Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies

1-1-2009

Comparing rural parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement: A mixed methods study

Ann C. Stout
Walden University

Walden University

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Ann Stout

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. Stephanie Helms, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Ashraf Esmail, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Denise DeZolt, Ph.D.

Walden University
2009

ABSTRACT

Comparing Rural Parent and Teacher Perspectives of Parental Involvement:
A Mixed Methods Study

Ann C. Stout

M.A., Grand Canyon University, 2002
B.A., Western Washington State College, 1975

Doctoral Study Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University
February 2009

ABSTRACT

Parents and teachers have differing perspectives of parental involvement which presents a barrier to the development of effective parental involvement. This mixed-method, sequential, exploratory study of parents and teachers in rural school districts sought to identify, compare, and analyze these divergent parental involvement perspectives. A sample of 122 parents and 21 certified teachers from 3 rural elementary schools were first surveyed using parallel questions from Epstein's *School and family partnerships parent (or teacher) questionnaire* (SFP). Independent-sample t-tests of SFP scales confirmed parental involvement perspectives of parents and teachers differed significantly. Survey data was analyzed descriptively and identified 5 specific topics of differences: parents' ability to help with reading and math, their need for teacher ideas, checking homework, volunteering, teacher and parent communication, and sharing learning expectations. Next, 5 focus groups of parents, teachers, and parents and teachers together probed these topics. Digital recordings of focus group data were transcribed, segmented, and coded for repeated words and phrases. Themes were then inductively developed. Results specified parents want clear, timely communication, while teachers want parents' support and to assist with children's homework. Results further indicated improved communication would assist in building stronger parent teacher relationships. Focus groups provided a venue for communication and building relationships inspiring transformation. The implications of social change are that parental involvement programs that address the perspectives of both parents and teachers improve understanding and promote a sense of social justice where both parents and teachers share positions of power in the education of children.

Comparing Rural Parent and Teacher Perspectives of Parental Involvement:
A Mixed Method Study by

Ann C. Stout

M.A., Grand Canyon University, 2002
B.A., Western Washington State College, 1975

Doctoral Study Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University
February 2009

UMI Number: 3342442

DEDICATION

This doctoral study is dedicated to Frank, my loving, supportive husband and my biggest fan, who encouraged me to embark on this perilous pursuit of a Degree of Doctor of Education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This introduction focuses on parent and teacher perspectives regarding parental involvement in elementary school education. The potential benefits of dynamic parental involvement are considered first. Next the divergent perspectives of how parents should be involved as well as the impacts perspectives have on levels of parental involvement are presented. The diverse and complex needs of school populations that influence parental involvement are then considered. Following this examination of benefits, perspectives, and needs is an exploration of barriers that hinder parental involvement. Finally, techniques for understanding perspectives of effective parent–teacher partnerships are presented.

Research shows that parents have much to contribute to the education of their children (Epstein, 1995; Hawley & Rollie, 2002; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Snyder & Ebmeier, 1992), and parental involvement enhances children's learning experiences and academic achievement (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Snyder and Ebmeire (1992) found parents to be a rich source of information about the instructional needs of their students, and were sometimes able to predict school conditions that foster student learning better than teachers.

The goal of parental involvement in elementary education is for children to experience success in school. As parents become involved in a child's education, research shows the benefits are rich and varied. They include higher grades and test scores, better attendance and homework completion, fewer placements in special education, more

positive attitudes and behavior, higher graduation rates, and greater enrollment in postsecondary education (Constantino, 2003; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007).

However, research also indicates a decisive discrepancy between what parents view as parental involvement and what teachers believe it to be (Lawson, 2003). Both parents and teachers agree that raising a well-behaved and motivated child is the most important aspect of parental involvement (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffet, 1999). Yet, six times more teachers than parents believe more parental involvement would improve public schools, indicating teachers and parents prioritize the importance of parental involvement differently (Langdon & Vesper, 2000). Whereas teachers see parental involvement as parents helping with the needs of the school, parents view parental involvement as monitoring student academic performance, building personal relationships with the child's teacher, and finding extra curricular programs for their child's participation as important examples of their involvement (Barge & Loges, 2003). Moreover, low-income families are focused on surviving in difficult living situations, meeting the basic needs of their children, and protecting them from danger and unfair school practices.

Teachers and parents have unique perspectives of what school is like based on past experience. Valli and Hawley (2002) found people engage new knowledge and skills through the lens of past experience which influence thinking, approach to learning, as well as perspective toward parental involvement. In a collective case study of parents' and teachers' perspectives on parent-teacher conferences, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003)

found that both parents and teachers viewed these opportunities to discuss student progress through the lens of their own school experiences. Parents and teachers with generally positive recollections of their school days were more willing to attend conferences and work together than were those participants who recalled generally negative school experiences. Because of the great degree of variance of these experiences, Lawrence-Lightfoot found a wide array of perspectives.

Besides both positive and negative past experiences, school populations also influence parental involvement. Today's schools are comprised of students with increasingly diverse and complex needs (Dantonio & Lynch, 2005). More diversity within the classroom has produced a diversity of languages, cultures, socioeconomic levels and special learning requirements. Added to this plethora of needs is the requirement that students meet state-mandated learning standards. The complexity of needs adds to the difficulty of developing dynamic parent-teacher partnerships.

Attempting to define parental involvement includes nebulous factors. For example, what constitutes "meaningful communication" may be viewed very differently by parents and teachers (Baker, 1997b). Parents may wish for personal communication with their child's teacher far more often than teachers feel able to provide. In addition, parent teacher conversations are complex. At times areas of confusion are not expressed and therefore not addressed (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). For the purposes of this study, parental involvement is considered the participation of parents in meaningful and consistent two-way communication involving academic learning and other school activities (National Coalition for Parent Involvement, 2004).

Communicating about academic learning means different things from the perspectives of parents and teachers. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) describes an incident of a father creatively confronting his son's teacher when he felt his child was not being sufficiently challenged in math. Lawson (2003) quoted a parent who claimed, "That's why parents get so upset at the school all the time because of the fact that the school always acts like they know everything" (p. 98).

In ethnographic interviews of teachers, involved and uninvolved parents, Lawson (2003) found radically different views of the meaning of parental involvement. Initially, parents said their understanding was defined by the school, and included activities such as chaperoning field trips, helping out in the classrooms, talking with teachers, and generally doing what the teacher asked of them. With deeper probing and understanding, however, parents revealed they viewed parental involvement as a desperate fight for their children's lives and futures.

Teachers in Lawson's study viewed parental involvement differently. They thought such involvement was a means for parents to cooperate and acquiesce to the needs of the school as defined by teachers. In other words, in teachers' views, a parent's involvement should facilitate a teacher's ability to teach. When parents and teachers view the concept of parental involvement from such widely varying viewpoints, engaging parents in the education of their children can be challenging.

In addition to past experiences and complex needs, the roles played by parents and teachers create varying perspectives. Parents often see their child as the most important person in their lives. As such, passionate and vulnerable feelings at times arise.

If parents feel their position in their child's life is threatened by their child's teacher, tensions develop (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Every day teachers carry the responsibility of helping a group of students with varying needs, abilities, and learning styles achieve learning standards. Sometimes parents intervene on behalf of their own child without considering the rights and needs of other students. When this happens, educators will often try to avoid these parents and the accompanying conflict. As a result, the teacher may effectively block out unwanted intervention from parents by relying on bureaucracy and professionalism (Cutler, 2000).

In a case study of parents and teachers in a low-income neighborhood school, O'Connor (2001) found both teachers and parents recognized instances of differential power between school personnel and families. When parents were included in a state-mandated decision making body, they lacked the requisite knowledge of the school curriculum, scheduling, and funding to allow them to make informed decisions. Consequently, they remained silent and powerless during most discussions. In addition, some teachers evidenced a tendency to question the ability of parents. This difference in perspectives creates barriers that can hinder both effective communication as well as the building of positive parent-teacher relationships.

O'Connor (2001) found working-class parents hesitated to become involved due, in part, to a feeling of discomfort in the classroom setting. For example, one parent expressed fear she might be put on the spot to read or write when she didn't feel she was good at those skills. Teachers in O'Connor's study expressed doubts about low-income parents' interest in their child's education, and failed to see them as equal partners in the

students' learning. In addition, teachers displayed the attitude that it was the teacher's job, not the parent's job, to teach the children.

Some parents perceived schools as closed systems where the teacher was always supported and protected at the expense of the student or parent (Baker, 1997b). Parents sensed that teachers and principals formed alliances and did not want to hear anything negative about other staff members.

Epstein (1991) found that teachers with positive attitudes toward parental involvement placed more importance on parental involvement practices than did other teachers. Such practices included holding conferences with all students' parents, communicating with parents about school programs, and providing parents with both good and bad reports about student progress. In addition, these positive attitudes were correlated with more success in involving parents. This was especially true for the "hard-to-reach" parents, which included working parents, less educated parents, and single parents.

In order for parents and teachers to work together in partnership, the complex needs of the school population must be addressed. Clear channels of communication must be developed, opportunities for parents and teachers to build relationships must be provided, and the perspectives of both parents and teachers must be valued (Epstein et al., 2002).

Barriers that prevent parents from becoming involved are physical, psychological, and cultural. Childcare needs, work schedules that conflict with school schedules, difficulties with transportation, and negative connotations regarding school all keep

parents (Baker, 1997a) from becoming involved. The development of effective and thriving parental involvement programs is dependent on teachers recognizing these barriers and designing ways to circumvent them.

Several studies have presented ways to remove barriers to parental involvement (Constantino, 2003; Henderson, 1986). Carefully designed parental involvement programs have been developed to break down barriers specific to school communities (Epstein et al., 2002). Giving parents specific guidance about what is expected of them can help remove parents' reluctance to become involved. Helping teachers find creative ways to utilize information from parents about a child's learning styles, interests, and talents can also serve to break down barriers to parental involvement (Baker, 1997b).

Leithwood found the role of the family had a significant effect on student progress (1993). His report suggested several ways that strong relationships can be developed between schools and families that break down barriers over time. For example, schools can provide parents with specific ways to assist children in their learning at home. In addition, providing resources for improving parenting skills can build confidence in parents as they develop home environments that support learning. Informing parents of community and support services that are available for children and families also helps build relationships and remove barriers.

Poorly prepared teachers presented another barrier to effective parental involvement. Caspe and Lopez (2006) and Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) found teacher education programs were inadequate in training teachers to work with parents. Teacher training increased teachers' bonding with parents and experienced higher rates of parent

participation. Yet, few teacher training institutions addressed the issue of parental involvement in their curriculum. New teachers reported communicating with and involving parents as the biggest challenge they faced. In addition, 24% of teachers surveyed in the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher reported dissatisfying relationships with their students' parents as well as feeling poorly prepared for engaging families in supporting their children's education (Markow & Martin, 2005).

Regardless of the myriad barriers inhibiting parental involvement, it is vital that teachers seek out and utilize the information possessed by parents to the academic benefit of students. Parents bring fresh perspectives to the school about their children (Constantino, 2003). Their perspectives relate first-hand to what they see their children need in order to achieve success. In addition to addressing specific needs of individual students, these perspectives can also provide school leaders with insights for setting school priorities. Leithwood (2002) comments, "When parents value the instruction being received by their children, they also become the most powerful allies that teachers can have" (p. 105).

Efforts to increase parental involvement are dependent on increasing the understanding of parents and teachers regarding their varying perspectives (Godber, 2002). Schools can enhance understanding by offering training opportunities to parents, as well as teachers, which inform them about how their perspectives differ. Improving methods of communication between school and home can also encourage parental involvement (Lawson, 2003). Behaviors that demonstrate respect, trust, and concern for

others can build mutual understanding. With such understanding, the insights and

perspectives of parents and teachers can be maximized.

While much research literature has examined parental involvement, little has

focused on identifying and analyzing the differing perspectives of parents and teachers

and how these perspectives impact levels of parental involvement. In addition, much of

the parental involvement literature has been set in urban schools and high poverty

populations. There is a gap in the literature in these two areas. This study considered

specifically the parental involvement perspectives of parents and teachers residing in

rural communities. Discovering the areas where teachers and parents perceive parental

involvement differently can open a door to the building of dynamic parent teacher

partnerships where diverse perceptions are accepted and valued.

In summary, a deeper and clearer comparison of the perspectives of parents and

teachers toward parental involvement is needed. The differing perspectives of parents and

teachers can be clearly identified and explained. Bridges can then be built over the

barriers which prevent a parent's involvement in their child's education or a teacher's

willingness to welcome and value a parent's participation. As these barriers are

circumvented schools can enhance parents' and teachers' willingness and availability, to

partner together. Such partnerships contribute to the improvement of education for all

children (Epstein et al., 2002).

Such enhancement of parental involvement provides myriad avenues to promote

school success. Parents who become involved in educating their children bring creative

ideas and strategies which they perceive improve the educational programs offered by

their school. Teachers can share ideas for reinforcing learning at home. Parents and

teachers working together in partnership can utilize one another's ideas to develop action

plans which meet the needs of all members of the school population. The specific needs

of families—regardless of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or level of education—can be

recognized and addressed. Moreover, when parents and teachers understand one

another's perspectives, instances of differential power between schools and families can

be identified. As these inequities are identified and removed, all participants in the

education of a child can have an equal voice (O'Connor, 2001).

<div align="center">Problem Statement</div>

The problem giving rise to this study is the lack of understanding between parents

and teachers as to what constitutes parental involvement from each of their unique

perspectives (Baker, 1997a;, 1997b; Jones, 2001). In order for parents and schools to

partner together for the benefit of children as mandated by The No Child Left Behind

(NCLB) Act of 2001, (Constantino, 2003), parents and teachers must perceive the

meanings and functions of parental involvement at least similarly and compatibly

(Epstein et al., 2002). Determining what parental involvement means and represents, to

whom, and under what conditions will help build on the strengths of both parents and

teachers as each seeks to promote the students' experience of success in school. In

addition, such understanding has the potential to overcome barriers that limit a parent's

eagerness to play an integral role in the education of their child (Constantino, 2003) or

prevents a teacher from welcoming a parent's participation. Removing these barriers can

provide opportunity for social change by engaging parents and teachers with the goal of partnering together in the educational success of all children.

Parents who may be considered uninvolved in their child's academic experience by their child's teacher may perceive themselves as adequately involved (Lawson, 2003). In 2001, the U. S. Department of Education published a report on the efforts of public schools to involve parents. Parents reported attending parental involvement events at a greater rate than schools reported parent attendance at the same events. In addition, schools reported implementation of practices to involve parents at a greater rate than parents reported provision of such practices (Chen, 2001). The factors motivating the discrepant perspectives as evidenced in Chen's report are not well addressed in the research literature. Identifying the specific areas where parent and teacher perspectives differ can point to weak links in the chain of the development and implementation of effective parental involvement practices. Comparing and analyzing these differences can assist parents, teachers, and other school personnel in understanding the myriad factors that encourage or discourage parental involvement.

While many factors influencing parental involvement have received attention in the literature (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), further study is needed to explore the divergent perspectives of parents and teachers on this topic. Studies of parents' perspectives of parental involvement are more prevalent in the research than are studies of teachers' perspectives (Barge & Loges, 2003; McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000; Riddick & Hall, 2000; Sheldon, 2002). Epstein and her colleagues have thoroughly examined teacher practices and school parental involvement programs (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Dauber,

1991; Epstein et al., 2002).While some studies comparing parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement do exist (Adams, 1998; Aina, 2001; Barge & Loges, 2003; O'Connor, 2001), the majority have occurred in low socioeconomic urban settings. There remains a gap in the literature regarding how teachers' perspectives of parental involvement compare with parents' perspectives. Conducting this study in a middle class rural community setting provided data regarding a demographic group that is underrepresented in research literature. Therefore there is a need for further study of the divergent parental involvement perspectives of parents and teachers.

Clarifying understanding of how parents and teachers perceive parental involvement can lead to improved communication. Clear communication supplies a conduit for collaboration among parents and teachers. Such collaboration provides a foundation for the development of effective parent teacher relationships. This foundation can then be used to build effective parent teacher partnerships (Dunst, Johanson, Rounds, Trivette, & Hamby, 1992).

As parents and teachers communicate and collaborate in the pursuit of common goals, communities of practice involving both parents and teachers may be formed (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003). Development of such communities of collaborators holds great promise and potential for promoting social justice and social change. The development of horizontal relationships between parents and teachers where power is shared promotes collaboration by demystifying relationships between the home and the school. Parents, acting as their child's advocate, can become bridges between teachers, students, and administrators (Addi-Raccah & Rinate, 2008; Ritblatt, Beatty,

Cronan, & Ochoa, 2002). Such relationships provide a voice for both parents and

teachers by building true partnerships in the common pursuit of school success for all

students. When parents and teachers partner together and share the goal of educational

success for all children social change occurs.

To summarize, this study seeks to identify, compare, and analyze the divergent

perspectives parents and teachers have about parental involvement and how these

perspectives impact a parent's involvement in the education of their child.

Nature of the Study

Many influences contribute to the education of a child. While parents are the first

and foremost teachers of a child (Epstein & Dauber, 1995), the school and community

also have myriad opportunities to make significant impacts on a child's success at school.

In a survey of attitudes toward the public schools, Langdon and Vesper (2000) found that

the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding the value of parental involvement

differed significantly. The largest proportion of teachers indicated that more parental

involvement would improve the school, and that lack of parental involvement was one of

the largest obstacles to school improvement. However, the public did not see parental

involvement as that crucial to school improvement placing it as equal in importance to

dress codes and academic standards. This study identified, compared, and analyzed the

differing perspectives of parents and teachers regarding parental involvement.

Clarifying understanding of parental involvement perspectives provides benefits

to students, parents, teachers, schools, and communities. Students whose parents are

involved in their education benefit with higher test scores, better attendance, more

completed homework, fewer special education placements, more positive attitudes and behavior, higher graduation rates, and greater enrollment in postsecondary education. Parents who are involved benefit from greater confidence in school and in themselves, greater likelihood to enroll in continuing education, and from teachers having a higher opinion of themselves and their child (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Finally, teachers, schools, and communities benefit from parental involvement with higher teacher morale, improved ratings of teachers by parents, more family support, and better community reputations (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

This study seeks to answer the following primary research questions:

1. What do parents perceive to be their involvement in their child's education?

2. What do teachers perceive to be a parent's involvement in their child's education?

3. How do the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding parental involvement compare? In what ways do their perspectives differ, and in what ways do they agree?

4. What actions do teachers and parents suggest that would enhance their ability to work together in partnership?

In addition, these secondary research questions were explored.

1. What factors influence the differing perspectives of parents and teachers?

2. What support do teachers and parents suggest can be given to promote a partnership effort in the pursuit of excellence in student learning?

Study of the differing perspectives of parents and teachers regarding parental involvement can serve as a foundation for improving the ability of parents and teachers to communicate clearly and build trusting relationships. Such collaborative partnerships can

help parents and teachers meet the shared goal of providing children with successful school experiences (Epstein, 1995; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003).

To gain a clear understanding of parent and teacher perspectives, an exploratory mixed methods design was employed. Parents completed a survey that identified their perspectives on parental involvement in their child's learning. Teachers completed a parallel survey that identified their perspectives on parental involvement in educating their students. The null hypothesis for this portion of the study predicted that there would be no significant difference between teachers and parents (H_0: parent perspective = teacher perspective) as indicated by survey scores that measured perceived levels of parental involvement. The alternative hypothesis predicted that there would be significant differences between parent and teacher perspectives on parental involvement (H_1: parent perspective ≠ teacher perspective) as indicated by survey scores that measured perceived levels of parental involvement.

Because the purpose of this study is to identify, compare, and analyze the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding parental involvement, the participants were divided into two groups; parents and teachers served as the quasi-independent variables (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2005). Participants' survey responses were categorized and scored according to levels of perceived involvement. These scores, the dependent variables, measuring teacher and parent perspectives were compared and correlated to identify patterns of variance in perspectives. Focus groups consisting of parents only, teachers only, and parents and teachers together served as a follow up to the survey data

sought to probe the underlying motivations for participant perceptions of parental involvement.

Utilizing qualitative techniques (focus groups), quantitative results (survey data) will be explored in detail resulting in a deeper understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2003; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006). Exploratory mixed methods design allows for the convergence of multiple forms of data in an attempt to build an in-depth picture of the case (Creswell, 1998). Moreover, it allowed the researcher opportunity to gain a better understanding of the complexity of the research problem. The factors influencing parental involvement perspectives are complex. This research design allowed the researcher to probe deeply and descriptively the perspectives, attitudes, and motivations behind the research participants who come from elementary schools in three rural school districts. Collected data was analyzed in order to be used to improve parental involvement strategies and reap the myriad benefits of effective parental involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henderson et al., 2007)

Purpose of the Study

The intent of this study was to identify, compare, and analyze the varying perspectives of teachers and parents regarding parental involvement. Parents and teachers view parental involvement differently. They lack understanding about how their perspectives differ (Baker, 1997a;, 1997b; Jones, 2001). This presents a barrier to the development of effective parent teacher partnerships. Armed with clearer understanding of how parent and teacher perspectives compare, parents and teachers together can improve their parental involvement efforts in order to help all students succeed in school.

Theoretical Framework

This study will be framed by three theories: Epstein's six levels of parental involvement (1995), her theory of overlapping spheres of influence (1995), and Hoover-Dempsey's parental role construction theory (1997).

Epstein theorizes there are six types or levels of parental involvement. The first type pertains to parents taking care of their children's basic needs and providing support for learning in the home. This level is evidenced as schools seek assistance from parents in understanding family cultures, and the goals families have for their children. Schools seek to provide assistance for families from all walks of life to help them establish home environments that provide the skills children need as students (Epstein et al., 2002).

The second type is communicating. Systems for communicating regularly and clearly between school and home are developed at this level. Schools communicate with families about school programs and student accomplishments. Parents share their insights and concerns regarding their child's progress. Together parents and teachers design strategies to maintain or improve student performance.

Volunteering, the third type of parental involvement, seeks parents' help as volunteers as well as audience members. Families become an audience when they attend presentations of student performances. Schools use a variety of ways to encourage volunteers in order to welcome the time and talents of all families. Volunteers need only have the goal of children's success in school to qualify to help. Volunteers can assist teachers, administrators, students, and other parents.

A fourth type of parental involvement occurs at home. When parents help students at home with homework or other school activities, they become aware of skills their child needs for each subject, the teacher's homework policies, and how they can help their child improve his or her skills. Schools work with parents by providing them with resources, skills, and strategies in order to help students experience success in school.

Including parents in the decision-making groups of a school is the fifth type of parental involvement. Such decision-making partnerships include parents from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups who serve as representatives of all parents. The sharing of parental perspectives in partnership with educators gives value to action plans and focuses these plans on shared goals. Parental participation in these decision-making groups not only provides parent perspectives as a factor in the development of policies but also offers parents a sense of ownership in their school's programs.

Epstein's sixth level of involvement is collaborating with the community. Parents collaborate to identify community strengths, talents, and resources with the aim of using these attributes to strengthen school programs and enrich curriculum and instruction. Families interacting with other families in the community are a rich source of information regarding community programs and opportunities available for student learning and development.

Epstein (1995) connects the six types of parental involvement to synonyms of caring for children. Parenting involves supporting and nurturing. Communicating includes relating and overseeing. Volunteering deals with supervising and fostering,

while learning at home encompasses managing, recognizing and rewarding. Decision making requires contributing, considering, and judging. Finally, collaborating involves sharing and giving. A positive relationship of trust and respect is the foundation for every level of parental involvement.

These two character qualities, trust and respect, transcend all levels of parental involvement and are imperative for building partnerships among schools, families and communities (Ritblatt et al., 2002). Activating these caring behaviors can enhance children's learning in their homes, schools, and communities (Constantino, 2003). The contexts of school, family, and community each have an influence on the type of parental involvement that develops. Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence posits that families' lives are impacted by external and internal spheres of influence. External spheres of influence occur between the family, school, and community and are controlled by the forces of time and experience. In some stages of development, such as infancy, the spheres are separate. During the school age years, families and schools overlap at every grade level. In fact, the maximum overlap occurs when schools and families act as true partners.

Internal spheres of influence address interactions, and influence which occur within organizations and between organizations. Levels of interaction may take place in a general format such as between school and families, or they may occur as specific individual interactions such as communication between a parent and teacher. Internal spheres of influence can keep the school and family separate or promote interpersonal relationships (Epstein & Dauber, 1995; Epstein et al., 2002). These overlapping spheres

of influence are complex and impacted by many factors such as institutional and individual histories and by the varying experiences of teachers, parents, and students. Internal spheres of influence change when teachers and school administrators change. As a result, the involvement of parents in the education of children also changes and expresses itself in a variety of ways.

The third theory framing this study is the parental role-construction theory. This theory proposes that actions parents believe parents are supposed to do in relation to their children's educational progress influence their involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). All parents belong to a variety of groups (e.g., the family, the child's school, the workplace). Each group holds expectations about appropriate role behavior. Members of these groups communicate their role expectations to parents. This includes behaviors related to a parent's involvement in their child's education. Since parents and teachers are influenced by different groups, their construction of the roles a parent should fill in the education of a child can vary widely. Misunderstanding of parent and teacher perspectives on the roles each of them should fill is well documented (Constantino, 2003; Epstein & Dauber, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Langdon & Vesper, 2000). Overcoming such misunderstandings can be foundational to the building of parent teacher partnerships (Lawson, 2003; Shannon, 1996).

Research on parental involvement reveals several other recurrent themes. Parental involvement can be seen as a "win-win" situation for parents, teachers, and students due to the myriad benefits parental involvement produces (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Parents and teachers share the same goal in wanting all students to experience academic

success (Epstein, 1995; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Barriers to parental involvement can be both physical and psychological (Lawson, 2003). Communication and trust are foundational to building collaborative relationships that lead to parent-teacher partnerships (Dunst et al., 1992).

In sum, when teachers and parents work together in partnership to promote student learning, the benefit of education is maximized and the ramifications are far-reaching. Parents have a unique perspective of their children's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers may have an entirely different perspective of the child as a student. Working together by developing understanding of differing perspectives, parents and teachers can synthesize their knowledge and promote a deep understanding of the child that can be used to assure students' success in school.

Definitions of Terms

Parental involvement is the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities (National Coalition for Parental Involvement, 2004). Parental involvement is multidimensional and complex (Caspe & Lopez, 2006) and includes parents, families, educators, and community members working together as real partners, holding themselves mutually accountable, and having the knowledge, skills, and confidence to succeed at improving the achievement of all students (Christie, 2005).

Family engagement is "the interaction between schools and families and the degree to which families are involved in the educational lives of their children" (Constantino 2003, p. 5). This collaboration between families and educators provides support for children's

learning and social emotional development through frequent, active communication (Minke & Anderson, 2005).

Assumptions

This study was conducted with the assumption that parents and teachers responded to the survey questions and focus group discussions honestly. It was also assumed that participants were a representative sample of the rural school population.

Scope and Limitations

The generalizability of this study has certain limitations. First, the research population for this study, three middle class rural elementary schools, differed from the economically depressed urban population on which the survey instruments, *School and Family Partnerships: Survey of Teachers in Elementary and Middle Grades* and *Survey of Parents in Elementary and Middle Grades* were originally developed. The survey reliabilities were based on this original research sample. Since the research sample in this study was from middle-class rural communities, some variance in data reliability may have occurred. In addition, because perspectives are impacted by many factors such as changing cultural mores, spheres of influence, and role construction, (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 1995; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003), the perspectives identified, compared, and analyzed are not static and may vary over time.

Demographic data was inadvertently omitted from the revised teacher surveys which limited the ability of this study to compare teachers and parents demographics. In addition, no economic data was collected from parent surveys. This limited the study's ability to analyze the effect economic level had on parent perspectives.

The low return rate of surveys was another limitation of this study. The parents

and teachers who did participate may have very different perspectives than those who

were unable or unwilling to participate. The researcher, as a member of the study's

population, brought subjective involvement to the study. Known biases of her perception

of participants' responses were bracketed. However, as a teacher and parent at one of the

schools being studied for over twenty years, she had many long-standing relationships

with both parents and staff members of the population. These long standing relationships

allowed the researcher "insider" status which provided insight into understanding parent

and teacher perspectives.

<div align="center">Delimitations</div>

This study sought to identify, compare, and analyze the discrepancies and

similarities of teacher and parent perspectives of parental involvement. The research

sample was limited to certified teachers and parents of students attending one of three

elementary schools located in a rural area of the Pacific Northwest region of the United

States. The research sample consisted of only those teachers and parents who chose to

complete the survey and were willing to attend focus group sessions indicating some

interest in the study.

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

The most recent MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (Henderson & Mapp,

2002) indicates that new teachers find communicating with and involving parents to be

their biggest challenge. When teachers feel poorly prepared to communicate and involve

parents in their child's education, the likelihood of teachers initiating parental involvement decreases (Langdon & Vesper, 2000).

Results of a study of focus groups of parents and teachers indicated that teachers felt strongly negative toward parents (Cavazos, 1989). They didn't really enjoy interacting with parents. Parents in the same study indicated feelings of negativity when they complained that teachers didn't inform them of their children's problems in time for them to get help. By conducting separate focus groups of parents and teachers in this study, participants had opportunity to contribute their ideas in confidence without concern for how members of the other group would react to their personal views. By conducting a combined focus group of parents and teachers, participants had opportunity to communicate their understanding between groups.

Surveys of parents and teachers in the United States as well as in other countries have consistently and repeatedly indicated teachers view parents very differently than parents view themselves (Baker, 1997a;, 1997b; Jones, 2001). Teachers lacked understanding of what parents did to help in the education of their children. This study sought to conduct a thorough and comprehensive investigation of parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement in order to develop effective parent teacher partnerships.

This study, identified, compared, and analyzed the divergent perspectives of parental involvement held by parents and teachers. The collected data can be used to increase parent and teacher understanding of what parents and teachers are trying to do at home and at school to help children achieve success at school. In addition, it provides an

accurate base on which to plan better programs and parental involvement practices of and parent-teacher partnerships.

Low levels of parental involvement are a serious concern for the three schools in the research population. Although some students enjoy strong learning support from their parents, many students do not. In the midst of very busy lives, this study provided an opportunity for teachers and parents to consider their frustrations and successes with parental involvement. The hurt feelings and defensiveness research has found in parent teacher relationships were not evident in the collected data. Instead participants, both parents and teachers, were eager to learn from one another and find ways resolve problems immediately (Geiger et al., 2002; Lawson, 2003; Miretzky, 2004).

The knowledge generated from this study identifies the similarities and differences of parent and teacher parental involvement perspectives. This knowledge can be used to enlighten the understanding of parents and teachers toward one another as they seek the academic success of every student. In addition, this study's findings have extended the knowledge base in the areas of communication between parents and teachers, barriers which inhibit parental involvement, and suggestions for enhancing parent-teacher relationships in order to develop positively productive parent-teacher partnerships.

Research demonstrates clear communication is a vital component of successful parental involvement programs (Lawson, 2003). In order to communicate effectively with parents and build vital relationships with them, a clear understanding of parent perspectives regarding parental involvement as well as a clear understanding of teachers'

perspectives toward parental involvement is needed. This understanding will provide teachers as well as parents with insights and applications needed to build strong parent-teacher relationships.

The ability to build supportive relationships between families and educators through collaborative approaches impacts society positively in myriad ways (Li, 2006). As teachers and parents build understanding of one another's perspectives, improved communication can lead to increased parental involvement both in quantity and quality. Moreover, understanding any discrepancies between parent and teacher parental involvement perspectives can produce significant social change. When parents and teachers gain understanding of each other's personal perspectives of parental involvement social justice occurs. Clarifying understanding equips each individual to interact positively in promoting the academic welfare of not only their own children but all children in the school. In addition, the endeavor to develop positive parent teacher relationships promotes the worth of what each person has to contribute.

Clarifying understanding of parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement, as this research seeks to do, provides a tangible contribution to positive social change. With clearer understanding of one another's perspectives, parents and teachers can deconstruct the barriers that prevent parental involvement. In addition, such understanding can provide insights into strategies for including all parents and teachers in the parental involvement process. Given the increasingly diverse needs of teachers, parents, and students in today's rapidly changing society, increasing understanding of how parental involvement is perceived can light the way to meeting those needs.

Summary

Many factors contribute to parents' involvement in the education of their children. Barriers such as child care and parents' work schedules hinder involvement, yet when teachers and parents partner together learning is enhanced. Parents and teachers see things differently, but each fills a vital role in the education of students. The unique perspectives of parents and teachers must be understood in order to promote positive parental involvement.

Using Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence (1995) and Hoover-Dempsey's theory of parent role construction (1997), a clearer understanding of parental involvement perspectives of parents and teachers can be gained. Discovering those actions parents and teachers view as helpful to improving parental involvement as well as what actions parents and teachers view as obstructing parental involvement can become a resource for developing strategies to increase effective parental involvement.

The challenge to teachers and administrators is to make parental involvement relevant and important to both teachers and parents. Creating such a context for motivating parents and teachers to seek workable partnerships is attainable. After all, virtually all parents want to see their children become successful in school. Similarly, all teachers want to see their students meet their learning goals (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 1995; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). This common desire provides solid ground on which schools can build motivation on the part of parents and teachers to promote the involvement of all parents in education. In addition, parents and teachers can develop

perspectives that recognize how working together in partnership can help achieve their common goal: that of helping every child achieve academic success.

Therefore, examining the discrepancies of parent and teacher perspectives regarding parental involvement and discovering methods for developing mutual understanding of varying perspectives regarding parental involvement, can serve to increase and improve parental involvement efforts. As understanding of perspectives is built between teachers and parents, insights into how parents and teachers can best help each other help students achieve success can be gained.

The following chapter will examine the unique perspectives of parents and teachers as well as the multi-faceted factors that influence them. Three theories of parental involvement will then be considered. Parental involvement will be shown to be a win-win situation for parents, teachers, students, and communities. In addition to myriad benefits, barriers to involvement will be explored. Teacher and parent perspectives will be examined and a sampling of successful parental involvement will be presented.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Years of research have built a strong case for the benefits of parental involvement on a child's education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), yet six times more teachers than parents view more parent involvement as an important means to improving public schools (Langdon & Vesper, 2000). This discrepancy in perspective is the basis for this study, which seeks to identify and understand the underlying factors that contribute to the differing perspectives of parents and teachers on parental involvement. Such understanding can promote an atmosphere of mutual respect, which in turn, can promote an increase in effective parental involvement (Cavazos, 1989; Ferguson, 2006).

This literature review used three data bases: Academic Search Premier, Educational Resource Information Clearinghouse (ERIC), and Pro Quest databases. Key words used successfully included parent involvement, family engagement, parent and teacher partnerships, perspectives, and attitudes. Search results were then explored to determine their relevancy to perspectives on parental involvement. More successful than key word searches of data bases were searches of article references. References cited in relevant studies provided the researcher a path to follow in the exploration of parental involvement perspectives. In order to narrow this study's focus to the perspective of parents and teachers of school aged children, some factors which impact parental involvement were omitted. These included studies focused on ethnicities, age, gender, role of school climate, and curriculum.

The libraries of Washington State University, Seattle University, The Evergreen State College, Montana State University, Centralia College, and the Document Delivery Service of the InterLibrary Loan Internet Accessible Database (ILLiad) provided resources relevant to the topic of parental involvement perspectives. Walden librarians also provided guidance in tracking down difficult to find articles.

Two hundred fifteen references were scanned for this literature review and ninety three items were cited. Although the topic of parental involvement is covered widely in the research, there is a dearth of information regarding parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement. The perspective of parents and teachers from rural areas limited the number of current research studies even further. Research which addressed perspectives of parents and teachers from urban areas was included. The references cited in this review addressed parent or teacher perspectives of parental involvement specifically. It was determined the review of current literature had been saturated when the researcher repeatedly found citations to articles that had already been explored. In order to remain abreast of current research throughout the doctoral study writing process, the researcher subscribed to several email newsletters including the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE), Family and Community Connections with Schools, Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE), and the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) which regularly report the findings of current research. The web sites for each of these organizations also provided links to related research which the researcher used for this review.

Foremost in this examination of perspectives was that parents and teachers were both involved and interested in the successful education of children. Yet there was a lack of understanding and agreement between parents and teachers regarding what constitutes effective parental involvement (Baker, 1997a;, 1997b; Jones, 2001) . This was because parent perspectives and teacher perspectives of parental involvement were motivated by very different factors (Geiger et al., 2002; Lawson, 2003; Miretzky, 2004). For example, uninvolved parents in a low-income, culturally diverse urban community perceived their involvement responsibilities as keeping their child safe, well fed, and out of trouble with the law. On the other hand, teachers in this study perceived that parent involvement is a way for parents and families to cooperate and to expedite the needs of the school and its teachers (Lawson, 2003).

Parents' perceptions of efficacy also contributed to levels of involvement. Middle-class parents reported higher levels of involvement in children's learning when they reported having knowledge of school practices in reading, math, and writing. However, when parents expressed less familiarity with school practices, their levels of involvement decreased (Li, 2006). Parents and other family members of students in middle grades increased their involvement levels with math homework when they were provided with prompts to assist them in their helping behavior (Balli, Demo, & Wedman, 1998).

In order to determine what accounted for these divergent perspectives, a review of parental involvement research was conducted. Because parental involvement is a broad topic and many complex factors contribute to the levels and types of involvement, the

review will first define parental involvement and address some of the many benefits described in the literature. Next, the historical foundation for parental involvement will be laid followed by its theoretical foundation. Following this, the elements of effective parental involvement programs will be addressed. From this big picture perspective, the focus of the review will narrow to explore elements, contexts, and examples of parental involvement. Then barriers impeding parental involvement are discussed. Finally an examination is made of the diverse parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement and the contexts in which they occur.

<div align="center">Parental Involvement Defined</div>

Different perspectives of parental involvement are evident in its definitions found in the literature. The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPI) defines parent involvement as, "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities," (National Coalition for Parental Involvement, 2004). The United States Department of Education defines parent involvement: "In the context of schooling, parent involvement describes a relationship between families and schools in which parents and educators work together to provide the best possible environment for the schooling of children" (Cavazos, 1989, p. 1).

Moreover, some studies focus on inclusion, and prefer the term family engagement, defining it as "those systems, processes, policies, procedures, and practices that allow parents and family to be a credible component within the academic lives of their children" (Constantino, 2003, p. 10).

Finally, the No Child Left Behind act defines parental involvement as parents participating as partners in regular, and meaningful two-way communication at all levels of their child's education (Public Education Network, 2004).

In sum, the many facets of parental involvement include participation, communication, relationship, inclusion, partnership, and parent empowerment. The many different foci of parental involvement definitions indicate a ring of truth to Constantino's (2003) proposition that parental involvement means different things to different people. This study will focus on parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement and how communication and relationships can build understanding on which to build effective and efficient parent teacher partnerships.

<div align="center">Benefits of Parent Involvement</div>

Parental involvement has been shown to produce a wide range of positive benefits in the academic achievement of children and adolescents (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henderson et al., 2007). More specifically, the involvement of parents has produced positive outcomes in academic achievement, school attendance, motivation, and the self-concept of students (Epstein, 1995; Gonzalez-Pienda et al., 2002). In addition, children of involved parents have been found to be more likely to seek challenging tasks, persist through academic challenges, and experience satisfaction in their schoolwork (Paulu, 1995).

Parents benefit as well; perceiving themselves as more capable parents when they become involved. Epstein and Dauber (1995) found that when teachers make involving

parents a part of their regular teaching practice, parents interact with their children more at home and feel more positive about their abilities to help their children.

Teachers and schools also benefit from parental involvement. Parents rate teachers as better teachers when they are involved (Epstein & Dauber, 1995) which benefits both the school and the teacher. Comer (2005) found that when parents sense they are welcome and can contribute something of value, they become involved in the work of the school and the education of their children.

Although the majority of research reports the benefits of parental involvement, Domina (2005) found such involvement does not independently improve children's learning, but it did prevent behavioral problems. In addition, the benefits of parental involvement for students whose parents had low socioeconomic status were found to be greater compared with students whose parents had high socioeconomic status.

Because of the recognized benefits of parental involvement, it is a major component of education reform recognized by the United States Department of Education. The Goals 2000 Educate America Act states, "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parent involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (NCPI, 2004, p. 3). In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to develop ways to get parents more involved in their child's education and in improving the school (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2005).

Historical Foundation

Although parents and teachers have interacted since schools were first formed in the United States, the concept of parental involvement has changed over time (Cutler, 2000). In the past, parents and teachers lived near one another which allowed for shared purpose and common values. However, as schools became larger and more impersonal, layers of school bureaucracy were added. This made it difficult for parents to become involved. In the nineteenth century, there was a shift in power from the home to the school. Along with this shift in power, came more teacher responsibility for both the cognitive and moral development of students. At the end of the nineteenth century, schools learned the benefits of working with parents. Schools often collaborated with parents in the founding of mothers' clubs or parent teacher associations. However, when compulsory school and child labor laws were instituted in 1910, division between home and school began to grow. The shift in the power relationship between families and schools continued to change, yet many schools recognized the importance of working with the home as distinct yet reciprocal institutions (Dodd & Konzal, 2002). When the Great Depression caused some schools to face the threat of bankruptcy, schools realized their need for parental loyalty and approval. Therefore the schools sought to strengthen their efforts at public relations. Twentieth century educators and reformers hoped the schools could be a conduit for educational and social reform and petitioned state and federal policy makers. Organizations such as the National Congress of Mothers and the National Congress of Parents and Teachers understood the need for the relationship between home and school to be based on cooperation rather than conflict (Cutler, 2000).

Although both conflictive and cooperative relations between home and school have occurred over the years, parents and educators continue to strive to find ways to collaborate effectively in the education of children.

Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms (1986) suggested five roles that are played by parents in education. Parents begin their involvement as partners by meeting basic obligations for their child's education and social development. Next on the continuum of development, parents become collaborators and problem solvers who strive to support the school's efforts and solve problems as they occur. Following this, involved parents become the audience by attending school performances and activities. The fourth level of involvement contains supporters. Supporter parents volunteer to help teachers, PTAs, and/or other parents. Finally, some parents become advisors and or co-decision makers by taking part in writing school policies or selecting curriculum.

Taking a different perspective, the United States Department of Education specified attitudes that enhance the effectiveness of parent and teacher roles when it recommended actions for parents and schools (Cavazos, 1989). These actions for parents included valuing habits that encourage children to value education, supporting the school by taking responsibility for attendance, discipline, and homework, learning about school expectations, and joining with other parents to improve the school. Recommendations for schools included respecting parents' concerns and values, providing encouragement, access, and clear information regarding expectations, initiating regular contacts with parents, helping parents assist their children with schoolwork, and providing parent training opportunities.

In 1994 President Clinton signed into law the Goals 2000: Educate America Act.
This act consisted of eight National Education Goals for the year 2000. The eighth and
final goal referred to parental involvement and instructed every school to promote
partnerships to increase parental participation in developing the social, emotional, and
academic growth of children" (Paulu, 1995). Thus the goal of parental involvement had
changed from the provision of passive roles for parents to fill in the 1980s to one of
collaboration and partnerships between schools and parents in the 1990s.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), raises parental involvement to a new
level (NCLB, 2005). While parents are still seen as partners in the education of children,
NCLB views parental involvement as empowering parents. NCLB now holds schools
accountable to attain adequate yearly progress (AYP) providing parents with much more
data regarding the schools' progress in the education of their children than ever before. In
addition, schools are instructed to work with parents in a new way in order to improve
parental involvement and thereby improve student achievement.

In current research, parental involvement is viewed from a collaborative home-
school partnership perspective in which families and schools develop relationships as
collaborative partners (National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), 2005).
Home-school collaboration involves families and educators actively working together to
develop shared goals and plans that support the success of all students.

Research continues to demonstrate how a parent's involvement produces positive
impacts to academic achievement (Henderson et al., 2007; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). As
this body of evidence has grown, changed, and developed, the perspective for the

inclusion of parents in education has broadened. Deepening the understanding of the differing perspectives of parents and teachers toward parental involvement can serve to further broaden understanding of how to increase the effectiveness of parental involvement.

Theoretical Foundation

Several theories of parental involvement, each of which has a different perspective, are prevalent throughout the research literature. Parents have unique perspectives of their role in the education of their children, and the parent role construction theory addresses how parent perspectives regarding the roles they should fill are developed (Walker, J., Wilkins, A., Dallaire, J., Sandler, H., & Hoover-Dempsey, K. 2005;, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In addition, Epstein (1995) identifies overlapping spheres of influence which influence five different types or levels of parental involvement. How a parent's perspective of parent involvement is theoretically developed, determined, and enacted will now be examined more specifically.

Parent Role Construction Theory

The parent role construction theory proposes that those things parents believe parents are supposed to do in relation to their children's educational progress influence their involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Roles are considered to be sets of expectations held by groups for the behavior of individual members. The development of certain perceived roles appears to establish a basic range of activities that parents will view as important, necessary, and permissible for their own actions in order to benefit their children. A parent's role is defined by the parent's beliefs about child development,

child-rearing, and what is appropriate parental help at home. In addition, these roles are influenced by expectations held by family, community, school, or other groups. Hence, the more those involved in the educational pursuits of the child agree on individual member's roles and role behaviors, the more positive will be the impact on the child's learning. On the other hand, when the parent's role is ambiguous, the parent's impact on the child's learning decreases.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) suggested that specific variables create patterns of influence at critical points in the parental involvement process and identified three reasons parents choose to be involved in their child's education. First, how parents see their role as a parent and the activities they see as valuable make the biggest impact on their decision to become involved. Secondly, parents' sense of self-efficacy also plays a role in their decision to be involved. Those parents who believe they can have a positive impact on their child's education are more likely to participate than parents who question their ability to positively impact their child's learning. Finally, the welcoming atmosphere of the school and an invitation from both children and children's schools to participate positively impact parents to find time to join in school projects. Therefore, parent perception of their role in education, their sense of self-efficacy, and the welcoming atmosphere of the school all affect levels of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Overlapping Spheres of Influence

The theory of overlapping spheres of influence recognizes the contexts in which students learn and grow are the family, the school, and the community (Epstein, 1995;

Sanders & Epstein, 1998). Although at times the family, school, and community operate

as separate spheres of influence, they can be linked together to create areas of overlap.

These influential spheres can be external, internal, or remain separate. External spheres of

influence are practices of the school, family, or community often with the purpose of

influencing children's learning and development. A parent who welcomes external

spheres of influence might say, "I really need to know what is happening in school in

order to help my child."

Internal spheres of influence refer to complex and essential interpersonal relations

between individuals at home, at school, and in the community. Positive internal spheres

of influence promote interpersonal relationships. Parents and teachers promote these

spheres by communicating closely with one another about how things are going at school

or at home.

Some parents or educators perceive the spheres of influence in their lives as

separate rather than overlapping. A parent with this perspective might make a comment

such as, "I raised this child, and it is your job to educate her."

Educators with this perspective might comment, "If the family would just do its

job, we could do our job."

However, educators who embrace the theory of overlapping spheres of influence

might comment, "I cannot do my job without the help of my students' families and the

support of this community" (Epstein, 1995, p. 2).

Overlapping spheres of influence therefore have the potential to bring together all

three contexts, home, school, and community, in which students learn and grow. With

frequent interactions between these three contexts, students receive common messages from a variety of people about the importance of school and the importance of learning.

Levels of Involvement

Comer (2001) delineates three elements of evidence of parental involvement. He sees general support from parents who participate in a variety of activities such as teacher-parent conferences and fund raising support. More involved parents volunteer at school as room parents, office support, or chaperones for field trips. This type of involvement gives parents opportunities to enhance their own skills and self-confidence. The final level of involvement comes when parents serve on decision making teams.

In considering how parents construct their roles in the education of their children, Epstein (1995) proposed the previously mentioned continuum of six types of parental involvement. She observed that involved parents take care of children's basic needs, communicate with the school, voluntarily take part in school activities, participate in children's homework, are involved in decision-making with the school, and collaborate with the community. As their children's primary teacher, Epstein elevated the role of parents to that of fellow educators and proposed that schools should show regard for parents in this role.

As has been seen, perspectives of parental involvement have many facets and are influenced by parents' and teachers' perceptions of their role in education and their feelings of self-efficacy, the external and internal spheres of influence on their lives, and the contexts in which their children learn and grow.

Elements of Effective Parent Involvement Programs

Marzano (2003) proposes three features which delineate effective parental involvement. They are communication, participation, and governance. Schools are responsible to initiate communication and provide an atmosphere in which parents feel free to communicate in return. Encouraging parent participation gives parents the sense that the school values and welcomes their ideas as well as their involvement. As families engage in positive avenues of involvement, not only do they help their children become engaged and successful, they also become interested in governing decisions which impact programs and practices that bear directly on the achievement of their children.

In addition to communication, participation, and governance, specific school programs and teacher practices that suggest, encourage, and guide parents to participate in their child's education are helpful (Epstein & Dauber, 1995). Examples of specific school programs of parental involvement will be explored in detail in the section entitled Examples of Parental Involvement Programs. When parents perceive that school provides knowledge in critical areas and helps their children, they are more likely to be involved. Ongoing dialogue and a trust-building school atmosphere are also more likely to initiate parent involvement especially when specific opportunities occur both at school and at home.

To encourage parents to seize opportunities to participate, schools seek to develop an atmosphere in which parents feel welcomed. Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) are areas set up in schools as places where parents can feel comfortable, find people to talk with, and learn of opportunities where they can be effectively involved in

the education of their children (U. S. Department of Education, 2004). Additionally, some schools have parent liaisons that are responsible for maintaining communication between parents and the schools. Such centers and liaisons have been found to be valuable in their ability to provide outreach and services as well as create a positive school culture (Constantino, 2003).

Contexts of Parent Involvement

As mentioned previously, there are three major contexts in which students learn and grow—the family, the school, and the community (Epstein, 1995). Since students are often the family's main source of information about the school, clear and consistent communication is critical to connecting the contexts of family and school. Partnership activities that connect the family, school, and community can be designed to engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce their own successes. Parents and schools partnering together allows for the creation of family-like schools where each child's individuality can be recognized. Partnerships also allow families to become more school-like and recognize their children as students. Community events held in family-like settings enable families to better support their children, build relationships with other families, and lead families to become more community minded. This community mindedness leads to families helping out neighbors and other families within the community.

Within the context of the school, the building of parent teacher relationships addresses the need for social justice. In a true partnership relationship, both parents and teachers are allowed to express their perspectives and believe that their perspective will

be heard and valued. Griffiths (2003) suggests a strategy for developing socially just partnerships in education which begin with listening and talking. Next, potential partners move on to consulting and cooperating in order to take action. Finally, with hard work and dedication, the participants can act together as partners. To successfully build parent teacher partnerships, parents and teachers must respect and value one another and realize that they each have a different relationship to power and status. Therefore, to create fair, equitable and just partnerships, differences in perspectives must be acknowledged, understood, respected, and valued.

In building relationships between parents and teachers in the pursuit of social justice, Bernard (2003) describes three protective factors that enhance student achievement. They include caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunities for participation. Caring relationships demonstrate respect, compassion, and a desire to get to know the gifts of students as well as members of their families. High expectations reflect the teacher's belief in the student and his or her parents. When teachers care for their students and believe in them, they want to give them a chance to be heard. When schools give students and their parents many opportunities to make choices, engage them in active problem solving, and ask questions that encourage critical thinking, they are recognizing parents' and students' voices. This redistribution of power results in the development of positive school cultures while promoting social justice (Griffiths, 2003).

The leadership of schools and districts act as the catalyst for the development of positive school cultures (Constantino, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2008). For schools to become places where students can thrive and achieve academic success, programs and

policies must be designed with this in mind. School vision statements can include a commitment to engaging all families regardless of their social status. In addition, schools need to determine and design action plans regarding how to attract and connect with no show families, those families who fail to attend school events such as parent conferences (U. S. Department of Education, 2004).

There are a variety of parental involvement programs that have been designed, implemented, and studied. In the following paragraphs samples of these programs are considered.

Examples of Parental Involvement Programs

Examples of programs designed to enhance parental involvement are replete in research literature. Although an exhaustive review of these programs is beyond the scope of this paper, the programs highlighted below are offered as samples of the many varied and creative parental involvement programs employed in schools throughout the United States. The three contexts in which students learn and grow, the family, the school and the community (Epstein, 1995), will serve as the basis for categorizing this examination of a sampling of such programs.

Community Programs

Seniors Offering Support (SOS) is a program implemented in the southeastern United States which seeks to address risk factors among students through academic tutoring and regular family contact (Geiger et al., 2002). Program volunteers are trained to listen to others' concerns and give friendly advice as they offer guidance and support to school-aged youths and families. Parents, students, and teachers report the seniors have

made positive impacts on their lives. As the majority of data in this evaluation study is anecdotal, and two years passed before the evaluation was conducted, some questions regarding the validity of the study's results could be raised. However, this program does demonstrate that trained senior volunteers have the potential to successfully meet the needs of parents, students, and teachers.

Family Programs

Toney, Kelley, and Lanclos (2003) conducted a quantitative study of the effects of self and parental monitoring of homework in adolescents. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups: parental monitoring, self-monitoring, or control. Parents in the parental monitoring group received training on structuring the homework routine and monitoring and assisting their child with homework. The self-monitoring group received the same training only it was delivered to the students with the parents primarily listening. The control group did not receive training. Eighty six percent of parent participants reported their participation in the study had positively affected their child's grades regardless of which treatment group they were assigned indicating parents' perceptions are a valid and important outcome of their involvement.

Rich (2004) seeks to enlighten parents to the opportune moments to do activities with children around the home that relate to school but do not duplicate it. She posits that the home is where children can learn to love learning by supplementing and extending what they are learning at school. Rich and the Home and School Institute (HSI) have developed ten keys to unlocking student learning potential which both parents and teachers can employ. The keys are termed Megaskills and focus on the character qualities

of confidence, motivation, effort, responsibility, initiative, perseverance, caring, teamwork, common sense, problem solving, and focus. These habits, behaviors, and attitudes are seen as foundational to the success of both parents and children. HSI provides ongoing training opportunities in these Megaskills for both parents and teachers thus providing a venue for connecting and complementing what is being taught at school with learning at home.

School Programs

The Volunteer Initiative Program (VIP) was instituted in west Texas, to increase community and parent involvement in grades kindergarten through twelve (Halsey, 2004). Teachers were encouraged through this program to increase their efforts to involve parents in their schools. Teachers focused on building relationships with parents which they understood required effort in the areas of recruiting, organizing, and developing ownership in the program. The program's focus on building relationships viewed relationship building as time and effort intensive requiring teachers to reach out and build friendships with parents.

In rural West Virginia the Parents as Educational Partners (PEP) program was developed by teachers and parents through action research in an effort to overcome geographic isolation. The program includes a telephone tree staffed by parent volunteers, a home visiting program, a parent coordinator and a parent resource center. Teachers are provided with time and resources to reach out to parents and regular training opportunities are provided to parents and teachers. Success is evidenced by the dramatic

increases in numbers of hours parents have volunteered as well as the increase in the number of families participating in annual volunteer training.

<div style="text-align:center">Barriers Inhibiting Parent Involvement</div>

Despite the evidence that parental involvement positively impacts the quality of a child's learning (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995), levels of involvement remain low. The Comer School Development web site lists several barriers or obstacles which inhibit parental involvement (Comer, 2001). Parents may avoid involvement because they have had past negative school experiences. They may have been unsuccessful at school themselves, or they may have only been contacted in the past to discuss problems. Alternatively, their attention may be focused on basic survival needs causing involvement in their child's education to seem a luxury they simply cannot afford. Some parents, especially in high poverty areas, may be incarcerated or struggling with drug addictions. Schools may have neglected to make accommodations for cultural diversity or language differences making the school an uncomfortable and foreign feeling place for some families. Also, parents may perceive unwillingness on the part of the school staff to invest time or effort in involving parents. Finally, pragmatic issues such as transportation, child care and the like may keep family members from participating in school activities.

Educators may inadvertently or intentionally set up barriers to parental involvement in a variety of ways for many different reasons. Because people tend to operate out of their own self interests (Dodd & Konzal, 2002), unless parents and teachers have an opportunity to develop relationships, they will see the other's role or

position rather than the person in it. What parents and teachers do not know about each other can cause misunderstanding and conflict. Teachers may choose to avoid such conflict by not sharing information with parents, or by hiding behind the bureaucratic structure of the school.

Teachers and administrators may inadvertently discourage parental involvement. Although teachers report a desire to involve parents (Saulawa & Johnson, 2001), Bauch and Goldring (2000) found that parents were perceived as outsiders in relation to the school, and principals were trained to guard teachers and prevent parents from interfering in the affairs of the school. In addition, according to Bakker (2007), teachers used their perspective of parents to stereotype them which impacted student academic performance. Lawson (2003) found parents complained that teachers acted like they knew everything which caused feelings of anger, alienation, and intimidation in parents. Moreover, Chen (2001) found significant discrepancies in the reports of schools and the reports of parents regarding the opportunities for parental involvement. Schools reported offering opportunities for parental involvement at a significantly greater rate than parents perceived them being offered.

Some barriers to involvement affect both parents and teachers. Both may suffer from a lack of adequate time to schedule extracurricular activities. Another barrier was exposed in a case study of seven children, their families, and teachers (Riddick & Hall, 2000). This study found that both parents and teachers expressed perceptions of not being understood and of not knowing each other well. In another study teachers viewed culturally and linguistically diverse students and families without understanding their

unique ways of knowing, learning and understanding (Colombo, 2006). Another problem

obstructing progress in the inclusion of parents was found when some teachers

demonstrated a defensive stance, in which they attributed a child's failure to something

other than their own responsibility. Other teachers blamed parents for low levels of

engagement with their children's schools (Flessa, 2008). Such negative attitudes resulted

in learning difficulties being attributed to the wrong causes which compromised

understanding between parents and teachers.

<p align="center">Discrepant Parent and Teacher Perspectives</p>

The perspectives of teachers and parents regarding parental involvement vary.

The largest proportion of teachers surveyed in a Phi Delta Kappa poll (Langdon &

Vesper, 2000) indicated that more parent involvement would improve the school and that

lack of parent involvement was one of the largest obstacles to school improvement.

However, the public did not see parent involvement as that crucial to school improvement

placing it as equal in importance to dress codes and academic standards. This discrepancy

of parent and teacher perspectives will now be examined by considering what research

shows to be perspectives of each group.

Teacher Perspectives

The 2004–2005 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher indicated parental

involvement is valued by teachers, yet they reported the challenge of engaging parents in

their children's education to be elusive (Markow & Martin, 2005). In fact, new teachers

were most likely to report that their biggest challenge was communicating with and

involving parents. Furthermore, a majority of secondary teachers expressed the belief that

although their school provided a range of ways for parents to participate, most parents did not participate.

In the 2006 MetLife survey, twenty six percent of the teachers surveyed felt unprepared for engaging families (Markow, Moessner, & Horowitz, 2006). Moreover, half of the teachers reported parents' lack an understanding of the school curriculum.

In addition to the perspectives presented above, other teacher perspectives may contribute to the building of barriers to parental involvement (DeHass, 2005). For instance, teachers may have low expectations of parents and fail to create welcoming opportunities for parents to take part in the education of their child (Comer, 2001). Some teachers may communicate defensive attitudes attributing blame to parents or the child rather than accepting responsibility for the current difficulties. In addition, they may view the parent as a client in need of redirection rather than an equal partner (Riddick & Hall, 2000).

In a survey of teacher attitudes toward parental involvement, teachers expressed strong positive attitudes toward parental involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991), yet school programs and classroom practices did not support these beliefs. Furthermore, teachers rated themselves as much stronger supporters of parental involvement than parents. Such discrepant perspectives were found to correlate to weaker programs of parental involvement. Teachers with more positive attitudes toward parental involvement though, reported more success in involving parents.

Parents' Perspectives

Parents view parental involvement from a different vantage point than do teachers. Although some parents report little involvement at school, they do express a desire for more and better information to know what to do that will help their child each year (Dauber & Epstein, 1989; Epstein, 2001). In addition, they yearn for better communication from the school regarding what their children are doing and what they are expected to do in school.

For example, many parents expressed insecurity about the correct way to handle homework (Baker, 1997b). Accordingly, in a study of parental monitoring of homework, parents who received training in how to monitor their children's homework rated the program positively and reported that participation in the study improved their child's grades (Toney et al., 2003).

Chen (2001) found schools' and parents' reports on whether schools used various practices to involve parents in their children's education differed consistently and significantly.

Teacher and Parent Perspectives in Context

As has been noted, many factors influence levels and effectiveness of parental involvement. Social class is an influencing factor in family-school relationships. Whereas parental involvement relationships with upper-middle-class parents are characterized by interconnectedness, often relations between working-class families and the school are characterized by separation. Working-class parents have been found to perceive teachers as being responsible for education. They therefore seek little information about school

curriculum or the process of learning (Lareau, 2000). Despite these different parent

perspectives of involvement, both working and upper class families share a desire for

their children to succeed in school (Epstein, 2001). Therefore, while social class may

contribute to low levels of parental involvement, it should not prevent the pursuit of

social justice in the development of effective parent teacher partnerships. In fact,

according to Griffiths (2003), "anything that is done in partnership with others in a spirit

of equality, democracy and solidarity is a matter of social justice" (p. 99). To this end, all

parents and teachers regardless of social class or level of education are vital participants

in building partnerships which enhance the education of all children.

Research also indicates a decisive discrepancy between what parents view as

parental involvement and what teachers believe it to be (Lawson, 2003). Teachers viewed

parental ideas as important insofar as they serve to meet the needs of the school.

However, parents saw teachers' wishes as important insofar as they meet the needs of

their children and community.

Hence forging parent-teacher partnerships, especially with uninvolved parents

present formidable tasks. A two-year ethnographic study of the community of Garfield, a

low-income, urban community, sought to determine the meanings and functions of parent

involvement in action (Lawson, 2003). Special effort was made to include uninvolved

parents as participants in the study that sought to gain understanding of school-family

relations from the perspectives of teachers, parents, and school staff. Many of the parents

of the Garfield community were found to struggle with the dual responsibilities of having

to safeguard their children by themselves, while striving to provide for them. In addition,

parents believed that drugs, violence and other environmental hazards created a school environment that centered on suspicion and fear. Parents reported that schools do not listen, but instead act like they know everything. This eroding trust in the school caused parents to approach teacher-parent interactions with hostility.

Teachers at Garfield regularly lamented the parents who were not involved. They found it difficult to forgive the uninvolved, nonworking parents and viewed their lack of involvement as a gross neglect of parental responsibility (Lawson, 2003). In addition, it was found that teachers tended to believe that their efforts in the classroom were fruitless for students of such parents. Some teachers, believing uninvolved parents must be involved, would search for appropriate incentives. This produced a conflict in their own values though; since teachers believed parents should intrinsically want to be involved.

Conflicting perspectives of parents and teachers have produced a negative cycle. "Teachers believe that when parents perceive themselves in lesser terms than teachers, they do not feel welcome. When parents feel unwelcome at the school, their insecurities lead them to feel that teachers will not listen to their concerns" (Lawson, 2003 p. 112).

Parents and teachers also have differing perspectives of influence (Riddick & Hall, 2000). Mothers in this study were found to see their children's development as strongly determined by their child's personality rather than by their own influence. Yet teachers, while seeing the child's personality as an important force, also felt that they had an opportunity to influence its development. In addition to the differing perspective of influence over the child's personality development, this study also found that when parents feel they do not know the teacher well, a lack of understanding can result. This

lack of understanding can lead to an increased incidence of teachers attributing blame to

the family's lack of involvement rather than identifying specific constructive ways of

overcoming difficulties. While all the practitioners in this study claimed to support

parent-teacher partnerships, some beliefs expressed towards individual children and

families caused the researcher to doubt these claims. In short, parent and teacher

perspectives of parental involvement vary in many ways.

Summary

Theories of parental role construction, overlapping spheres of influence, and

levels of parental involvement shed light on how parents view their involvement in their

child's education. Research literature indicated the educational benefits as well as the

barriers to effective parental involvement. Parental involvement strategies have addressed

characteristics, contexts, evidence, and different programs. Discrepant parent and teacher

perspectives can inhibit parental involvement.

Parental involvement literature focuses on a variety of facets related to parental

involvement including factors to address and elements to include when developing

effective programs. Studies examine the perceptions of parents and teachers regarding

their schools' efforts to involve parents. However, little is found in the literature

regarding the discrepant perspectives parents and educators embrace regarding parental

involvement, how the perspectives of educators and families compare, or what

underlying factors contribute to each perspective. Therefore, by studying teacher and

parent perspectives regarding parental involvement, it is hoped that insights can be

discovered which can put elements of parental involvement in a new perspective for both

educators and parents enabling them to increase their understanding of one another.

The following chapter will explore the basis for selecting a mixed method design.

The study's hypothesis, H_1: parent perspective $\neq$ teacher perspective, will be introduced.

The decision to collect quantitative survey data and qualitative focus group data will be

defended. Determining significant differences between parent and teacher perspectives of

parental involvement will be data-driven.

CHAPTER 3:

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed-method, sequential, exploratory study was to identify, compare, and analyze differences in parent and teacher perspectives on parental involvement. Their perspectives were examined through parallel surveys and focus groups to determine what accounts for the discrepancy in their views of parental involvement. Teacher perspectives regarding levels of involving parents in their teaching were examined. Parents' attitudes and perspectives regarding their own level of parental involvement at home, and in the school, were also studied. Finally, actions that parents and teachers perceived would enhance their ability to work in partnership were explored.

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What do parents perceive to be their involvement in their child's education?

2. What do teachers perceive to be a parent's involvement in their child's education?

3. How do the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding parental involvement compare? In what ways do the perspectives differ, and in what ways do they agree?

4. What actions do teachers and parents suggest would enhance their ability to work together in partnership?

5. What factors influence the differing perspectives of parents and teachers?

6. What support do teachers and parents suggest can be given to promote a parent-teacher partnership effort in the pursuit of excellence in student learning?

The null hypothesis for the survey portion of the study states there is no significant difference in perspective towards parental involvement between teachers and parents (H_0 : parent perspective = teacher perspective) as indicated by survey scores measuring perceived levels of parental involvement. The alternative hypothesis states there are significant differences between parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement (H_1 : parent perspective ≠ teacher perspective) as indicated by survey scores measuring perceived levels of parental involvement. The two participant groups, parents and teachers served as the quasi-independent variables, and the ratings of parental involvement perspectives for each group served as dependent variables.

<div align="center">Research Design and Approach</div>

A mixed method sequential exploratory study design is well suited to a study of the complexity of the factors influencing parental involvement perspectives (Creswell, 2003; Ivankova et al., 2006) and was chosen for this study. This study emphasized qualitative techniques to explore the research problem in detail. Quantitative data was collected first from surveys of parents and teachers from three rural school districts. The collected survey data was then further explored in focus groups and served as an agenda for focus group discussions. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data provided a means of triangulation to assure data reliability.

A survey design comparing two independent samples, parents and teachers, was used for the initial data collection phase of this study. The use of a survey design provided a numeric description of perspectives of the population by studying a sample of the population (Creswell, 2003). In addition to providing quantitative data, the surveys

provided a rapid turnaround in data collection and economized the efforts of the researcher. Numeric data regarding perspectives ascertained in the survey was used in identifying and measuring the perspectives of parents and teachers.

The survey utilized in this study, School and Family Partnerships Survey (Epstein & Salinas, 1993), was revised. Three criteria were used in determining the revisions. First, survey questions that addressed the same topic were consolidated. For example, on the parent survey, questions 1e and 2a both addressed the topic of talking about school at home. On the revised survey these questions were combined.

The second criteria attempted to narrow the survey's focus. Because this study sought to understand parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement, questions related to specific academic subjects, community involvement, or extra curricular activities were omitted. Question two is an example of this type of revision. On the original survey, parents were asked to check subjects they would like to know more about.

The third and final revision criteria addressed the order in which questions were presented. The order of questions was rearranged to facilitate the comparison of collected data. However, the questions not meeting the three criteria listed above were copied from the original questionnaire and included on the revised survey.

Both the revised and original survey consisted of two separate questionnaires, one for teachers and one for parents. Parents and teachers were asked to self-assess their own parental involvement attitudes and practices. The revised surveys (see Appendixes B and C) were personally distributed to all participants.

The surveys have been widely used in research establishing their reliability (Epstein & Salinas, 1993). Originally the instrument was implemented using a research sample of 243 teachers and 2,115 parents in 15 inner-city elementary and middle schools in Baltimore, Maryland. Using Cronbach's alpha (α) reliability formula, the teacher and parent scales ranged from a low of $\alpha = .44$ to high of $\alpha = .91$ resulting in an estimated reliability mean of $\alpha = .81$. In addition, the survey also produced relatively low standard errors of measurement. Given the well established reliability of Epstein's survey, it provided a reliable foundation on which to begin this study. The numerical data collected with the survey served as a reliable starting point for focus group discussions. The qualitative focus groups were used to validate the quantitative survey results as well as provide an in depth examination of factors influencing parent and teacher perspectives (Silverman, 1993). Additionally, the survey data served as an agenda which drove the discussions in the qualitative focus groups. Merging these two types of data enhanced the reliability of the collected data.

Since the purpose of this study was to identify, compare, and analyze the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding parental involvement, the participants were divided into two groups, parents and teachers, and served as the quasi-independent variable (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2005). Participants' survey responses were categorized and scored according to levels of perceived involvement. These scores, the dependent variables, for teacher and parent perspectives were compared and analyzed to identify patterns of variance in perspectives.

Using parallel surveys allowed the researcher to compare parent and teacher responses in similar areas in order to identify, compare, and analyze similar and divergent perspectives. Table 1 indicates the correlation of topics addressed on the teacher and parent surveys. Comparing the response scores of parents and teachers for questions on the same topic strengthened the data's reliability and validity as it provided insights regarding the parental involvement perspectives of parents and teachers.

Table 1
School and Family Partnerships Survey for Teachers and Parents
Parallel Survey Questions

Parental Involvement Topic	Parent Survey Question Number	Teacher Survey Question Number
Perspective of PI	Q – 1	Q – 1
Methods of PI	Q – 2	Q - 2
Communication	Q – 3	Q – 3
Perceived levels of PI	Q – 4	Q – 4
Homework	Q – 5	Q – 5
Most helpful PI practice	Q – 6	Q – 6

Note. PI = parental involvement

The research population for this study differed considerably from the research population on which the survey instrument was developed, urban elementary and middle schools. These differences limit the generalizability of this study. However, the results of this study have potential to improve parent teacher partnerships within the participating school districts as well as in other small rural districts.

Whereas participant perspectives were initially quantitatively identified and measured through the use of the revised School and Family Partnerships Questionnaire (Epstein & Salinas, 1993) survey on parental involvement (see Appendices B and C), the focus group discussions received emphasis in this study and measured the perspectives of participants qualitatively.

The initial survey findings were used to assist in explaining and interpreting the underlying factors which motivated parent and teacher involvement. Perspectives of parental involvement were explored in focus groups. Two focus groups consisted of parents only, and two consisted of teachers only. Both parents and teachers formed the fifth and final focus group. Each focus group was formed when the researcher telephoned survey participants and invited them to join in a focus group. This provided convenience samples of parents and teachers from each of the three participating schools. Each group consisted of six to eight participants and lasted a little over an hour. Each focus group probed the survey responses and offered suggestions of actions parents and teachers perceived would enhance their ability to work together in partnership.

Collected focus group data was analyzed descriptively. Responses were categorized by the topics listed in Table 1: perspective of parental involvement, methods of parental involvement, communication, perceived levels of parental involvement, homework, and the most helpful parental involvement practice. To provide an agenda for the researcher in the focus group discussions, survey responses of parents and teachers were ranked according to the level of response discrepancy – from the most divergent to

the least divergent views. Discussion began with topics of greatest discrepancy in survey responses and proceeded in order down the list finishing with areas of least discrepancy.

Focus group discussions were digitally recorded and transcribed. Collected data was categorized according to themes which emerged from the conversations. The social phenomena of differing perspectives of parental involvement within the context of a rural setting was carefully described and analyzed. In order to assure inter-rater reliability, the researcher and a colleague independently categorized the data from transcripts of the focus group audio tapes. These categorizations were then compared and discrepancies in analysis were discussed and corrected. These audio tapes provided in themselves a highly reliable record to which the researcher returned again and again as the study proceeded.

The purpose of the focus group study was to explore the underlying factors contributing to the personal perspectives of parents and teachers regarding parental involvement. The quantitative survey data played a subordinate role to the focus group discussions, but provided an opportunity to triangulate data (Hatch, 2002). The focus group data extended and deepened the survey data.

The results of the data analysis have been shared with participants in each of the three schools through a written report. Participants have been invited to share their views on the accuracy of the collected data and resultant findings. This member checking allowed the researcher to refine the data analysis and increased the validity of the study's findings.

Since all qualitative research is characterized by the search for meaning and understanding (Merriam & Associates, 2002), the researcher assumed a learning role as

opposed to a scientific testing role. Seeking to answer the question, "What is going on here?" the researcher attempted to determine how parent and teacher perspectives were enhancing or impeding parental involvement. A study utilizing surveys and focus groups was the best strategy for identifying, comparing and analyzing varying perspectives of parents and teachers regarding parental involvement.

<div align="center">Instrumentation</div>

The purpose of this mixed method sequential exploratory study was to identify, compare, and analyze differences in parent and teacher perspectives regarding parental involvement. To accomplish this aim, one parent from each family with students in each of the aforementioned elementary schools was invited to complete the revised School and Family Partnerships Parent Questionnaire (See Appendix B). Parents completed the survey from the perspective of their own involvement. All certified classroom teachers on staff at each of the three schools were invited to complete the revised School and Family Partnerships: Teacher Questionnaire (See Appendix C) from the perspective of their efforts to involve parents in the education of their students (Epstein & Salinas, 1993).

The mixed method sequential exploratory design worked well for studying the factors which contribute to the complex perspectives teachers and parents hold toward parental involvement. Parallel survey data allowed the researcher to quantitatively compare the current perspectives of teachers and parents. Following up this data with focus group data added understanding of the cultural contexts in which the participants lived as well as allowed for triangulation of the data within and between participant

groups (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Thus, this design provided a solid foundation for this study of parent and teacher perspectives.

<div align="center">Setting and Sample</div>

The population for this study was comprised of parents and teachers in three rural school districts identified as School A, B, and C in Table 2.and located in Washington State.

School A is a two-classroom public school district which serves as the hub of the community as it has since 1883. The two classroom teachers have each taught at the school for over twenty-five years. Some of the teachers' former students now have children of their own attending the school. Students in the school's two classrooms are separated according to grade level. Primary grades, kindergarten through third grade, are in one classroom. Intermediate grades, third through sixth grade meet in the other classroom. Typically students loop through the same teacher's class for three to four years. The elementary school is the only school in the school district. Although parents and teachers appreciate a rich community history and know each other fairly well, parental involvement remains less than optimal.

School B has six multi grade classrooms and also serves as the hub of its community. Students loop with the same teacher for two years. Located in what was once a thriving agricultural community, the school enjoys a rich history yet steadily declining enrollment. The elementary K-8 school is the only school in the school district. Shortly before this study was conducted, this area was deluged with over ten inches of rain in a

short period of time. The area was declared a disaster area with some homes flooded by up to eight feet of water.

School C is located in a small town and has a larger enrollment than Schools A or B which are located in the country. The majority of teachers have single grade level classes. The elementary school serves kindergarten through sixth grade and is the only elementary school in the district.

Table 2

Population and Sample Size Data of Three Participating Rural Elementary Schools

School	Population and Sample Data
School A:	Total enrollment: 51 students Grades: K - 6 Participants: 2 certified teachers Free and Reduced Lunch N/A 2004 Census Poverty Data 3.33% Teachers' average years experience 16.8 Student ethnicity 94.1% White 5.9% Hispanic
School B:	Total enrollment 84 students Grades K – 8 Participants: 5 certified teachers Free and Reduced Lunch 57.5% 2004 Census Poverty Data 21.88% Teachers average years of experience 9.5 Student ethnicity 92.9% White 7.1% Hispanic

School C:	Total enrollment: 383 students
	Grades K - 6
	Participants: 20 certified teachers
	Free and Reduced Lunch 37.4%
	2004 Census Poverty Data 13.38%
	Teachers average years of experience 14.1
	Student ethnicity 89.8% White
	               5.5% Hispanic
	               4.6% Other

Note. From Washington State Report Card at:

http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/Summary.aspx?groupLevel=District&schoolId=1&reportLevel=State&orgLinkId=142

&yrs=&year=2006-07 (OSPI, 2006-07)

A criterion sample, in which all cases will meet the criterion of having students attending participating schools or teaching in the participating school, was utilized. Surveys were distributed to all families and teachers in each school. Some stratification of the sample was employed using data collected in the survey to assure both male and female parent perspectives were represented in the sample. The researcher stratified the sample by selecting focus group participants that represented the various groups within the population (Fink, 2006). Therefore, in order to have a sample of parents where fathers, mothers, and other care givers such as grandparents are represented, the researcher sought out a variety parents to be represented.

The diversity of ethnicity within the research population as indicated in Table 2 was low. Therefore, when arranging focus groups, the researcher paid special attention to the inclusion of participants with different ethnicities and socio-economic levels. This assured these underrepresented groups were guaranteed a voice in the research which benefited from their unique perspectives.

Gathering a sample of parents with a wide range of parental involvement levels served to achieve the purpose of the study which is to identify, compare, and analyze the varying perspectives of teachers and parents regarding parental involvement.

According to Hatch (2002), "Qualitative researchers argue that no direct relationship exists between the number of participants and the quality of a study" (p. 48). The sample size for the study was smaller than what may be required in a postpositivist survey design. However, given the use of the survey as one form of data collection, the emphasis on the qualitative nature of the study, and the rural context in which the study

was set, the researcher discovered there was much to learn from the available population sample.

Researcher's Role

The researcher has been employed by School A as an intermediate grade teacher for the past twenty two years. Given the small number of families living within the district and the high number of years working for the district, the researcher has developed many relationships with parents and teachers there. In fact, some of the students currently enrolled are children of students formerly taught by the researcher. These relationships enhanced the researcher's ability to recruit volunteers, establish a researcher-participant working relationship, communicate with participants, and elicit personal feelings regarding parental involvement. The researcher attempted to set aside all prejudgments, bracketing her experiences and relying on observation, intuition, and imagination, in order to obtain a picture of participant perspectives of the parental involvement experience.

Participants' Rights

The researcher discussed this study with the school principals and received their approval and encouragement to proceed with data collection (See Appendix E). Participants' rights were covered in the invitation to participate which introduced the study (see Appendix A) and the Participant Consent Form (see Appendix D). Participants were assured that their participation throughout the study was completely voluntary, and they were free to choose to end their participation at any time. In addition, participants were informed that their survey responses were anonymous. All participants in the focus

group discussions were encouraged to keep the comments made within the group

discussion in confidence. Furthermore, to protect the confidentiality of the data, audio

tapes of the focus group discussions have been placed in a locked file cabinet at the

researcher's home away from the school grounds. Finally, in order to protect the rights of

the participants, the entire study was presented to Walden University's Instructional

Review Board (IRB) and received approval number 01-23-08-0290607.

In summary, participants were informed that their participation was completely

voluntary, they did not need to respond to any question unless they would like, and that

their responses would remain anonymous.

<center>Survey Data Collection and Procedures</center>

Parents were introduced and invited to participate in this study by a packet

brought home from school by their oldest child at the school. The packet contained a

letter of invitation to participate which assured parents that their participation was

completely voluntary and that their responses would be kept strictly confidential (See

Appendix A). Also included in the packet were the survey (See Appendix B), and consent

form (See Appendix D). The letter of invitation encouraged parent participants to contact

the researcher with any questions they had. Parents were asked to return the completed

survey and signed consent to school with their child as soon as possible or within one

week. Students received a pencil when they returned the surveys as an incentive for their

completion. Teachers collected the surveys and returned them to the collection box in the

school office.

The researcher explained the study and personally invited all teachers to participate at a regularly scheduled teacher's meeting. At the meeting teachers received a packet of information containing a letter of invitation (see Appendix A), a letter of consent (see Appendix D), and the School and Family Partnerships: Teacher Questionnaire (Epstein & Salinas, 1993) (see Appendix C). Within the packet there was a gift card for a latte as an incentive for teachers to participate. Teachers were asked to return their completed surveys and signed consent forms to the school office within one week.

Focus Group Data Collection and Procedures

There were three types of focus groups: parents only, teachers only, and parents and teachers together. Focus group size ranged from four to eight participants. For the parents' focus group, parents from each of the schools were invited to join the discussions. Teacher participants were invited to join a teacher only focus group. The combined parent and teacher focus group consisted of an equal number of parents and teachers drawn from Schools A and C. A total of five focus group sessions were conducted. The focus groups were held at each of the schools after students had gone home for the day. Sessions lasted about sixty minutes. Refreshments were provided.

Data Analysis and Validation

The purpose of this study was to identify, compare, and analyze differences in parent and teacher perspectives regarding parental involvement. To accomplish this purpose, scores on parallel questions from parent surveys were compared to scores from teacher surveys. Survey questions with four answer choices were coded with a low of *1*

(strongly disagree) to a high of *4* (strongly agree). Patterns discovered in this raw data showed not only where teachers and parents agreed or disagreed, but also where they shared common interests and goals for children (Epstein & Salinas, 1993). Using the collected survey data, the mean scores for each participant group were compared. Each survey item was analyzed descriptively. Mean scores for teacher and parent responses to parallel items were compared. The difference between the mean scores of the two groups (parents and teachers) was arranged in numerical order from highest to lowest. The areas of perspectives with the highest divergence were addressed in the focus groups. Further analysis of survey and focus group data provided portraits of teacher and parent perspectives which can be utilized in the refining of partnership practices.

According to Gravetter and Wallnau (2005), an independent-measures research study should evaluate the mean difference between two populations. Therefore, the *t* test for independent samples was the chosen method of analysis. However, there was only one question that was identical on both parent and teacher surveys. Therefore, the *t* test for independent samples was calculated only for question 1L and was analyzed to a level of .05 significance using SPSS software (2005).

The results discovered from the survey data were used to probe further understanding in the focus group discussions. For example, the survey data indicated that the highest discrepancy between parent and teacher responses occurred in the area of parents' ability to help their children with reading and math. Therefore, parents' ability to help their children with reading and math was the opening focus group topic. Questions

were aimed at determining what underlying factors influenced the differing perspectives of the participants.

The results garnered from the transcribed focus group discussions were analyzed descriptively and sorted according to themes and categories. Areas of similarities of perspective and areas of discrepant perspectives were compiled and then examined for repeated themes. Completed analysis of focus group data was summarized. This compilation of data was then shared with participants to check for accuracy and validity.

Conclusion

The challenge for teachers and administrators to develop strategies that make parental involvement relevant and important to both teachers and parents is attainable. Identifying where and how parental involvement perspectives differ was an instrumental step in meeting this challenge. Understanding the influences that impact parent and teacher perspectives aided the building of relationships by enhancing communication between parents and teachers. As understanding of perspectives were built between participating teachers and parents, insights into how parents and teachers could best help each other help students achieve were gained. With this understanding as a foundation, parents and teachers developed a perspective that helped them recognize how they could work together effectively in partnership to achieve their common goal, helping each child achieve academic success.

All parents want to see their children become successful in school (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Similarly, teachers want to see their students meet their learning goals. This common desire provided solid ground on which schools could build motivation for

parents and teachers to partner together in education. Such parent teacher partnerships serve the needs of all students by helping them to achieve personal and academic success.

In the next chapter, survey data will be analyzed to identify how parents and teachers view parental involvement. Focus group data will be used to probe the survey data and provide a basis for determining in what areas parent and teacher perspectives diverge. Collected quantitative and qualitative data will then be analyzed for themes and categories.

CHAPTER 4:

RESULTS

The lack of understanding between parents and teachers about what constitutes

parental involvement from each of their unique perspectives can hinder the development

of vital parent teacher partnerships. The purpose of this study was to identify, compare,

and analyze the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding parental involvement by

reporting the findings related to the following research questions:

1. What do parents perceive to be their involvement in their child's education?

2. What do teachers perceive to be a parent's involvement in their child's education?

3. How do the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding parental involvement

compare? In what ways do their perspectives differ, and in what ways do they agree?

4. What actions do teachers and parents suggest that would enhance their ability to

work together in partnership?

Using an exploratory mixed method design, quantitative data generated from

teacher and parent responses on the School and Family Partnerships Survey of Parents

and Teachers (Epstein & Salinas, 1993) were analyzed descriptively using Statistical

Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software (2005). Next, qualitative survey

responses were analyzed for themes and categories. In order to focus the collection of

data pertinent to parental involvement perspectives, the original survey (Epstein &

Salinas, 1993) was modified by omitting questions not directly related to perspectives on

parental involvement, consolidating questions that were asked more than once on the

original surveys, and rearranging the order in which questions were presented (See

Appendix B and C).

After identifying parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement, survey

data were analyzed to compare areas of discrepant perspectives. From this data, topics for

focus group discussions were generated to probe the underlying motivations that

contribute to areas of varying parental involvement perspectives.

The data from five focus groups were digitally recorded and analyzed for

categories and themes to identify factors contributing to parent and teacher perspectives

of parental involvement. Finally, parents' and teachers' suggestions for enhancing their

ability to work together in partnership were gathered.

To present the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative data, this chapter

will be divided into sections. The demographics of parent respondents will first be

examined. Next, data analysis of the quantitative portion of the survey results will follow.

This analysis will include descriptive statistics and t tests for independent samples to

determine areas where parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement diverge.

Then a descriptive analysis of themes and categories from the qualitative survey

questions and focus group data will be presented. A final section will summarize and

synthesize the findings.

<div align="center">Respondent Sample</div>

Parents and teachers from three rural school districts were surveyed. Table 3

indicates that mothers most often completed the survey, most families had two children

attending the school, and the gender of the oldest child was equally divided between

males and females. Unlike Epstein's original study (1993), demographic data from teacher respondents was not collected in this study.

Table 3

Parent Respondent Demographics

	School A		School B		School C		Total	
Relationship to student	Mother	18%	Mother	80%	Mother	91%	Mother	84%
	Other	82%	Other	20%	Other	9%	Other	16%
Number of children in family	1	23%	1	36%	1	57%	1	48%
	2	59%	2	32%	2	28%	2	35%
	3	9%	3	23%	3	14%	3	15%
	4	9%	Omitted	9%	Omitted	1%	4	2%
Gender of student	Male	50%	Male	45%	Male	38%	Male	42%
	Female	50%	Female	45%	Female	47%	Female	48%
	Omitted		Omitted	10%	Omitted	15%	Omitted	10%

A total of 122 completed parent surveys were returned, and 21 teachers returned surveys. Table 4 indicates the survey return rate of parents and teachers in each of the three school districts.

Table 4

Survey Return Rate

Respondents	School A		School B		School C	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Parent Surveys Distributed	24		51		260	
Parent Surveys Returned	22	91%	21	41%	79	30%
Teacher Surveys Distributed	2		5		20	
Teacher Surveys Returned	2	100%	5	100%	14	70%

Survey return rates decreased as the size of the school district increased. School A, the smallest school with only 24 families, had a parent survey return rate of 91%. The researcher has taught at School A for the past twenty four years which may have contributed to its high return rate. The area served by School B was devastated by flood waters which filled some homes with eight feet of water just two months prior to distribution of the surveys. This disaster likely impacted the ability of some families to return their survey within the allotted time frame. Only 30% of parents with students in School C, the largest school, returned completed surveys. Since the researcher was unknown to the parents and teachers of Schools B and C when the survey was distributed, some teachers and parents may have felt no obligation to participate by completing the survey. The return rate of surveys was less than desirable. However, when survey data was combined with the collected focus group data, practical and specific ways to improve parent teacher partnerships were discovered.

Analysis of Survey's Quantitative Questions

The School and Family Partnerships Survey of Parents and Teachers (Epstein &
Salinas, 1993) contains both quantitative and qualitative questions. The quantitative data
collected will be examined first followed by an examination of the qualitative data.

The purpose of this study was to identify, compare, and analyze the perspectives
of parents and teachers regarding parental involvement. The collected survey data served
to meet the study's first purpose, to identify parent and teacher perspectives. In order to
compare perspectives of parents and teachers, survey questions were organized into
questions from parallel categories as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5

Parallel Questions from Parent and Teacher Surveys

Survey Question	Parent Survey Question	Teacher Survey Question
1	We would like to know how you feel about this school right now.	What is your professional judgment about parental involvement?
Views parents as partners	lL	1L
Parents can help	1i 1j	1b
Active PTA	1d	1c
Could help with ideas	1k	1e
Parents want to be involved	6c	1g
Contact w/student problems	3h	1m
2	In which ways you have been involved this year with your oldest child?	Estimate the percent of your students' families who…

Check homework	2j	2a
Attend PTA	2i	2b
Parent Teacher Conference	3c	2c & 3d
Parent help w/reading	1i	2d
Parent help w/math	1j	2f
Clear notices	3g	3a
Attend special events	2l	3e

3 and 4	In what ways has the school contacted you this year?	What activities do you think should be conducted by parents?
Learning expectations	3b	4d
Check homework	2j	4e
Talk w/teachers	2h	4g
Volunteer at school	2k	4j
Attend school events	2L	4L

Survey questions 3 and 4 are considered together. Question 3 on the parent survey deals with ways parents perceived schools should contact them, while question 4 on the teacher survey deals with ways teachers believe parents should be involved. Aligning the subtopics of questions 3 and 4 allowed the researcher to compare parent and teacher perspectives.

To address the second part of this study's purpose, to compare the perspectives of teachers and parents, a comparative examination of parent and teacher response data to parallel questions was made. Survey results indicated parents and teachers perceived parental involvement differently in the areas of attitudes, involvement, and communication (Table 6).

Table 6

Areas of Discrepancy in Parent and Teacher Survey Responses

Attitudes	Parents	Teachers
Parents can help with reading and math	95% agree (1i)	38% disagree (1b)
Parents need teacher ideas	58% disagree (1k)	90% agree (1e)
Involvement		
Parents check homework	85% do many times (2j)	62% do regularly (2a)
Parents volunteer at school	62% never 38% 1 – few times 21% many times (2k)	60% of all teachers rated pretty important to very important (4j)
Communication		
Parents talk with teacher	5% never 17% 1 – 2 times 42% few times 35% many times (2h)	60% see it pretty important to very important (4g)
Parents are informed of learning expectations	31% marked does not do or could do better (3b)	100% marked pretty or very important (4d)

Note: Letters and numbers in parentheses indicate survey questions and subtopics rated. For example 4e in the teacher's column indicates question 4 and topic e on the teacher survey. Copies of the surveys can be found in Appendices B and C.

The greatest discrepancy in perspective occurred in the area of attitudes toward parental involvement. When parents and teachers rated parents' ability to help their children with reading and math, 95% of parents felt confident of their ability to help, but

only 38% of teachers perceived parents knew how to help their children with schoolwork at home. In addition, 90% of teachers saw parents as needing ideas from them in order to help their child, yet 58% of parents disagreed with the statement, "I could help my child more if the teacher gave me more ideas."

Parent and teacher perspectives also diverged in the area of a parent's involvement. The majority of parents, 85%, stated they check their child's homework many times, yet teachers perceived only 62% of parents checked homework regularly. A majority of teachers, 60%, identified volunteering at school as important; however 62% of parents stated they never volunteered.

The final area of diverging perspectives was communication. Teachers rated talking with parents as important 60% of the time, yet by March 2008, when the survey was distributed, 22% of parents stated they had talked with their child's teacher either never or only one to two times.

Communicating learning expectations was another area that was perceived differently by parents and teachers. Table 7 shows how parents and teachers from each of the three schools rated learning expectations. One hundred percent of teachers stated it was important that parents know what students are expected to learn each year, yet a total of 30.6% of parents stated the teacher does not do or could do better in the area of telling them what skills their child needs to learn each year.

Table 7

Learning Expectations

Respondents	Parents		Teachers	
Survey Prompt	School tells me what skills my child needs to learn each year.		Parents should know what children are expected to learn each year.	
	Does not do	Could do better	Pretty Important	Very important
School A	4.5%	13.6%	--	100%
School B	5.0%	20.0%	60%	40%
School C	5.1%	30.4%	50%	50%
Schools A, B, & C combined	5.0%	25.6%	42.9%	57.1%

Survey results also revealed areas where parent and teacher parental involvement perspectives align. Table 8 shows that parents and teachers agree or strongly agree their schools view parents as important partners in the education of students. Participants also show agreement on the importance of talking about school with their children and with one another. Attending special events sponsored by their school are viewed as important by both parents and teachers.

Table 8

Areas Parent and Teacher Parental Perspectives Align

Area of Alignment	School A		School B		School C	
	% of Parents	% of Teachers	% of Parents	% of Teachers	% of Parents	% of Teachers
View parents as partners	100%	100%	100%	100%	91.1%	100%
Talking with children about school	100%	100%	100%	100%	97.5%	100%
Attending Special Events	91%	100%	75%	100%	79.7%	100%

In the proposal for this study, the researcher planned to analyze survey data collected using *t* tests for independent samples. However, the survey items within the parent and teacher surveys, although similar in content, did not ask identical questions. Some survey items on the teacher survey were measured in percentages while items on the parent survey measured items of similar content by asking parents to identify their level of agreement. For example, Question 2f on the teacher survey asked teachers to estimate the percent of their student's families who understand enough to help their child with reading at home. On the parent survey, Question 1i asks parents to state whether they agree strongly, agree a little, disagree a little, or disagree strongly that they feel they can help their child in reading. So, while both items deal with perspectives of parents and teachers regarding parents' ability to help their child with reading, the units of measurement are not easily compared.

Item 1L, "This school views parents as important partners" appeared on both the parent and teacher surveys and asked respondents to rate their level of agreement using

nearly the same scale. This allowed the researcher to conduct a *t* test for independent

samples. Table 9 presents the group statistics for each sample using collected data for

survey item lL.

Table 9

Survey Question1L: This school views parents as important partners.
Data from t test for Independent Samples

Participants	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Parents	121	1.3306	.62435	.05676
Teacher	21	1.8095	.67964	.14831

The resulting *t* score when equal variances are assumed is -3.203 with a

significance of .002. This result indicates that teachers and parents have significantly

different perspectives of how their schools view parents as important partners. Teachers

rate schools higher in viewing parents as partners than parents do. However, both

teachers and parents agree or strongly agree that their school views parents as important

partners. Although this significant difference is measured on only one survey item, as the

survey's qualitative data and focus group data were analyzed, additional differences in

parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement were identified and compared.

Analysis of Survey's Qualitative Questions

The survey also included open ended questions allowing for the collection of

qualitative data. Parent participants had opportunity to answer five short answer

questions, and teacher surveys gave opportunity to respond to three short answer

questions. The qualitative survey data from parent surveys will be examined first and will be followed by an examination of collected qualitative data from the teacher surveys.

Parent Survey Data

Question 6a: What is your greatest concern as a parent?

Table 10 shows parent responses to the first question, 6a, and categorizes in descending order topics parents mentioned most often. Parents' greatest concern was the academic success of their child. The social and emotional needs of their children were also of concern. The need to have a positive relationship and good communication with teachers was also important to parents. Other areas causing parents concern included safety, teacher effectiveness, stress, and time constraints. High stakes testing and feeling inadequate to the challenge of parenting also appeared in a number of parent responses.

Table 10

Parent Survey Responses to Question 6a: What is your greatest concern?

Category	School A Number	School A %	School B Number	School B %	School C Number	School C %	Total Number	Total %
Academic success	12/20	60%	8/18	45%	27/62	44%	47/100	47%
Social and emotional needs	5/20	25%	4/18	23%	17/62	28%	26/100	26%
Relationship/ Communication	2/20	5%	4/18	24%	5/62	8%	11/100	11%
Safety	1/20	5%	1/18	6%	7/62	12%	9/100	9%
Teacher effectiveness	1/20	5%	2/18	12%	6/62	10%	9/100	9%
Stress/Time Constraints	0/20	0%	2/18	12%	6/62	10%	9/100	9%
WASL/high stakes testing	0/20	0%	1/18	16%	7/62	12%	7/100	7%
Parenting inadequacy	3/20	15%	3/18	6%	2/62	4%	7/100	7%

Note. Data in columns headed as Number represent the number of responses in the specified category compared to the total number of responses for the school.

Upon examination of the data for categories and themes, two themes became apparent as parents communicated their greatest concern. Respondents repeatedly made references to "my child" and expressed fears for their child or children. As can be noted on Table 11, 69% of parents surveyed made references to their concern for their own child, and 14% made comments regarding fears they had for their children. Parents most

frequently mentioned they feared academic problems in their child's future especially

problems that could be avoided by regular communication with the school or their own

shortcomings in parenting. Identifying these themes was unexpected. However, parents'

focus on their own child along with their fears indicates the very personal perspective

parents bring to their involvement. These themes were absent from the teacher data

thereby indicating an area where parent and teacher perspectives are different.

Table 11

Themes from Parent Survey Responses to Question 6a: What is your greatest concern?

Category	School A	School A	School B	School B	School C	School C	Total	Total
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Fears expressed	5/20	25%	4/28	23%	5/62	8%	14/100	14%
"My child" references	16/20	80%	10/18	56%	43/63	69%	69/100	69%

Note. Data in columns headed as Number represent the number of responses in the specified category

compared to the total number of responses for the school. My child references included the terms my child,

my/our children, my/our daughter, my/our son, my kids, and my little girl.

Question 6b: What school practice to involve parents has helped you the most?

The second qualitative question asked parents to share the parental involvement

practice they found most helpful, and parents most frequently cited parent teacher

conferences. Parents frequently mentioned that the one on one time to talk with the

teacher at conferences was helpful. Parents also shared that helping with homework was

useful saying, "It's our time together." Another parent mentioned, "Having parents sign,

saying the kids have done their homework really helps to get parents to participate more

with their children's schoolwork." Many practices parents found helpful revolved around communication or building a relationship between school and home. Parents' responses included such statements as, talking to the teacher is important, getting to know the teacher and the kids in her class, the teacher's openness and loving attention to all of my kids and their needs, and being welcomed and informed. Various ways of communicating therefore helped parents feel involved in their child's education.

Question 6c: What is one thing that you or your family could do to help this school?

When expressing one way their family could help the school, 42% of parents said they should volunteer more. They also suggested they could support the community by participating in school fundraisers, paying their taxes, and communicating regularly with the school.

Question 6d: What is the best thing that this school could do next year to help you with your child?

Parents were asked to share how their school could help them in the coming school year. Of the 122 parent surveys, eighty parents responded with suggestions. Table 12 categorizes their ideas.

Table 12

Question 6d Parent Suggestions:
The Best Thing School Could Do Next Year to Help Them with Their Child

Category	School A Number	School A %	School B Number	School B %	School C Number	School C %	Total Number	Total %
Ways to improve curriculum	7/15	46%	7/13	53%	13/52	25%	27/80	33%
Communication	3/15	20%	5/13	38%	16/52	30%	24/80	30%
Affirmations of current school practices	5/15	33%	1/13	7%	15/52	28%	21/80	26%
Progress reports	4/15	26%	4/13	30%	9/52	17%	17/80	21%
Improving parent - teacher relationships	0/15	0%	1/13	7%	4/52	7%	5/80	6%

Note. Data in columns headed as Number represent the number of responses in the specified category compared to the total number of responses for the school.

Most of the suggestions regarded changes in the curriculum. Parents suggested various ways to help them help their children do better in specific subjects such as math or spelling. They also frequently suggested specific ways to keep communication between school and home thriving.

Teacher Survey Data

Qualitative data was also collected from teacher surveys in the form of open-ended questions. Three questions were presented to teacher participants who had the opportunity to respond in a short answer format. Although not all participants responded

to all three questions, collected data bears light on teacher perspectives of parental involvement.

Question 6a: What is the most successful practice to involve parents that you have used?

Table 13 indicates the two most frequent categories of responses for teachers' most successful parental involvement practice. Involving parents in teaching and developing parent teacher relationships through communication were mentioned most frequently. The majority of teachers, 42%, cited ways they involved parents in teaching as their most successful practice. Specifically teachers utilized parent help in listening to students read, leading learning centers, and helping with specific math skills. Building relationships and communicating clearly and frequently were also mentioned by 36% of teacher respondents. Sending home weekly notes, biweekly progress reports, and calling parents with specific invitations to help were reported to have worked well for teachers.

Table 13

Teacher Survey
Question 6a: What is the most successful practice to involve parents that you have used?

Category	School A		School B		School C		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Involving parents in teaching	1/2	50%	3/5	60%	4/10	40%	8/17	47%
Relationship/ Communication	1/2	50%	1/5	20%	4/10	40%	6/17	36%

Note. Data in columns headed as Number represent the number of responses in the specified category compared to the total number of responses for the school.

Question 6b: In what ways could better partnerships with families help you as a teacher?

A majority of teachers viewed partnering with parents as beneficial in the areas of communicating and building trusting relationships as the data in Table 13 indicates. One teacher explained the important results of communicating and thereby building relationships with the statement, "I would be aware of any situations that might hinder a student, and I could also get ideas of how parents help at home and share these with other parents."

Table 14

Teacher Survey Question 6b: In what ways could better partnerships with families help you as a teacher?

Category	School A		School B		School C		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Communication	1/2	50%	2/4	50%	2/10	20%	5/16	31%
Relationship	-	-	1/4	25%	4/10	40%	5/16	31%
Responsibility	1/2	50%	1/4	25%	2/10	20%	4/16	25%
Trust	-	-	-	-	2/10	20%	2/16	12%

Note. Data in columns headed as Number represent the number of responses in the specified category compared to the total number of responses for the school. A dash (-) indicates no data was obtained.

Teachers viewed parents as partnering together with them when what they saw as parent responsibilities such as making sure their children came to school well rested, well fed, and well prepared with assigned homework completed were fulfilled. Although teachers from School C were the only teachers to specifically mention developing trust as helpful to building better partnerships with families, this may have been inherent in

School B's view of the importance of building relationships in order to build partnerships with families.

Question 6c: Do you have any other ideas or comments that you would like to add?

When given the opportunity to comment freely about their ideas, 25% of teachers mentioned the frustrations of involving parents. These teachers found involving parents to be yet another demand on their time. One teacher stated, "Parent volunteers are one more management component in an already busy day." Some teachers also commented they find parents to be inconsistent or unreliable in their commitments to help out.

After analyzing the survey data of parents and teachers regarding perspectives of parental involvement, the results were used as a basis for discussions in focus groups of parents and teachers. A discussion and analysis of the data collected from the focus groups will now occur.

<div align="center">Focus Group Data Analysis</div>

Five focus group sessions were digitally recorded. Focus Groups One and Two consisted of teachers only, Focus Groups Three and Four were made up of parents only, and Focus Group Five had both parents and teachers in attendance. Focus group participants were selected at random from consent forms which included their phone numbers and were returned separately at the time of the survey. Parents and teachers were invited to participate by a telephone call from the researcher. Most parents were eager to participate if their schedules allowed it. Teachers, on the other hand, displayed more reticence to participate. This may be attributable to the teacher's comments mentioned previously regarding the busyness of a teacher's day.

The discussion of data gathered will occur in the order in which the focus groups were conducted. Teacher focus groups met first. Parent focus groups followed, and the focus group of parents and teachers combined completed the focus group data collection portion of the study.

Teacher Focus Groups One and Two

As mentioned previously and presented in Table 6, survey data indicated three areas where parent and teacher perspectives diverged. These areas were categorized as attitudes, involvement, and communication. These areas of diverging perspectives were used as the basis for discussion in each category. Parents and teachers had differing attitudes toward parental involvement. Most parents surveyed, 95%, perceived they were able to help their children with reading and math. However, 38% of teachers disagreed that parents were capable of helping their children in these subjects. While 90% of teachers viewed parents as needing teacher ideas to help their children succeed in school, 58% of parents disagreed that they needed ideas from the teacher. Parents and teachers also viewed a parent's involvement differently. Most parents (85%) reported checking their children's homework many times, yet only 62% of teachers perceived parents as regularly checking their children's homework. And while 60% of teachers rated volunteering at school as important, 62% of parents reported they never volunteered at school. The category of communication involves parents and teachers talking together. Although 60% of teachers rated it as important, 64% of parents stated they had talked to their children's teachers only a few times or even less. Understanding the learning

expectations at each grade level was viewed as important by 100% of teachers surveyed, yet 31% of parents viewed this was not being shared with them well if at all.

The information from Table 6 provided the agenda for discussions for Teacher Focus Groups 1 and 2. Eight teachers from Schools A and B participated in Focus Group 1. This group represented 100% of the certified teaching staff at the two rural elementary schools. Focus Group 2 consisted of five teachers from School C and represented 23% of the certified teaching staff. Discussions centered on parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement based on the data in Table 6.

Teachers saw parents as less able to help their children with reading and math than parents did. They attributed this to several things. One teacher stated, "Parents' lack of participation indicates their inability to help." Another teacher commented, "Students come to school with math assignments incomplete stating, 'My mom couldn't help me.'" Teachers reported that parents had lots of questions about math. One teacher commented, "They don't understand the terms, the curriculum, problem solving strategies, or an approach that is different from the way they learned." Teachers recognized students are expected to learn skills at a younger age than their parents did which may have contributed to parents' difficulty in helping. While teachers thought parents could help their children with mastery of basic math facts and calculations, they didn't perceive many parents helping their children attain mastery in these areas.

When teachers were presented with the data that 58% of parents surveyed didn't feel they needed teacher ideas to help their child, one teacher wondered, "When parents

ask for ideas, are they asking for them legitimately? Do they really want to help their child or is it the correct question to ask the teacher?"

Teachers viewed school work as not being given the proper priority by parents and saw it often squeezed out by other activities. This was evident to them in students' homework. While one teacher described parents as not knowing how to require something of their children and follow through on it, another teacher stated, "Being able to make the time is difficult for parents."

Teachers saw volunteering as important and said they always appreciate good, dependable volunteers. They recognized the difficulty for working parents to find time to volunteer. One teacher was proud of her parent volunteers stating, "I have three moms that come in consistently every week." Other teachers had parents who volunteered to do something at home in the evening or sent items to school for special events. Still other teachers confessed to not wanting parent volunteer help.

Finding useful ways to involve parent volunteers requires teacher time, effort, and preparation. One teacher shared, "I find it difficult to use parent helpers. They often don't show up leaving me short handed. I'm not good at encouraging parents, so I don't nurture it. I feel I can't depend on them. I'm used to doing it myself. It has to do with my comfort level and my age. I'm too old to change."

Teachers recognized communication as an integral part of parental involvement. One teacher commented, "Parents who display hostility when communicating may be struggling with issues remaining from their own negative experiences in school." Comments from teachers such as, "Parents don't show up for conference or open house."

indicated teachers' discouragement by the apparent lack of participation by parents. However, one teacher expressed commitment to parents when she stated, "It's important to raise parent awareness of the importance of their involvement in their child's education." Communication was seen as one way this could be accomplished.

Sharing learning expectations with parents was an area where teachers believed they could improve. "At the beginning of the year we send home a packet of general expectations regarding homework, class work, and makeup work, but no specifics as to academic topics," one teacher volunteered. Other teachers acknowledged that most of the expectations they shared with parents involved school routines and behavior management. Some teachers expressed discouragement with the lack of parent follow through on the learning goals that they had shared such as mastery of basic math facts. "I tell my parents at the fall conference for third grade they need to know the multiplication facts, but I can count on one hand the parents that make sure their child knows them," shared a teacher. Although teachers recognized their limitations in clearly stating student learning expectations, they were unconvinced that identifying more learning expectations would produce an increase in parental involvement.

Parent Focus Groups Three and Four

Eight parents of students in School C were invited to participate in Focus Group Three. Four mothers and one father attended, but three parents who had accepted the invitation to participate did not attend. Focus Group four consisted of three mothers with students in School B. Three additional parents had been invited and had agreed to participate in this focus group but did not attend.

Parent Focus Groups Three and Four explored the same areas of parental involvement as did the teacher focus groups. However, some of the discrepancies in scores identified by the survey data resulted in tension among the teachers in the teacher focus groups. Therefore, in an effort to promote and protect positive parent teacher relationships, the discussion in the parent focus groups was aimed at parents' perspectives of the divergent areas of parental involvement listed in Table 6 without sharing data differences of parent and teacher perspectives. Table 15 indicates the areas and questions for discussion presented to parent Focus Groups Three and Four. The questions were used to stimulate discussion. Although all the questions were presented, parents' thoughts and ideas flowed freely and frequently strayed off topic.

Table 15

_____

Parent Focus Group Discussion Topics and Probing Questions

Area	Probing Questions
Reading and Math 95% of parents feel like they can help their child.	How do you help? What sort of help do you need to give your child? What is difficult about it? What makes it rewarding?
Teacher Ideas 58% of parents did not feel they needed more teacher ideas.	Why is that? How do you use teacher ideas? Are teacher ideas helpful or necessary? It appears from the survey results that most parents don't want teachers' ideas. Do you have any ideas why that is so?
Homework 85% of parents stated they check homework many times.	What do you do when you check your child's homework? Does checking it seem tedious? Do you see any benefit in checking it? Why do you check the homework?
Volunteering 65% of parents responded they never volunteer.	What prevents parents from volunteering? Do you think it is important? Would you like to volunteer if barriers such as work and child care were dealt with?
Communication 64% of parents said they talk with their child's teacher either never, 1 – 2 times, or a few times.	Do you think that is enough? Why might a parent not talk to their child's teacher? What prevents parents and teachers from talking? What method of communication works best for your family?
Learning Expectations 31% of parents felt their child's teacher could do a better job of telling them what skills their child needs to learn each year.	Have you been informed of the skills your child needs to learn? Would that be helpful to you? How? How could teachers do a better job?

Additional Ideas   What are your goals for being involved in
Are there any areas of parental involvement   your child's education?
you would like to talk more about?

In discussing the first topic, reading and math, parents indicated they felt helpful

with reading and found various ways to help. Math was reported as being more difficult

and confusing than reading. Parents did find techniques for resolving difficulties though.

One parent shared, "I don't know math or reading very well. Dad is home now, and he

can help." Parents complained they didn't learn math the way their children are being

taught and found it difficult to help. Even areas of math parents did understand presented

challenges. Finding ways to integrate into their schedules time to help their children

master basic math facts was difficult for parents. Working parents complained of how

little time they had available to be involved in their child's learning. One mom explained

it this way, "I usually get home at six. I have three hours to cook dinner, sports, and

piano. Nerd Day is tomorrow, so we have to find something for them to wear. All the

little things that need to be kept track of make it hard."

Parents frequently conveyed feelings of guilt that the busyness of their lives kept

them from being more effectively involved. "I like helping my child with schoolwork. It

makes me feel guilty and sad as the parent because I'm gone all day. When I can help

them, I feel more rewarded but what's really rewarding is when they work hard and

improve. Now I feel like a nag. If only I could work part time," one parent lamented.

The next area parents discussed was their need for teacher ideas to help their

child. Although 58% of parents indicated on the survey that they disagreed they could

help their child more if the teacher gave them more ideas, parents in the focus groups indicated a desire for more ideas. One parent explained, "I'm not a teacher, and I don't know what to do." Another parent stated, "We need hands on helpful tools to implement the work students have at home." Other parents wished teachers would explain why their child was struggling or why work they had helped their child complete was marked wrong. Parents didn't want new ideas from teachers as much as they wanted clarity and help with implementing the ideas teachers had presented.

Parents had lots of experience with homework and freely shared their frustrations. They claimed homework could be frustrating for both parent and child. Parents were unhappy when their child came home frustrated and not understanding an assignment. Most frequently parents complained about work students brought home without any instructions indicating how the teacher wanted the child to show their work. One parent realized this could be the result of miscommunication. She shared, "It can be a communication thing because the children might not be telling me exactly the instructions the teacher gave them to know how to do something, and there's no explanation. It can be confusing not knowing what the teacher wants from the student."

Parents reported they have to nag their children to do their homework and many complained that it seemed like a lot of work some days. One mother shared, "My daughter would rather play outside, but I make her do her homework first." Most parents stated they checked their children's homework even though it was tedious. When asked why parents check homework, one parent shared, "This is our only daughter, so we want the best." Another parent shared how she enjoyed having her son explain to her how he

had found the answer to his math problem. The lack of "down time" available to their children was an issue of concern to some parents. They struggled balancing their children's time for schoolwork and time for relaxing.

On the topic of volunteering, work schedules were mentioned most often as preventing parents from being available to volunteer at schools. Parents saw some teachers as not really wanting their help in the classroom. "Some teachers just don't want the help. They think they can do it by themselves," suggested a parent. In addition, they believed their presence might be distracting and make the teacher nervous. Parents thought the need for volunteers decreased with students' age because teachers wanted to increase student independence. "The older they get the less volunteers are needed. It tends to be more academic," suggested a parent.

Parents suggested one reason parents don't volunteer is they don't know what needs to be done. They shared requests for volunteers should be specific and able to occur at a variety of times and places. Parents expressed willingness to work on volunteer projects at home or on weekends. Overall parents shared they would love to help if barriers such as work schedules and care for younger siblings could be overcome.

When communication between school and home was lacking, parents felt frustrated and disconnected. Parents found it particularly distressing when they received notices after an event had occurred or without enough lead time to easily respond to it. One parent perceived her child's teacher didn't want to talk to her which kept the parent from talking to the teacher. On the other hand, a different parent shared that she made a point of saying hi to her child's teacher whenever she was at school. Parents realized they

may be overprotective of their children which could hamper positive communication with their child's teacher.

Parents regularly expressed a desire to know about problems right away. As one parent stated, "We need to know right when problems arise. Sooner not later. If I don't know what's happening in the classroom with her, how can I help?" Parents shared numerous ways they had found to stay informed. Communicating about school with other parents and extended family members at extra curricular events or at chance meetings in the community worked well for them. The focus group meeting itself provided an avenue for parents to share information about school. Participating parents were eager to encourage one another by sharing what knowledge they had about their school.

Parents were unaware of the learning expectations for their children at each grade level. They felt such expectations had not been clearly shared, but showed interest in knowing specifically what their child should be learning each year. They believed such information would help them know where to focus their help and give them a goal. One parent explained it this way, "It would be easier for me {to help}. We don't know what they're doing." Another parent agreed, "I think that would be nice for me too because I feel like I don't know hardly anything. We don't know what they're going to be doing. I'd kind of like to know. I want to know what to help her on. I'd love knowing that." Parents also saw having that information as a possible starting point for thinking of ways to volunteer their help.

When parents were given the opportunity to talk about other areas of parental involvement, they shared passionate feelings about high stakes testing. They felt

inadequate in their ability to help and thought too much emphasis had been placed on preparing students to do well on the tests. Another issue of concern to parents was the safety of their children. They wanted to be informed when their child got hurt at school and wondered what the school did to protect children on the playground from intruding strangers.

There were a number of areas where parents and teachers in Focus Groups 1 – 4 shared similar perspectives. Parents and teachers agreed that math could be confusing and intimidating and that helping children gain mastery of basic math facts was a difficult challenge. They agreed the new approach to teaching math made it difficult for parents to help, and high stakes testing increased the complexity of math assignments.

Both parents and teachers also recognized that homework could be a negative experience, and it was frustrating to find an assignment brought home without instructions. They also agreed that the busyness of life has made completing homework difficult, and that some days the amount of homework seemed overwhelming.

There was also agreement that work schedules hindered parents' ability to volunteer during school hours but there were a variety of ways parents could be involved. Parents and teachers both perceived communication as the key to successful partnerships. In addition, parents and teachers agreed that learning expectations had not been adequately addressed, and that addressing learning expectations at each grade level would be a helpful step for parents and teachers. Participants also agreed that the sharing of common goals for their children and students was a viable way to enhance their ability to work together in partnership.

Combined Parent and Teacher Focus Group Five

Focus Group 5

consisted of two teachers from School A, one teacher from School C, and three mothers

and one father from School A. Additional teachers and parents from School C were

invited but were unable to attend. Participants were presented with a paraphrase of

research question three: "What actions could you suggest to enhance (help) our ability to

work together in partnership?" was posted on a white board as the focus for discussion.

Noticeable on the audio tapes was an atmosphere less animated and more reserved

than in the first four focus groups. Periods of silence, nervous laughter, and hesitation in

responses were more frequent in Focus Group 5 than in any of the previous focus groups.

While many of the concerns raised in previous focus groups were again discussed, the

opinions of teachers and parents were more guarded regarding the different challenges

each faces. While negative feelings were sometimes shared in prior focus groups of either

teachers or parents, this was not the case in Focus Group 5 Areas of disagreement were

not raised, although frustrations were freely shared. Much of the discussion revolved

around parents sharing their concerns. Teachers and other parents then responded to the

concerns raised.

A majority of this focus group's discussion dealt with the need for clear and

frequent communication. Parents and teachers agreed such communication was

imperative to effectively partnering together. However, it was recognized that between

the student and the home a lot of communication got lost. One parent remarked, "The

student may not want to tell the parents when assignments are due." Another parent

suggested, "Some parents have a fear of talking to the teacher which may be due to insecurity or past negative school experiences. They may be afraid of hearing about their child's misbehavior." Parents expressed a preference to being contacted by phone when issues with their child occurred, and they liked it to occur as soon as a need arose. In addition to phone calls home, regular newsletters were mentioned by parents as being very helpful.

Parents also expressed frustration and lack of understanding regarding assignments. One parent explained, "We're trying to teach them from the curriculum we grew up with, and it's completely different now." Parents again expressed frustration with homework which did not include instructions and shared that their children's frustration with homework frequently resulted in tears. A teacher apologized for allowing student work to go home without an explanation of how the work should be completed. She explained, "It may be the result of gathering up homework at the end of a hectic day when both the teacher and the student are tired."

On a related topic, parents reported getting discouraged when they worked together with their child on an assignment, and it was marked wrong. One parent suggested that at least one sample problem accompany work sent home to help her help her child. Another parent suggested sending home a template of how teachers wanted an assignment completed. Another parent recommended sending "cheat sheets" home which gave an overview of teacher policies, and explained meanings of terms. These could be used throughout the year as a reference for parents when helping their child with assignments.

Parents and teachers agreed learning expectations had not been clearly conveyed. They also agreed a clear presentation of learning expectations at the beginning of each grade could help parents and teachers partner together. One teacher suggested developing a type of syllabus for each grade. The idea of holding orientation meetings where learning expectations are shared at the beginning of the school year was also suggested. Including reminders of learning expectations in the school newsletters throughout the year was another suggested idea.

On the topic of volunteering, parents expressed eagerness to volunteer, but were stymied by work schedules or younger siblings in the home. One mother shared, "I would have loved being a reading tutor when they asked for tutors. I love to read especially reading aloud. I would have a ball with that. But I work and right now and with the flood and everything, I can't even consider doing that. It's kind of disappointing when opportunities like that come up, and I just can't do it."

Although teachers perceived that parents always wanted to work with students when they volunteered, some parents expressed a preference for volunteer work that did not involve working directly with students. One parent shared, "I would love to come to school on a Saturday and work in the gardens."

Evidence of Quality

This study implemented several techniques to assure the quality of data collection and analysis. The use of a sequential approach to data collection insured validity of the data collected (Creswell, 2003). The researcher personally delivered teacher survey packets to teachers. Packets included separate confidential envelopes for returning

consent forms to protect the privacy of each participant. Parent survey packets were distributed and collected by classroom teachers. Consent form envelopes again were separated from surveys when collected to protect participants' privacy.

A sequential mixed method data analysis was implemented to allow the information from the analysis of the survey database to inform the focus group database (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Quantitative survey data was entered into SPSS (2005) software and analyzed descriptively. As the data was being studied, it was checked and data entry errors were corrected by the researcher. The data were analyzed descriptively to identify mean differences in parental involvement perspectives. The qualitative survey data were analyzed by manually color coding themes and categories. To incorporate member checking and increase the reliability of the data analysis, a colleague of the researcher, who had been familiar with the project since its inception, was given transcripts of the qualitative survey responses and asked to color code responses according to a list of categories developed by the researcher. Researcher and colleague analyses were then compared, discussed, and recoded if necessary. Collected survey data was then used to develop discussion agendas for focus groups to probe further the basis and motivations underlying perspectives.

Focus group data were recorded, transcribed, and categorized. To establish validity, data was compared to data collected from other focus groups and triangulated with previously collected survey data. Published reliability scores for the School and Family Partnerships Survey of Parents and Teachers (Epstein & Salinas, 1993) use Cronbach's alpha (α) reliability formula and estimate a reliability mean of $\alpha = .81$. The

population for the current study is rural rather than urban and smaller than the study on which the reliabilities were originally established. This limits the generalizability of its results to other populations but focuses the results on improving parent teacher partnerships in the school populations studied.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

This mixed methods exploratory study compared the perspectives of parental involvement held by teachers and parents. The survey, The School and Family Partnerships Survey of Parents and Teachers (Epstein & Salinas, 1993), identified perspectives of parents and teachers in three rural school districts. An analysis of quantitative survey responses to parallel questions revealed perspective discrepancies in the areas of parental involvement attitudes, types of involvement, communication, and learning expectations. Parents saw themselves as more able to help their children than did teachers. Volunteering at school and helping with homework were also viewed differently by parents and teachers. Although parents viewed communication between school and home as vital, they talked to their child's teacher infrequently. Teachers thought it was important for parents to know the learning expectations for their child, yet parents didn't feel such expectations were clearly communicated.

The survey also collected qualitative data from parents and teachers in the form of open-ended questions. Responses to these questions revealed parents' greatest concern was the academic success of their child. Parents found parent teacher conferences as the most helpful practice for their involvement, and many parents wished they could volunteer more than they did. In expressing how schools could help parents, suggestions

for curriculum changes and improving communication were shared. Teachers reported experiencing the most parental involvement success when they involved parents in teaching. The collection of quantitative and qualitative data from the survey developed the agenda for focus groups which followed.

Focus group data revealed differences in parental involvement perspectives. Both parents and teachers shared frustrations they had in their attempts to partner together. Teachers perceived many parents were lacking ability to help their child with their school work especially in the area of math. They also perceived parents as setting a lower priority on school work than they believed it should have. Parents reiterated in focus groups their wish to be able to volunteer more than they did, however many conflicting responsibilities prevented their participation. Parents felt frustrated when they were uninformed about what went on at school. They wanted more information regarding their children's progress, and they wanted to be informed in as timely a manner as possible. Parents were very interested in knowing the learning expectations set for their child at each grade level yet reported that such expectations were not forthcoming. Both parents and teachers therefore shared frustrations and recognized areas that could be improved to strengthen parent-teacher partnerships.

The results of this study indicate parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement definitely differ. Participants suggested many concrete ideas for ways to overcome barriers and work on developing quality parent teacher partnerships. These suggestions, which will be discussed further in the next section, can be used by each of

the participating schools to build stronger, more effective partnerships among parents and

teachers.

CHAPTER 5:

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to identify, compare, and analyze the differences in perspectives held by teachers and parents regarding parental involvement in education. In addition, actions teachers and parents suggested would enhance their ability to work together in partnership were sought.

The research questions addressed by this study were:

1. What do parents perceive to be their involvement in their child's education?

2. What do teachers perceive to be a parent's involvement in their child's education?

3. How do the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding parental involvement compare? In what ways do their perspectives differ, and in what ways do they agree?

4. What actions do teachers and parents suggest would enhance their ability to work together in partnership?

A mixed method design was utilized in this study to first identify the parental involvement perspectives of parents and teachers through the use of a survey. Using data collected in the survey, focus groups probed in depth the areas where teacher and parent perspectives differed. Study participants were parents and teachers from three rural elementary school districts located in Washington State. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through the revised School and Family Partnerships Survey of Parents and Teachers (Epstein & Salinas, 1993). The hypothesis predicting significant differences between parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement (H_1: parent perspective

≠ teacher perspective) was tested using a *t* test for independent samples from the SPSS program with a critical region of α = .05. The resulting *t* score was -3.203 with a significance of .002 which indicated parents and teachers have significantly different perspectives regarding how their school views parents as partners.

An analysis of survey data revealed three categories of differences in perspective: attitudes, types of involvement, and communication. The survey responses of parents and teachers showed the greatest difference in perspective on parental ability to help a child with reading and math. Ninety-five percent of parents saw themselves as able to help, compared with only 38% of teachers. Perspectives also differed in the areas of checking homework, volunteering at school, talking with teachers, and communicating learning expectations. To examine these differences in greater depth, focus group discussions were conducted.

Five focus groups (2 of parents only, 2 of teachers only, and 1 of parents and teachers together) discussed attitudes toward parental involvement, types of parental involvement, and communication. Participants shared the areas of parental involvement they found frustrating as well as those they found rewarding. Focus groups data indicated teachers wanted learning to have a higher priority at home. Parents wanted improved communication between the school and the home.

<div align="center">Interpretations of the Findings</div>

To interpret the study's findings each research question will be considered separately.

What do parents perceive to be their involvement in their child's education?

Parents viewed their involvement from the perspective of their own child. When commenting on their greatest concern, 69% of parents mentioned "my child" in their response. While parents shared fears they had for their children indicating a possible lack of confidence in their parenting ability, 95% believed they were capable of helping their children with reading and math. Parents' commitment to their children and their dependence on and desire for communication between school and home were results similar to those found by Lawson (2003) in his ethnographic interviews with urban parents.

Parents in the current study saw themselves as checking their child's homework regularly, but found it difficult to volunteer at school. They felt they should do more to help the school and expressed feelings of guilt at not doing so. Homework, parent teacher conferences, and phone calls from teachers when issues arose helped keep them involved. Parents also appreciated opportunities to develop relationships with school staff and other families who had children in their school. However, many parents shared they had spoken infrequently with their child's teacher.

Applying Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence (1995), parents desired the school's influence in helping their child do well in school, yet they felt conflicted and at times inadequate in their ability to smoothly overlap the school's sphere of influence with other demanding influences in their lives.

What do teachers perceive to be a parent's involvement in their child's education?

Thirty-eight percent of teachers perceived many parents as unable to help their child with reading and math. Most teachers (90%) thought parents needed their ideas to be involved with helping in these areas. The majority of parents checked their child's homework according to teachers. Teachers perceived parents' lack of participation as an indication of their inability to help. In addition, teachers perceived that some parents put a higher priority on extra curricular activities rather than schoolwork. Parents' volunteering at school was important to teachers, yet they realized many factors prevented parents from doing so. Successful ways teachers found of involving parents at school included having parents listen to students read, lead learning centers, and help with specific math skills. Twenty-five percent of teachers mentioned their frustration when they attempted to involve parents as classroom volunteers and labeled them as unreliable.

Teachers also viewed communication with parents as very important, and tried to find ways to develop relationships and build communication to enhance parental involvement. They viewed parents as involved when children arrived at school fed, rested, prepared, and with homework completed which corresponded to the first four levels of parental involvement identified by Epstein (1995). Teachers recognized they could do a better job of communicating their learning expectations for students at each grade level. Within the confines of the focus group, teachers initiated a discussion of ways they could improve their communication of learning expectations to parents.

How do the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding parental involvement compare? In what ways do their perspectives differ, and in what ways do they agree?

Parents and teachers viewed the roles they fill in the academic growth of a child differently. Parents perceived their involvement from the vantage point of their child. Just as Barge and Loges (2003) found, parents expressed concerns over their child's emotional well-being and extracurricular activities as well as their academic performance. Teachers, however, viewed parental involvement from the vantage point of managing a group of students. They looked for ways parents could help the group make progress. Similarly, Lawson (2003) found teachers viewed parental involvement as parents helping with the needs of the school. These differing vantage points revealed a foundation for the variance in parental involvement perspectives of parents and teachers.

Survey data revealed parents perceived themselves as capable of helping their child. However, teachers in focus groups questioned parent's capability. Teachers cited parents' requests for help in understanding math as well as their lack of participation in their child's homework as support of their perspective that many parents are not capable of helping their children.

Parents wanted their child to do well in school and were willing to help them toward that end. One indicator for parents of how well their child was doing at school was how happy their child was with school. In other words, if their child liked school, parents felt good about school and their attempts at parental involvement. Teachers shared in focus groups they too wanted happy students, but their perspective of parental involvement was influenced by student progress toward meeting learning goals. Similarly

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) found parents' and teachers' differing perspectives of parental involvement were in part determined from their own school experiences. Hence, parents who saw evidence at home that their child was happy at school, perceived parental involvement in a positive light. Likewise, teachers whose students made steady progress academically also perceived parental involvement positively.

Parents saw communication as a key to partnering together with teachers. In responding to the survey question that asked parents and teachers to name the practice to involve parents that had helped them the most, 47% of parents mentioned parent teacher conferences. Parents also mentioned relationships and feeling connected as important to them. Communication with parents was seen as important to teachers, but they mentioned it less often than did parents. In fact, one teacher shared her perception that what she had shared with parents was disregarded. This caused her to consider skeptically whether it was really necessary to invest more time in communication efforts.

The parent role construction theory (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) was evidenced as parents shared their struggles in fulfilling their role as parents. Feelings of guilt at not volunteering enough at school or not helping their child enough with needed skills were shared by parents. They also struggled with how to fit everything such as homework, sports, chores, and family time into their child's busy schedule.

Baker (1997b) found teachers wanted parents to support them in their decisions. Additionally they wanted open communication with parents about the child especially in areas that might help the teacher understand the child's behavior. This desire for support was evident in teacher responses when they spoke critically and with some

discouragement that parents did not give schoolwork the priority it deserved. Although there were many areas where parent and teacher perspectives diverged, there were some areas where their perspectives converged.

In two of the three schools studied, parents and teachers were in complete agreement that parents were viewed as partners. Parents reported talking with their children about school and attending special school events. Teachers recognized parents' involvement in these areas. Students experiencing success in school was a common goal in both parent and teacher responses. When student success was experienced, both parents and teachers reported feelings of success and accomplishment as well.

What actions do teachers and parents suggest that would enhance their ability to work together in partnership?

Both parent and teacher focus group participants were hesitant to answer this general question when initially presented. This may be attributed to the confusion that exists concerning the goals and desired outcomes of parental involvement practices (Epstein, 2001). Teachers are inadequately trained and unprepared for working positively with their students' families. Parents and teachers rarely have opportunity to share their unique perspectives on what parental involvement means to them. They are therefore unsure as to what suggestions would be appropriate and produce a positive outcome. Though focus group participants were hesitant to make suggestions directly, suggestions for enhancing parent teacher partnerships were interwoven among their responses to other topics. Surveyed parents also offered suggestions of actions from their perspective that would improve parent teacher partnerships.

Parents participants suggested improving communication between home and school and offered a variety of ways teachers could keep them better informed thereby minimizing frustration for all involved. Providing parents a template of how the teacher wanted homework assignments formatted and sending home a reference sheet of terms, abbreviations, and acronyms used in class were ideas parents suggested would help them help their child.

Teachers expressed willingness to work together with parents. Providing parents access to student progress reports online was seen as a helpful way of keeping parents informed without requiring an unreasonable amount of teacher time. It is interesting to note that when teachers in Focus Group 2 recognized they had not communicated specific learning expectations for each grade level well, they immediately began brainstorming ways that could be achieved.

Parents and teachers all spoke of time restrictions which prevented them from doing more with parental involvement. Research has demonstrated that parents view their children differently and more emotionally than teachers view the same children (Cutler, 2000; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). This variance in perspective was confirmed in this study's findings. Compared with teachers, parents displayed more emotion regarding the barrier of limited time. Parents shared feelings of guilt at not doing more to help their child experience school success, something they desperately wanted. Teachers, on the other hand, were more guarded in committing their time than parents and addressed their time constraints more objectively than parents. They carefully considered the value of

adding additional responsibilities which might or might not improve parental involvement to their already packed schedules.

To summarize the data gathered in this study, parents and teachers frame their pictures of parental involvement differently. Parents paint their parental involvement picture with subjective emotion. Teachers paint their picture with objective goals and accomplishments. Neither of these framed pictures of parental involvement is right or wrong. They are simply different. This confirms findings in the literature which indicate the complexity of factors contributing to parental involvement perspectives of both parents and teachers.

The majority of studies of parental involvement have been conducted on urban populations. This study was conducted using a rural population and confirmed many of the findings from previous studies of urban school settings hold true in rural school settings as well. While both parents and teachers aim for school success for children, they come from very different starting places and look at parental involvement through very different lenses. Such is the difficulty when dealing with the complexity of developing and maintaining authentic, thriving partnerships of parents and teachers.

<div align="center">Implications for Social Change</div>

The focus group portion of this mixed method exploratory study provided a non threatening opportunity for parents and teachers to share not only their parental involvement perspectives, but also their ideas for improving parent teacher partnerships. Baker (1997) expressed surprise at the limited opportunities parents and teachers have to share their unique perspectives of what parental involvement means to them. The focus

group opportunity provided a starting point for parents and teachers to institute change within their learning community and improve the ways in which they partner together.

When parents were invited to participate in focus groups, many were eager to do so and indicated their pleasure that someone was interested in understanding their perspective. Parent participants each had a voice that was valued regardless of possible negative past school experiences or fears they had of talking with their child's teacher. This opportunity to share ideas, perspectives, and personal opinions regarding parental involvement was a new experience especially for parent participants.

When teachers were invited to participate, they were not as eager as parents. Teachers displayed dedication to student success, yet they were cautious about committing their limited time to a project which did not assist them in meeting their learning-centered goals or added more responsibilities to their already overloaded schedules. However, teachers who did participate in the focus groups displayed interest and some surprise as they gained understanding of parent perspectives as indicated by the survey results. For example, teachers expressed particular interest in learning that 95% of parents surveyed felt confident in their ability to help their child in reading and math. This afforded teachers the opportunity to share their philosophies and clarify the reasons behind their actions especially in the focus group of parents and teachers combined. Hence the desire to be understood was strong amongst both groups.

Continuing to build upon shared desire for understanding has the potential to lead to social change. Giving a voice to the perspectives of both parents and teachers and valuing those voices, empowers stakeholders. Providing regular opportunities for

teachers and parents to share their perspectives on a variety of school related topics improved communication and relationships in local participating schools. In addition, such conversations gave both parents and teachers a sense of reaffirmation, realizing that their voice really can make a difference in the way schools pursue the success of every child.

To achieve positive parental involvement, Epstein (2002) recommends providing a clear channel of communication valuing the perspective of both parents and teachers. The focus groups provided this and began the process of developing relationships between parents and teachers in each of the three participating schools. Focus groups for this study provided a non threatening platform for parents and teachers to share their concerns, questions, and ideas about parental involvement. These meetings were designed to seek out the perspectives of participants and were relatively free of controversial issues.

Instances of differential power between school personnel and families such as those found in O'Connor's case study (2001) of parents and teachers from a low-income neighborhood school were not apparent. Instead, both teachers and parents eagerly sought to encourage fellow focus group members. When one parent participant spoke of a barrier she had faced in her attempts to be involved, several fellow group members suggested ways to circumvent the barrier including offers to help with transportation or child care. This community of encouragement which allowed participants to approach discussion of parental involvement with confidence may have been influenced by the rural setting and the familiarity of people in small, rural communities.

Continuing discussions such as those that occurred in the focus groups could lead to the formation of communities of practice involving parents and teachers in the pursuit of common goals (Buysse et al., 2003). In addition, such non threatening discussions among parents and teachers provide a vehicle for communicating understanding, building relationships, and producing positive social change.

It is interesting to note that the three rural school districts that participated in this study were the only districts in the local area to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) as mandated by No Child Left Behind (VanTuyl, 2008). Further research is needed to determine the differences of parental involvement perspectives in urban and rural communities. With research based evidence of the differing needs for successful parental involvement in urban and rural populations, the designing, developing, and implementing of parent and teacher partnership programs can be tailored to address the specific needs of each population.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Action</div>

The design of this study provided parents and teachers of three rural school districts an opportunity to consider aspects of parental involvement by completing a survey and then discussing in depth their perspectives of areas where parent and teacher perspectives diverged. This same design could be adapted for individual school districts seeking to build parent teacher partnerships through a deepening of understanding of parental involvement.

To deepen understanding of the parental involvement perspectives of parents and teachers, opportunities to share their respective voices should be created. This can be

achieved by inviting more parents and teachers to participate in focus groups. Such invitations, especially when they are communicated personally, validate participants' perspectives and let them know both their ideas and their involvement is valued (Constantino, 2003). Focus group participation also provides a doorway for the building of relationships. Parents find specific ways they can be involved, and teachers learn additional ways to garner parent participation.

This study utilized focus groups of parents only, teachers only, and parents and teachers combined. Although the format for each focus group was similar, the discussions took different paths. Parents in the parent only group had many questions about school programs and many personal experiences and frustrations which they were eager to share. Teachers in the teacher only group shared their own frustrations with involving parents as well as ideas to try to increase parental involvement. The focus group of parents and teachers together, while less animated, provided opportunity for teachers to clarify their goals and actions and for parents to share their frustrations in their attempts at being involved.

In order to give direction to focus groups, specific topics to explore as well as specific outcomes or products to pursue should be shared with the school community. Specific topics of discussion could include Epstein's six levels of involvement (1995). The sharing of specific outcomes could take the form of an article in the school newsletter, a workshop for parents and teachers, or an article in the local paper. Workshops could address frustrating areas of parental involvement for parents and teachers and suggest strategies for overcoming the frustrations. Workshops could also

provide small group opportunities for participants to share personal frustrations and successes.

Beyond the use of focus groups, schools can and should look for innovative ways to gain parental involvement perspectives. This can be achieved by looking for ways to include all parent populations. One school district in Washington State involves incarcerated parents in parent teacher conferences through the use of video conferencing technology. Other possibilities could be employed which are unique to each school.

Parents surveyed offered a plethora of ideas and suggestions for making parental involvement inclusive of all parents. They wanted teachers to be more approachable and communication to include challenges facing the school as well as successes achieved. Weekly school newsletters were suggested as a way to share school needs, problems, and future goals with parents. Parents also requested regular monthly parent nights where their questions and concerns could be addressed. Finally, rather than sending a note home with the student, parents wanted to be asked directly for their volunteer help at school.

Teachers also had suggestions for improving parental involvement. They wanted parents to consistently discuss with their child what they were reading. Helping students master basic math facts was mentioned repeatedly by teachers as one area where they could really use parent help. Teachers would like parents to communicate with them regarding issues occurring at home which might impact the child's learning. Finally teachers want parents to share in the joy of learning together with their child.

Parents and teachers have much they can learn from one another. The recommendations listed above are far from conclusive. An action plan for understanding

parental involvement perspectives will vary from school to school. However, parents and teachers provided with opportunities to discuss their perspectives of parental involvement in a non threatening environment can build a foundation of understanding for the implementation of helpful actions in the development of parent teacher partnerships. This foundation can then be used to enhance the abilities of parents and teachers to work together in vital partnerships.

<center>Significance of the Study</center>

Parental involvement is clearly beneficial to student success in school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). However, parents and teachers in this study expressed dissatisfaction with current levels of parental involvement. Parents and teachers have diverse perspectives due to differing priorities, goals, spheres of influence, and roles they fill in students' lives. Although their perspectives vary, both parents and teachers seek student success in school (Comer, 2005).

When parents and teachers were given the opportunity to identify, share, and compare their perspectives, they were each given a voice of value. Valuing the perspectives of parents and teachers empowered them to consider their perspective in relation to the perspectives of others. This provided a foundation on which to build understanding and begin developing effective parent teacher partnerships.

This study has taken an initial step to understand the complex issue of developing vital and prosperous partnerships between parents and teachers. It adds to the existing body of literature by identifying, comparing and analyzing varying parental involvement perspectives of parent and teachers within three rural school districts. The findings of this

study can be further developed to deepen and clarify understanding between parents and teachers building communities of practice which enable teachers and parents to partner together in building school success for all students.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study identified, compared, and analyzed parental involvement perspectives of parents and teachers in three rural school districts in Washington State. The small sample size limits the generalizability of this study's results to other school districts. However, for the participating schools in this study, the mixed method design provided participating parents and teachers opportunity to first consider their perspective individually on the survey and then in comparison with others in the focus groups. This improved communication and built relationships, which are two areas that research indicates have a positive impact on improving parental involvement (Epstein, 1995),

Research in the future would be well served by repeating this research study with a larger sample size in another rural school district within the state of Washington. In addition, research would benefit from comparing data collected in this research of parental involvement perspectives of elementary school parents and teachers with perspectives of parents and teachers from middle schools. The most current research of parent perspectives of high schools reveals parents believe their involvement strongly influences the academic success of their child (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, & Mason, 2008). Comparing this with the parental involvement perspectives of high school teachers would be another step toward determining how parental involvement can be maximized to increase student success in school.

How school size impacts parental involvement perspectives is yet another area in need of further exploration. Data collected on ways better partnerships with families could help teachers indicated relationships and trust were not issues from the perspectives of teachers in the two smaller schools. However, teachers from the larger school, School C, thought relationships and trust were needed to help them partner more effectively with families. Exploring the variable of school size and its impact on parental involvement perspectives would further develop understanding of the complexity of establishing effective and inclusive parent teacher partnerships.

Marital status is another factor needing to be explored in parental involvement perspectives. Since married parents have been found to spend nearly four times as much time at school with extra curricular activities than single parents, further study of its impact on parental involvement perspectives is needed (Ritblatt et al., 2002).

An exploration of the underlying reasons for the differing parental involvement perspectives could provide data which lead to increased understanding of perspectives. Additional areas that could benefit from further research and provide needed insights regarding parental involvement perspectives include determining motivations for parental involvement, the roles teachers and parents perceive they should fill, and the impact of a school's reputation in the community.

Conclusion

Teachers and parents can be compared to two planets spinning in different orbits. Occasionally, their orbits draw near and both planets benefit as they travel together. At other times their orbits collide and cause sparks to fly. At still other times their orbits may

cross paths with little knowledge of where each planet is headed. This researcher hopes that by deepening understanding of the orbital paths or perspectives of teachers and parents, the time they travel together can be increased to the benefit of students.

Parents and teachers each hold a piece of the education picture for students and need each other to clearly see the picture as a whole. When together parents and teachers seek to understand the whole picture of parental involvement perspectives with all its layers and intricacies, frustration in partnering together can be minimized while maximizing school success for all students.

Reflections

As a teacher-researcher, some pieces of this study impressed and surprised me. From the survey data, I was surprised that 95% of parents were confident in their ability to help their child with school work. I was also surprised at how, according to survey data, parents didn't think they needed more teacher ideas to help their child learn. However, focus group data indicated parents desired teacher ideas. This affirms the use of the mixed method research design. Participants shared different perspectives in focus groups compared with survey responses.

As a currently employed classroom teacher, I have perceived limited parental involvement. This was evidence I assumed of parents lack of confidence in their desire or ability to help. This study's data has made me wonder, if teachers, myself included, think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. My assumption caused me to underestimate the ability, confidence, desire, and dedication of parents to their child's success in school. This insight has helped me to place greater value on the voice of

parents and seek to listen to the comments of students' parents more deeply, thoughtfully, and diligently. It has opened my mind to practices I may not have been willing to try otherwise. For example, the mother of a struggling student in my class asked to come to school whenever her daughter had a test. From this mother's perspective, if she could sit with her daughter during the test, her child would maintain her focus, take her time, and improve her performance. Initially I was against it and thought the mother would give the student the too much help. I decided to let the mother try, and it has been very successful. The student likes having her mother come whenever she calls her, and is experiencing success on her tests for the first time in her school experience. As the student's confidence builds, I predict she will no longer need her mother's presence to do her best and experience success. Parents' ideas for their children are valuable, and I am glad I am learning to trust parents' perspectives.

I have been extremely impressed by the way participants in the focus groups encouraged one another. Parents brainstormed ways they could network together in order to resolve dilemmas individuals faced. When issues arose in focus groups, teachers were ready to resolve issues on the spot. Parents and teachers showed they are results oriented. If a problem was mentioned, they were not satisfied with just talking about the problem; they wanted to talk about ways to resolve it.

Parent focus Groups 1 and 2 seemed more relational than the other focus groups and shared very personal perspectives of their involvement including their fears of parenting poorly. Parents who had performed poorly when they were in school seemed especially hungry to have their voices heard now as parents. The amount of guilt parents

claimed to have about not volunteering as much as they felt they should surprised me. The transparency parents were willing to bring to the focus groups resulted in increasing my own compassion for the role parents were attempting so passionately to fulfill.

As school communities become more diverse, so do the challenges of understanding parental involvement perspectives (Dantonio & Lynch, 2005). The various factors contributing to these unique perspectives are complex, yet the value of understanding them is great. Research clearly and repeatedly indicates parental involvement produces myriad benefits to school success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Therefore, studying new perspectives of parental involvement can produce positive social change for members of all school communities.

REFERENCES

(2005). SPSS career starter program (Version 14.0 for windows). Belmont, CA: Wasdsworth.

Adams, K. (1998). Differences in parent and teacher trust levels: Implications for creating collaborative family-school relationships. *Special Services in the Schools, 14*(1/2), 1-22.

Addi-Raccah, A., & Arviv-Elyashiv, R. (2008). Parent empowerment and teacher professionalism: Teachers' perspective. *Urban Education, 43*(3), 394-415.

Aina, O. (2001). Maximizing learning in early childhood multiage classrooms: Child, teacher, and parent perceptions. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 28*(4), 219-224.

Baker, A. J. L. (1997a). Improving parent involvement programs and practice: A qualitative study of parent perceptions. *School Community Journal, 7*(1), 127-153.

Baker, A. J. L. (1997b). Improving parent involvement programs and practice: A qualitative study of teacher perceptions. *School Community Journal, 7*(2), 155-183.

Bakker, J., Denessen, E., & Brus-Laeven, M. (2007). Socio-economic background, parental involvement and teacher perceptions of these in relation to pupil achievement. *Educational Studies, 33*(2), 177-192.

Balli, S. J., Demo, D. H., & Wedman, J. F. (1998). Family involvement with children's homework: An intervention in the middle grades. *Family Relations, 47*(2), 149-157.

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

Bauch, P., & Goldring, E. (2000). Teacher work context and parent involvement in urban high schools of choice. *Educational Research and Evaluation, 6*(1), 1-23.

Bridgeland, J. M., Dilulio, J. J., Streeter, R. T., & Mason, J. R. (2008, October 2008). *One dream, two realities: Perspectives of parents on America's high schools*, Retrieved from http://www.civicenterprises.net//pdfs/onedream.pdf

Buysse, V., Sparkman, K. L., & Wesley, P. W. (2003). Communities of practice: Connecting what we know with what we do. *Exceptional Children, 69*(3), 263-277.

Caspe, M., & Lopez, E. (2006). *Lessons from family-strengthening interventions: Learning from evidence-based practice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Cavazos, L. F. (1989). *Education our children: Parents and school together*. Washington, D. C.: Department of Education.

Chen, X. (2001). *Efforts by public K-8 schools to involve parents in children's education: Do school and parents agree?* (Statistical Analysis Report No. NCES 2001-076): National Center for Education Statistics.

Christie, K. (2005). Changing the nature of parent involvement. *Phi Delta Kappan, 86*(9), 645-646.

Colombo, M. (2006). Building school partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse families. *Phi Delta Kappan, 88*(4), 314-318.

Comer, J. (2005). The rewards of parent participation. *Educational Leadership, 62*(6), 38-42.

Comer, J. P. (2001, July 2004). *The parent team*. Retrieved from http://www.med.yale.edu/comer/about/parent.html

Constantino, S. M. (2003). *Engaging all families: Creating a positive school culture by putting research into practice*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Education.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

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

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Cutler, W. W. (2000). *Parents and schools: The 150-year struggle for control in American education*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Dantonio, M., & Lynch, K. M. (2005). *To teach, to lead, to transform: Teacher leadership and the future of school reform*. Retrieved from www.ciconline.org/threshold

Dauber, S., & Epstein, J. L. (1989). *Parent attitudes and practices of parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools* (Report No. 33). Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools.

DeHass. (2005). Facilitating parent involvement: Reflecting on effective teacher education. *Teaching and Learning, 19*(2), 57-76.

Dodd, A. W., & Konzal, J. L. (2002). *How communities build stronger schools*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Domina, T. (2005). Leveling the home advantage: Assessing the effectiveness of parental involvement in elementary school. *Sociology of Education, 78*(3), 233-249.

Dunst, C. J., Johanson, C., Rounds, T., Trivette, C. M., & Hamby, D. (1992). Characteristics of parent-professional partnerships. In S. L. Christenson & J. C. Conoley (Eds.), *Home-school collaboration: Enhancing children's academic and social competence* (pp. 154-174). Silver Spring, MD: The National Association of School Psychologists.

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

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

Epstein, J. L., & 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., & Dauber, S. (1995). Effects on students of an interdisciplinary program linking social studies, art and family. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 15*(1), 114 - 131.

Epstein, J. L., Jansorn, N. R., Sanders, M. G., Salinas, K. C., Simon, B. S., & Van Voorhis, F. L. (2002). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (Second ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Epstein, J. L., & Salinas, K. C. (1993). *School and family partnerships: Surveys and summaries*. Baltimore, MD: Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, Johns Hopkins University.

Farkas, S., Johnson, J., & Duffet, A. (1999). *Playing their part: Parents and teachers talk about parental involvement in public schools*. Retrieved from http://www.publicagenda.org/specials/parent/parent.htm

Fink, A. (2006). *How to conduct surveys: A step by step guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Flessa, J. (2008). Parental involvement: What counts, who counts it, and does it help? *Education Canada, 48*(2), 18-21.

Geiger, B. F., Petri, C. J., Boling, W., Hartline, A., Powers, C., & Britton, J. (2002). Seniors offering support program for students, families, and teachers. *Mentoring & Tutoring, 10*(3), 189-195.

Godber, Y. E. (2002). *School climate: Understanding parent perspectives to strengthen family-school relationships.* Unpublished Qualitative dissertation, University of Minnesota.

Gonzalez-Pienda, J. A., Nunez, J. C., Gonzalez-Pumarlega, S., Alvarez, L. W., Roces, C., & Garcia, M. (2002). A structural equation model of parental involvement, motivational and aptitudinal characteristics, and academic achievement. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 70*(3), 257-287.

Gravetter, F. J., & Wallnau, L. B. (2005). *Essentials of statistics for the behavioral sciences*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Green, C., Walker, J. M., Hoover-Dempsey, K., & Sandler, H. (2007). Parents' motivations for involvement in children's education: An empirical test of a theoretical model of parental involvement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 99*(3), 532-544.

Griffiths, M. (2003). *Action for social justice in education: Fairly different*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

Halsey, P. (2004). Nurturing parent involvement: Two middle level teachers share their secrets. *The Clearing House, 77*(4), 135-137.

Harris, A., & Goodall, J. (2008). Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning. *Educational Research, 50*(3), 277-289.

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

Hawley, W. D., & Rollie, D. L. (Eds.). (2002). *The keys to effective schools: Educational reform as continuous improvement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Henderson, A. T., & Berla, N. (1994). *A new generation of evidence: The family is crucial to student achievement*: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: National Center of Family & Community Connections with Schools: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. R., & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the bake sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Henderson, A. T., Marburger, C. L., & Ooms, T. (1986). *Beyond the bake sale: An educator's guide to working with parents*: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Hoover-Dempsey, K., Walker, J., Sandler, H., Whetsel, D., Green, C., Wilkins, A., et al. (2005). Why do parents become involved? Research findings and implications. *Elementary School Journal, 106*(2), 105-130.

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

Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (1995). Parental involvement in children's education: Why does it make a difference? *Teachers College Record, 2* (Winter), 310-331.

Ivankova, N. V., Creswell, J. W., & Stick, S. L. (2006). Using mixed-methods sequential explanatory design: From theory to practice. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 3-20.

Jones, R. (2001). Involving parents is a whole new game: Be sure you win! *American School Board Journal, 188*, 18-22.

Langdon, C. A., & Vesper, N. (2000). The sixth phi delta kappa poll of teachers' attitudes toward the public schools. *Phi Delta Kappan, 81*(8), 607-612.

Lareau, A. (2000). *Home advantage: Social class and parental intervention in elementary education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (2003). *The essential conversation: What parents and teachers can learn from each other*. New York, NY: Random House.

Lawson, M. A. (2003). School-family relations in context: Parent and teacher perceptions of parent involvement. *Urban Education, 38*(1), 77-133.

Leithwood, K. (1993). *Years of transition: Times for change. A review and analysis of pilot projects investigating issues in the transition years. Volume two: Explaining variations in progress*. Ontario, Canada: Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, Toronto.

Li, G. (2006). What do parents think? Middle-class Chinese immigrant parents' perspectives on literacy learning, homework, and school-home communication. *The School Community Journal, 16*(2), 27-46.

Markow, D., & Martin, S. (2005). *Transitions and the role of supportive relationships: A survey of teachers, principals, and students* (Survey). New York, NY: Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

Markow, D., Moessner, C., & Horowitz, H. (2006). *Expectations and experiences: A survey of teachers, principals and leaders of college education programs*.

McDermott, P., & Rothenberg, J. (2000). Why urban parents resist involvement in their children's elementary education. *The Qualitative Report, 5*(3 & 4). Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR5-3/mcdermott.html

Merriam, S. B., & Associates. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Minke, K. M., & Anderson, K. J. (2005). Family-school collaboration and positive behavior support. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 7*(3), 181-185.

Miretzky, D. (2004). The communication requirements of democratic schools: parent-teacher perspectives on their relationships. *Teachers College Record, 106*(4), 814-851.

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). (2005). *Position statement on home-school collaboration: Establishing partnerships to enhance educational outcomes*. Retrieved from http://www.nasponline.org/about_nasp/pospaper_hsc.aspx

National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools (2005, September). *Reaching out to diverse populations: What can schools do to foster family-school connections ?*Austin, TX: Ferguson, C.

National Coalition for Parental Involvement. (2004). *NCLB action briefs: Parental involvement*. Retrieved from http://www.ncpie.org/nclbaction/parent_involvement.html

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

O'Connor, S. (2001). Voices of parents and teachers in a poor white urban school. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 6*(3), 175-198.

OSPI. (2006-07). *Washington State Report Card*, Retrieved from http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/Summary.aspx?groupLevel=District&schoolId=1&reportLevel=State&orgLinkId=142&yrs=&year=2006-07

Paulu, N. (1995). *Helping your child with homework*. Retrieved from http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/homework.html

Public Education Network. (2004). *Parental involvement: Action guide for parents and communities*. Retrieved from http:www.ncpie.org/nclbaction/parent_involvement.html

Rich, D. (2004). *MegaSkills education online parent test*. Retrieved from http://www.megaskillsHSI.org

Riddick, B., & Hall, E. (2000). Match or mismatch: The perceptions of parents of nursery age children related to those of the children's main nursery workers. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 8*(2), 113-128.

Ritblatt, S. N., Beatty, J. R., Cronan, T. A., & Ochoa, A. M. (2002). Relationships among perceptions of parent involvement, time allocation, and demographic characteristics: Implication for policy formation. *Journal of Community Psychology, 30*(5), 519 - 549.

Sanders, M. G., & Epstein, J. L. (1998). *School-family-community partnerships in middle and high schools: From theory to practice* (No. 22). Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk.

Saulawa, D., & Johnson, J. (2001). *A preliminary investigation of teachers' perspective on parental involvement in children's literacy development in the black belt region* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED461097). Little Rock, AR.

Shannon, S. M. (1996). Minority parental involvement: A Mexican mother's experience and a teacher's interpretation. *Education and Urban Society, 29*(1), 71-84.

Sheldon, S. (2002). Parents' social networks and beliefs as predictors of parent involvement. *The Elementary School Journal, 102*(4), 301-317.

Silverman. (1993). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Snyder, J., & Ebmeier, H. (1992). Empirical linkages among principal behaviors and intermediate outcomes: Implications for principal evaluation. *Peabody Journal of Education, 68*(1), 75-107.

Toney, L. P., Kelley, M. L., & Lanclos, N. F. (2003). Self- and parental monitoring of homework in adolescents: Comparative effects on parents' perceptions of homework behavior problems. *Child & Family Behavior Therapy, 25*(1), 35-51.

U. S. Department of Education. (2004). *Parental involvement from the practitioner's perspective [Webcast]*, Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/parents/webcast/pntinvwebcast.html#wise

U. S. Department of Education. (2005). *Facts and terms every parent should know about NCLB: Overview*. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/parents/parentfacts.html

Valli, L., & Hawley, W. D. (2002). Designing and implementing school-based professional development. In W. D. Hawley & D. L. Rollie (Eds.), *The keys to effective schools: Educational reform as continuous improvement* (pp. 86 - 96). Thousand Oaks, CA: National Education Association.

VanTuyl, A. (2008, August 29, 2008). Report: More schools need to ramp up. *The Chronicle,* pp. 1, 12.

Walker, J., Wilkins, A., Dallaire, J., Sandler, H., & Hoover-Dempsey, K. (2005). Parental involvement: Model revision through scale development. *The Elementary School Journal, 106*(2), 85-106.

APPENDIX A

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

**Evaline Elementary School
111 Schoolhouse Road
Winlock, WA 98596
360-785-3460 FAX 360-785-0951
evaline@localaccess.com**

February 20, 2008

Dear Parents and Teachers,

I am an Ed. D. candidate at Walden University. This Ed. D. program involves research. I have chosen to study the way parents and teachers view parent involvement in learning. I would like you to take part in a survey for my research. This survey will ask you questions about your participation in your child's' schooling. Then I would like you to talk about this topic in focus groups with other parents and/or teachers.

Research shows parents and teachers have different views of parents taking part in learning. Parents and teachers need to understand where one another are coming from. This will help parents and teachers work together. This survey is part of the process.

You do not have to take part in the survey or focus groups. It is voluntary. The survey is also private. Please do not put your name on the survey. If you have questions about this study you can contact me or my advisor, Dr. Stephanie Helms. You can reach me at the above address and telephone number. You can contact Dr. Helms at 919-694-4582 or at shelms@waldenu.edu.

Will you take part in the study? Please fill out the ***School and Family Partnerships: Parent (or Teacher) Questionnaire.*** The survey needs to be filled out by February 28, 2008. Please place the completed survey in the envelope labeled Survey Return Envelope and your signed consent form in the separate envelope labeled Consent Form Envelope. Both envelopes can be returned to school with your child. Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,

Ann C. Stout
Teacher, Grades 3 – 6
Doctoral candidate, Walden University

APPENDIX B

SCHOOL AND FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS
PARENT SURVEY

February 20, 2008

Dear Parents:

I am conducting a research study to discover ways that schools and families can help each other and help all children succeed in school. I have discussed my study with ████████, the principal of ████████ Elementary School. He has agreed to allow ████████ parents and teachers to participate in a survey to discover how parents and teachers view parental involvement. I will use your responses to identify strategies for developing effective parent teacher partnerships. To do this I need ideas from families with students attending ████████ Elementary School.

Your answers will be grouped together with those from other families in three local school districts. No individual will ever be identified. Of course, you may skip any question, but I hope you will answer them all. Once the survey portion of this study is complete, some of you will be invited to meet with other participants to discuss together your responses. I will share the results of this study with you at a meeting once it is complete.

Your ideas can help develop a true partnership between school and home for all families, so I hope you will share your views of parental involvement on the enclosed survey.

Please complete this survey, sign the consent form, and return them to your school using the enclosed envelopes as soon as possible or before February 28, 2008.

Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Ann Stout
Intermediate grades teacher
Evaline School

SCHOOL AND FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS
Parent Survey

A. This survey should be answered by the PARENT or GUARDIAN who has the MOST CONTACT with this school about your child.

Who is filling in the survey? **Please check if you are**………

___ mother	___ aunt	___ guardian
___ father	___ uncle	___ other relative
___ stepmother	___ grandmother	___ other (describe)
___ stepfather	___ grandfather	

B. **How many children** in your family go to <u>this</u> school **this year**? (Circle how many.)

    1   2   3   4   5 or more

C. What **grades** are they in? **Circle all** of the grades of your children in <u>this</u> school.

Kindergarten   1   2   3   4   5   6

If you have more than one child at this school, please answer the questions in the survey about your **oldest child** at this school

D. Is your oldest child a: _____ boy or   _____ girl?

Question – 1   We would like to know how you feel about this school right NOW. Please CIRCLE one choice for each statement.

YES	Means you AGREE STONGLY with the statement.
Yes	Means you AGREE A LITTLE with the statement.
No	Means you DISAGREE A LITTLE with the statement

a. This is a very good school.	YES	Yes	no	NO
b. The teachers care about my child.	YES	yes	no	NO
c. I feel welcome at the school.	YES	yes	no	NO
d. This school has an active parent organization (e.g., PTA/Booster Club)	YES	yes	no	NO
e. My child should get more homework.	YES	yes	no	NO
g. Many parents I know help out at the school.	YES	yes	no	NO
h. The school and I have different goals for my child.	YES	yes	no	NO
i. I feel I can help my child in reading.	YES	yes	no	NO
j. I feel I can help my child in math.	YES	yes	no	NO
k. I could help my child more if the teacher gave me more ideas.	YES	yes	no	NO
l. This school views parents as important partners.	YES	yes	no	NO
m. This school is one of the best schools for students and for parents.	YES	yes	no	NO

Question 2   Families get involved in different ways at school or at home. Which of the following have you done <u>this year</u> with the OLDEST CHILD you have at this school? Please CIRCLE one choice for each item.

NEVER	means you do NOT do this or NOT YET this year
1 – 2 TIMES	means you have don this ONE or TWO TIMES this year
A FEW TIMES	means you have done this a FEW TIMES this year
MANY TIMES	means you have done this MANY TIMES this year

		1-2 TIMES	A FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
a. Talk to my child about school.	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	A FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
b. Visit my child's classroom.	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	A FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
c. Read to my child.	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	A FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
d. Listen to my child read	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	A FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
e. Help my child with homework.	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	A FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
f. Practice spelling or other skills before a test.	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	A FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
g. Help my child plan time for homework and chores.	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	A FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
h. Talk with my child's teacher.	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	A FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
i. Go to PTA/ Booster Club meetings.	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	A FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
j. Check to see that my child has done his/her homework.	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	A FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
k. Volunteer at school or in my child's classroom.	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	A FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
l. Go to special events at school.	NEVER	1-2 TIMES	A FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES

Question 3 Schools contact families in different ways. CIRCLE one choice to tell if the school has done these things THIS YEAR.

DOES NOT DO	means the school DOES NOT DO this
COULD DO BETTER	means the school DOES this but COULD DO BETTER
DOES WELL	means the school DOES this VERY WELL now

THIS SCHOOL……

a. Tells me how my child is doing in school.	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
b. Tells me what skills my child needs to learn each year.	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
c. Has a parent-teacher conference with me.	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
d. Explains how to check my child's homework.	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
e. Gives me information about how report card grades are earned.	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
f. Assigns homework that requires my child to talk with me about things learned in class.	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
g. Sends home clear notices that I can read easily.	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
h. Contacts me if my child is having problems.	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
i. Invites me to programs at the school.	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
j. Contacts me if my child does something well or improves.	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
k. Asks me to volunteer at the school.	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
l. Invites me to PTA/Booster Club meetings.	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL

Question 4   Over the past two years, how much has the school involved you at school and at home?

_____ (1) School involved me **less this year** than last

_____ (2) School involved me **about the same** in both years

_____ (3) School involved me **more this year** than last

_____ (4) My child **did not attend** this school last year

Please answer the last questions about your **oldest** child in this school.

Question 5 ABOUT HOMEWORK

a. About how much time does your child spend doing homework on most school days?
Minutes my child does homework on most school days: (Circle one.)

None   5-10   25-35   35-45   50-60   over 1 hour

b. How much time do you spend helping your child with homework on an average night?
Minutes of my time:
None   5-10   25-35   35-45   50-60   over 1 hour

c. How much time **could you spend** working with your child if the teacher showed you what to do?
Minutes I <u>could</u> spend:

None   5-10   25-35   35-45   50-60   over 1 hour

d. Do you have time on weekends to work with your child on projects or homework for school?

Yes_____   No_____

Question 6 WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE YOUR IDEAS……

A. What is your greatest concern as a parent?

b. What school practice to involve parents has helped you most, and why?

c. What is **one thing** that you or your family could do to help this school?

d. What is the best thing that this school could do **next year** to help you with your child?

e. Any other ideas or suggestions?

**PLEASE HAVE YOUR OLDEST CHILD AT THIS SCHOOL
RETURN THIS TO THE TEACHER TOMORROW OR AS SOON AS
POSSIBLE.**

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR HELPING US!

APPENDIX C

SCHOOL AND FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS
TEACHER SURVEY

February 20, 2008

Dear Teacher:

I am conducting a research study to learn more about how schools and families can assist each other to better understand and improve family and school connections. I have discussed my study with ██████, the principal of ██████ Elementary School. He has given his permission to allow ██████ parents and teachers to participate in a survey to discover how parents and teachers view parental involvement. The questions in the attached survey were developed by teachers and administrators working with researchers at Johns Hopkins University. They also designed questions for families to learn about their ideas and needs.

I am requesting teachers from three local school districts, ██████████████, and ██████ to complete the enclosed survey. All information you provide is completely confidential. Your responses will be grouped to provide a "portrait" of present practices, opinions, and trends. No one will ever be identified individually. Of course, your participation is voluntary and you may leave any question unanswered. However, your ideas and experiences can make the results useful for our schools. I am counting on you to help.

The data generated by these surveys will be analyzed and shared with you at a meeting when the study is complete. The results may be useful to you as you plan school and family partnership projects for the future.

Please complete the survey, sign the consent form, and return them to the school office using the enclosed envelopes as soon as possible or before February 28, 2008.

Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Ann Stout, researcher
Evaline School

Question 1   The first questions ask for your professional judgment about parent involvement. Please CIRCLE the one choice for each item that best represents your opinion and experience.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Parent involvement is important for a good school.	SD	D	A	SA
b. Most parents know how to help their children on schoolwork at home.	SD	D	A	SA
c. This school has an active and effective parent organization (e.g. PTA/ Booster Club)	SD	D	A	SA
d. Every family has some strengths that could be tapped to increase student success in school.	SD	D	A	SA
e. All parents could learn ways to assist their children on schoolwork at home, if shown how.	SD	D	A	SA
f. Parental involvement can help teachers be more effective with more students.	SD	D	A	SA
g. Parents of children at this school want to be involved more than they are now.	SD	D	A	SA
h. Teachers do not have the time to involve parents in very useful ways.	SD	D	A	SA
i. Teachers need in-service education to implement effective parental involvement practices.	SD	D	A	SA
j. Parental involvement is important for student success in school.	SD	D	A	SA
l. This school views parents as important partners.	SD	D	A	SA
m. Mostly when I contact parents, it's about problems or trouble.	SD	D	A	SA

Question 2   Please estimate the percent of <u>your students' families</u> who did the following THIS YEAR:

a. Check daily that child's homework is done	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
b. Attend PTA meetings regularly	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
c. Attend parent-teacher conferences with you	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
d. Understand enough to help their child at home with reading at your grade level	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
f. Understand enough to help their child at home with math at your grade level	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All

Question 3   Teachers contact their students' families in different ways. Please estimate the percent of <u>your students' families</u> that you contacted this year in these ways:

a. Letter	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
b. Telephone	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
c. Meeting at school	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
d. Scheduled parent-teacher conference	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
e. Performances, sports, or other events	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All

Question 4 **The next questions ask for your opinions about the activities that you think should be conducted by <u>the parents of the children you teach.</u> Circle the choice that best describes the importance of these activities <u>at your grade level</u>.**

PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES	NOT IMPORTANT	A LITTLE IMPORTANT	PRETTY IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT
a. Send children to school ready to learn.	NOT IMP	A LITTLE IMP	PRETTY IMP	VERY IMP
b. Teach children to behave well.	NOT IMP	A LITTLE IMP	PRETTY IMP	VERY IMP
c. Set up a quiet place and time for studying at home.	NOT IMP	A LITTLE IMP	PRETTY IMP	VERY IMP
d. Know what children are expected to learn each year	NOT IMP	A LITTLE IMP	PRETTY IMP	VERY IMP
e. Check daily that homework is done.	NOT IMP	A LITTLE IMP	PRETTY IMP	VERY IMP
f. Talk to children about what they are learning in school.	NOT IMP	A LITTLE IMP	PRETTY IMP	VERY IMP
g. Talk to teachers about problems the children are facing at home.	NOT IMP	A LITTLE IMP	PRETTY IMP	VERY IMP
h. Ask teachers for specific ideas on how to help their children at home.	NOT IMP	A LITTLE IMP	PRETTY IMP	VERY IMP
i. Talk to children about the importance of school.	NOT IMP	A LITTLE IMP	PRETTY IMP	VERY IMP
j. Serve as a volunteer in the school or classroom.	NOT IMP	A LITTLE IMP	PRETTY IMP	VERY IMP
l. Attend special events at the school.	NOT IMP	A LITTLE IMP	PRETTY IMP	VERY IMP

Question 5 **Some teachers involve parents (or others) as volunteers at the school building. Please check the ways that you use volunteers in your classroom and in your school THIS YEAR (CHECK <u>all</u> that apply.**

A. In my CLASSROOM, volunteers….

_____ (a) I don NOT use classroom volunteers

_____ (b) Listen to children read aloud

_____ (c) Read to the children

_____ (d) Grade papers

_____ (e) Tutor children in specific skills

_____ (f) Help on trips or at parties

_____ (g) Give talks (e.g., on careers, hobbies, etc.)

_____ (h) Other ways (please specify) _____

Question 6   We would value your ideas on the following questions if you have a few more minutes.

a. What is the most successful practice to involve parents that you have used or that you have heard about?

b. In what ways could better partnerships with families help you as a teacher?

c. Do you have any other ideas or comments that you would like to add? (Feel fee to add other pages.)

**PLEASE RETURN THIS COMPLETED SURVEY TO THE SCHOOL OFFICE
AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP!**

APPENDIX D

Evaline School
111 Schoolhouse Road
Winlock, WA 98596
360-785-3460 FAX 360-785-0951
evaline@localaccess.com

PARENT INVOLVEMENT PERSPECTIVES CONSENT FORM

Ann Stout is a teacher at Evaline School and a student at Walden University. She is conducting a research study. You are invited to be part of this study on how you and other parents and teachers from the local area view parental involvement. Will you please read this form and ask any questions you may have? Then, we hope you will agree to join us in this study.

Background Information

Parental involvement means different things to teachers and parents. This study hopes to learn how parents and teachers view parental involvement. We want to learn how they are similar. We also want to know how they are different. Parents and teachers have ideas for ways schools and families can work together. We want to learn more about those too.

Procedures

You will be asked to fill out a survey about how schools and families work together. The survey should take less than 30 minutes to complete. We will also ask some of you to share your ideas by meeting with other parents or teachers. These meetings should last about sixty minutes. The meetings will be tape recorded. You will be able to explain what parental involvement means to you. After the meetings, parent and teacher ideas will be studied. The ways in which the ideas of parents and teachers are the same and how they are different will be explored. This will help us understand the ways teachers and parents see parental involvement. This understanding can then help us strengthen the ways families and schools work together.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Joining in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

(Please turn over.)

Compensation
No compensation is being offered for this study.
Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study
You will be asked questions about your views. These questions may be hard for you to answer. They may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to respond to any question. You may be asked to share your insights and views about parental involvement. This may help others to understand how you view parental involvement.
Confidentiality
Any information you share with us will be kept private. It will not be used for anything besides this study. Nothing that could identify you in any reports of the study will be used. *Contacts and Questions*
Ann Stout is dong this study. You may ask her questions by email or a phone call. Her phone number is 360 785 3460. Her email address is evaline@localaccess.com. Ann's advisor is Dr. Stephanie Helms. She can be reached at 1 336 449 4948 or by email at shelms@waldenu.com. Dr. Leilani Endicott will also be glad to talk with you. She is the Director of the Research Center at Walden University. Her phone number is 1 800 925 3368, extension 1210. Upon your request, Ann Stout will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I have received answers to any questions I have at this time. I am 18 years of age or older, and I consent to participate in the study.

Printed Name of Participant

Participant's Written Signature

Participant's Phone Number

Researcher's Written Signature

Please place this form in the white envelope included in your survey packet. The envelope with your signed consent form will be removed before examining your responses in order to protect your privacy. Thank you again for contributing your thoughts to the research regarding parental involvement perspectives.

APPENDIX E

LETTERS OF COOPERATION

Ann,
I think your study will provide data that will be beneficial to both teachers and parents. It will allow sharing of information between three districts, which will validate your findings. Therefore, the Boistfort District will participate and support your efforts as you work toward your doctorate degree.
Regards,
Rich Apperson
Boistfort SD 234

----- Original Message -----
From: Ann
To: rapperson@boistfort.k12.wa.us
Sent: Monday, November 05, 2007 10:12 PM
Subject: Parental Involvement Research Study

Dear Mr. Apperson,

Thank you for meeting with me today to discuss my doctoral study proposal, "Perspectives on Parental Involvement: A Comparison of Parent and Teacher Perspectives".

Thank you too for agreeing to allow teachers and parents from your district to participate in this study. If you would be so kind to indicate your approval by replying to this email, I would be most appreciative.

I look forward to working with you and the people of Boistfort School in the near future.

Sincerely,

Ann Stout
Teacher, Grades 3 – 6
Evaline School

Evaline School District #36
111 Schoolhouse Road
Winlock, WA 98596
360-785-3460 FAX 360-785-0951
evaline@localaccess.com

September 8, 2006

To Whom It May Concern:

Ann Stout, Walden University doctoral candidate, has obtained approval to use data collected from the Back to School parent questionnaire completed by Evaline parents in 2005 and 2006. We have been assured that any data used will remain anonymous as to its author. In addition, she has my approval to collect parental involvement perspective data from families and teachers of Evaline School.

Sincerely,

Linda Godat

Linda Godat, Superintendent

Hello Ann,
This is to indicate my approval to allow the teachers employed at Napavine Elementary School and parents of Napavine Elementary School students to participate in your doctoral study.

Bob Hunt
Principal
Napavine Elementary School

From: Ann [mailto:evaline@localaccess.com]
Sent: Monday, November 05, 2007 10:19 PM
To: 'bhunt@napa.k12.wa.us'
Subject: Parental Involvement Research Study

Dear Mr. Hunt,

Thank you for meeting with me today to discuss my doctoral study proposal, "Perspectives on Parental Involvement: A Comparison of Parent and Teacher Perspectives".

Thank you too for agreeing to allow teachers and parents from your district to participate in this study. If you would be so kind to indicate your approval by replying to this email, I would be able to document your approval in my proposal.

I look forward to working with you and the people of Napavine Elementary School in the near future.

Sincerely,

Ann Stout
Teacher, Grades 3 – 6
Evaline School

APPENDIX F

PERMISSION TO USE SURVEY

4-5-07

To: Ann Stout

From: Joyce Epstein

Re: Periscopes of Perspectives on Parental Involvement: A Comparison of Parent and Teacher Perspectives

This is to grant permission to you to use and adapt the teacher and parent questionnaires that we developed in your dissertation study to compare the
perspectives of parents and teachers about parental involvement.

All we ask is that you include a reference to the original surveys in your dissertation references and publications. The full reference is:

Epstein, J. L. & Salinas, K. C. (1993). *School and Family Partnerships: Surveys and Summaries.* Baltimore, MD: Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, Johns Hopkins University.

You are correct, that we are trying to encourage the use of the term—school, family, and community partnerships (instead of parent involvement) so that it is clear that schools have a role to play in developing and sustaining programs *so that* all families can become productively involved in their children's education.

Also, you will want to compare your findings with our earlier surveys of teachers and parents. The publications are included as "readings" in chapter 3 of my text:

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

Best of luck with your study.

Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D.
Director, Center on School, Family, and
  Community Partnerships
  and the National Network of Partnership Schools
Johns Hopkins University
3003 North Charles Street, Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21218

tel: 410-516-8807
fax: 410-516-8890

jepstein@csos.jhu.edu
www.partnershipschools.org

CURRICULUM VITAE

Ann C. Stout

Date of Birth	July 10, 1952
Place of Birth	Seattle, Washington
High School	Nathan Hale High School Seattle, Washington Graduated June 1970
Bachelor of Arts Special Education	Western Washington College Bellingham, Washington Graduated June 1975
Master of Arts in Teaching	Grand Canyon University Phoenix, Arizona Graduated August 2002
Present Position	Classroom Teacher Evaline Elementary School Winlock, Washington 1984-present