement measures encouraged and supported by the school, (c) ways the school can support families, (d) barriers to communication, and (e) the climate of the school organization and Parent Center.

The researcher detailed her academic credentials in order to establish the reliability of this study. Rubin and Rubin (2005) aptly stated that interviews should be devised around a balance of initial, follow-up, and probing questions. The primary questions utilized in the interviews tapped into the parents' overall life-experiences dealing with the schools and understandings of the interview queries. The responses did not always provide the requisite depth required for the study. Therefore, it was imperative to develop and use a set of primary questions with probing sub-questions and prompts that encouraged interviewees to discuss the various components of the study in detail. Rubin and Rubin (2005) said, "By listening for information, which addresses the research question, the researcher would be able to develop follow-up questions to provide information to solve the research problem" (p. 153). Additionally, "it was vital for the interviewer to use clear and concise wording to allow the interviewees the latitude necessary to present their own experiences yet ensure that those experiences articulated to the research topic" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 157).

The formulated questions focused on school communication and the effect it had on parental involvement. This was accomplished by consulting with teachers and school leaders at the schools to ensure the quality and clarity of the questions used for the interviews. Even respected researchers validate their work through the review of other professionals or reference confirmed experts to support their studies and subsequently derived conclusions. Qualitative analysis is a recursive and cyclical process, which contributes to the reliability and makes research conclusions valuable to the readers. In addition, to enhance accuracy of reporting, the interviews were recorded and quoted

precisely to ensure that the feelings and perceptions were documented without personal biases and extraneous opinions.

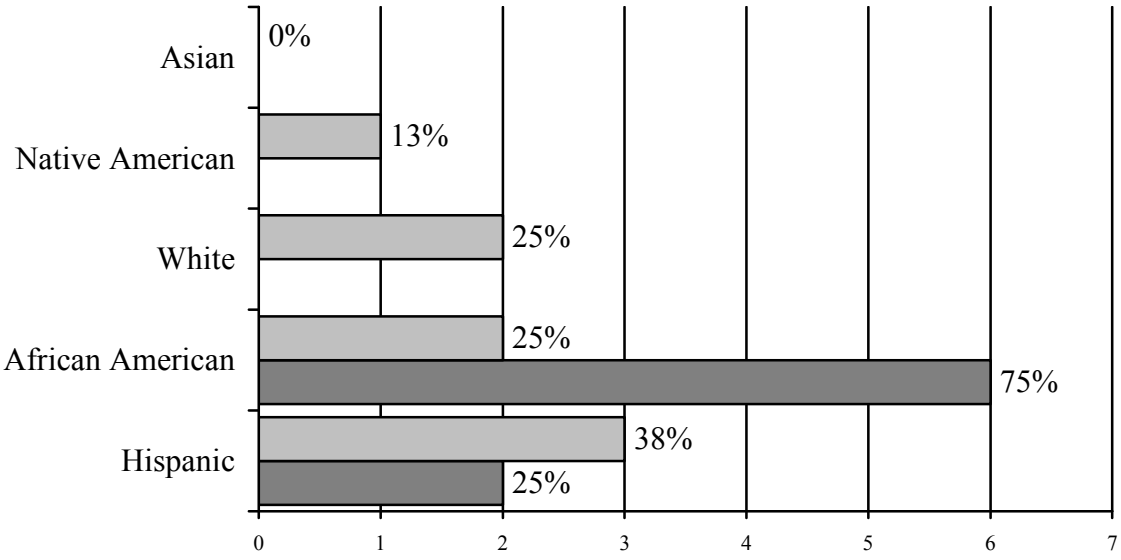
A phenomenological study assumes that each participant has his or her own idea about the phenomenon studied. What is important in this type of research is finding the common issues that all participants have as they live the phenomenon. These issues were examined for the connections or agreements that indicated a common essence or shared perspective of the phenomenon. Member checking and peer reviews resolved any important information that did not seem to connect. Additional interviews or interview questions could have been added to address any inconsistencies. Without a resolution, a complete description of the phenomenon would not have been possible. The unique or discrepant data is either truly not a part of the phenomenon or, when understood, adds to delineating the crux of the phenomenon.

Three, individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the 16 participants. The results of the interviews were used to structure the data. The interview questions are included in Appendices E, F, G (English) and H, I, J (Spanish). The interviews were conducted during the winter of 2014.

The open-ended questions offered an opportunity for parents to provide information about their role in their children's education. After receiving permission from the schools' principals, invitations were mailed to each family (620 parents). From this, 75 parents responded and agreed to participate in the study. A purposeful sampling method was utilized to obtain a sample of 16 respondents for the interview process. The confidentiality of the study and the anonymity of the participants was emphasized. The

completed interviews were numbered P1–P16 allowing the researcher to differentiate between individual interviewees.

As documented in Figure 6, the compiled data corresponding to the parent population revealed that of the 16 parents, the sample was comprised of predominantly females. Specifically, there were 12 females (75%) and four males (25%). The parents' ethnicity/race was characterized as Hispanic, African American, White, Native American, or Asian. The distribution of ethnicities for the semi-structured interviews was: five Hispanics (31%), eight African Americans (50%), two Caucasians (13%), and one Native American (6%). Figure 6 displays the ethnic demographic distribution of the participants.




| | Hispanic | African American | White | Native American | Asian |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Male | 2 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

*Figure 6.* The demographic data from parent participants.

Three 20-to 30-minute, individual interviews were conducted face-to-face at the designated schools. The interviews were scheduled to accommodate the participants' schedules. During the interviews, the researcher audio-taped the sessions, took informal notes, and asked probing questions. Hatch (2002) asserted, "Using prompts can be a useful tool for encouraging participants to go more deeply and give specific examples" (pp. 138-139). As suggested by Hatch, I was able to keep the conversation focused on the topic by using prompts and probes.

Throughout the interviews, I listened keenly to each participant and thanked them for making the time to participate in the study. Utilizing multiple sources to obtain data on a research topic ensures the reliability of the data and reported findings. Hatch (2002) affirmed, "qualitative researchers use interviews to uncover the meaning structures that participants utilize to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds" (p. 91). Hatch asserted that member checking enables researchers to produce a study that is reliable. Participants were provided transcripts of the interviews for verification, to guarantee the accuracy and reliability of the analyses. The NVivo software was used to assist finding common themes within the interview data.

## Data Processing and Analysis

This study used Epstein's (2005) six types of involvement framework to assess the perceptions of parents within a parental involvement program. Field notes were taken during each interview to capture the researcher‘s initial reactions, perceptions of the participants and gestures not reflected by the verbal responses of the participants. The transcripts for each question were reviewed and reduced to codes to assist the researcher

in determining categories (Bhattacharya, 2007). The process of coding data, categorizing, and documenting emerging common themes was ongoing during data analysis for each interview.

The interview process allowed for development of an insightful understanding of the responses. After data collection, each of the sixteen participants' responses were typed word for word and saved in a word document. After each interview session, the participants were given the opportunity to review and crosscheck their responses. Interviews were recorded in order to allow the researcher to write down observations of what could not be captured during the interview (Herbert & Beardsley, 2002). The responses from the interviews were transformed verbatim into a sequence of events form once the data were collected, analyzed, and confirmed. The interviews occurred in an office located on each campus, and the venue was free from background noise and interruptions. Three, 20 to 30 minute, individual, face-to-face interviews were conducted on the selected dates, and recorded with a digital recorder.

Once the semi-structured interviews were completed, all the interview data were transcribed and uploaded as a Microsoft Word document to the NVivo program. The data collected from the interview session with the participants were placed in a secured, locked storage cabinet. The files and the recordings will be destroyed within the required timeline after the conclusion of the study.

The preliminary focus of the qualitative analysis was to report findings and results provided by the individual participants as data sources. The data collection was conducted during three separate individual semi-structured interviews. The insights and

experiences of the 16 parents (i.e., 8 from School A; 8 from School B) documented their perceptions of (a) effective school communication and (b) strategies that are or should be in place to increase parental involvement. The multi-session data collection process was conducted to ensure the parents were given sufficient opportunity to communicate their lived experiences regarding the modes or methods of school communication that best elicited their involvement.

According to Creswell (2007), the process that enables participants to communicate and describe the meaning of the phenomenon, based on their personal experiences, is revealed through expressive, receptive, and nonverbal communications. The data analysis process started once the data collection was completed. Each participant was given an alphanumeric code to indicate the individual and interview session (e.g., P1-8A/B_ 2.4.14). This ensured anonymity, while enabling the researcher to keep track of the data source. The letter, P, stood for parent, the numbers 1 through 8 indicated the individual interviewee, the letters A or B indicated the school site; the latter part stood for the month, date and year when the interview was conducted. The alphanumeric codes were changed to P1-16 to indicate the individual interviewee within the data report.

Triangulation was utilized to manage potential bias in the interpretation of data. Triangulation included (a) thematic data from the literature review and archived district resources, (b) coded data from the semi-structured interviews describing the parents' lived experiences, (c) annotated data from the researcher's observations, (d) feedback from member checking, and (d) secondary data sources provided by the parents as

examples of communication between school and home. The researcher audiotaped all interviews, with the consent of interviewees (Arkley & Knight, 1999; Bailey, 1996). The researcher recorded each set of interviews on a digital recorder and labeled each recording with the specified interview dates and alphanumeric code. Shortly after each interview session, the researcher carefully listened to the recordings and made additional notations. The researcher transcribed key words and statements in order to enable the participants' insights to be heard.

The phenomenological data analysis involved open, axial, and selective coding, which involves categorizing and making sense of the essential meanings of the phenomenon. According to Saldana (2009), the preliminary coding process "is appropriate for practically all qualitative studies, but particularly for novice qualitative researchers learning how to code data, ethnographies, and studies with a wide variety of data forms" (p.81). Kleiman (2004) provided an overview of the methods used for qualitative research analysis. The structure Kleiman described was based on the extraction of significant meanings that were present in the participants' lived experiences, identifiable in their reported perceptions, and held consistent through the analytic examination. Subsequent and ongoing comparative processes confirm or refute these meanings as common to the group of participants as representative of their shared experience of the phenomenon studied (Kleiman, 2004).

The key finding of any descriptive phenomenological study is the building of experiences. I used a constant comparative process to extract this understanding and identify the participants' answers regarding their experiences. I read and reviewed each

interview transcript in its entirety, to develop my appreciation for the complete picture presented by each respondent. Next, I reread each interview transcript a second time, to begin to separate the data into meaningful pieces. I sorted the interview transcripts in two ways; based on respondent and based on interview number (1-3) and question (RQ1-5). During the initial coding process, each participant's responses were analyzed line-by-lined to identify terms or phrases that were repeated. Each of these instances was counted. Use of NVivo facilitated this word count analysis. Next, also using NVivo, I reviewed the list of repeated words to group and label them based on similar or related meanings. These were named or coded based on the category of meaning or the category of topic addressed. I began to synthesize the interview parts that had similarities; this enabled me to begin to make sense of the reported perceptions. This exposed related meaningful sections of the transcripts for further processing and analysis. The themes that emerged were coded to show the connections between the reported perceptions and the questions asked. This enabled me to begin to document the shared perceptions regarding the communications and identify answers for each research question. Contemplating the data in this manner enabled me to elaborate on the findings by connecting the themes with evidence from the secondary data sources, field notes, or literature reviewed. During the second and third interviews, the thematic findings and any additional questions from the prior interview(s) were brought back to the interviewees for verification or clarification. Next, I revisited the raw data transcripts to elicit examples and secure justifiable explanations of the documented findings. This enabled me to substantiate the accuracy of the findings. With this substantiation, I

proceeded to extract the constructs for professional discourse, draw research conclusions, and document implications for future practice and further study. Summarily, the significant implications and the overall structure of the findings were documented in narrative and graphic formats for presentation herein as well as to the district and university representatives.

Diverse views surfaced during the investigation of the data. Specifically, there were differences in opinion regarding possible (a) barriers for parents' involvement, (b) reasons for not participating, and (c) communication strategies believed to increase parental involvement. During the interview process, the participants' responses were both negative and positive, but always informative. At times, parents noted that some of the questions were redundant or similar to a high degree. It was explained that this might be to verify responses or gain details for clarification; however, the parents were also reminded that they had the option to skip these questions if they had nothing further to add.

The ensuing sections of this chapter summarize the responses from the three interviews regarding each of the guiding research questions and its sub-questions. All of the respondents' answers were considered together. There was no distinction made between respondents from School A or School B.

## Responses to Interview Questions

### Interview 1 Questions and Responses

**Question 1: Tell me about your involvement at A/B School.** The participants' responses to this question revealed the activities parents were most likely to participate.

Forty-eight percent of the parents participated primarily in parent-teacher conferences and Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings. This implied that parent-teacher conferences were a constructive means of getting parents involved in their child's education. Likewise, PTO meetings were necessary to keep parents informed and involved in the educational process as well as other school activities and events. Six percent (one parent) indicated limited or no participation in the conferences or PTO meetings. Time was a significant constraint as the parents had to work in order to provide for their families. In cases where there was little or no parental involvement, perhaps other forms of communication (e.g., phone or computer-based conferences) should be considered as a viable alternative.

Schools and parents are facing continuously increasing expectations, economic pressures, and time constraints. Schools must forge effective partnerships with parents, as they are crucial to meet the needs of the students. Epstein (1995) depicted communicating with parents as one of the six components of parent involvement practices fundamental for forging a robust working partnership between parent and teacher. Berger (1991), stated communication includes one-way or two-way interactions. Communication initially begins when the teacher and the parent first dialogue about forging a partnership to serve the child. There are various modes of communication that strengthen this partnership including, but not limited to, academic assemblies, school events, student progress reported through varied sources. Examples of these modes of communication include letters, fliers, emails; episodic newsletters or announcement memos; and progress reports or report cards. Of all of the methods of communication,

face-to-face dialogue between teacher and parent remains the most beneficial. The direct conversations that occur during home visits, scheduled parent-teacher conferences, open house, book fairs, and community events, or even phone calls, are preferred. Parents must be made aware that the schools have an open door policy. Similarly, the schools must welcome all parental interactions, with the condition that the instructional program will not be interrupted.

**Question 2: How many times a month do you attend school events/check on your child's academic progress?** The majority of the parents attended a school event only once a month. These school events did not reflect their interest or concern. Out of the 16 parents who were interviewed, 12 (75%) worked and were the sole providers for their families. Fatigue and child care duties also played a role in low turnout. The parents admitted that after a full day of work they were often too tired to attend any school function. The primary reason for parents not attending school events involved conflicts with their work schedule. The second and third reasons preventing parents from volunteering or attending school events were child care issues and lack of awareness of school activities, respectively. The parents expressed sincere concern about their child's education. However, financially supporting their families was a greater priority.

Only 2 of the 16 parents (13%) interviewed attended school events during the year and monitored their child's academic progress regularly. One parent (6%) was able to scrutinize her child's academic progress; this parent was a teacher at the school her child attended. The other parent (6%) did not work, and expressed that her children's education was a major focus for her, so she made it a point to become involved in the

school on a daily basis. P5B stated, "the teachers and administration did not necessarily enjoy my every day presence; but, they did show me respect."

**Question 3: Does A/B School provide clear information about opportunities for you to become involved?** The overall consensus in response to this question was negative. The parents' responses indicated that the schools were not effectively disseminating information about the opportunities for parents to become involved. Fifteen of the sixteen parents (94%) interviewed received flyers concerning parental involvement opportunities. However, two parents specifically stated "the flyers were not sent home consistently" and the information contained in the flyers were "not clear about dates and times of the activities" (P2B, P4B). During the interview process, parents showed a level of frustration that was evident in their body language, tone of voice, and physical mannerisms or gestures when discussing involvement opportunities.

Clearly, the schools need to do a more competent job of informing parents about involvement opportunities. P3A (6%), who responded favorably, to this question was, in fact, a teacher at the school. She posed a thought-provoking question: "If parents are sincerely interested in their child's education, is it necessary to continually provide information about involvement opportunities?" She suggested, "parents should ask about involvement opportunities." Implied within her comments was the assertion that communication is a two-way street and parents must take the initiative to be involved in their child's education.

**Question 4: In what ways are parents involved at A/B School?** The answers to the question regarding being informed about involvement opportunities were directly

relevant to the responses to this query. The parents described the ways they were involved. Seven (44%) of the sixteen parents indicated that they did not see any parental involvement. Five (31%) of the sixteen parents were involved in parent/teacher conferences and nothing else. Only four (25%) of the sixteen parents indicated that they were involved in other school activities and events.

Working from the premise that it takes the parents at home and teachers at school working together for children to be successful, this lack of specific involvement from the majority of the parents represented is truly a serious concern that must be addressed. Without question, it is fundamentally accepted that parental involvement is a necessary component for high performing schools and bolstering students' achievement. Several parents recommended that, at parent/teacher conferences and PTO meetings, this belief should be addressed so solutions can be identified and implemented.

**Question 5: How are the parents' skills, talents, and interest utilized at A/B School?** Many of the parents were hesitant to answer this question because they, initially, viewed it as an infringement of their privacy. Once they understood the reasoning behind this question they were quite opinionated with their answers. Twelve (75%) of the parents had various positive responses; but, their responses did not truly answer the question. Two parents (12%; P3A, P4A) described their involvement in fundraisers. P8A (6%) was involved in craft-type activities. Another parent attended PTO meetings. Two parents (13%; P6A. P8B) periodically helped the office staff with clerical duties (e.g., making copies of flyers and notices, stapling information packets). The other parents (25%) offered negative comments regarding surveys being sent out but

not followed-up by a staff member. The lack of follow-through was offered as justification for not being involved.

**Question 6: How does A/B School make volunteer opportunities known to the community?** The parents' responses were repetitive of already addressed topics. Flyers, emails, and newsletters were the top three responses. Seven (44%) of the sixteen parents indicated that emails were the way the schools communicated or informed them about volunteer opportunities and events. Five parents (31%) received flyers and newsletters. Three parents (19%) indicated only flyers informed them.

Four parents (25%) responded negatively. Overall, they asserted there was little or no follow through. Further, they believed it was the duty of the schools to keep parents informed about volunteer opportunities. P1A replied, "Do they do that? I do not recall." She was quite serious; she indicated that, at some point, she would call or meet with school administration to address this concern.

**Interview 2 Questions and Responses**

**Question 1: How does A/B School communicate with you?** All the parents interviewed had very definitive and quick replies to this question. Nine of the sixteen parents (56%) replied that they received flyers or emails, some parents indicated receiving both. Seven parents (44%) indicated that they received communication by phone. Two parents specified that the school communicated with them through progress reports.

**Question 2: How often do you receive communication from A/B School?** Question 2 regarding the frequency in which parents receive communication from the

school were answered in a variety of ways. Six parents indicated that they received some form of communication from the school once or twice a month. There were no other comments or reactions to the question. They only answered the question in a clear, concise manner. P1A only heard from the school when the teacher wanted something or needed something from the parent. P2A's response was "two times a year." The answer was given with some exasperation and frustration, but, she felt no responsibility to contact the school or offer any other possible solutions. P5A answered the question with a question. P5A asked, "Is there any communication at all from the school?" Again, like the other parents she made no contact on her own to express her concern about the lack of communication. These responses are indicative of the need for better communication with the parents.

**Question 3: How often does your child's teacher communicate with you?** When assessing the responses regarding the frequency teachers communicated with parents, it was clear that regular and consistent communication practices were not implemented at their school. The responses varied from "once or twice a week" to "not at all." Four parents (P1A, P3B, P5B, P7A) specifically stated that they only heard from teachers when their child was in trouble or something bad had occurred. Clearly, frequency of communication is an area that requires improvements. All of the parents, regardless of their answers, expressed that they would appreciate more communication from the teacher about the academic and behavioral development of their children.

**Question 4: What methods of communication does your child's teacher use to communicate with you?** These responses revealed that teachers use numerous methods

to converse with parents. Twelve (75%) of the sixteen parents indicated that teachers utilize phone calls and emails. Three parents (19%) specified that the teachers used face-to-face communication. One parent (6%) stated she received progress reports and letters as well as face-to-face communication with the teacher.

**Question 5: Does A/B School have a parent-center?** The responses to the question revealed that neither school has a parent-center. Parents indicated that it would be beneficial to have a parent-center on campus because their questions and concerns could be readily addressed. Parents would appreciate direction and guidance to help their child's academic progress. A parent-center would provide an opportunity for interaction with staff. Parents suggested that having a parent-center on campus would make it more likely that they would volunteer and participate in school programs.

**Question 6: How often do you participate in the parent resource center?** Without a parent center, all the participants indicated that they did not participate. P5A appeared to be surprised by the question and asked, "Does the school have a parent-center? … I never knew about visiting no parent center?" As previously noted, the parents did indicate that they would probably volunteer to help and might be able to get involved with other activities, if there were something like this on campus.

Three questions were skipped since they could not receive communication from the parent center. Likewise, they could not address the nature or frequency of communications from a non-existent parent center. It is suggested that follow-up or alternative questions might include, "If your child's school had a parent-center in what ways might you become involved?"

**Question 9: Tell me about a time when you were contacted by A/B School.** Six parents (38%) indicated that they were contacted by the school when their child was fighting, demonstrating gross disrespect to the teacher, or not following school policies. Three parents (19%) revealed they received communication from the school when their child had issues with illness and health. Five parents (31%) said they were contacted by the school for upcoming awards assemblies and community events. P5A stated, "This is a good question. I guess my child has not been bad enough, so I guess that is why I have never received a call from the school." P1B said the communication coming from administration is "often depressing."

**Question 10: Tell me about a time you contacted A/B School.** Six participants (38%) revealed that they contacted the school in regard to their child being absent. Three parents (19%) contacted the school about upcoming school events. These events included award assemblies, parent-teacher conferences, and parent night. Six parents (38%) contacted the school for assorted reasons. The examples included (a) obtaining clarification of their child's assignment, (b) concerns about their child's declining academic performance, (c) general concern over notification of a school lockdown, and (d) bullying issues. P7A has never contacted the school.

**Interview 3 Questions and Responses**

**Question 1: Which types of school communication are most effective in getting you involved at A/B School? Why?** Six parents (P2B, P3B, P4B, P6B, P7B, P8B) (38%) stated emails had a significant influence upon getting them involved at school. Three parents (19%) said they preferred receiving information by way of flyers.

One parent (6%) articulated that she favored face-to-face communication with staff members as opposed to phone calls and emails. The researcher asked her why she preferred this form of communication. She responded, "Extensive communication and questions cannot be addressed by the internet." Five parents (31%) indicated a preference for a combination of various communication types such as phone calls, emails, and flyers. Another parent (6%) revealed that she preferred receiving memos and notes regularly. Only the one parent elaborated about her preferred form of communication.

**Question 2: Which types of school communication are least effective in getting you involved at A/B School? Why?** Two parents (13%) revealed that phone calls were the least effective getting them involved at school. The researcher asked why. One parent explained "by the time I get home from work returning a call to a teacher or administration is not worth it because they are not there." P8B indicated that the Tele-Messenger System (TMS) is an automated telephone dialing operation that can be programmed to dial the homes of students to relay important school-related information to parents. It can be set to redial as necessary. P8B explained, "This method of communication is not preferable to more direct ones, but is seen as highly effective and efficient for the sole purpose of contacting hard-to-reach parents, in particular."

Two parents (13%; P3A, P2B) (13%) verbalized that letters/emails are the least effective mode of communication to get them involve. Several parents indicated that school flyers often do not reach home because the notices are buried in the child's backpack and not discovered in a timely manner. Emails from school are not effective because at least these two parents have no Internet services.

P3A (6%) said another related problem is the prevalence of illiteracy, in either language, in homes of this community. In such cases, reliance of students to deliver and read these materials to parents is paramount. “Some do, and some do not” the parent said. Two parents (13%) indicated that not hearing from the school prevents them from wanting to be involved, and five parents (31%) sited that inaccurate information (dates and times) on flyers prevented their involvement. Two parents (13%) said that no communication would cause them not to participate; one parent (6%) shared that negative communication from the teacher and administration would cause them not to be an active participant.

**Question 3: Tell me about a time when you were really involved in a school event.** Seven parents (44%) divulged that they attended awards assemblies at their child’s school. Three parents (19%) said plays would encourage their participation. They did not indicate any other participation in school events. One parent (6%; P3A) said, “I attend all sports activities.” Three parents (19%) said they participated in fundraisers and tutorials. One parent (6%; P3A) asked, “You want me to make up an answer to that question?” and then retorted, “NO!” Finally, one parent countered with an emphatic “NO!” and refused to engage in any further discussion.

**Question 4: How much advance notice do you receive prior to a school event?** Nine parents (56%) did not directly answer the question. They indicated one week’s notice prior to the event would be advantageous. Two parents (13%) said no advanced notice was necessary for them to attend a school event. Two other parents (13%) expressed they would appreciate a two-week notification prior to a school event. One

parent (6%) indicated she would welcome a three day advanced notification. Another parent (6%) requested a month's notification prior to a school event.

**Question 5: Does A/B School provide adequate notice of events for you to attend?** Ten parents (63%; P1A, P2A, P5A, P7A, P1B, P3B, P4B, P6B, P7B, P8B) stated the schools do not provide sufficient notice of events for them to attend. P3A and P4A (13%) said that the schools do provide adequate notice. Four parents (25%) revealed that sometimes the schools provide sufficient notification. Two-thirds of the participants felt that they did not receive adequate notice of school events to enable them to attend.

**Question 6: How much prior notice of the event would you like?** Eight parents (50%) shared that they would like one week advanced notice in order to plan to attend scheduled school events. Two parents (13%) indicated that they would like a two week advanced notice in order to align their work calendar with upcoming school events. One parent (6%; P4A) stated that three weeks would be sufficient prior notice. P1B and P2B (13%) indicated that they would prefer a month's advanced notice. Two parents revealed that they would like one to two week advanced notice in order to plan for school activities. P3A indicated three days advanced notice would be sufficient.

**Question 7: If you had adequate prior notice of a school event, would you be more apt to attend?** All (100%) of the parents indicated adequate prior notice would enable them to attend school events.

**Question 8: Which types of school communication encourage you to participate?** Nine parents (56%) indicated that emails and letters from the school encouraged them to participate. Four parents (25%) specified that frequent calls and

flyers from the school encouraged their support. One parent (6%) revealed that face-to-face communication with the school staff encouraged her support. Two parents (13%) said both phone calls and newsletters from the school garnered their participation.

**Question 9: Which types of communication discourage you from participating?** Four parents (25%; P6A, P6B, P7B, P8B) said that the phone calls from the school discouraged them from participating in school events. The messages were often not retrieved in a timely manner. Two parents (13%; P1B, P5B) indicated that the negativity and verbal attacks received from the teacher hindered their participation in school events. P3A (6%) revealed that no form of school communication would ever prevent him from participating in school events. P4B said, "Incorrect information on school communication (e.g., dates and times) would cause her not to be a receptive participant." Letters, flyers, and emails were the initial reasons P2A, P8A, P3B (19%) did not get involved in school activities. The other communications that interfered with participation included problems with the tele-messaging system (e.g., messages were received too late) and problems with relayed messages by word of mouth (e.g., incomplete information).

**Question 10: When do you receive school communication?** Six parents (38%) indicated that they received school communication once a month. Two parents (13%) said they obtained communication twice a week. Four parents (25%) said they received communication once a week. One parent (6%) stated that she received communication at the beginning of the school year but failed to receive further communiqués for the rest of the school year. Another parent (6%) said she received school communication the day

before the event. A different parent (6%) said that he received communication two to three times a year. Finally, one parent (6%) stated that she received school communication in the middle of each week.

**Question 11: What would be the most convenient days/times for you to receive school communication?** Seven parents (44%; P2A, P8A, P1B, P4B, P6B, P7B, P8B) indicated the most convenient days and times for them to receive school communication was on Friday because it was the end of the school week, and they had time to assimilate the information over the weekend. Three parents (19%; P4A, P7A, P2B) said, "Wednesday would be an appropriate day to receive school information because that was their scheduled "off day from work." Two parents (13%) revealed "Monday would be a beneficial day to receive school communication because they would have ample time to plan for up-coming school events." Two parents (13%; P3A, P5B) indicated that a school communication received on Friday was never convenient because they were focused on the upcoming weekend's events and paid little attention to school activities. Two parents (13%) stated "that they were receptive to receiving school communication at any time."

## Analysis and Discussion of Coded Themes from the Interviews

The information gathered through interviewing was organized into meaningful units of analysis. Several themes emerged during the preliminary evaluation of the transcripts. Subsequent in-depth reviews of the data revealed themes that were not previously detected. The emergent subthemes provided an understanding of which methods of school communication, as perceived by parents, elicited active involvement.

Academic performance and race or ethnicity, were not a source of inconsistencies in the reported perceptions.

Interviewing was the primary, qualitative data collection procedure used by the researcher. Using the interviews meant that the findings elicited to answer the research questions, draw conclusions, and consider implications, all had to come directly from the interviews. To ensure the answers gathered from the interviews were aligned with the research questions, NVivo software was used to code all the responses collected from the interviews. Five major themes emerged from the coding process. The data addressed the parents' perceptions of:

1. Existing school communications used to elicit parental involvement,
2. Effectiveness of existing school communication modules,
3. Relevance of regular and timely communication for connecting with parents,
4. Parents' preferred form and approach to communication, and
5. Making the parent-center more effective/efficient.

Categorization of interviewee responses generated topics for each main theme. For four of the five themes, three subthemes emerged. Theme 5, due to the absence of a parent center, was independent. A total of 13 nodes were analyzed and discussed in relation to the research questions. Figure 7 displays the theme patterns that emerged within the analyzed findings from the interviews and discussions. The dialog about each theme was completed with the support of existing literature to ensure that the analysis would be empirical, evidence-based, and reliable.

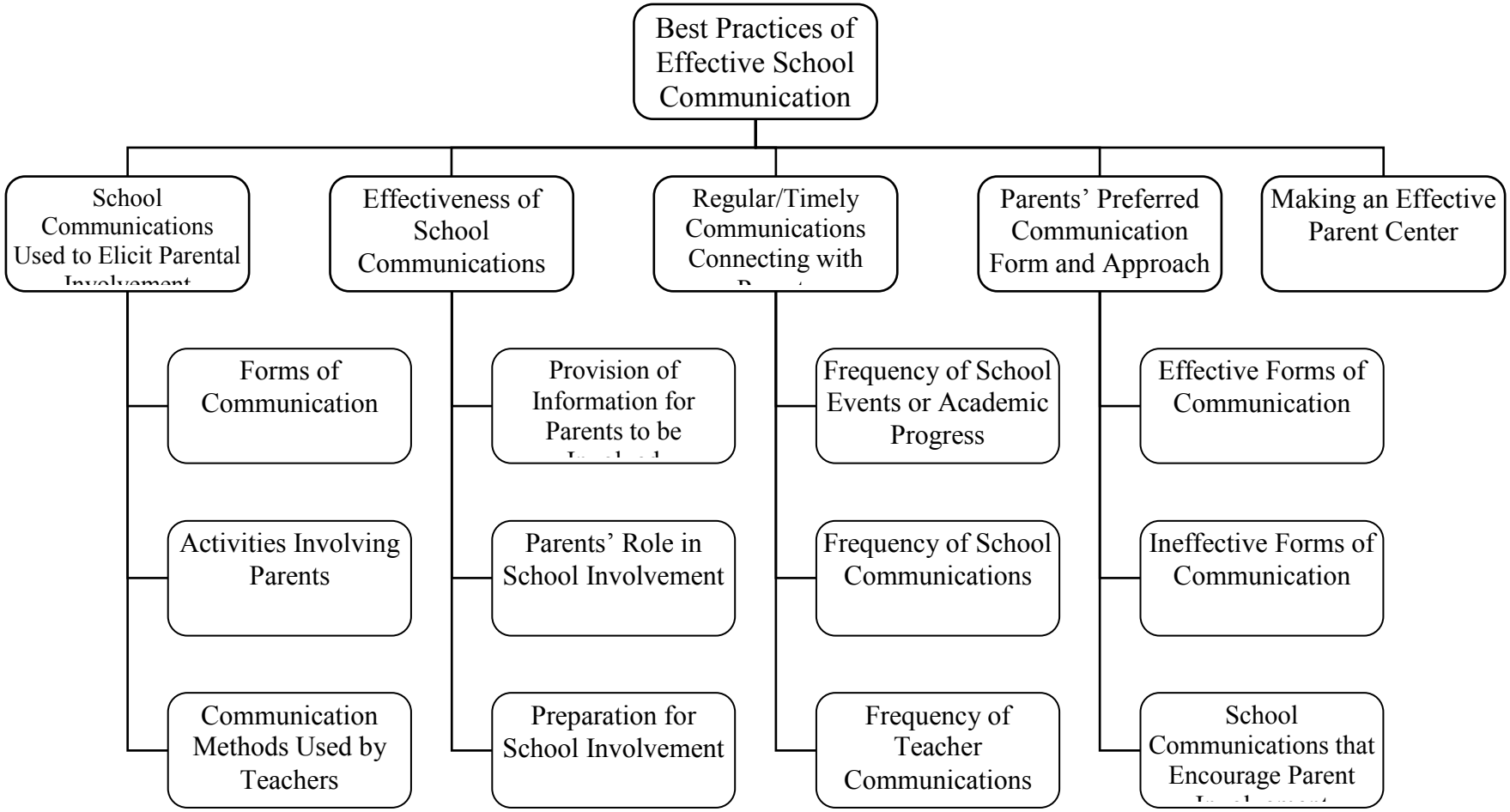



*Figure 7.* The best practices of effective school communication.

**Theme 1: Existing School Communications Used to Elicit Parental Involvement**

The first theme identified by the NVivo software was existing school communication used to elicit parental involvement. The theme's relevance was to identify the participants' perceptions of various communication tools and mechanisms used by the schools and compare them to their acceptability within the literature from prior research. Figure 8 displays the three subthemes that emerged when asking about the school communications currently utilized to elicit parental involvement.

**Forms of communication with parents.** The interview responses (Interview 2 Question 1) when parents were asked about the nature of their involvement at the school their child attends are displayed in Figure 8. The graph displays the various modes of communication the parents reported were utilized by the schools. The parents also reported the effect of each communication approach upon parental involvement.

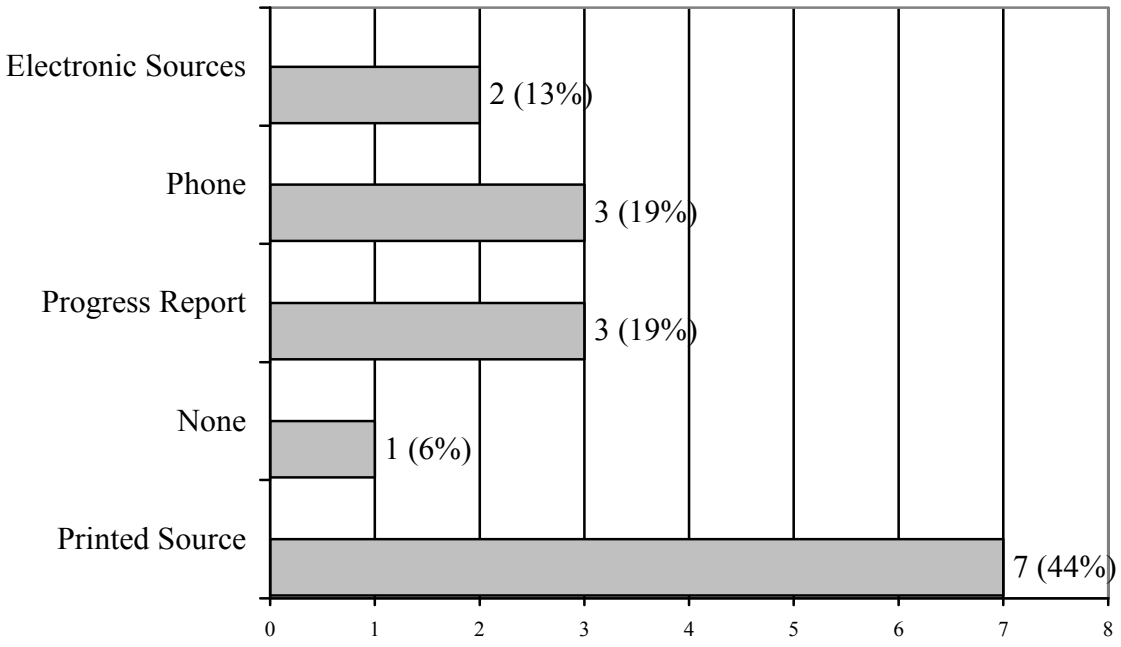



*Figure 8.* The modes of communication Schools A and B used.

The graphed data indicated that the schools utilized four modes of communication that the parents recognized. The schools' use of several communication approaches confirms the use of best practices as identified in the literature of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995). This research team outlined the need for schools to use an array of communication methods. Further, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler suggest schools must strive to individualize their modes of communication to meet the needs of individual parents. Effective communication begins with a commonality; the parents must understand it. The regularity and multiplicity of communication between home and school and user-friendliness of the communication method can play a crucial role in parents' decisions to become involved in their children's education. The findings showed a deviation from the popularity of electronic sources of communication as emphasized by

Jesse (1998). With the surge of electronic sources of communication such as emails, school blogs, and other social media networking platforms, technology has become the most preferred mode of communication. Still, schools utilize several written forms of communication, delivered by students, U.S. Post, or other distribution methods, to communicate with parents. As evidenced by the research, this mode of communication is not always effective for eliciting parental participation. Unlike the more direct electronic sources, printed communiques may be misplaced by students or simply not delivered in a timely manner. As an educator, I have observed students intentionally and unintentionally forget or discard memos and more pertinent deliveries intended for the parents.

**Activities involving parents.** From Interview 1 Question 1, the focus shifted to the typical school activities the interviewees agreed enticed them to become involved at school. The rationale for this question was based on Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) identification of the formal educational system as the shared responsibility of parents and teachers. To provide the networked foundation for learning, regular and reliable communications between teachers and parents is essential. It is imperative that there be a continual flow of communication from the school to the parents informing them of involvement opportunities. Research has consistently confirmed that parental involvement is vital for the success of the child's education (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Melaville et al., 2006; Walker, Shenker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010). The school establishes a bond with students and parents; this becomes the cornerstone of effective two-way communication.

The interview responses indicated that the parents agreed the most effective school effort to communicate that brought them to the schools, was parent-teacher conferences. Most of the parents interviewed indicated that they wanted more frequent communication, directly with their child's teacher. The respondents reported a deep desire to keep abreast of their child's academic progress. Other activities that engaged the parents, included educational assemblies, Open House, music recitals, speech contests, talent shows, and fundraisers. The parents were more apt to attend school functions when their child was directly involved.

**Communication method used directly by teachers.** The data from Interview 2 Question 4 revealed that most communication the teacher had with the parent was directed by policy, or mandated by the school. The contacts were not initiated by the individual, educational staff member. Parents indicated that occasionally, they reached out to the teacher during instructional time, because this accommodated their personal schedule.

Direct teacher to parent communication is required. This direct form of communication it is used to ensure that parents are updated on their child's academic progress. Jesse (1998) explained that this updated notifies the parents before issues become unresolvable or must be forwarded to higher authorities at the schools. Typically, these reports address academic progress as well as behavioral issues (Jesse, 1998). Together, the teacher and parents might develop immediate and direct solutions or mediations, which prevent the issues from escalating.

The researcher asked the parents how the teachers communicated with them directly. Figure 9 summarizes the reported modes of communication from the teacher:

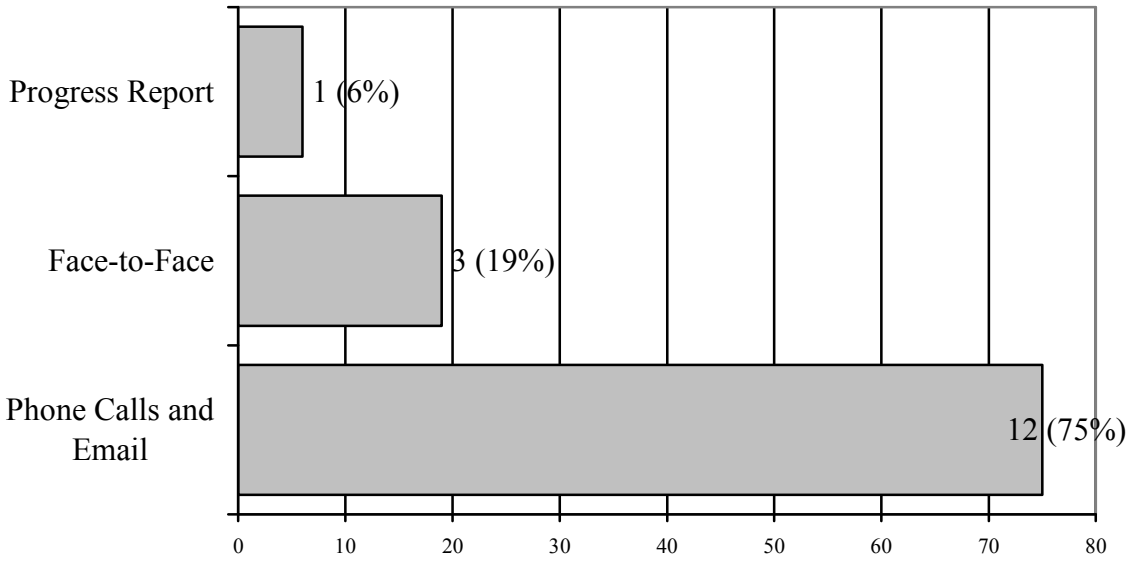



*Figure 9.* The teacher communication modes utilized in Schools A and B.

Seventy-five percent of teachers used phone calls and emails to communicate with parents. Only 19% used face-to-face communication and only 6% indicated use of progress reports. Implied by the findings, more effective means of school communication must be established. The parents at both schools preferred frequent face-to-face contact with their child's teacher. This form of communication is correspondent based, allowing parents to respond easily to the teachers' concerns and expectations.

**Theme 2: Effectiveness of Existing School Communication Modules**

The participants were asked to convey their level of satisfaction with school communication. To obtain an unbiased and internally consistent form of response, the researcher used different subthemes derived from various questions in the interview. This theme was aligned with the second research question, "How effective are current school

communications in eliciting parental involvement?" The themes were analyzed and summarized.

**Provision of clear information about opportunities for parents to be involved.** Jung-Sook and Bowen (2006) indicated that the school communication process must be one that is cyclical, regulation, and current. It is vital for the schools to make an avid effort to create a timely awareness of involvement opportunities among parents. The majority of parents would like to be included in their child's education. However, research shows that it is more likely to happen " if teachers, administrators, and counselors showed them how to help their children increase reading and math scores, improve attendance, and meet other important goals" (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004, p. 10). Until parents are made aware of school involvement opportunities, there will be no increase in their participation. There is not an adequate amount of communication between parents and teachers (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2009).

Applying this understanding, Interview 1 Question 3 was used to document the parents' perceptions regarding the provision of clear communication concerning involvement opportunities. Summarily, the parents reported dissatisfaction with the communications received and the specific information about opportunities to become involved with their child's education...

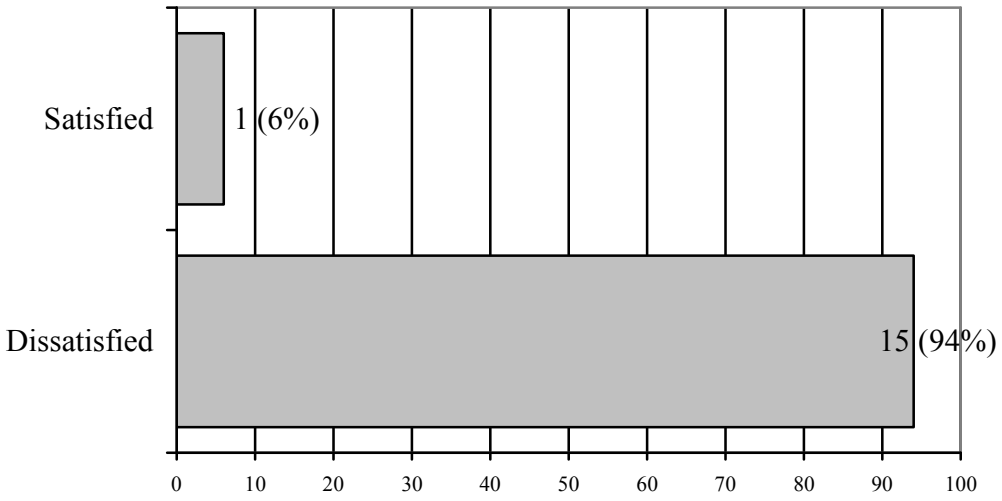



*Figure 10.* Opportunities for involvement Schools A and B offered to parents.

Figure 10 indicates that the majority of the parents expressed dissatisfaction with the method the schools used to make parents aware of opportunities to become involved. Parents revealed that the overreliance on flyers was no longer proving to be effective. The parents reported that these printed handouts were inconsistent and rarely arrived in the home on time. To be considered reliable, the parents indicated that the timeliness of the information was as important as the frequency and accuracy of details provided. The implication of findings indicate that parents may have many contributions to play a part as change agents in the formal educational process; they are prevented from doing so because the approaches incorporated by the schools are not suitable in making the parents identify their opportunities for involvement. Byrd (2003) asserted

> Parental involvement allows parents and teachers to reinforce skills and provide an environment that has consistent learning expectations and standards. Parents also become more knowledgeable about their child's school, the school's policies,

> and the school staff. Most importantly, parent involvement provides an opportunity for parents and children to spend time together. During that time, a parent can communicate a high value for education and the importance of effort in academic achievement (p. 1).

**Parents' role played in school involvement.** The opportunities presented to the parents to become involved was not impressive. The interview focus shifted to explore whether the parents had a chance to become involved in a manner they deemed satisfying. This perspective acknowledged that it is one thing to become involved and another thing to actually feel like they are being involved in an effective or productive way. As explained by Katyal and Evers (2007), effective school involvement would ensure that the parents could become a productive part of the educational process. Katyal and Evers explained that in circumstances where there are no effective roles given to the parent, their involvement becomes a formality.

Interview 2 Question 9 and Interview 3 Question 3 were used to examine parents' perceptions of the role they have in school involvement. The data from these two interview questions revealed five major roles that were engaged by the parents. The vast majority of the parents' responses addressed engagement with negative circumstances. Specifically, 38% ($n$=6) indicated that their roles had to do with disciplinary issues, such as when their children were engaged in fighting, breaking school rules, or demonstrating gross disrespect. This was aligned with the findings of prior research from Epstein (2001) who discovered that teachers and parents communicate more about problem children who demonstrate behavioral concerns. The next role reported by 31% ($n$=5) of

the participants revealed that they were involved with awards assemblies and community events, where they had to attend as observers, not as partakers. Nineteen percent of the participants (*n*=3) were involved due to child illness issues, where they had to come in because their children were sick. Six percent (*n*=1) spoke about cruel acts engaged by their children and other depressing circumstances.

From this information, the data seems to indicate that educators are most concerned about disciplinary issues or more apt to reach out for parental support associated with discipline. It must be examined whether misbehavior is deemed more important than improving academic performance. Alternatively, it must also be considered whether the parental role is more evident associated with disciplinary concerns. As much as discipline is important, there must also be tasks assigned to parents where they get a chance to be involved in student learning.

Child advocates, such as Van Velsor and Orozco (2007), have indicated that parents need to feel respected and supported regarding their parental authority. Van Velsor and Orozco studied low-income families. Financially depleted, parents today are driven to long work hours or multiple jobs. This leaves countless families struggling to devote more time to their offspring (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007) Prior suggestions included the development of flexible policies that encourage parents' resourcefulness in their efforts to support the educational process (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). This refers to being creative about the way the parents are encouraged to become involved. Further, if families are to become involved as partners in their children's education, it is imperative to provide unlimited opportunities to address parents' concerns and comments

as well as providing information (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). Parents must be made to feel like they can be an essential part of the learning process or other school-based activities. In addition, multiple avenues ought to be created so that the parents' interest and commitment to become involved is encouraged (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007).

**Preparation for school involvement.** According to Jung-Sook and Bowen (2006), the best way to ensure that schools obtain the most from parental involvement and the communication process is by making sure that parents are given time to adequately adjust their schedule to participate in school activities. This requires several considerations about timely, accurate, and frequent notice prior to events or involvement opportunities. Aligned with this, the parents were asked (Interview 3 Question 4) how much advance notice they would like to receive from schools prior to school events. Table 2 summarizes the responses.

Table 2

*Parents' Preferred Notification Time*

| Responses | *n* | % |
|---|---|---|
| 1 month | 1 | 6% |
| More than 2 weeks | 9 | 56% |
| 2 week notice | 2 | 13% |
| 3 days | 2 | 13% |
| No prior notice | 2 | 13% |

Table 2 indicates that the majority (88%) of the parents would like to have some form of advanced notice before any activity that required their attendance. The data also showed that two parents indicated that they were always prepared to participate, even without advanced notice.

Currently, the global economic stress makes many parents very busy. Because of this, failure to give them adequate notice might cause them not to participate in school activities. Alternatively, insufficient notice might cause them not to respond in the most effective way to communications or correspondence from the schools. Parental involvement is often hindered by employment commitments. Job insecurity and employer indifference may prevent some parents from taking off to attend school functions or to cultivate volunteer opportunities (Yap & Enoki, 1995). Based on this fact, schools are encouraged to improve the effectiveness of communications by giving prior notice, except in times of emergencies and unplanned events.

**Theme 3: Relevance of Regular and Timely Communication Connecting with Parents**

After the forms of communication methods used by the schools and their effectiveness had been tested, the inquiries were focused to address the role of communication frequency for properly connecting with the parents. This theme aligns with Research Question 3, which asked, "How does regular and timely communication on the part of schools compare with parental participation." This theme addresses the division of opinion present in the literature debating whether increasing the frequency would lead to communications being perceived as a mere formality (Loughlin, 2008).

Others believe the only way to connect with parental participation is to make communication frequent (Katyal & Evers, 2007). Three subthemes from the interview responses revealed the views of the parents about the frequency of communications.

**Existing frequency of school events or academic progress.** From the literature reviewed, most researchers explained that a month should be sufficient time to provide parents with some form of contact or communication with the school, at minimum; this could be an educational progress report (Loughlin, 2008). The reason monthly assessment and reporting is necessary is that it helps address any lapses and ensures parents are informed very early and at its initial stages. Separate from the times parents go to the schools to address the educational progress of their children (e.g., conferences, disciplinary meetings), the schools can hold events that bring the parents to the schools to interact with their children and their teachers. These should have diverse, positive focuses.

The interview responses demonstrated that 75% ($n$=12) of the parents used excuses such as fatigue and childcare to justify not being involved. The remaining parents indicated that they had some involvement. This trend of data showed that most parents have the wrong perception about the formal educational system. This is because most of the parents perceive the school to be entirely independent of the home, meaning that once their child went to school, it became the sole responsibility of teachers and administrators to take care of them. For this reason, school-organized activities should be used to bring the parents to the schools. Although educators acknowledge potential barriers, they continuously work under the assumption that, united, the school staff can

overcome those barriers and guarantee the academic success of every student. Communication is required to engage the support of parents and bolster students' enthusiasm for achievement.

**Frequency of communication received from school.** Once it became evident that parents were not demonstrating commitment for involvement in their children's schools, it was expected that the schools would improve communication with the parent. Consequently, Interview 2 Question 2 was used to understand the parents' view of how often they received communication of any kind from the schools. Several varied responses were received. The most common assertion was once or twice a month (*n*=9, 56%). However, some parents (*n*=1, 6%) asserted that had received no communication in as long as a year. Some parents (*n=1*, 6%) indicated that they received no communications from the school. One parent (6%) revealed that communication occurred only when the teachers needed something from them.

Contemplating these responses, it can be said that the schools have not been proactive involving the parents in the communication process. This could be a major reason some parents have not developed a positive attitude for engaging in the academic welfare of their children. It has been suggested that most parents would be comfortable to see the schools extend a helping hand. The beliefs, values, attitudes, and perceptions of parents also influence the scope of parental involvement. According to Liontos (as cited in Jesse, 1996), "Some parents have a 'leave it to the school' attitude; other have logistical problems; some have economic, emotional or time constraints to handle" (p. 4). However, where the schools are reluctant to do so, chances are that the parents will also

sit back and not participate (Marchant et al., 2001). Thus, even if the local educational agency will not regularly communicate with parents, classroom teachers must take it upon themselves to do this periodically.

**Frequency of communication from teachers.** As recommended, the teachers must also have a part in the communication process. Teachers can ensure that, as often as possible, they reach the parents. The proof is convincing and reliable that families play a crucial part in cultivating their children's educational development (Fan & Chen, 2001). The interest that parents demonstrate in their children's education should contribute to making children realize that education is to be esteemed; this helps bolster the desire to excel academically (Fan & Chen, 2001). Aligned with this assertion, Interview 2 Question 3 was used to help understand the parents' beliefs about the level of frequency involved in the communication they received from the teachers. The parents' responses, when processed using the NVivo software, produced nodes that were simply disturbing. This is because the frequency was very small. Those who received the best and most communication from teachers indicated receipt twice a week. However, only a few teachers did this ($n$=1, 6%). The implication of this line of data is that teachers are refusing to take advantage of advancements in technology or the numerous methods through which they can now communicate to parents. It should not be difficult for teachers to give parents almost constant feedback or notifications about what is happening with the students at school. Sadly, within this data set was the acknowledgement that, even when there were communications, they did not address the academics of students. This situation must also be addressed.

**Theme 4: Parents' Preferred Form and Approach to Communication**

Another important theme identified in the data analysis process was the preferred form and approach the parents would like to receive. The rationale for this theme is that Marchant, et al. (2001) had rightly identified parents to be stakeholders in the educational system, meaning that parents should have a voice in what happens, including communication. This theme was inspired by Research Question 4, which asked, "Which form of communication with the school do parents feel most comfortable?" There were three subthemes that emerged in the data for this theme. The subthemes were generated from responses to five questions from the interview. The data have been analyzed and are discussed below.

**Forms of communication considered by parents as effective.** In response to Interview 3 Question 1 and Interview 1 Question 6, the parents identified the forms of communication they considered to be the most effective. McDermott and Rothenberg (2004) purported that once a form of communication that is viewed as convenient and effective is used for a person, chances increase that the individual will respond to it. This was the rationale informing this subtheme. The opinions expressed by the parents regarding the most effective forms of communication are presented in Figure 11.

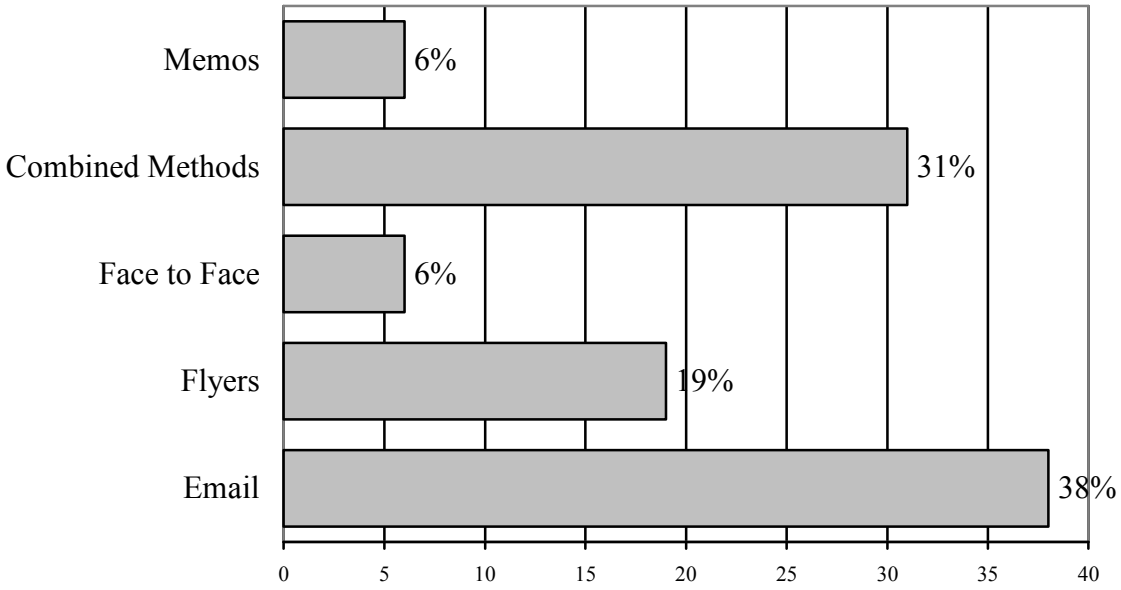



*Figure 11.* The effective school communication modes according to parent surveys.

It must be stressed that the selection of an efficient mode of communication is different from a preferred communication method. One may identify a communication method as effective. However, because the individual might not have the means to access this form of communication, it may not be their preferred method. This refers to technology access as well as language competency issues.

The two most effective communication methods documented were emails and combined methods. The effectiveness of emails have been supported in the literature because they were rapid and personalized (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). However, educators have cautioned that this has the possibility of exposing student information and breaching confidentiality when the emails get into the hands of hackers and other unlawful users of the Internet (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2004). Bittle (1975) revealed that communication is really only effective when the used method is accessible to the

parents. Bittle demonstrated an increase in parent-initiated contacts when an answering service was made available to the parents by a teacher. Newer technologies could be used to deliver and receive messages constantly. Despite the problems addressed herein, the researcher was encouraged that parents are receptive to face-to-face communication. This also ensures that the teacher delivering the message has 100% guarantee that the information reaches the intended recipient. Further, the teacher has the opportunity to verify understanding of the message delivered. These attributes could only benefit communication and engagement of the parents in their child's education.

**Forms of communication considered to be less effective.** Having noticed which communication methods were considered by the parents as effective, the researcher used Interview 3 Question 2 to explore the forms of communication the parents thought were less effective for eliciting involvement. The most articulated form of communication that was considered ineffective by the parents was the use of telephone. The parents revealed that in most cases, the calls came when they were not at home. Meanwhile, trying to return all calls was always a primary challenge because they were either at their job or extremely exhausted after the work day. Some parents noted that flyers often contained mistakes in regard to dates and times of events. Alternatively, the printed message might not make it home to the parent or it might not reach the parent in a timely manner. These answers gathered from the participants reinforced the validity of the point made that face-to-face contact and email have distinct benefits. It was acknowledged that face-to-face communications can also be ineffective. Language barriers or education level are only part of the problem. Reaching the parents in person can be very challenging. Through

email, however, there are several platforms (e.g., mobile phones, computers) that announce incoming emails. Due to technology advances, it is always possible to ensure prompt communication and information delivery between teachers and parents.

**School communication that encourages the most parent participation.** The last sub-theme focused on school communications that encouraged the parents to participate most. As previously stated, it is one thing to send communications to the parent; it is something different getting the assurance that the parent will respond to the communication method and enact upon it. Miedel and Reynolds (1999), therefore, advised the schools to ensure that the means of communication they select to reach parents would motivate the parents to partner with the school system.

With this idea in mind, the researcher used Interview 3 Questions 6 and 8 to document which types of school communication encouraged the parents to participate. On this issue, there seemed to be a consensus preferring flyers as the means of communication that encouraged them to participate. There is so much understanding that can be built upon the responses given by the parents. When communication comes in the form of flyers, it seems more official and formalized. What is more, because this is a printed form of communication, it is possible for the parents to keep the flyers as a reminder. This means the documents can be kept for a long time and serve as a constant reminder of the upcoming events and possible requests from the staff to execute the impending event.

### Theme 5: Making the Parent-Center More Effective

The final theme focused on making the parent-center more efficient. This was addressed by several interview questions (i.e., Interview 1 Questions 4 and 5, Interview 2 Questions 5, 6, and 7). It was unfortunate that neither schools had a parent-center. This was a very disturbing development because where these exist, the schools have the ability to formalize the communication process to make it more effective. Newman and Bizzarri (2012) revealed that the use of parent-centers compels parents to take charge of the communication process. Further, the school can establish original policies and structures to ensure that the center becomes a very vibrant means to deliver and gather information to and from the parents.

## Research Questions Answered

The intent of this phenomenological study was to provide an overview of the real life experiences of 16 parents concerning effective communication links between school and community. The focus was two K-8 schools in one large metropolitan area in a southwestern state. On various questions, there was an overlap of parental interpretations. This would seem to indicate there is a common thread that schools elicit or deter regarding parental involvement. A quarter (25%) of interviewees expressed divergent viewpoints of school communication. The interview questions corresponded with the research questions.

### RQ1. Approaches Currently Used to Elicit Involvement

1. Staff development specifically designed to provide all school personnel with information about methods aimed at improving communication with parents,

and encouragement to do so.

2. Enhancement of written communication, such as school newsletters, bulletins, memos, emails, flyers, and notes to parents. This initiative involves not only the frequency/consistency, but also the quality of these communications.
3. Discussion of a Parent Center, as a mechanism for effective communication between stakeholders.
4. Efficient management of the Tele-Messenger System, an automated telephone-based operation that is designed particularly to facilitate communication with parents identified as hard to reach.

**RQ2. Effectiveness of Communications Use to Elicit Involvement**

1. ***Staff Development***. Periodic mandatory staff development sessions, commencing very early in the fall for teachers, administrators, and support staff provided by qualified professional presenters (to include psychologists). Training should focus on the development of awareness, sensitivities, and techniques (skills), related to effective communication between school personnel and parents. Training sessions must led by certified facilitators who use role play to strengthen skills involved in face-to-face interactions. These direct communications were deemed most important and most effective by the research findings. Specific attention must be focused on ways to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers.
2. ***Written communications.*** The school utilizes a number of written forms of communication aimed at providing information to parents and gathering

pertinent feedback. Informal assessment of the effectiveness of such forms as the school newsletter and various bulletins has indicated that there is room for improvement and change. Qualitative enhancement of these forms will be an aim of the efforts; emphasis will also be placed on timeliness and consistency. Dissemination of these communications will be appropriately timed based on necessity. Cultural and resource-related challenges presently exist. This district encounters problems related to the need to translate all documents (i.e., English to Spanish) with accuracy and in a timely manner. Another related problem is the prevalence of illiteracy in either language in this community. In such cases, reliance on students to deliver and read these materials to parents is paramount. Some do, and some do not.

3. ***Tele-messenger system***. The Tele-Messenger System (TMS) is an automated telephone dialing operation that can be programmed to dial the homes of students of students to relay important school-related information to parents. It can be set to redial as necessary. This method of communication is not preferable over more direct ones. But, it is seen as highly effective and efficient when contacting hard-to-reach parents, in particular. Traditionally, it is reserved to convey information about attendance/truancy. Broader use of this technology is projected to include communication of many types (e.g., homework, event schedules, etc.).

**RQ3. Regular and Timely Communication Connects with Participation**

Communication documents must be reviewed or examined in order to establish baseline data to be used in proposed comparisons. For example, records of the frequency and timing of school newsletters, bulletins, emails and flyer distribution must be examined. A sample of each of these written forms must be reviewed for content, sufficiency, and overall quality, in order to aid in the development of a rubric for assessment of future editions.

**RQ4. Preferred Form of Communication**

Fifty-six percent of the parents revealed that emails and letters from the school motivated their participation. Twenty-five percent of the parents said that phone calls from the school discouraged them from engaging in school events because the communications are not received in a timely manner.

**RQ5. Consistent Communication and a Parent-Center**

The parent-center should be a physical space within the school building that is designated and maintained for use by all parents. At this time, neither school has a designated parent-center. It must be a place where parents can meet and obtain and exchange information (among themselves and/or with school staff). In order for the center to function most effectively and efficiently, a coordinator who is responsible for its daily operation is required. The Parent-Center coordinator should be an individual who can assist in devising and implementing strategies to engage parents, as well as distributing to and receiving from parents school related information. This information must be verbal, written, and audio-visual (including electronic). The coordinator must be

bilingual (English and Spanish), and written and electronic forms must be available in both languages. The coordinator must be responsible for planning and scheduling such parent activities as various workshops, assemblies, classes (e.g., English Language, etc.). The parent-center must open at regular hours convenient to most parent schedules, must be the venue for regularly scheduled workshops that center on communication, as well as the Parents as Learners (PALS) initiative. PALS includes activities as quilting and sewing, provides additional opportunities for parent-to-parent and school-to-parent communications. The role of the coordinator must be defined to include group activities, active recruitment of parents for workshops, and daily training. An aggressive effort must be made to recruit more parents into these programs, as well as the Site Council and Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTO).

## Summary

Chapter 4 restated the findings of the semi-structured interviews with sixteen parents from two, urban, elementary schools, in a large metropolitan area, in a south-western state. The participants in the study served as vital informants for seeking new and additional information about the communications between parents and educators. The findings from the interviews reflected the perceptions of parents regarding effective methods of communication. A review of the sampling procedure, demographics, research questions, interviews, collection of data, findings, and discussion of the interviews were also included in the chapter to explain the information gathered in each interview session.

The purpose of this phenomenological research design was that it enabled data collection and analysis to be completed efficiently and systematically. NVivo software

was used to analyze the interview data for common themes. While analyzing the data, multiple emergent themes were uncovered that addressed the topics of each of the guiding research questions. Consistent themes formed patterns through the breakdown of the data.

Chapter 5 identifies and expounds upon the study's findings. The major categories associated with the schools' communication are presented for professional consideration and further discourse. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the limitations of the study relevant for generalizing the findings. Recommendations and implications for future social change, educational practice, and future research are presented.

# Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The final chapter of the study presents a summary of the research problem, methods used to guide the research, outcomes, conclusions, justification and implications for future research and practice, and limitations of the study. This was a qualitative phenomenological study conducted to determine which methods of school communication ensured the active involvement of parents. The research examined active parental involvement from the perspective of the parents. Parental perception and opinion about the types of school communication was collected. The purpose was established with the rationale that parents were key stakeholders in the educational system and ought to be communicated within a manner that is deemed most appropriate and acceptable to them (Eccles & Harold, 1996). The study used a phenomenological approach, which is a type of qualitative research. The rationale for undertaking a qualitative study was to ensure that data would be collected from a social dimension that allowed for wider expression and participation of parents due to the social background of the issue of communication being contested in the research (DuFour et al., 2004). I prepared semi-structured interviews that were administered to parents of students in two K-8 public schools in one large, metropolitan, school district in a southwestern state. The study examined the perceptions and experiences of parents when it came to their level of involvement with different modes of school communication. The study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of school communication strategies used.

Data collection included semi-structured interviews. The first key finding was that the schools used a variety of communication strategies (emails, flyers, phone calls, tele-

messenger, and direct interface) to inform parents of school events and involvement opportunities. Schools utilized various communication strategies in order to meet the needs of individual parents. The second key finding indicated that the schools' communication strategies had not been perceived as effective by the parents. The responses from the parent interviews placed in the NVivo software indicated that most were dissatisfied with school communications. The major parent concern was missed communication from the school. In many instances, children never shared flyers from the schools. Parents were not home to answer phone calls. The schools tended to treat all parents as having the same communication needs.

## Interpretation of Findings

In this section, I interpret the key findings of the study by relating them to literature in order to unearth any relationship between the primary research findings and what has already been recorded in the literature. The findings were then interpreted in the contextual environment of the theoretical framework of the study. Five major themes surfaced from the study, each of which brought about one key outcome.

### Existing School Communications Used to Elicit Parental Involvement

The modes of communication common to both schools consisted of printed sources (hard copy), progress reports, phone calls, and electronic sources. Of these modes, the most common used was printed sources, followed by progress reports and phone calls. Electronic sources were the least utilized. The literature, Furstenberg et al. (1999) noted that this line of development in the schools is not very synonymous with modern practices. National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA, 2011)

"recently surveyed 50 of its member districts (ranging from small to large and urban to rural, with a total of 43,310 responses in 22 states) to learn the communications preferences of both parents and non-parents." (s. 3). The results determined the top five preferred modes of school communication preferred by parents: "Email from the district/school, online parent portal, district/school e-newsletters, district/school website and telephone/voice messaging system" (NSPRA, 2011, s. 26). The majority of the parents in this particular study concurred with these findings. School communication currently utilized by these two schools did not motivate parents to become involved. The findings from this study indicated that if the schools modernized their communication delivery systems, increased parental involvement would follow.

**Effectiveness of Existing School Communication Modules**

The results from this theme could be utilized to interpret the previous theme. The results suggested that 94% of respondents were dissatisfied with existing school communication modules. This validated the interpretation given to the first theme. Huag and Mason (2008) made reference to the motivational system theory and emphasized the need for parents to be actively motivated to be part of communication in the schools. Jacobs et al. (2004) also stressed the point that there are parents who have a feeling the educational system is independent of the family system. Such parents would not be motivated to participate in school activities. School communication is critical in reaching and motivating such parents. Based upon the data collected, such school communication is not currently in place. These two schools have not been proactive in utilizing communication modules that reinforce interest from parents.

**Relevance of Regular and Timely Communication in Connecting with Parents**

The third theme centered on the issue of regular and timely communication with parents. The objective was to learn first-hand parents' perceptions of the various forms of school communication and how they affected their participation. The data disclosed that 75% of parents used various forms of excuses to exempt themselves from school participation. The research data indicated that the school communication did not encourage parental involvement. Liontos (1992) noted that if the school communication did not delineate the roles of parents, such involvement might be seen as a mere formality. This type of school communication that did not explain parental roles was evident in the two schools researched. The parent responses to the interview questions led to the conclusion that the two schools' communication delivery was ineffective in eliciting parental involvement. The concern expressed by the most parents (63%) was the lack of timely information regarding school events.

**Parents' Preferred Form and Approach to Communication**

The study also focused on parents' preferred approach to school communication. Marchant et al. (2001) established that school communication should be structured around the needs of parents. Parents indicated that electronic communication from the schools would generate more involvement from them. The study found that the greater percentage of parents, represented by 38% and 31% respectively, preferred the use of electronic sources and combined methods individually. Parents are highly comfortable with modern communication and would, therefore, benefit from analogous forms of school communication that mimic those of their everyday world (Ramirez, 2001). Parents

responded that the personal dialogue with staff was the least preferred method of school communication. The normal socioeconomic activities of parents made it difficult to schedule times that they could meet with school personnel. This finding should motivate schools to place more emphasis on electronic communication.

### Making the Parent-Center More Effective/Efficient

The final research theme concerned parental involvement in the schools' parent-center. Neither school had an active parent-center. Reglin (2002) stressed the importance of such innovations as the parent-center, indicating that it is a novelty, in tune with motivational and parental involvement theory as it creates a sense of ownership among parents. According to participants responses parental involvement would escalate if either school offered a viable parent-center.

## Limitations of Study

The major issue of trustworthiness was the data collection procedure. I used semi-structured interviews. A qualitative approach to data collection was highly subjective and was based on the discretional level of respondents. Face-to-face interviews could be considered intimidating for some respondents. There could be a tendency to satisfy the researcher rather than providing heartfelt responses. These interviews could have been intimidating to some respondents if they felt their anonymity could be compromised, forcing them to provide responses that would portray them in a favorable light to the school. This study utilized two schools, thus affecting the trustworthiness of the results, as the findings could not be generalized for all K-8 schools. Each school had many

individual variables. Widening the scope of this research would ensure this limitation would be addressed.

## Recommendations

Based on the strengths, limitations and literature reviewed in the study, a number of recommendations were made for further research. Future researchers who undertake a study in this area should consider the use of surveys rather than a phenomenological study. The rationale for this recommendation is that surveys would ensure that there is broader coverage for the research setting. Consequently, many schools who could present the researcher with varying variables of communication with parents could be included in the study. When this is achieved, chances that results of the study can be generalized are greater. On-going data collection as to the effectiveness of school communication is critical. Based on this research, utilizing the questionnaire format with individual parents proved highly effective in collecting feedback concerning school communication and should be considered in future research. The questionnaire may perhaps ensure much confidentiality and anonymity with the data collection. The questionnaire might also confirm that the respondents have much more freedom to express themselves, in a way; that best represent their opinions and interest. This will certainly overcome the limitation where responses gathered for the study would be seen as satisfying the interest of the researcher or the school authorities. A major strength of the study was the use of the NVivo software in data exploration. Researchers are, therefore, admonished to repeat the use of any form of statistical data analysis tool that enhances the credibility of the data analysis process.

Lopez (2002) concluded that the distribution of the information about policies, goals, and changes to families and students are of the utmost importance. The constant changing environment of the school requires that everyone be regularly updated. Initially, we intend to allocate written communication on a regular basis. We realize that no alternative communication can replace the human voice. Instead, written communication acts as a facilitator that paves the way toward individual communication, despite the often difficult terrain.

From the literature review, there were key recommendations for administrative implementation and management of communication among K-8 schools. In the first place, there was a common trend in the literature where the need for schools to keep their forms of communication abreast with time was identified (Gaetano, 2007). From every indication, what is more advanced, modern and current is the use of technology-based communication. This should, therefore, be a challenge for various K-8 schools to modify their approach to communication by incorporating the use of such electronic platforms as the social media, emails and internet blogs. Having internet websites that give total coverage of every department and faculty in the school would also be an innovative way to ensure that parents are motivated to be concerned with knowing about what is happening in the schools of their wards in a much simplified way. Once this is done, chances that parents will appreciate the need to play their parts in exchanging communication with the schools can be guaranteed. Last but not least, it will be recommended for the schools to focus on the need to have parent-centers as reflected in

the literature by Reglin (2002) who stressed that having parent-centers is an initiative that can ensure that parents communication with the schools in their own hands.

## Implications for Social Change

The current study comes with two positive implications for social changes. The first social change occurs on an individual level when parents' realize and embrace their roles as stakeholders with their child's education. Once this social change has been implemented, the door will be opened for two-way communication between the school and parents. The second social change will occur at the organizational level as schools realize the need to change their approach in communicating with parents. The ultimate goal is to enhance two-way communication where the school and parents have unrestricted dialogue.

Theoretically, the implication that evolved from this study is that proper motivation leads to involvement. Personalize communication from schools to parents is at the forefront of motivation. The literature and primary data collection has established that once the schools put in place a system of effective communication, parents will respond by involving themselves in the schools' activities through effective communication. This study identified the need for schools to research the best modes of communication to reach individual parents. Schools must investigate and implement methods of establishing two-way communication with parents.

## Conclusion

This study has exposed weaknesses existing in school communication within two K-8 schools. Based upon feedback from parent interviews, it was concluded that school

communication with parents has been ineffective. The administration at both schools conveyed to the researcher their awareness that there is a problem eliciting parental involvement. Further, both administrators purported that current school communication systems have been ineffectual. Seventy-five percent of the parents interviewed concurred that the schools' current school communication modes were not relevant to them. The researcher sensed that both schools were ill-informed regarding how to communicate with individual parents. The parent interviews indicated that schools fail to address their needs of time and modernity. In order for schools to motivate parents to become involved, current modes of communication must be revamped to address the needs of the individual parents. Relevant, timely, more frequent, and positive communications would be welcome and responded to by contemporary parents.

## Final Thought

Summarily, I find myself reflecting on the adage, "It takes a village to raise a child." What this implies is in order to be a well-rounded individual you must experience life beyond the family infrastructure and learn from others who you encounter in your daily existence. Every individual should communicate knowledge to children and expose them to experiences so that they learn as much as possible. The school's essential goal must be to emphasize the student. Communicating and partnering with the parents of our students will surround them with the supports needed to attain their greatest potential. As Marianne Williamson so aptly stated, "As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same."

References

Addison, J. T. (1992). Urie Brofenbrenner. *Human Ecology*, *20*(2), 16-20.

Adler, N. (2002). *International dimensions of organizational behavior*. Cincinnati, OH: South-Western.

Allen, J. B. (2007). *Creating welcoming schools: A practical guide to home-school partnerships with diverse families*. New York, NY: Columbia University Teacher's College Press.

American Federation of Teachers. (2007). *Building parent-teacher relationships*. Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers.

Anderson, K. J., & Mink, K. M. (2007). Parent involvement in education: Toward an understanding of parents' decision making. *Journal of Educational Research*, *100*(5), 311-323.

Arksey, H., & Knight, P. (1999). *Interviewing for social scientists*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.

Bailey, C. A. (1996). *A guide to field research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.

Baker, A., & Snoden, L. (1997). *Parent involvement in children's education: A critical assessment of the knowledge base*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Ballen, J., & Moles, O. (1994). *School-family partnerships. Strong families, strong schools*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Barge, J., & Loges, W. (2003). Parent, student, and teacher perceptions of parental involvement. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *31*(2), 140-163.

Barrera, J. M., & Warner, L. (2006). Involving families in school events. *The Journal of Kappa Delta Pi Record*, *42*(2), 72-75.

Bauch, J. P. (Ed.). (1997). *The Bridge Project: Connecting parents and schools through voice messaging* (Monograph of the Betty Phillips Center for Parenthood Education). Nashville, TN: Peabody College of Vanderbilt University.

Belenardo, S. (2001). Practices and conditions that lead to a sense of community in middle schools. *NASSP Bulletin*, *85*, 33.

Bemak, F., & Cornely, L. (2002). The SAFI Model as a critical link between marginalized families and schools: A literature review and strategies for school counselors. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *80*(3), 322-331.

Benson, F., & Martin, S. (2003). Organizing successful parental involvement in urban schools. *Child Study Journal*, *33*, 187-193.

Berger, E. H. (1991). *Parents as partners in education: The school and home working together* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Macmillan.

Bhattacharya, K. 2007. Consenting to the Consent Form: What are the fixed and fluid understandings between the researcher and the researched? *Qualitative Inquiry*, *13*(8), 1095–1115.

Bittle, R. (1975). Improving parent-teacher communication through recorded telephone messages. *Journal of Educational Research*, *69*(3) 87-95.

Boethel, M. (2003). *Diversity: School, family, and community connections: Annual Synthesis.* Austin, TX: National Center for Family and Community Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Boston Arts Academy. (2002). *Boston Arts Academy yearend report*. Retrieved from http://boston.k12.ma.us/baa/documents/YER2001-2002.pdf

Boyd, C. O. 2001. Phenomenology: The method. In P .L. Munhall (Ed.), *Nursing research: A qualitative perspective* (3rd. ed., pp. 93-122). Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett.

Brandon, R. R. (2007). African American parents: Improving connections with their child's educational environment. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *43*(2), 116-121.

Brewer, W. R., & Kallick, B. (1996). Technology's promise for reporting student learning. *In Communicating student learning: 1996 ASCD yearbook* (pp. 178-187). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, USA.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brown, F., & Malholmes, V. (2004). More than a cliché: making parental involvement meaningful. *Education Update*, *46*(1), 1-2.

Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2007). *Business research methods* (2nd ed.). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Byrd, B. (2003, May). Parental involvement in education: The key to your child's success. *Emerging Minds*. Retrieved from http://www.emergingminds.org/may03/parents.html

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. (1989). *Turning points: Preparing American youth for the 21st century*. NY, NY: Carnegie Corporation.

Catasambis, S., & Garland, J. E. (1997). *Parental involvement in students' education during middle school and high school* (No. 18). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Chavkin, N. F. (1989). Debunking the myth about minority parents. *Educational Horizons*, *67*(4), 199-123.

Chen, J. Q., & Dym, W. (2003). Using computer technology to bridge school and community. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *85*(3), 232-234.

Chen, W., & Gregory, A. (2009). Parental involvement as a protective factor during the transition to high school. *Journal of Educational Research*, *103*, 53-62. doi:10.1080/00220670903231250.

Child Trends Data Bank. (2013). *Parental involvement in schools*. Retrieved from http://www.childtrends.org/databankorg/indicators/39ParentalInvolvementinSchools.cfm

Christenson, S. L. (2001). *Promoting engagement with school and learning: A resource for Check & Connect mentors to enhance student success*. Minneapolis, MN: Early Risers "Skills for Success" Project, University of Minneapolis.

CNN Student News. (2010, May). *Information or distraction*. Retrieved from http://cnnstudentnews.blogs.cnn.com/2010/05/10/information-or-distraction/

Cochran, M., & Dean, C. (1991). Home-school relations and the empowerment process. *Elementary School Journal*, *9*(3), 261-269.

Cohen, D., & Crabtree, B. (2006, July). *Qualitative Research Guidelines Project*. Retrieved from http://www.qualres.net/index.html

Constantino, S. (2003). Emerging Families. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*: *Choosing among five approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd. ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Crew, R. (2007). *Only Connect: The way to save our schools*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Dart, J. A., Political Platform for the 21st Century, 2002, 2004: Toward a culture of individualized empowerment II. *Mouth Magazine,* available at http://www.mouthmag.com/justin/empower_2.htm

Davern, L. (2004). School-to-home notebooks: What parents have to say. *Council for Exceptional Children*, *36*(5), 22-27.

Davies, D. (1991). Schools reaching out: Family, school and community partnerships for student success. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *72*(5), 376-382.

Davies, D. (1993). Benefits and barriers to parent involvement: From Portugal to Boston to Liverpool. In N.F. Chavking (Ed.), *Families and schools in a pluralistic society* (53-72). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Davis-Klean, P. E., Malanchuk, O., Peck, S., & Eccles, J. S. (2003 March). *Parent influences on academic outcome*: *Do race and SES matter?* Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research on Child Development, Tampa, FL.

Dearing, E., Krieder, H., & Weiss, H. (2008). Increased family involvement in school predicts improved child–teacher relationships and feelings about school for low income children. *Marriage & Family Review*, *43*(3/4), 225–254.

deCharms, R. (1968). *Personal causation*: *The internal affective determinants of behavior*. New York, NY: Academic Press.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human Behavior.* New York, NY: Plenum Press.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Humans needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, *11*, 227-268.

Delgado-Gaitan, C. (2004). *Involving Latino Families in Schools.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

DePlanty, J., Coulter-Kern, R., & Duchane, K. A. (2007). Perceptions of parent involvement in academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Research*, *100*(6), 361-368.

Desforges, C., & Abouchaar, A. (2003). *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review*, Research Report RR433, London: DfES.

Deslandes, R., & Bertrand, R. (2005, January/February). Motivation of parent involvement in secondary-level school. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *98*, 164-176.

Dettmer, P., Thurston, L. P., & Dyck, N. (2005). *Consultation, collaboration, and teamwork for students with special needs* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Dickinson, D. K., & Tabors, P. O. (Eds.) (2001). *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school*. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing Co.

Dornbush, S. M., & Glasgow, K. L. (1996). The structural context of family-school relations. In A. Boothe & J. F. Dunn (Eds.), *Family-school links: How do they affect education outcomes?* Mahwah, N J: Lawrence Erlabum Associates, Inc.

Dornbush, S. M., & Ritter, P. L. (1988). Parents of high school students: A neglected resource. *Educational Horizons*, *66*(2), 75-77.

DuFour, R., DuFour R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G. (2004). *Whatever it takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

DuFour, R., Guidice, A., Magee, D., Martin, P., & Zivkovic, B. (2002, May 1). *The Student Support Team as a Professional Learning Community.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED464270).

Eccles, J. S., & Harold, R. D. (1996). Family involvement in children's and adolescents' schooling. In A. Booth & J. F. Dunn (Eds.), *Family-school links: how do they affect education outcomes* (pp. 3-34). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Enderlin-Lampe, S. (2002, September). Empowerment: Teacher perceptions, aspirations, and efficacy. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 29*(3), pp. 139-147.

Englund, M., Egeland, B., Luckner, A., & Whaley, G. (2004, December). Children's achievement in early elementary school: Longitudinal effects of parental involvement, expectations, and quality of assistance. *Journal of Educational*

*Psychology*, *96*(4), 723-730.

Entwisle, D. R., & Alexander, L. L. (1993). Entry into schools: The beginning school transition and educational stratification in the United States. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *19*, 401-423.

Epstein, J. L. (1990). School and family connections: Theory, research, and implications for integrating sociologies of education and family. *Marriage and Family Review, 15*(1-2), 99-126.

Epstein, J. (1992). *School and family partnerships*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning. (ERIC Document Reproduction No. ED 343715).

Epstein, J. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Delta, Kappan*, *76*(9), 701-712.

Epstein, J. (2001). *School, family and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools.* Boulder, CO: West View Press.

Epstein, J. L., & Associates (2009). *School, family and community partnerships: Your handbook for action*, (3rdEd). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, a Sage Co.

Epstein, J., & Dauber, S. (1991). School programs and teacher practices of parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, *91*(3), 289-305.

Epstein, J. L., & Jansorn, N. R. (2004b). School, family, and community partnerships link the plan. *The Education Digest*, *69*(6), 19-23.

Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Van

Voorhis, F. L. (2002). *School, community, and community partnerships*: *Your handbook for action* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Fan, X. T. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A growth modeling analysis. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, *70*, 27–61.

Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-Analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, *13*(1), 1-11.

Ferguson, C. (2008). *The school-family connection*: Looking at the larger picture. Austin, TX: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools.

Ferrera, M.M. (2009). Broadening the myopic vision of parent involvement. *The School Community Journal*, *19*(2), 123–142.

Ford, M. E. (1992). *Human motivation: Goals, emotions, and personal agency beliefs*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Foster, L. (2004). Parental vigilance and the discursive construction of local school policy. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, *50*(2), 151-168. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Frances, I. (2009). Getting parents and children off to a strong start in reading. *Reading Teacher*, *63*(4), 342–344.

Furger, R. (2006). Secret weapon discovered! Scientists say parents partnering with teachers can change the future of education. *The Edutopian*, *11*, 46-49. ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED346082).

Furstenberg, F., Cook, T., Eccles, J., Elder, G., & Sameroff, A. (1999). *Managing to make it: Urban families in adolescent success*, Chicago: University of Chicago

Press.

Gaetano, Y. D. (2007). The role of culture in engaging Latino parents' involvement in school. *Urban Education*, *42*(2), 145-162.

Gates, B. (1997, June). Keynote remarks. Paper presented at the National Educational Computing Conference, Seattle, WA.

Goldberg, P.E. & Proctor, K.M. (2010). Background. *A Survey on Teacher Recruitment and Retention*. Retrieved from http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/teachertoteacher/ttt/voices_part_1.pdf

Gonzalez, N., Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: theorizing practices in households, communities and classrooms.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, Publishers.

Green, B. L., Everhart, M., Gordon, L., & Garcia-Gettman, M. (2006). Characteristics of effective mental health consultation in early childhood settings: Multi-level analysis of a national survey. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education* 26, pp. 142-152.

Greenberg, P. (1989). Ideas that work with young children. Parents in young children's development and education. A new American fad: Why does it matter? *Young Children*, *44*(4), 61-75.

Griffith, J. (1996). Test of a model of the organizational antecedents of parent involvement and satisfaction with public education. *Human Relations*, *49*(12), 1549-1571.

Grolnick, W. S., Benjet, C., Kurowski, C. O., & Apostoleris, N. H. (1997). Predictors of

parent involvement in children's schooling. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *89*(3), 538-548.

Grolnick. W. S., & Slowiaczek, M . L. (1994). Parents' involvement in children's schooling: a multidimensional conceptualization and motivation model. *Child Development*, *65*, 237-252.

Halfon, R. (2008). School essay, PPC for Harlow...(n.d.). Retrieved from http://cnes4education wordpress.com/2008/09/29/school-essay-by robber-haflon-ppc-for-harlow.

Halle, T., Kurtz-Costes, B., & Mahoney, J. (1997). Family influences on school achievement in low-income, African-American children. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *89*(3), 517-537.

Halsey, P. A. (2005). Parent involvement in junior high schools: a failure to communicate. *American Secondary Education*, *34*(1), 57-69. Retrieved from Ebscohost Database.

Hanafin, J., & Lynch, A. (2002). Peripheral voices: Parental involvement, social class, and educational disadvantage. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *23*(1), 35-49.

Harniss, M. K., Epstein, M. H., Bursuck, W. D., Nelson, J., & Jayanthi, M. (2001). Resolving Homework-Related Communication Problems: Recommendations of Parents of Children With and Without Disabilities. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, 17*, 205-225.

Harris, Marvin. (1968). *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*. New York: Harper and

Row.

Harter, S. (1978). Effectance motivation reconsidered: Toward a developmental model. *Human Development*, *1*, 34-64.

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Hawes, K. (2008). Parents Are Not the Enemy: Ten Tips for Improving Parent-Teacher Communication. *Mathematics Teacher*, *101*(5), 328-331.

Henderson, A., & Berla, N. (Eds.) (1994). *A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement*. National Committee for Citizens in Education, Center for Law and Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED3750968).

Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement.* Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Herbert, J. P., & Beardsley, T. M. (2002). Jermaine: A critical case study of a gifted black child living in rural poverty. In Merriam, S. B. and Associates (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: Example for discussion and analysis*. (pp. 201-232). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hester, H. (1989). Start at home to improve home-school relations. *NASSP Bulletin*, *73*(513), 23-27.

Hiatt, D. B. (1994). Parental involvement in american public schools: an historical perspective 1642-1994. *The School Community Journal*, *4*(2), 27-38.

Hill, N. E., Castellino, D. R., Lansford, J. E., Nowlin, P., Dodge, K. A., Bates, J. E., & Pettit, G. S. 2004). Parent academic involvement as related to school behavior, achievement, and aspirations: Demographic variations across adolescence. *Child Development*, *75*(5), 1491-1509.

Hill, N. E., & Taylor, L. C. (2004). Parental school involvement and children's academic achievement: *Pragmatics and issues. Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *13*(4)*, 161-164.*

Hill, N. E., & Tyson, D. F. (2009). Parental involvement in middle school: A meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement. *Developmental psychology*, *45*(3), 740-763.

Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (1995). Parental involvement in children's education: Why does it make a difference? *Teachers College Record*, 97: 310-331.

Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (Spring 1997). Why do parents become involved in their children's education? *Review of Educational Research*, *67*(1), 3-42.

Howe, F., & Simmons B. J. (2005). *Nurturing the Parent-Teacher Alliance.* Bloomington, IN. *Phi Delta Kappa Fastbacks*, *53,* 1-37.

Huang, G. C., & Mason, K. (2008). Motivations of parental involvement in children's learning: Voices from urban African-American families of preschoolers. *Multicultural Education*, *15*(3), 21–27.

Jacobs, J., Davis-Kean, P. E., Bleeker, M., Eccles, J. S., & Malanchuk, O. (2005). "I can

do it but I don't want to." The impact of parents, interests, and activities on gender differences in math. In A. Gallagher & J. Kaufman (Eds.), *Gender differences in mathematics*. *An integrative psychological approach*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Jesse, D. (1995). *Increasing parental involvement: a key to student achievement*. Retrieved from http://www.mcrel.org/pdf/noteworthy/learners_learning_schooling/danj.asp

Jesse, D. (1996). *Increasing parental involvement: A key to student achievement*. Retrieved from http://www.mcrel.org/topics/noteworthypages/noteworthy/danj.asp

Jesse, D. (1998). *Increasing parental involvement: A key to student achievement.* Retrieved from http://www.mcrel.org/topics/noteworthypages/noteworthy/danj.asp

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2008). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Johnson, R. B., & Christensen, L. B. (2004*). Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Jung-Sook, L., & Bowen, N. K. (2006). Parent involvement, cultural capital, and the achievement gap among elementary school children. *The Journal of American Educational Research*, *43*(2), 193-198.

Kanold, T. D., Toncheff, M., & Douglas, C. (2008). Two High School Districts Recite The ABCs of Professional Learning Communities. *Journal of Staff Development*,

*29*(3), 22-24, 26-27, 66.

Kantor, Ronald J., & Harrington, Mary Margaret. (1997). Situating the Bridge Project in the context of distance learning: Implications for the future. *In The Bridge Project: Connecting parents and the schools through voice messaging* (Monograph of the Betty Phillips Center for Parenthood Education, 68-75), Nashville, TN: Peabody College of Vanderbilt University.

Katyal, K. R., & Evers, C. W. (2007). Parents – partners or clients? A re-conceptualization of home-school interactions. *Teaching Education*, *18*(1), 61-76.

Kleiman, S. (2004) Phenomenology: To wonder and search for meanings. *Nurse Researcher 11*(4): 7-19.

Kellaghan, T., Sloane, K., Alvarez, B., & Bloom, B. S. (1993). *The home environment and school learning: Promoting parental involvement in the education of children* (pp.50-61). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Keyes, C. (1995). *Creating transitions that support children and families: Beginning the conversation in Westchester*. White Plains, NY: Westchester Education Coalition.

Knopf, H. T., & Swick, K. J. (2007). How parents feel about their child's teacher/school: Implications for early childhood professionals. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *34*(4), 291-296.

Kushman, J. W. (1999). It takes more than good intentions to build a partnership: Klawock City Schools. Case study (Report No. ED437258): *Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory*. Fairbanks: Alaska University.

LaBahn, J. (1995). Education and parental involvement in secondary schools: Problems,

solutions, and effects. *Educational Psychology Interactive*, *1*, 1. Retrieved from http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt

Lavoie, R. (2008). The Teacher's Role in Home/School Communication: EVERYBODY WINS! Exclusive to LD Online.

Lawson, M. A. (2003). School-family relations in context. Parent and teacher perceptions of parent involvement. *Urban Education*, 38, 77-133.

Lee, J. S., & Bowen, N. K. (2006, Summer). Parent involvement, cultural capital, and the achievement gap among elementary school children. *American Educational Research Journal*, *43(2)*, 193-218.

Leedy, P., & Ormrod, J. (2001). *Practical research: Planning and design*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Lichtman, M. (2010). *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Lindle, J. C. (1989). What do parents want from principals and teachers? *Educational Leadership*, *47*(2), 12-14.

Liontos, L. B. (1992). *At-risk families and schools: Becoming partners*. Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, College of Education, University of Oregon.

Lloyd-Smith, L., & Baron, M. (2010). Beyond conferences: Attitudes of high school administrators toward parental involvement in one small Midwestern state. *School Community Journal*, *20*, 23-44. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ908208).

Lopez, E. (2002, Spring). When parents assess schools. *The Evaluation Exchange*, *8*(1),

16-17.

Loughlin, J. P. (2008). Fostering parental involvement: A critical action research study of Title I parents' participation in public elementary schools. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University.

Mann, S. (2006). *Indo-Canadian parents: Perceptions on parental involvement in elementary schools*. Retrieved from University of British Columbia, Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies http://www.educ.uvic.ca/epls/faculty/storey/mann.htm

Marchant, G. J., Paulson, S. E., & Rothlisberg, B. A. (2001). Relations of middle school students' perceptions of family and school contexts with academic 117 achievement. *Psychology in the Schools*, *38*(6), 505-519.

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

McDermaid. K., & Barnstable, D. (2001). *Step-by-Step Guide to Conducting a Social Profile for Watershed Planning*. Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Retrieved from http://www.watershedplanning.illinois.edu/WatershedGuide.pdf

McDermott, P., & Rothenberg, J. (2004, October). "Why Urban Parents Resist Involvement in Their Children's Elementary Education." *The Qualitative Report* 5.3, 5.4.

McIntosh, J., & White, S. (2006). Building For Freshman Success: High Schools Working As Professional Learning Communities. *American Secondary*

*Education*, *34*(2), 40-49.

Melaville, A., Berg, A. C., & Blank, M. J. (2006). *Community-based learning: Engaging students for success and citizenship*. Retrieved January, 2008, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailminijsp?_nfpb=true&_&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED490980&ERICExtSearchSearchType_0=eric_accno&accno=ED490980

Miedel. W. T., & Reynolds. A. J. (1999). Parental involvement in early intervention for disadvantaged children: Does it matter? *Journal of School Psychology*, *37*(4), 379-402.

Million, J. (2003). Talking to parents. *The Education Digest*, *68*(5), 52-53.

Montgomery, D. J. (2005). Communicating Without Harm: Strategies to Enhance Parent-Teacher Communication. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *37*(5), 50-55.

National Association of School Psychologists. (2008). *Ready to learn, empowered to teach: Excellence in education for the 21st Century*. Bethesda, MD: Author.

National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). *Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983.

National Parent Teacher Association (PTA). (1992). *Proceedings of the National Parent Involvement Summit.* Chicago: Author. National Science Foundation (NSF). (2000). *Indicators 2000-Chapter 5: Elementary and Secondary Education-Student Achievement*. Arlington, Virginia.

National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). (2011, July). *Communications*

*survey: Results and analysis*. Rockville, MD: K12 Insight.

Newman, T. H., & Bizzarri, S. A. (2012). Friday letters: connecting students, teachers, and families through writing. *Reading Teacher*, *65*(4), 275-280. Retrieved from ERIC Database.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. (2002). Pub. L. 107–110, 115 Stat. 1425.

*Obama worried technology can affect democracy* - Pocket-lint. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.pocket-lint.com/news/103596-obama-worried-technology-affects-democracy

Obrien, A. (2011). What Parents Want in School Communication. Edutopia. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.edutopia.org/blog/parent-involvement-survey-anne-obrien

Olby, K. (2004). Advocate offers advice for fostering parental involvement: new methods, said to boost student achievement, reject 'mentality of the 1950s'. *Educational Daily*, *37*, 6.

Olivos. E. (2004). Tensions, contradictions, and resistance: An activist's reflection of the struggles of Latino parents in public school system. *The High School Journal*: *Cicana/o Activism in Education: Theories and Pedagogies of Trans/formation*, *April/May*, *87*, 25-35.

Olson, J. L., & Platt, J. C. (2004). *Teaching children and adolescents with special needs* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc. *for Evaluation*, No. 86 (pp. 5-16) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

*Parental Involvement in Learning*: *Statistics | Education.com*. (n.d.). Retrieved from

http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Parental_Involvement

Partnership with Parents. (n.d.).Retrieved from http://www.parrotpublishing.com/Inclusion_chapter_4.htm

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Proctor, R. W. (2005). Methodology is more than research design and technology. *Behavior Research Methods*, *37*(2), 197-202.

Punch, K. F. (2005). *Introduction to social research: quantitative and qualitative approaches* (2nd ed.) London: Sage

QSR International. (2008). NVivo8 Qualitative Analysis Software. Retrieved on January 3, 2010, from the QSR International Web site: www.qsrinternational.com/.../NVivo8's_coding_tools_offer_flexibility.pdf

*Qualitative Research*. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://qualitativeresearch1358fst.blogspot.com/

Quigley, D. D. (2000, April). *Parents and teachers working together to support third grade achievement: Parents as learning partner*. Paper presented at annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Ramirez, A. Y. (2001). Parental involvement is like apple pie: A look at parent involvement in two states. *The High School Journal*, *85(*1), 1-9.

Reglin, G. (2002, Fall). Project reading and writing (R.A.W): Home visitations and the school involvement of high-risk families. *Education*, *123*, (1), 153,106, 154-60.

Reising, B. (2008, July/August). Family must be a part of the solution in closing the

achievement gap. *The Clearing House*, 245-246.

Richardson, S. (2009). Principals' perceptions of parental involvement in the "Big 8" urban district. *Research in the Schools*, *16*(1), 1–12.

Risko, V., & Walker-Dalhouse, D. (2009). Parents and teachers talking with or past one another—or not talking at all? *Reading Teacher*, *62*(5), 442–444.

Rose, L. C., Gallup, A. M., & Elam, S. M. (1997). The 29th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *79*(1), 41-56.

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. (2005). *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication, Inc.

Rutherford, B., & Billing, S. H. (1995). *Parent, family and community involvement in the middle grades.* Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 448411).

Ryan, R. M. (1993). Agency and organization: Intrinsic motivation, autonomy and the self in psychological development. In J. Jacobs (Ed*.)*, *Nebraska symposium on motivation: Developmental perspectives on motivation*, *Vol. 40* (pp. 1-56). Lincoln, NE: University Of Nebraska Press.

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Shatkin, G., & Gershberg, A. I. (2007). Empowering parents and building communities;

The role of school-based councils in educational governance and accountability. *Urban Education*, *42*(6), 582-615.

Simon, B. S. (2001). Family involvement in high school: predictors and effects. *NASSP Bulletin*, *85*(627), 8-19.

Simon, B. S. (2004). High school outreach and family involvement. *Social Psychology of Education*, *7*, 185-209.

Sociology. (2003). Ch. 14 Qualitative field research. Mother and Child Health: Research Methods. Retrieved from http://www.sociology.org.uk/mpoprint.pdf

Stafford, L. (1987). Parent teacher communication. *Communication Education*, *36*(2), 182-187.

Stake, R. E. (1995). The art of case study research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Staples, K. E., & Dilberto, J. A. (2010, July/August). Guidelines for successful parental involvement. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *42*(6), 58–63.

Stewart, E. B. (2008). School structural characteristics, student effort, peer associations, and parental involvement :The influence of school- and individual-level factors on academic achievement. *Education and Urban Society*, *40*(2), 179-204.

Stouffer, B. (1992). We can increase parent involvement in secondary schools. *NASSP Bulletin*, *76*(543), 5-8.

Tan, E., & Goldberg, W. (2009). Parental school involvement in relation to children's grades and adaption to school. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 30*, 442−453.

Taylor, O. (1988). *Cross-cultural communication: An essential dimension of effective*

*education.* Washington, DC: Mid-Atlantic Center for Race Equity.

Thorp, E. K. (1997). Increasing opportunities for partnerships with culturally and Linguistically diverse families. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *32*, 261-269.

U.S. Department of Education. (1994). The Goals 2000 Act: *Supporting community efforts to improve schools*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

U.S. Department of Education. (1997). Achieving the goals: goal 8, parental involvement and participation. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?u=1&num=74&seq=89&view=plaintext&size=100&id=mdp.39015041733000

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (1997). *Fathers' involvement in their children's schools,* NCES 98-091, by Christine Winquist Nord, DeeAnn Brimhall, & Jerry West. Washington, DC.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003). *Parent and Family Involvement in Education: 2002-03*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005: Table 3. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005043

Valencia, R. R. (2002). *Chicano school failure and success: Past present, and future* (2nd ed.). NY, NY: Routledge Falmer.

Van Velsor, P., & Orozco G. (2007). Involving low-income parents in the schools: Communitycentric strategies for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, *11(*1), 17-24.

Vandergrift. J. A., & Greene, A. L. (1992) Rethinking parent involvement*. Educational*

*Leadership*, *50*(1), 57-59.

Walberg, H. (1984). "Families as Partners in Educational Productivity," *Phi Delta Kappan*, *65*, 19-27.

Walker, J. T., Shenker, S. S., & Hoover-Dempsey, K. V. (2010). Why do parents become involved in their children's education? Implications for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, *14*(1), 27-41.

Walsh, M., Kenny, M., Wieneke, K., & Harrington, K. (2008, December). The Boston Connects Program: Promoting Learning and Healthy Development. *Professional School Counseling*, *12*(2), 166-169.

Weise, H. B., Lopez, M. E., & Caspe, M. (2006). *Family involvement in early childhood education.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

Wentzel, K. R. (1991). Social competence at school: Relation between social responsibility and academic achievement. *Review of Educational Research*, *61*, 1-24.

Wentzel, K. R. (1993). Does being good make the grade? Social behavior and academic competence in middle school. *Journal of educational Psychology*, *85*, 357-364.

Wentzel, K. R. (2002). The contribution of social goal setting to children's school adjustment. In A. Wigfield & J. S. Eccles (Eds.), *Development of achievement motivation* (pp. 222-246). San Diego: Academic Press.

Wherry, J. (2005, March/April). Do you have a parent involvement disconnect. *Principal*, *84*(4), 6.

White, R. W. (1959). Motivation reconsidered: The concept of competence.

*Psychological Review*, *66*, 297-333.

Wickwire, P. (2002, May 1). *Current Trends and Their Implications for Futures in the Guidance Profession.* Retrieved 1 17, 2009, from ERIC Database: http://ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?

Wolcott, H. F. (1990). *Writing up qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Wong, M. M. (2008). Perceptions of parental involvement and autonomy support: Their relations with self-regulation, academic performance, substance use and resilience among adolescents. *North American Journal of Psychology*, *10*, 497–518.

Worthy, J. (2006). *Como si le Falta un Brazo:* Latino Immigrant Parents and the Costs of Not Knowing English. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *5*(2), 139-154.

Yap, K. O., & Enoki, D. Y. (1995). In search of the elusive magic bullet: Parental involvement and student outcomes. *School Community Journal*, *5*(2), 97-106.

Zill, N., & Nord, C. W. (1994). *Running in place: How American families are faring in a changing economy and an individualistic society.* Washington, DC: Child Trends Inc.

Appendix A: Parent Invitation (English)

# You are invited!

December 15, 2013

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Karen L. Moore. I have taught in the XXXX School District for 11 years. Currently I am attending Walden University and I am doing research on parental involvement at your school.

I would like your insights into parental involvement at _____ School. Your opinions are very valuable. You are invited to meet with me over light refreshments to discuss the parental involvement at your school.

If you are interested in sharing your thoughts please return the bottom portion of this note in the self-addressed envelope by _____ and I will contact you.

I look forward to meeting with you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Karen L. Moore

**********

**Please return this bottom portion by_____.**

Name: _____

Grades of children attending _____ School: _____

Telephone Number (best time to call):_____

Email Address: _____

Appendix B: Parent Invitation (Spanish)

**İEstás invitado!**

15 de diciembre de 2013

Estimados Padres/Guardianes:

Permítame presentarme. M e llamo Karen L. Moore. He enseñado en el Distrito Escolar XXXX por 11 años. Ahora, estoy asistiendo a la Universidad de Walden y estoy haciendo un proyecto de investigación sobre la participación de los padres en la escuela. Me gustaría obtener sus opiniones acerca de la participación de los padres en La Escuela _____. Sus opiniones son muy valiosas para mí.

Le quiero cordialmente invitar a encontrarse conmigo para discutir sobre la participación de los padres en la escuela, lo cual le agradeceré de sobremanera.

Si usted está interesado en compartir sus opiniones, por favor regrese la porción de la hoja de abajo de esta carta para el _____. En el sobre anexo.

Yo me comunicaré con usted a la brevedad posible. Gracias por su atención y cooperación en este estudio.

Sinceramente,

Karen L. Moore.

**********

**Por favor regrese esta porción para_____**

Nombre: _____

Nivel de los niños asistiendo a la Escuela:

_____

Número de teléfono (mejor tiempo para llamar):

_____

Dirección Electrónico:

_____

Appendix C: Parent Consent Form (English)

You are invited to take part in a research study about the perceptions of effective school communication and parental involvement. You were randomly chosen for the study because you are a parent in one of the two urban elementary schools in the XXXX School District. This form is part of a process entitled "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether you would like to participate.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Karen L. Moore, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. Additionally, she is a reading and special education inclusion teacher with elementary and secondary experiences.

**Background Information:**
The purpose of this study is to research and identify reliable and effective communicative means that elicit parental participation in two diverse schools.

**Procedures:**
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Allow me to interview you for 60 minutes of time.
- Allow me to record the interview to be analyzed at a later time for common themes with other interviews.
- Answer and clarify any questions at the end of the interview.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**
Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision whether or not you want to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not be in the study. If you decide to consent now, you can still change your mind later. Any parent who feels stressed during the study may stop at any time. They may also skip any part of the interviews. They may also avoid any uncomfortable questions in the interview.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**
Being in this study might help you gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by diverse student populations. This study might help other primary schools to adopt better practices regarding effective communication and parental involvement. Moreover, this study will also examine reliable and effective modes of communication in correlation to parental involvement.

**Compensation:**
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your name for any purposes outside of this research study. Any information gathered will be stored on a password protected disc within a locked file cabinet. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything that could identify you in any reports of this study.

**Contacts and Questions:**
You may ask any questions you have now. Or, if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone at 602-748-6637 or at karen.moore2@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss these questions with you. Her phone number is (612-312-1210 email address irb@waldenu.edu). Walden University's approval number for this study is **12-12-13-0044246** and it expires on **December 11, 2014**. The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

**Statement of Consent:**
*I have read the above information and I feel I understand this study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.*

Printed Name of Parent: _____

Signature of Parent: _____

Date of consent: _____

Appendix D: Parent Consent Form (Spanish)

Usted está invitado a participar en un estudio acerca de las percepciones de comunicación efectiva escolar y participación del padre. Si fue elegido para el estudio es porque usted es un padre en una de las dos escuelas urbanas dentro del Distrito Escolar XXXX. Este formulario es parte del proceso titulado, "consentimiento informativo" para permitirle entender este estudio antes de decidir si quiere participar en el.
Este estudio está siendo dirigido por la investigadora nombrada Karen L., Moore, quien es estudiante de doctorado en la Universidad de Walden. Adicionalmente, ella es una maestra de lectura y de educación especial con experiencias en la primaria y secundaria.

**Información del Fondo**:
El propósito de este estudio es para investigar e identificar formas de comunicación fiable y efectiva que provoquen participación del padre en dos escuelas diversas.

**Procedimientos**:
Si usted está de acuerdo de participar en este estudio, será requerido a hacer lo siguiente:

- Permitirme entrevistarle por 60 minutos.
- Permitirme grabar la entrevista para en una fecha futura analizar temas comunes con otras entrevistas.
- Contestar y clarificar cualquier pregunta al final de la entrevista.

**La Naturaleza Voluntaria del Estudio**:
Su participación en este estudio es voluntario. Esto significa que todos los miembros del estudio respetarán su decisión si usted no que quiere participar en el estudio. Nadie le tratará diferente si usted decide que no desea participar en el estudio. Si usted decide dar su consentimiento hoy, usted podrá cambiar su decisión después. Cualquier padre que se sienta estresado durante el estudio lo podrá suspender a cualquier momento. También, podrán pasar por alto cualquier parte de las entrevista o también, pasar por alto cualquiera de las preguntas en la entrevista.

**Riesgos y Beneficios de Participación en el Estudio**:
Participando en este estudio quizás pueda ayudarle a conseguir un mejor entendimiento de los desafíos confrontados por poblaciones estudiantiles diversas. Este estudio quizás pueda ayudar a otras escuelas primarias adoptar mejores prácticas acerca de comunicación efectiva y participación del padre. Además, este estudio también, examinará modos de comunicación fiable y efectiva en correlación con participación del padre.

**Compensación**:
No hay compensación por participar en este estudio.

**Confidencialidad**:
Cualquiera información que usted provee será mantenido confidencial. La investigadora no usará su nombre para ninguno propósito afuera de este estudio. Cualquiera información coleccionado será guardado en un disco con contraseña protegido dentro de un gabinete de archivos encerrados. También, la investigadora no incluirá su nombre o cualquier cosa que se puede identificarle en reportes de este estudio.

**Conctactos y Preguntas**:
Usted puede hacer cualquiera pregunta que usted pueda tener. O, si usted tiene preguntas más tarde, contacte a la investigadora por medio del teléfono a las (602)-748-6637 o a correo electrónico: karen.moore2@waldedn.edu. Si usted quiere hablar en privado acerca de sus derechos como participante, usted puede llamar a la Doctora Dr. Endicott. Ella es la representante de la Universidad de Walden que puede aclarar cualquier duda con usted. Su número de teléfono es el (612-312-1210 correo electrónico: irb@waldenu.edu). El número de aprobaciónón de la Universidad de Walden para este estudio es IRB, IRB inscribirá número de **12-12-13-0044246** aprobaciónón aquí y expirara en: **December 11, 2014**. La investigadora le dará una copia de este formulario.

**Declaración de Consentimiento**:
He leído la información arriba y me siento que entiendo este estudio bien para hacer una decisión acerca de mi participación en el estudio. Al firmar abajo, estoy de acuerdo con los términos mencionados arriba.

Nombre Escrito del Padre:_____

Firma del Padre:_____

Fecha de Consentimiento:_____

Appendix E: First Interview Questions (English)

1. **The various communication systems utilized at the school level will be evaluated and assessed by a team of parents in order to determine their effectiveness in obtaining parental involvement.**

    - Tell me about your involvement at_____.
    - How many times a month do you attend school events/check on your child's academic progress?
    - Does _____School provide clear information about opportunities for you to become involved?
    - In what ways are parents involved at _____ School?
    - How are the parents skills, talents and interests utilized at the school?
    - How does the school make volunteer opportunities known to the community?

Appendix F: Second Interview Questions (English)

1. **The research questions utilized in this study will revolve around identifying communication links between school and community.**

    - How does the school communicate with you?
    - How often do you receive communications from the school?
    - How often does your child's teacher communicate with you?
    - What methods of communications does your child's teacher use to communicate with you?
    - Does the school have a parent resource center?
    - How often do you participate in parent resource center activities?
    - What types of communication have you received from the parent resource center?
    - How often do you receive communications from the parent center?
    - Tell me about a time when you were contacted by the school.
    - Tell me about a time that you contacted the school.
    - What types of communication have you received from the parent resource center?

Appendix G: Third Interview Questions (English)

**3. This phenomenological research will critically evaluate the current methods of school communication and how each is received by parents.**

- Which types of school communication are most effective in getting you involved at school? Why?
- Which types of school communication are least effective in getting you involved at school? Why?
- Tell me about a time when you were really involved in a school event.

**4. How does the method and timing of school communication effect parental involvement?**

- How much advance notice do you receive prior to a school event?
- Does the school provide adequate notice of events for you to attend?
- How much prior notice of the event would you like?
- If you had adequate prior notice of a school event, would you be more apt to attend?
- Which types of school communication encourage you to participate?
- Which types of school communication discourage you from participating?
- When do you receive school communications?
- What would be the most convenient days/times for you to receive school communication?

**Distinguishing Characteristic of this Research**

Parents are asked to identify a hierarchy and scheduling of effective school communication that encourages their participation.

Appendix H: First Interview Questions (Spanish)

- **Los varios sistemas de comunicación utilizados al nivel de la escuela será evaluado y examinado por un equipo de padres para que se pueda determinar la eficacia en obtener participación del padre.**
- Cuénteme de su participación _____.
- Cuántas veces al mes asistes a los eventos escolares/revisar el progreso académico de su niño/niña.
- Se provee La Escuela_____información clara acerca de las oportunidades en que se pueda participar?
- En cuáles maneras están participando los padres en La Escuela _____?
- Cómo se están utilizando las habilidades, talentos e intereses de los padres en la escuela?
- Cómo se hace obvio a la comunidad las oportunidades para hacerse voluntario?
- Cuántas veces al mes asiste usted a los eventos ecolares/examinar el progreso académico de su niño?

Appendix I: Second Interview Questions (Spanish)

- **Las preguntas utilizadas del estudio se rodeará acerca de identificar modos de comunicación entre la escuela y la comunidad.**
- Cómo se comunica la escuela con los padres?
- Con frecuencia recibe comunicación usted de la escuela?
- Con frecuencia comunica el maestro de su hijo/hija con usted?
- Cuáles modos de comunciación usa el maestro de su hijo/hija con usted?
- Tiene la escuela un Centro de Recursos Familiares?
- Con frecuencia participa usted en las actividades del Centro de Recursos Familiares?
- Cuáles modos de comunicación ha recibido usted del Centro de Recursos Familiares?
- Con frecuencia recibe comunicación del Centro de Recursos Familiares?

Appendix J: Third Interview Questions (Spanish)

- **El estudio fenomenólogico críticamente se examinará los métodos corrientes de comunicación escolar y cómo están recibidos por los padres.**
- Cuáles modos de comunicación escolar son más efectivos a ayudarle hacerse involucrado en la escuela? ¿Por qué?
- Cuáles modos de comunicación escolar son menos efectivos a ayudarle hacerse involucrado en la escuela? ¿Por qué?
- **Cómo se efecta la comunicación del padre por el método y el horario de la escuela?**
- Con frecuencia recibe usted aviso de eventos escolares?
- provee la escuela suficiente aviso por participación en eventos escolares?
- Cuánto tiempo le gustaría tener usted aviso de un evento escolar?
- Si tuviera usted aviso previo de un evento escolar, asistiría el evento?
- Cuáles modos de comunicación le puede motivar a participar?
- Cuáles modos de comunicación le quita la motivación a participar?
- Cuándo recibe usted comunicación escolar?
- Cuáles serían los días y tiempos más convenientes para recibir comunicación escolar?

**Distinguir la Característica de Este Estudio**

Le piden a los padres identificar un proceso y horario de comunicación escolar efectivo que motive la participación de los padres.

Curriculum Vitae

**Karen Lynn Moore**

## EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATION

**Ph.D. in Education, Special Education**
Walden University (Minneapolis, MN) Graduate July 2015

**M.Ed. Reading Curriculum and Instruction**
Illinois State University (Normal, IL) Graduate December 1992

**B.S. Special Education Elementary and Secondary Education**
Western Illinois University (Macomb, IL) Graduate December 1978

**A.A. Special Education**
Joliet Junior College (Joliet, IL) Graduate May 1976

## CERTIFICATION AND PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- Ages K-12 Special Education (Phoenix, AZ)
- K-12 Reading Certificate (Phoenix, AZ)
- Community College Certificate (Phoenix, AZ)
- Council for Exceptional Children

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Special Education Teacher 2008- Present
Betty Fairfax High School District 2 (Phoenix, AZ)
- Reading Specialist
- Mentor Teacher
- English/Inclusion

Reading Teacher 1997 - 2008
South Mountain Community College (Phoenix, AZ)

Special Education Teacher 1996 - 2008
Brooks, Academy School District #66 (Phoenix, AZ)

Special Education Teacher 1992 - 1996
Farragut School District #86 (Joliet, IL)
- Inclusion Teacher

Supportive Learning Specialist 1982 - 1992
Joliet Public School System District #86 (Joliet, IL)
- Special Education Consultant

Special Education Teacher 1979 - 1982
Washington Jr. High School District 86 (Joliet, IL)