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Communication Between Educators and Parents in Title I Elementary Schools

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

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MA, University of Phoenix, 2006

BS, Jarvis Christian College, 1992

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Education

Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

The lack of positive communication between parents and educators in the Texas district under study is a problem because it interferes with learners' academic success. The purpose of this mixed method study was to understand the communication gap between educators and parents in Title I elementary schools in that district. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems and Epstein's parental involvement model formed the theoretical framework to address the importance of communication between educators and parents as related to student academic achievement. The quantitative portion of the study was carried out through descriptive survey research. The case study method was used for the qualitative portion of the study with data gathered from interviews. The data represented responses from the parent (n = 42) and educator (n = 119) surveys, interviews (n = 10), and a focus group (n = 8) to uncover both educators' and parents' perceptions of communication in the learning environment. Results revealed constructive concerns associated with lack of accessibility, education trust, parent educational background knowledge, collaborative partnerships, continuous communication, and guides to blueprints of learning expectations. The findings indicated the need for an intervention involving a 4-session parent-educator training program designed to implement positive partnerships and to eliminate and bridge the existing communication gap. This project study could promote social change in Title I schools because it conveys an improved understanding of communication gaps within the learning environment. Specifically, this study provides a plan to help parents and educators engage in positive communication to support students' academic success.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my grandmother, Mary Lou Daniels, my mother, Hattie Boney, and my daughter, Victoria J. Taylor. These three women represent a different phase in my life; however, each one of them have contributed to inspiring and motivating me to help me become who I am today. My grandmother was a woman that loved her grandchildren. On November 26, 2010, God called her home; however, I hold her in my heart because she cared about me, listened to me, and was my reason for being a strong "BLACK" woman. My mother cared for four children working sometimes-early shifts or even two jobs. Doing the best she could as a single parent she always motivated her children to do their best. My mother supports us unconditionally without displaying more love toward one than the other. She inspired all of us to be who we are today. We are truly blessed. We are all middle-class, working, responsible God-fearing adults caring for our families.

My legacy will live on through Victoria J. Taylor. I want my daughter to know that she can do anything that she sets her mind and heart to achieve with God's help. Maintain your confidence, continue to care about people, trust God for everything, and hold on to achieve your dreams. You are the master of your destiny. Obstacles come to make you strong as well as to help you know that God is your strength. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Psalms 119:71).

Remember: *The question isn't who is going to let me; it's who is going to stop me.*

--Ayn Rand

Acknowledgments

To God my heavenly father for his grace, strength, and mercy throughout this journey: The completion of this work inspires me to continue in life with other journeys that I aspire to achieve. In addition, I extend thanks to my daughter, Victoria, my husband, Reginald Taylor, and my mother, Hattie Boney for their patience, encouragement, and continuous motivation throughout this course in my life. To my siblings, Jeremiah, Sr., Stephanie, Bobbie, and Donald: I would not be where I am today without your persuasion and continuous support. Also, I truly thank Dr. Glenn Penny for always being on my side. In addition, I graciously extend a sufficient amount of gratitude to Dr. Cody Arvidson for taking me under your "statistical and editing" wings and helping me accomplish this dream. Lastly, thanks to my church family and close friends for continuously praying for me and encouraging me when I felt like giving up several times.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

In the educational environment, communication gaps between parents and educators in Title I elementary schools compromise students' academic achievement. Communication is essential to ensure the formation of effective parent-educator partnerships that provide a stable foundation that enables academic success for all learners. Many researchers and practitioners have documented the importance of parent involvement as it relates to communication and the positive influence it has on student success. Researchers Caplan, Choy, and Whitmire (1992), Dixon (1992), Epstein (2001), and Henderson and Berla (1994) showed that when parents and educators communicate effectively, an increase in the academic achievement of learners occurs.

A communication gap can be defined as a state that occurs when communication is not happening when it should or when information is not being communicated to addressees clearly, completely, and properly (Merriam-Webster.com, 2013). Communication includes both direct and indirect methods of interacting. Through communication, information is gathered and released to broaden the understanding of communicators. When information is not transmitted effectively within the educational system, misunderstandings evolve among parents and educators (Duncan, 1992). The misunderstandings lead to divisions within the environment, which impact the roles of both parents and educators, creating a hardship for learners.

The structure of family is in a state of continuous change (Duncan, 1992; Lewis, 1992). The current nuclear family is composed of father, mother, and children but has

weaker ties with the extended network of relatives than those that previously existed (Hiemstra 1998). Single mothers or fathers also make up the modern day family (Hiemstra, 1998), as well as grandparents raising grandchildren (Duncan, 1992).

Duncan (1992) and Lewis (1992) explained that, although the traditional American family continued to be the model, a lack of mutual understanding underlying communication between educators and parents is present. This lack of understanding influences students' academic outcomes in Title I elementary schools. Since perspectives of communication vary, it is essential to build a shared understanding between parents and educators that can help to bridge the communication gap (Duncan, 1992). Striving to eliminate the communication gap in the school system helps to build relationships that work in the best interest of students (Duncan, 1992). As parents and educators work together, partnerships develop clear expectations based on the perspectives of both groups (Lewis, 1992).

According to Epstein (2001), the definition of communication partnership in education includes the following:

> Both the direct and the indirect verbal and nonverbal exchange of student information between parents and educators in the learning environment works to benefit instruction of children. When parents and educators communicate effectively as it related to student's education, thus creating a partnership which plays a positive role in children's education, therefore causing children do better in school. (p. 113)

In order to fully understand the importance of bridging the communication gap between educators and parents in Title I elementary schools, it is essential to examine and comprehend how communication relates to student achievement.

Both parents and educators can possess different perspectives when it comes to communication. Both educators and parents offer vital perspectives that benefit learners. However, multiple distractions tend to work against a communication partnership in the learning environment. Such distractions include language barriers, time management challenges on both the parents' and educators' part, past negative experiences, as well as parents' limited educational background and other negative factors (Dixon, 1992; Epstein, 2001). As time passes and society continues to change, educating learners should still be the overall goal of schools. However, this goal can only be achieved with full communication between parents and educators. Both groups should be seeking an improvement in Title I elementary schools. Their goal should be to restore successful academic achievement for all learners.

Definition of the Problem

A communication gap between educators and parents has been an evolving problem in most Title I elementary schools within an urban school district located in a large Texas city (TEA, 2008; Robberson, 2010;). Jackson (2010) reported that issues related to this communication have negatively influenced elementary students' academic achievement. Jackson conducted a study in the local school under study and found that the communication gap created obstacles. The obstacles identified by the author included: families' limited educational background, parents' inflexible schedules, past personal

educational experiences, low levels of system-wide support from the learning institution, and limited effectiveness of family-school communication. In the urban school district under study, learners have suffered academically due to the extensive communication gap, which predominantly influences African American and Hispanic students (Texas State Board of Education, 2012).

The Texas 2011 No Child Left Behind Report Card (2011) for the urban school district under study indicated that African American and Hispanic American third grade students' levels of achievement represented the lowest among the various ethnic groups. Student achievement scores by proficiency level for the state-mandated standardized test showed that only 52% of African American students in 2009-2010 met standards at the proficient level (TEA, 2008). This dropped to 11% in the 2010-2011 school year (TEA, 2008). Similarly, in 2009-2010, only 47% of Hispanic students met proficiency standards, and that number declined to 46% in 2010-2011 (Texas State Board of Education, 2012). The Title I schools in the district under study have had scheduled monthly Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings where both parents and educators could come together to discuss factors that may affect learners. However, the parental turn-out has been low.

An elementary school's administrator from one of the schools within the district expressed a concern that parents did not attend these meetings (S. Cooper, personal communication, September 15, 2009). Parents choosing not to attend the monthly meetings showed a clear indication of limited communication which created a negative influence on student success (S. Cooper, personal communication, September 15, 2009).

Sharing of information between the school and home could open a line of positive communication and ensure the success of students.

Measures have been implemented on some elementary-level campuses in this school district to expand the communication between educators and parents (G. Bennett, personal communication, September 15, 2008). However, parents have not actively communicated, and educators are retreating from the call to action to collaborate. Likewise, negative communication situations between educators and parents have affected student learning as well as teaching (G. Bennett, personal communication, September 15, 2008).

Subsequently, principals in the urban school district designed programs to open the lines of communication among educators and parents. Coffee with the Principal was one school's initiative to encourage parents to meet with the principal and teachers to discuss concerns (R. McElroy, personal communication, October 9, 2010). After scheduling several of these sessions the principal stated, "Out of 625 students enrolled on the campus, only five of 625 parents were in attendance" (R. McElroy, personal communication, October 9, 2010).

Parent Academies represent another program implemented on three of the elementary campuses in the district to encourage communication. During the Parent Academies, parents received introductions to learning methods, instructional concepts, and hands-on activities that allowed them the opportunity to experience what children do in school daily. Unfortunately, campus principals expressed deep concerns related to low parental attendance or limited responses about interest in attending (C. Daniels, R.

McElroy, & N. Johnson, personal communications, February 19, 2009). These problems reflected the findings of Jackson (2010), substantiating the existence of the communication gap between educators and parents.

A study conducted at one of the elementary campuses in the district found that the school was encountering retention issues, increasing disciplinary problems, and a continuous decrease on state standardized test scores from 2006 to 2009 and that these problems had connections to limited communication (Jackson, 2010). In light of those findings, it was important to examine the primary factors that influenced the communication gap as it relates to student academic success. Gaining an understanding of why the communication gap existed as well as the barriers that initiated the concern was the primary focus of this study. Due to the lack of a clear explanation of how the communication problem developed and methods for eliminating the communication concern, the problem continued to exist and negatively influence the academic success of learners.

Rationale

From both educator and parent perspectives, many ideas have been considered about the causes of the communication gap in urban school districts. For instance, educators often hold a strong distrust of the parents of children they teach (Robberson, 2010). Educators seek opportunities to communicate with parents in the learning environment; however, they are often unsure of the proper methods to use to make the learning atmosphere welcoming (Boukaz & Persson, 2007). Educators find the communication gap to be a great concern among schools that have nonfunctioning PTAs

and poor parental attendance during parent-teacher conferences or principal-designed initiatives (Schumacher, 2007). Parents' perceptions of communication have been addressed differently than educators' perceptions because education is believed to be primarily the school's responsibility (Schumacher, 2007). Parents have stepped back from being active agents in education, which has initiated a hardship on a child's full development.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

In some cases parents have been reluctant to communicate with educators or seek assistance regarding their children due to a limited educational background (Bouakaz & Persson, 2007). Cultural differences associated with both language and cultural beliefs have been barriers that impact communication between educators and parents (National Institute for Urban School Improvement, 2011). For this reason, parents have felt disconnected from their child's school and consider themselves academically incompetent. Both parents and teachers might have had predominantly negative past experiences working with each other, leading to a communication gap that deterred them from working together. In spite of positive experiences that occur within the learning environment, negativity seems to take precedence, and parents, especially, develop a lack of trust in the educational system (Bouakaz & Persson, 2007). Finally, parents' work schedules might often be rigid and conflict with an educator's availability leaving them unable to communicate in a timely and effective manner.

According to Robberson (2010), all urban school districts in the United States have experienced similar overwhelming problems with interconnective concerns as they

relate to communication between educators and parents. Moreover, local school data reports released from the state indicated that several Title I elementary schools did not meet proficient standards on the state standardized test (Texas State Board of Education, 2012). After reviewing the state ratings of each school, based on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), several schools and districts were identified as academically unacceptable for 2 or more consecutive years (Stutz, 2009). According to data gathered through the Texas Education Agency (TEA), 58% of students failed to master the state standards in both reading and mathematics, causing the school's rating to decline (TEA, 2008). In addition, these schools encountered an alarming increase in disruptive behavior from students in grades pre-kindergarten to fifth grade Dallas Independent School District (Behavior Management, 2009).

Krasch and Carter (2009) discussed how student behavior influences the teaching and learning environment. As misbehavior increases, student academic achievement tends to decline, due to the educator's inability to provide efficient and effective academic instruction (Krasch & Carter, 2009). These issues represent possible causes of communication gaps between educators and parents and that need to be addressed to help strengthen education as a whole.

The Title I schools in the district under study scheduled monthly PTA meetings where both parents and educators could come together to discuss factors that may affect learners. However, the parental turn-out was low, as expressed by one elementary school administrator's concerns (S. Cooper, personal communication, September 15, 2009). Parents who chose not to attend school meetings showed a clear indication of limited

communication which created a negative influence on student success (S. Cooper, personal communication, September 15, 2009) and evidence of the problem at the local level.

Definitions

In the context of this research, key terms are defined as follows:

Academic success: Academic success is the learner's ability to master target standards on an average or above average basis (Sharon & Nimisha, 2009).

Collaboration: For the purpose of this study, collaboration builds relationships between individuals that enable the act of working jointly with educators or parents to promote the academic success of learners (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2013).

Communication: For the purpose of this study, communication is the act of transmitting any or all information communicated by nonverbal, verbal, or written message (Merriam Webster, 2013).

Communication barriers: Communication barriers are identifiable obstacles in the learning environment that prevent effective exchange of influential ideas, or strategies between educators and parents that work against academic success of learners (Stalker, Brunner, Maguire, & Mitchell, 2011).

Culture awareness: Individuals that acknowledge, accept, as well as appreciate, the physical, social, spiritual, psychological, and cultural differences among diverse individuals possess this awareness (Eberly, Joshi, &Kozal, 2007).

Educators: Educators are teachers, librarians, counselors, and administrators involved as research participants in this study (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Elementary school: For the purpose of this study, an elementary school is a school that offers kindergarten through fifth grade or pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school configuration in the large urban district used in the study (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Negative change: For the purpose of this study, negative change exists when educators, parents, and students feel uncomfortable, unwanted, devalued, unaccepted, and insecure in a learning environment with dishonest or untrusted individuals (Vera et al., 2012).

Negative communication: For the purpose of this study, negative communication is verbal or body language that comes across as rude and uninterested (Harris & Goodall, 2008).

Parents (when referencing parent participants): Mothers, fathers, older siblings, single parents, foster parents, care-givers, and grandparents of the children who are enrolled in the Title I schools participating in the study (Merriam Webster, 2013).

Parent-teacher conference: A parent-teacher conference is identified as a brief meeting between teachers and parents of students enrolled in specific learning institutions to discuss student's academic performance as well as academic or behavioral problems (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Perceptions: For the purpose of this study, perception is the process by which people translate sensory impressions based on coherent, unified views and incomplete and unverified information (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007).

Positive change: For the purpose of this study, positive change exists when educators, parents, and students feel comfortable, wanted, valued, accepted, and secure in a learning environment where they can interact with trusted individuals (Marshall & Swan, 2010).

Positive communication: For the purpose of this study, positive communication is verbal or body language that is demonstrated through friendly, smart, and helpful demeanor directed toward educational strategies that works to increase the academic success of learners (McCoach, Goldstein, Behuniak, & Reis, 2010).

Social change: As defined through Marxism and the purpose of this study, social change is referred to as an alteration in the social order of a society of its influence on the socioeconomic structure of learning institutions to enhance the academic performance of learners (Stapley, 2010).

Title I schools: Title I schools have a high concentration of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds that receive federal education funding. This funding is designed to help low income students identified as being academically behind or at risk of falling behind or dropping out of school (U. S. Department of Education, 2011).

Significance

Bridging the communication gap between educators and parents, specifically in Title I educational settings, might be critical to student, teacher, administrator, and school

success. Identifying the problems related to communication between educators and parents might be useful by presenting information that demonstrates the impact of communication on the academic success of learners in Title I elementary schools. In addition, the literature identified current problematic barriers connected to communication from both parents and educators. The data from this study uncovered a number of negative influences affiliated with the communication gap as well as the dynamics that continue to cause it to expand. Specifically, at the local and the district level, exploring this problem was useful for developing intervention plans for Title I elementary schools to eliminate the communication barriers. Additionally, through implementing innovative strategies to increase communication, the academic success of all learners might be better supported.

Guiding/Research Question

Although research has shown the benefit to students in schools with effective communication between parents and educators, much is still needed to be understood about the effect of communication on the success of students in Title I elementary schools. Additionally, updated research on the reasons for a lack of communication and strategies for improving communication in this setting was needed. This study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to better understand the complex problem of communication between educators and parents. The research questions were the following:

RQ1: What are the barriers that contribute to the lack of communication between educators and parents?

RQ2: How do educators and parents perceive the relationship between communication and student academic success?

RQ3: What communication needs do educators and parents perceive that support student academic achievement?

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

This study was based on a combination of ideas from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems perspectives and Epstein's typology theoretical framework (Swick & Williams, 2006). Both Bronfenbrenner and Epstein developed theories that reflected the importance of communication between educators and parents as well as the connection that develops to support student academic achievement (Keyes, 2002). Additionally, both theories establish communication connection between parents and educators that build a nurturing relationship, which also works to improve positive student engagement within the learning environment to enhance the learning environment (Swick et al., 2006; Schumacher, 2007).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model is a four-ring structure that illustrates an individual's psychological make-up (Schumacher, 2007). In the years after this original model was developed, a fifth ring was added (Bronfenbrenner, 2001; Schumacher, 2010). The overlay of rings represents a communication system that focuses directly on immediate guidance, support, generating roles, norms, and rules that shape development and societal affiliations in an individual's life (Popoviciu, Popoviciu, Pop, & Sass, 2010; Schumacher, 2007). The systems include the following: (a) microsystem, (b)

mesosystem, (c) exosystem, (d) macrosystem, and (e) chronosystem (Education Commission of the States, 1996). The microsystem is a person's immediate association with the environment, such as family and school (Schumacher, 2007).The mesosystem is a generated connection developed between home and school or school and home (Keyes, 2002; Schumacher, 2007).The exosystem includes the connections that indirectly influence a person's life, such as the workplace, church, or school (Schumacher, 2007). The macrosystem is an individual's cultural connection (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). The chronosystem was later added to the system and was identified as a social connection acknowledging change over time and influences on people (Education Commission of the States, 1996).

Based on this theory, both educators and parents possess an influential role in the lives of students. Their roles operate in different capacities; however, each role is significant in a child's development. The breakdown of a child's microsystem leaves a child without the essential tools to operate or connect with any of the other systems (Popoviciu, Popoviciu, Pop, & Sass, 2010). Uniquely, exploring how the microsystem relates to a child's development pinpoints the need for a trustworthy connection between the home and school. A strong parental relationship works to provide a learner with stability that encourages, supports, and motivates healthy development (Keyes, 2002; Schumacher, 2007).

Epstein's typology incorporates six major components associated with parental involvement with a significant connection to communication (Keyes, 2002). Communication is noted as the primary focus of the theory, creating a bridge that

connects educators with parents to develop a partnership that supports student achievement (Bronfenbrenner, 2001; Schumacher, 2007). The five categories attached to communication include the following: (a) parenting, (b) volunteering, (c) decision making, (d) home learning, and (e) collaborating with the community (Keyes, 2002; Schumacher, 2007). Based on Epstein's typology, communication is the linkage that supports the existence of a communication gap between educators and parents (Schumacher, 2007). Communication struggles have been present in the teaching and learning environments for a sufficient amount of time to produce numerous outcomes (Schumacher, 2007). The common goal that exists between educators and parents is to educate students. Through this theory, two-way communication benefits are developed in the home as well as within the school. This experience subsequently offers confidence that the gap in communication can be eliminated. Communication generates a balance that supports educator and parent relationships, which in turn, works to enhance learning for students.

Personal and environmental issues influence the theoretical factors of social behavior (Subban, 2006). A vast majority of students are being raised in a nontraditional setting, such as with only one parent, grandparents working in the role as the legal guardian, or in a foster home setting. Life within one of these various environments can create distracting factors that affect the lives of everyone involved, which subsequently influences the effectiveness of communication. Both personal and environmental issues have a connection with the methods by which students are being raised and influences that generate social distraction, causing a breakdown in communication. Interacting

through communication in the learning environment is a significant aspect of a child's social, as well as academic development (McLeod, 2007). Education is the foundation of student learning, and it is vital for educators and parents to improve communication in order to more fully support student academic development.

Communication Gap Between Educators and Parents

In the educational environment, communication is essential to achieving goals and maintaining balance for all learners. Schumacher (2007) addressed the bridging the communication gap concern in relation to the value of intentional, positive, teacher-initiated communication. In brief, the primary focus of the study was to examine ways to initiate positive communication.

Schumacher's Parent Day in July 2006 was the initial session of the beginning of the study. Upon the completion of the initial session, a parental survey was issued to 101 families, of which 46 surveys (2.2%) were returned (Schumacher, 2007). The results showed that parents remained satisfied as long as the school continued to practice effective communication methods. Likewise, the results showed that the parents' role in the communication plan was a vital component because they have a responsibility to collaborate with educators to continue to practice open communication.

Loughrey and Woods (2010) developed a project study entitled, Sparking the Imagination, to improve the educational prospects of children from disadvantaged and low socioeconomic households. The overall aim of the project study was centered on developing an arts-based program for schools' creative educators to collaborate with stakeholders and children for developing positive attitudes toward education and local

schools. All of the adult participants agreed to be a part of project and understood their participation would be a long-term commitment, and time elements included observations and interviews (Loughrey & Wood, 2010).

The project officer proceeded with the initial collection of data by interviewing principals, teachers, creative educators, as well as parents sampled from each participating school (Loughrey & Wood, 2010). Results drawn from the collected data showed that the schools in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas expected little from their local community and lacked a basic understanding of the needs of their students. The resultant plan of action offered the opportunity to design novel professional development opportunities through collaborative learning, mentoring, and creative approaches to generating knowledge and skill development as part of improving the lives of children (Loughrey & Wood, 2010).

Laluvein (2010) examined the context of teacher decisions in connection to children with special educational needs. The first session engaged uniquely with the perspectives of parents and the second session involved a separate interview with parents and teachers that spoke about individual children as well as their perspectives concerning one another (Laluvein, 2010). Data were drawn from a small-scale interview of 10 pairs of parents and mainstreamed primary teachers jointly involved in providing an education to the child that was giving cause for concern (Laluvein, 2010). Based on the data in the transcripts of parents and teachers, the facts surprisingly showed that an initial consensus of concern occasionally emerges (Laluvein, 2010). Consensus existed among parents and teachers, who shared both similarities and differences concerning the understanding and

interpretations of the cause and nature of children's educational difficulties (Laluvein, 2010). The mutual respect, effective communication, and action were perceived to be appropriate and increased the space for extending understanding and negotiating provisions among parents and teachers (Laluvein, 2010).

Abel (2012) investigated the predictive relationship between attitude and behaviors that lead to the limited involvement of African American fathers in the lives of their elementary-aged children. The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge of the factors influencing fathers' decisions to become active agents in their children's education (Abel, 2010). However, Abel investigated the relationship between Epstein (2001) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2000) to examine the influential factors contributing to parental engagement. The multiple regression study revealed that African American fathers made decisions to be involved as active agents in their children's lives. Contributing factors included the following: (a) invitation from others and home school communications, (b) father's life style in alignment to school-based involvement, and (c) the overall parent involvement below-average score (Abel, 2012.

Abel (2010) identified a major limitation of the study as the small sample size of African American fathers. Abel explained how the number of participants misrepresented the broader populations of African American fathers of children in middle and high school. In addition, parents and students could have been surveyed to present a triangulated study.

Perceptions of Communication

McCoach et al. (2010) examined parents' perceptions about communication directed toward the lack of teacher awareness about student culture. Participants in the study included administrators, teachers, and parents from 25 positive outlier schools and 12 negative outlier schools. The results showed how parents' perceptions about communication with educators differ significantly due to the lack of educator awareness of various cultures. Educators displayed a dramatic lack of background knowledge of learners that correlated with a decline in student achievement (McCoach et al., 2010). Likewise, McCoach et al. found that parental perceptions concerning the communication gap was the key variable that helped to explain the differences between overachieving and Title I schools.

Esquivel, Ryan, and Bonner (2008) explored the teacher participants' experiences with school-based meetings as a method of identifying behaviors that encouraged parental involvement and communication. This exploratory study involved Esquivel et al. partnering with a large Midwestern school district serving several suburbs of a major metropolitan city. The participants were 17 district special educational advisory committee parent members (Esquival et al., 2008). The advisory committee membership included educators, parents, and stakeholders from the community (Esquival et al., 2008). The purpose of the initial survey was to determine thoughts and opinions about the stakeholder meeting experience, and the purpose of the second survey was to determine if the stakeholders comprehended the district summary (Esquivel et al., 2008). A total of 16 parents completed both the initial follow-up surveys (Esquival et al., 2008). Overall, the

findings revealed that parental perceptions involved more negative experiences than positive (Esquival et al., 2008). Parents believed in the educators associated with their children's learning (Esquival et al., 2008). They believed in the innovative ideas created to implement differentiated instruction as it related to each child's learning ability (Esquival et al., 2008). In addition, educators in the learning community helped to improve the parent's experience by conveying their knowledge about each child's uniqueness and acknowledged parental emotions during the meetings, whether they were positive or negative (Esquival et al., 2008).

Marshall and Swan's (2010) study focused on parents' perception of mathematics and how it influenced the parent and educator partnership within the school. To support the parental partnership within the school, the researchers conducted mathematical clinic workshops for the parents. A group of four parents participated in the qualitative study (Marshall & Swan, 2010). The participants agreed to participate in pre and post workshop interviews (Marshall & Swan, 2010). Four predetermined questions were asked, but Marshall and Swan used probing and prompting to encourage participates to elaborate on their responses. Marshall and Swan revealed a positive change in parental behavior and satisfaction. Parents appeared to want to provide academic support for their children; however, they were unsure of what was expected of them and unsure if they could maintain confidence in their ability to help (Marshall & Swan, 2010). Parents demonstrated a strong commitment to assist their children in mathematics, displayed a higher level of confidence in mathematics, and developed a stronger perception of how to support their children academically (Marshall & Swan, 2010).

Shiffman (2011) examined the connection between adult education participation and parent communication in children's education. The study was carried out using an exploratory case study method. Data sources for this study included interviews with parents, adult educators, and elementary school staff, in addition to field notes and documents. The results demonstrated that participation in adult education helps to strengthen parental perception of student learning and increased parents' self-efficacy (Shiffman, 2011). Parents gained the ability to support their children's learning experiences (Shiffman, 2011). Shiffman reported additional results reinforcing the benefits of a parent-school connection in communication as a critical dimension in supporting a child's education.

Cyprus, a district within the Greek-Cypriot educational school system, sought to enhance communication efforts between parents and teachers (Symeou, Rousounidou, & Michaelides, 2012). To determine the communication needs, a teacher in-service training program was developed, implemented, and evaluated (Symeou, et al., 2012). The teacher in-service training program followed the program evaluation design, which implemented both quantitative and qualitative methods of research (Symeou et al., 2012). Data were gathered through questionnaires completed by teachers before the initial training and after implementation, when teachers were expected to use all of the communication skills and approaches taught throughout the course (Symeou et al., 2012). An identical questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the training and again in the last course meeting (Symeou et al., 2012)). The analysis of the data demonstrated a considerable modification of teachers' perceptions about various aspects of

communication with parents and a positive appraisal of competence in organizing and implementing communication sessions with parents (Symeou et al., 2012). Overall, the results offered supporting evidence of the effectiveness of the teacher-training program primarily focusing on communication skills (Symeou et al., 2012).

Malsch, Green, and Kothari (2011) used a qualitative research study to explore parental perspectives during the transition of kindergarten students. The purpose of the study was to address the importance of parental participation in facilitating affirmative transition from early childhood settings of elementary school, for children with challenging behaviors and those at risk for more serious emotional or behavioral disorders. Of the 95 participants notified about the study, 75 agreed to participate. Participants in the study included parents of students demonstrating any form of mental delay, educators, and family advocates who expressed concerning about a child's ability to transition successfully into kindergarten. The results from the study revealed a conceptual model developed for parents that focuses on communicating information, providing emotional support, and preparing parents to be an advocate for their children within the school system (Malsch et al., 2011).

Young, Austin, and Growe (2013) defined parental involvement how parent's perception of parental involvement differs from school administrators. The ground theory design study developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 was implemented as a qualitative research approach to assess school administrators, teacher and parents to capture their defining perceptions of parental involvement in the learning environment. A population for this study consisted of participants attending three different presentations by the

researchers. Over 3,000 attendees attended the first major conference as the professional development program offered by a local school district and a state associated conference. However, the participants sample size only consisted of participants that submitted a definition of parental involvement. The number of attendees from the total venues was 400 and 100 who submitted written responses to the question. Based on the submitted documentation 50% of them were submitted by school administrators. The analysis of the data caused several categories to emerge based on the definition submitted by the school administrators. The categories included the following: (a) parents actively engaged, (b) parents supporting, (c) parents as advocates, (d) parents being knowledgeable, and (e) parent's communication. The categories that generated the most responses included parents actively engaged and parents support. The definitive results demonstrated activities that validated parental engagement and involvement; however, if schools are expecting parents to be involved based on their definitions of parental involvement, specific explanation must be clarified to fulfill support.

Lea, Wegner, Mac-Rae-Williams, Chenhall, and Holmes (2011), in a qualitative interpretive research study, explored the engagement relationship between parents and teacher of indigenous, low-income families in Australia. Lea et al. sought to unravel the curious way of others within a school setting rather than identifying a cultural difference. Lea et al. conducted interviews with educators and parents utilizing the snowballing technique, school based observations, and community fieldwork over the course of 2 years in two towns as data collection. A total of 48 participating parents and caregivers in the study were interviewed in their homes. Educators participating in the study included

teaching staff, schools leaders, and indigenous liaison officers, based on their years of employment. Educators were concerned about the culture and physical barriers that influenced limited engagement; however, those same views were not shared with the indigenous parents. The results showed that both parents and educators accepted the fundamental facts of the school's exclusionary practices (Lea et al., 2011).

Korkmaz (2007) conducted a quantitative research study and explored teachers' opinions about the responsibilities of parents, schools, and teachers to address the concern of enhancing students learning. The purpose of this study was to draw out teacher's perceptions of parents as well as the schools' and teachers' responsibility to enhance student learning. A short survey comprised of three open-ended questions was administered to 148 teachers. Results from the study revealed a clear explanation for the parents, the schools, and teachers as an individual entity working jointly to enhance the academic achievement of students. For parents, results indicated that more time and attention should be directed toward their children to ensure that basic needs were met. Secondly, the results revealed the importance of school characteristics and the methods for aligning them with students' academic achievement. High level learning for students can only occur in a safe, attractive, and positive environment. The results directed toward teachers recognized educators as a powerful factor in lives of students and correlated the effectiveness of their role with increased academic success (Korkmaz, 2007).

Communication Barriers

Harris and Goodall (2008) conducted a study that examined the communication problem in terms of how to intercede using constructive methods, which can help to

increase student performance and build stable communication partnerships among educators and parents. The factors contributing to negative communication among the school and parents, created divisions and interfered with the student learning. Harris and Goodall collected data from 20 schools in England with 314 respondents for the case study. The results revealed that schools present both negative and positive influences on parental communication (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Barriers developed from social and economic factors ultimately prevented parents from being active agents in the learning experience of their children. The evidence presented in the results demonstrated that schools, rather than parents, were difficult to reach.

Bouakaz and Persson (2007) performed a qualitative critical ethnography and participatory action research study focused on minority parents in the work of the schools and efforts to develop closer relationships between the parents and the school their children attended. The results demonstrated that minority parents trust teachers; however, parents invested too much trust in the teachers. Parents remained excluded from the work of the school without a communication network connecting them to the learning environment.

Vera et al. (2012) examined the educational involvement of parents of English learners. The purpose of the study was to explore specific barriers and facilitators related to parental involvement among diverse groups within four elementary schools. A total of 239 parental participants from a large Midwestern metropolitan area, representing 28 different cultural groups volunteered for the study. Vera et al. collected data through distribution of a modified version of the Family Involvement Questionnaire (Epstein,

1995; Fantuzzo, Teghe, & Childs, 2000). The results revealed implications for the design and implementation of interventions within a program directed at increasing parental involvement among English language learners (ELL). The findings suggested that both parental and school characteristics demonstrate a strong connection that related types of parental involvement exhibited in the effort to support their children's educational success. Vera et al. (2012) indicated that additional research needed to be carried out to for the following reasons: (a) providing disparate patterns findings that emerged in predicting types of parental involvement, (b) presenting tailored interventions aimed at increasing parental involvement to parents based on negative barriers that presents issues, and (c) stabilizing the schools climate to ensure positive messages about parental involvement is articulated as it relates to the educational success for all learners.

Smith, Stern, and Shatrova (2008) examined the dynamics that inhibit school involvement by Hispanic parents. The qualitative study of 15 Hispanic parents worked in alignment to No Child Left Behind to intensify "the need to improve academic achievement" (p. 8). Smith et al. sought to identify major obstacles hindering parental involvement within their children's schools. Smith et al. collected data using individual and focus group interviews. All of the participants had little to no English fluency and came from the larger Hispanic community located within a Midwestern rural area. Inhibiting factors included the following: language barriers, cultural differences, trust issues, lack of school operations understanding, transportation obstacles, and parents' lack of education.

In addition, Smith et al. (2008) found communication to be a strong inhibiting factor. During the interviews, parents described how the school failed "to send general information letters, school calendars, lunch menus, or newsletters printed in Spanish" (p. 10). Parents explained how the communication deficiencies caused them and their children to undergo confusion. Smith et al. explained that additional research should be conducted primarily focusing on the following concerns: (a) effective communication practice affiliated with prepared documentation in Spanish, (b) examinations of successful programs that reveal positive implementation practices in other schools, and (c) consideration of immigration status and how it affects the degree of Hispanic parental involvement.

Bartel (2010) explored home and school factors affecting parental involvement in Title I elementary schools. The purpose of this study was to ascertain home and school factors that influence involvement, examine parental attitudes and their impact on their children's education over time, and improve parent involvement practices. Bartel performed two sessions of data collection. The first session of data collection involved semi-structured interview questions based on the works of Walker and Hoover-Dempsey (2000) that addressed motivational factors connected to parental involvement. One-to-one interviews were recorded and later cross-tabulated. The data were used as a baseline to determine the perception of parents as they related to being actively engaged in their children's education.

During the second session of data collection, Bartel (2010) asked teaching staff to complete the school factors that impact parental involvement pre-survey based on the

Epstein data collection instrument. For the quantitative session of the study, all the teaching staff were invited to participate; however, only 26 of the 35 opted to take the survey. A year later, Bartel (2010) administered the post survey with the same participants. Data from the first survey served as a baseline to evaluate how school communication practices change as a result of efforts to improve practices in involve parents. Results connected to the quantitative survey indicated a need for teachers to better understand the lives as well as the culture of Title I parents as they work to improve their efforts to support children education.

Stalker, Brunner, Maguire, and Mitchell (2011) explored previous research to identify barriers that influence the involvement of parents with disabilities in their children's education. Stalker et al. reviewed 24 case studies. Each dealt with parents exhibiting a range of physical impairments and how maintained active involvement in their children's education. The common theme of these studies centered on tackling the barriers faced by disabled parents and included access within the building and to information that embraces inclusion, recognizing the importance and benefits of involvement, and meeting the need for effective communication (Stalker et al., 2011).

In addition, Stalker et al. (2011) conducted case studies with intent to explore the views of parent's experiences with involvement. Results provided a nuanced understanding of disability and offered detailed accounts as well as clearer explanations of how parents with disabilities work through barriers for maintain involvement with their children's education. Parent responses to the interview questions provided information directed toward good practices in involvement with teachers and the school.

Stalker et al.'s participating parents identified that "a key element in overcoming potential barriers lay in communicating with parents in an accessible, consistent, and informal manner" (p. 18).

Communicating to Expand Academic Success

Sharon and Nimisha (2010) examined parent communication in connection with parental involvement in middle schools. The participants in the study included 437 parents and guardians of students in regular education, middle school sixth-eighth grade classrooms in two kindergarten-to-eighth grade, Title I public schools in a large urban city. Both participating schools demonstrated diverse populations within a part of the same elementary district (Sharon & Nimisha, 2010). Based on the results, Sharon and Nimisha concluded that both parents and educators tend to overestimated student's academic abilities. Within the study information revealed how the roles of parents' changed from their involvement in the scholastic aspects of the students' life to their use of a more supportive role. Parents took the time to not only focus on just the academic component of their children's learning but shifted into the role of supporting the child's work performance as well as their learning ability to ensure learning success. In addition, results demonstrated parents taking on their specific role allowed them to continue as an active agent during their children's educational years and encouraged them to become self-directed learners.

Pryor and Pryor (2009) study included 40 K-12 teachers from several districts in a large metropolitan area in the Southwest; 12 secondary and 28 elementary teachers participated. Data gathered through the first questionnaire prompted educators' ideas

concerning useful behavior, which could be demonstrated to encourage parental communication at the elementary and secondary level. The second questionnaire was used to rate educators' beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral intentions when it came to communicating with parents, and it coincided with the theory of reason (Pryor & Pryor, 2009). Results presented from the study differed between elementary and secondary teachers; the strongest component in connection to intention and the elementary teachers displayed significantly higher measures of the three behaviors.

Risko and Walker-Dalhouse (2009) examined extended day programs to explain how communication strategies were examined, aligned, and analyzed to sure a positive relationship among educators and parents and to maintain the overall goals of learners. Communication between educators and parents can be positive with beneficial factors connected to learners, or limited, which creates a hardship between the groups as well as for students when it comes to learning. The results indicated the importance of educators taking the time to interact with parents during community events and demonstrating a willingness to learn about the student and their families.

Sad and Gürbüztürk (2013) examined the extent of parental involvement among primary school children in first thru fifth grade concerning the area of communication, home setting, and homework support. The purpose of this study was to measure the parent level of involvement in their children's education at a primary school. In addition, Sad and Gürbüztürk gave special regard to the variables of a parent's gender and educational background, a child's class, the type of school, and a family's average income. The quantitative data were collected from a Turkish Parent Involvement Scale

(TPIS) developed previously by Gürbüzturk and Sad (2010). The Likert-scale survey items measured the extent to which parental involvement was represented. Findings revealed that parental tasks performed most often involved communication with teachers and the school as well as parents' self-development toward becoming better involved. In relation to Abel's (2012) study concerning African American fathers, Sad and Gürbüztürk shared similar finding that the mother's level of communication and involvement were significantly higher than the father's.

Implications

Despite the various definitions and applications of the term communication, researchers have reached consensus that communication between educators and parents of children in Title I elementary schools is essential to ensure academic success for all learners (Abel, 2012; Esquivel, Ryan, & Bonner, 2008; Pryor & Prayor, 2009; Young, Austin, & Growe , 2013). Various approaches and theoretical frameworks exist to support development of a strong home-school partnership. Past researchers explored parental involvement, communication barriers, parent educator's perceptions, and connections directly affiliated with the academic achievement of learners. This focus is comprehensible when parental involvement and communication are connected. Researchers also identified the existence of a communication gap in the home-school relationship and its influence on the success of learners.

The review of literature showed that strong home-school communication works to increase the academic achievement for all learners. The literature also identified the existence of barriers of parental and educator perceptions that create hindrances within

the learning environment. Working with parents and educators to analyze their perspectives and broaden their knowledge about communication offered visible and immediate benefits to all students. In spite of negative factors that influence home-school relationships, communication has been shown as positively related to the academic success of Title I elementary school students.

Summary

Studies have been conducted on this topic, both qualitative and quantitative, but the lack of a detailed understanding of a communication gap and how to bridge it, has made it difficult for researchers to draw a clear conclusion about parents and educators working as partners in Title I elementary schools to support student achievement. Parents and educators share similarities and differences when it comes to perceptions of effective communication. If parents and teachers had a better understanding of each other's expectations, both groups could work more effectively to ensure positive collaboration. Eliminating the communication gap in learning institutions might allow parents and educators to become more responsive to each other's needs. Understanding the existing communication factors that created a negative influence on student achievement was the important impetus for the project study. The review of the literature displayed the similarities in both parents' and educators' expectations for effective communication as well as the differences in their perceptions about explaining why the communication gap existed.

As the literature in this review illustrated, bridging the communication gap between educators and parents might be essential in supporting student achievement in

Title I elementary schools. Educators and parents both possess a different role in the educational experience of learners. However, communication is the important factor that supports learning. Much of the literature examined existing communication barriers, the perception of both educators and parents, and the influence of communication on the academic success of learners. The relationships between educators and parents could determine students' success. The next section explains the methodology of this study including information concerning the targeted population, how data were gathered, and how data were integrated through a mixed-methods approach. The mixed-methods approach blended the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research to promote an in-depth examination of the parent-educator communication gap.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

This project study used a mixed methods research design and a sequential transformative approach. According to Creswell (2009), mixed-methods research refers to the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The sequential transformative approach is identified as a two-session project supported by a theoretical framework (Creswell, 2009). Epstein's (2001) parental involvement theory was used to guide this study in the examination of the of home-school communication problem (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011).

First, in this study, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods provided a deeper understanding of the communication between educators and parents in Title I schools and how this communication contributed to the academic success of all learners. Second, the mixed methods design offered a sufficient amount of flexibility with the collection of data for this study. In fact, mixed methods research allowed for a more complete understanding of this complex phenomenon. Third, this research design allowed me to compensate for the weaknesses of one method with the strengths of another. Implementing qualitative methods allowed for explaining, clarifying, and providing depth of meaning to the quantitative data. Overall, mixed methods research can add to the credibility and validity of findings by representing a form of triangulation and reducing bias (Creswell, 2012; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010).

Research Approaches and Tradition

Mixed-Method Approach

This study involved the use of a mixed-methods research design with the sequential transformative approach. According to Creswell (2009), mixed-methods research includes the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The sequential transformative approach is identified as a two-session project that supports a theoretical framework (Creswell, 2009). Data for the study were collected sequentially and analyzed with equal weight being given to both quantitative and qualitative sessions of the research. Mixed-methods research often produces well-validated and substantiated findings (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2009; Lodico et al., 2010).

Quantitative Tradition

The quantitative portion of the mixed-methods study was carried out through descriptive survey research. Descriptive survey research is one of the five methods associated with quantitative research. According to Lodico et al. (2010), this specific method of research is used to describe behavior as well as gather participants' opinions, perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs toward issues in education. Questionnaires and surveys are used in descriptive survey research to enable generalization toward a population (Creswell, 2009). This specific method of research addresses the following: (a) providing data in a short amount of time through the questionnaires, (b) sampling from a population, (c) designing data collection instruments, and (d) achieving a high response rate from the participants (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010).

Qualitative Tradition

The case study method was used for the qualitative portion of the mixed method study. Case studies are one of the four methods associated with qualitative research. Creswell (2010) defined the case study as an approach the researcher uses to explore one or more individuals in depth and collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures. This specific method of research addresses the following: (a) human experience, (b) interview processes, and (c) direct observation through a focus group (Lodico et al., 2010; Stakes, 1978). Information was gathered during this process of qualitative research and presented as a narrative rather than a numerical representation as in a quantitative approach (Lodico et al., 2010).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding about the essence and the underlying structure of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Conducting the qualitative portion of this study by investigating case studies offers advantages. The advantages helped me understand the problem and answer the research questions for the present study (Creswell, 2009). In addition, the case study allowed me the opportunity to capture the essence of the human experience of the participants (Lodico et al., 2010; Stakes, 1978). Participants discussed personal experiences or situations and how those experiences influenced student behavior and attitudes.

Lodico et al. (2010) focused on a single phenomenon to gain a clear understanding of the participants' perceptions as to why communication is limited as well as how it influenced the academic success of students through a case study. Other

qualitative research traditions include phenomenological, ethnographical, and grounded theory. They were each considered, but none were appropriate for goals of this study.

The phenomenological approach requires the researcher to plan prolonged engagements at designed sites over a time span of 3 months and the usage of repeated data collection methods are expected. This approach was discarded due to the extensive time frame required to complete the study. The ethnographical approach focuses on the interactions of individuals or groups in specific settings; however, the ethnographical method is based upon large cultural groups studied over time and was not useful for this study (Creswell, 2009; Lodico et al., 2010). Grounded theory is the third qualitative method excluded from my study approach. Based on the data gathered in the grounded theory approach, a theory is developed from the ground or from the narrative data produced within the study (Creswell, 2009; Lodico et al., 2010). Characteristics identifying the grounded theory approach involve constantly comparing data and theoretical sampling of different groups to find the similarities as well as the differences within the information (Creswell, 2009). I did not evaluate a program. Rather the support and barriers that contributed to the communication gap and the needs for communication to support student achievement causes were examined. Therefore, I rejected the grounded study approach.

Methods of Data Collection

Quantitative Research Method

An online, quantitative, cross-sectional Likert-scale survey instrument was used to gather and analyze data. This method allowed data to be collected among a group with

projected thoughts and ideas to promote innovative changes (Fink, 2009). The survey used in this study was the School and Family Partnership Survey for Parents and Teachers by Epstein and Salina (1993), as seen in Appendix A. Each survey was imported into Survey Console for educators and parents. Survey Console is a web-based software designed for creating and distributing surveys (Survey Console, 2013). The software was controlled through Question Pro interfacing and allowed the surveys to be designed with custom variables with the use of a database or report automation component to ensure all results were exported electronically (Survey Console, 2013).

Qualitative Research Method

The purpose of this study was to understand the communication gap between educators and parents in Title I elementary schools. During this study, influences were examined and clearly defined to determine their effects on student academic achievement. The primary effort was to identify the contributing factors which initiated the communication concerns between educators and parents as well as understand how working together promotes student success. During the qualitative session of the study, I conducted 45-minute, face-to-face, audio-recorded interviews with five educators and five parents. After the individual interviews, educators and parents formed a focus group to provide additional clarifying data to support the information brought out in the interviews.

Justification of Design

Mixed-methods research is an approach that combines the strength of both quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research is technical and typically

requires the use of close-ended data obtained through a survey (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative researchers use open-ended questioning through interviews or focus groups to gain new or unexpected insights that offer descriptions and deeper understandings of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; Lodico et al., 2010). Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches involves using well-developed procedures for collecting and analyzing data (Lodico et al., 2010). Incorporating the mixed-method approach for this study offered the opportunity to study in-depth the communication in Title I elementary schools to identify barriers, reflect on the perceptions of both educators and parents, and examine the ways that communication influences the academic achievement of learners. Past studies focused mainly on quantitative data, without extensive supporting knowledge of the specific characteristics of an issue, which may have limited the broader perception offered by participants concerning the educational experiences within the learning environment.

Integration of Approaches

The quantitative and qualitative approaches were integrated during data collection and interpretation of the results. The parent and educator surveys included closed-ended questions to collect quantitative data. The face-to-face interviews with educators and parents included open-ended questions to collect qualitative data to support findings from the qualitative portion of the study. The findings of both approaches were integrated during data analysis and supported triangulation within the methods to gain a deeper understanding of the existence of a communication gap between educators and parents (Creswell, 2009; Glense, 2011; Lodico et al., 2010).

Target Population and Sample

Quantitative Target Population and Sample

The study was limited to Title I elementary school educators and parents in a large Texas urban school district. Of the 157 elementary schools in the district, 147 were identified as Title I schools. Of the population of Title I elementary schools, five Title I elementary schools were randomly selected to participate in the study. One hundred percent of the educators and parents from each school were asked to voluntarily participate in the study. Through this method, the entire population could participate in the survey. Therefore, the selected sample size allowed for generalization of the results of the study to the entire population from which the sample was drawn.

The urban school district studied was the 14th largest school district in the nation, with a diverse population of 157,000 students and more than 20,000 employees. The number of educators employed on each of the five campuses ranged from 30 to 38. Based on these numbers, the estimated population was 169 educators from the participating sites. Raosoft's (2014) sample size generator revealed that a minimum sample of 119 educators was necessary to provide a 90% confidence level and $\pm$5% margin of error. Therefore, the sample was expected to be 119 educators.

The student population for each of the five campuses involved in the study ranged from 539 to 719 students. The five Title I schools involved in the study enrolled at total of 3,144 students. The parent population size for the study was assumed to be equal to the total student population of the five campuses, thus the parent population was assumed to be 3,144. The School and Family Partnership survey for Parents and Teachers by Epstein

and Salina (1993) instructs all parents to only complete the survey once; therefore, only one parent per student was considered to be part of the population that might submit a survey. Raosoft's (2014) sample size generator revealed that a minimum sample of 250 parents was necessary to provide a 90% confidence level and ±5% margin of error. Therefore, the sample ideally would have included at least 250 parents.

Qualitative Target Population and Sample

For the qualitative session of the study, 10 of the 369 participants were randomly selected from those who volunteered for the second session through a response on the electronic survey. For each of the five participating Title I elementary schools, one educator and one parent were randomly selected for the interview. Ten participants completed in the face-to-face, audio-recorded interview session.

Volunteers for the second portion of the qualitative data collection session participated in a focus group. Participants for the focus group were selected from those not selected for the interviews. For each of the five participating Title I elementary schools, one educator and one parent were randomly selected to take part in the focus group. One educator and one parent had indicated they would attend from each of the five participating Title I elementary schools. If all of the parents and educators had attended, the focus group size would have been 10. However, one educator and one parent were unable to attend. Therefore, the focus group consisted of eight participants instead of the expected 10.

Protection of Participants' Rights

To ensure confidentiality and protect the anonymity of all participants, an official application seeking permission for the initiation of the study was submitted to the Walden University Institutional Review Board committee prior to conducting any research. The application explained the purpose of the study, the appropriate time required of the participants, and the expected time allotted to complete both the quantitative and qualitative data collection sessions. After permission was granted from Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), a completed research proposal application form was submitted to the school district's research department for approval to carry out the study. When research permission was granted, I used the district's email address book (housed in Microsoft Outlook) to gain access to the randomly selected Title I elementary school administrators. An email was sent to those administrators introducing the study, explaining what the research involved, and what was needed from the participants volunteering in the study. I gained access to educators' email addresses and parents' addresses through a request provided to the public information department in the school district.

I emailed invitational letters to educators (see Appendix F) asking prospective educator participants for consent and to complete the survey. The hyperlink located at the end of the email allowed the participants to consent automatically and linked the educator to the electronic survey. I mailed an invitational letter (see Appendix F), and a paper copy of the parent survey to parents of students enrolled in the five Title I schools. The parents had the option to complete the paper copy of the survey and mail it back or could opt to

complete the on-line version of the survey. The invitational letter discussed the concept of the informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, the fact that the data were secured and that participation in the study was voluntary. The letter informed the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Prospective participants had the option to respond by email or mail the consent form back in the addressed prepaid envelope.

To ensure confidentiality within the study, various procedures were implemented for the school district as well as for the participating schools involved in the study. A fictitious name was used for the school district and the schools. Participants' personal information was not listed nor was teachers' identification information released. The study data regarding the study and participants' confidentiality information were stored in the researcher's personal safety deposit box at a banking institution for 5 years following the completion of the study; after which, they will be shredded.

Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Data Collection

In the beginning, quantitative session of the study, I collected survey data from educators and parents of Title I elementary schools. The Epstein and Salinas (1993) Teachers and Parents in the Elementary and Middle Grades Questionnaire was completed by all participants. This 4-point Likert-scale cross-sectional questionnaire survey enabled data to be gathered for the quantitative session of the study. The survey questions elicited contributing factors associated with communication barriers, positives or negatives of

existing communication methods being used, and other elements that might work to help improve communication.

The Epstein and Salinas (2001) survey was used to measure five parental involvement and five educator attitudes about parental involvement scales (Appendices B and C). The five parent involvement scales include parent attitudes about their children's school, parent reports about all types of activities related to school programs, parent reports of school program of communicating activities, parent involvement in all types of activities, and parent involvement in learning activities at home (Epstein, 2001; Schumacher, 2007). For example, the agreement range parent attitudes about child's school was from 1 to 4, with 1 representing the lowest level of agreement as "disagree strongly", 2 representing lack of agreement as "disagree a little", 3 representing agreement as "agree a little", and 4 representing the highest level of agreement as "agree strongly"(Epstein & Salinas, 1993; Fink, 2009). Examples of items in this scale include "this is a very good school" and "I feel welcome at the school."

The five educator attitude scales were teacher attitudes about the importance to teachers of all practices to involve families, teacher reports of total school program to involve families, teacher reports of parent responsibilities, teacher views of support for partnerships, and teacher attitudes about family and community involvement. For example, for items measuring teacher attitudes about family involvement in the school, the educators chose from "1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree" (Epstein & Salinas, 1993; Fink, 2009). Examples of items in the scale include

"parent involvement is important for a good school and this school views parents as important partners."

Testing of reliability was unnecessary because I added no new questions to the survey. According to Epstein and Salinas (1993), the reliability coefficients range from .44 to .91. Participants accessed the survey through www.surveyconsole.com from any computer with an Internet or network connection.

Qualitative Data Collection

In the qualitative session, I used face-to-face and audio-recorded interviews, along with a focus group, to build upon the quantitative data by gathering information on the importance of communication between educators and parents in addition to how communication influences student achievement (Appendix G). The interview process appears next. The focus group explanation concludes this section about qualitative data collection.

Interviews. The qualitative method started the second session of the data collection for this project study. I conducted audio-recorded interviews in a meeting room at a predetermined time agreed upon by the participant. Participants were asked five open-ended questions(different from the cross-sectional questions) designed to help explore their personal thoughts, explain how they perceive communication, and discuss their beliefs concerning communication between educators and parents, also how communication influences the academic success of students (Appendix G). As data were gathered in the study, a sufficient amount of information was received from the participants to demonstrate their different perspectives (Lodico et al., 2010). Parents and

educators provided suggestions for what they believed could help increase effective communication.

Each interview was approximately 45 minutes, and I obtained permission to audio-record each interview session. At the beginning of each recording the participant number was stated as a method of identification for transcription. Field notes were taken during the interview to align with the recordings; the characteristics included on the field note pages included participant number, date, time, location, key comments, highlight points, and body language. I also took written notes during each interview session. Prior to the interview session, each participate completed an electronic survey that posed various questions related to school, teacher, and parents. The final questions asked the participants' permission to be audio-recorded during the interview.

Interested participants were contacted with a notice which listed the participant's date, time, and location for the interview. At the conclusion of the week and after all interviews were completed, verbatim transcriptions of each audio-recorded interview session were completed within the subsequent week. After the field notes were transcribed, I was able to review each document and connect specific components and specific codes that had been previously determined based on survey data.

Focus Group. Educators and parents participating in the survey indicated their willingness to volunteer during the focus group. Based on that information, individuals were recruited to take part. Ten of the randomly selected participants were given focus group recommended guidelines to establish group norms (Appendix H). The focus group included both educator and parent participants. Participants in the focus group came

together for 1 hour to discuss five open-ended questions (Appendix I). Educators and parents had the opportunity to express their opinions during the focus group, which took place in one of the conference rooms of a selected participating elementary school. The discussion was used to enhance the quantitative and qualitative data through the use of social interactions.

During the discussion, the researcher took hand-written notes on the form shown in Appendix J. These notes reflected the content of the discussion as well as nonverbal behavior, including facial expressions, body language, group dynamics, and other observations (Lodico et al., 2010). In addition, tape recording equipment was used to ensure that all components of the focus group discussion were captured and to support the previously written notes and qualitative data. During this group discussion, the researcher played the role of observer and evaluated participants on their modes of communicating with each other, tone of the meeting room (attitude toward one another--respect), and problem solving techniques carried out through the meeting session.

Role of the Researcher

In my role as the author of this study, I gathered quantitative data from an online survey administered to elementary Title I parents and educators. In addition, I conducted qualitative interviews and a focus group before analyzing and reporting the findings. I worked in the school district with various educators and parents involved in the study for 13 years at the elementary levels. During data collection, I worked as the English, language arts, and reading (ELAR) instructional coach at one of the Title I elementary schools in the district. I served in a supervisory role that required me to evaluate the

teachers on a single elementary campus. To avoid any conflict of interest, the school at which I was employed was excluded from participating in the study.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data gathered from the surveys were electronically exported into SPSS for analysis (Green & Salkind, 2011). The data were tabulated and analyzed using charts, graphs, and tables to display information following the recommendations of Lodico et al. (2010). The researcher compiled statistical data including the percentages, means, and standard deviations from the surveys completed by both educators and parents. Bar charts and histograms provided visual representations of the frequencies for the surveys' variables (Green & Salkind, 2011).

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data gathered from the face-to-face, audio-recorded, and focus group interviews were transcribed and then imported into the QSR NVivo coding system (Creswell, 2009; DT Digital, 2012; Glense, 2011). All information was aligned, evaluated, and analyzed to determine how communication influences student academic achievement. As data were collected and coded, themes emerged to determine the complexity of the situation. Early data analysis took place during the qualitative data collection session through the use of categorical coding to identify various segments of the data describing the phenomena (Lodico et al., 2010). The overall activities included the following: evaluating and monitoring all participants, monitoring the method of communicating, description of participants' reactions to specific questions/activities,

probing questions, teachers' reactions, and strong emotional statements. I carefully scrutinized data from both the face-to-face interviews and focus groups to ensure relevance (Glesne, 2011). Educational administrators peer reviewed the study by assessing samples of the raw qualitative data and the findings to ensure reasonableness following the recommendations of Merriam (2009).

Procedures for Integration of Data

The sequential transformative strategy was used to analysis the data gathered in this mixed method study (Creswell, 2009). The study started with a replication of Epstein's (1993) quantitative survey and analysis with permission from Epstein and Salinas. Following the data collection and analysis of the survey, I scheduled and performed 10 qualitative interviews. In addition, 10 other interested participants participated in a focus group to add validity, reliability, and supportive data to the study (Creswell, 2009).

Assumptions

Assumptions for this case study included expectations that educators and parent participants responded to the interview questions honestly and with depth. Likewise, I assumed that educators were open to participate in the study. The educator participants openly responded to the interview questions and in the focus group based on their personal and first-hand experience of the study. However, some of responses were abbreviated to avoid possible conflicts during the focus group discussion. In comparison to the educator participants, I assumed that the parents' participation could be limited due to lack of experience within the school system because they were not employees and

educators. However, the participating parents openly responded to the questions with confidence they were being heard. Overall, all the participants in the study responded to the surveys, interview questions, and focus group questions based on their true perceptions and not based on what they felt their perceptions should be.

Limitations

As a result of the participants consisting of educators and parents from five Title I elementary school in the district participating in the study, I acknowledged specific limitations. First, participants in the study and the data collection result might not have represented other elementary schools in other surrounding school districts. Second, the result might not generalize to small or larger populations. The results from the study only reflected perceptions of educators and parents from the district in the study. In addition, the results were generalizable to a similar population and might not be generalizable to parents and educators representing Title I elementary schools outside of the geographic area.

Moreover, the responses given by the educators might have been influenced in some way. For instance, the participants may have been hesitant to honestly answer questions because of their association to the school district and their apprehensions about research confidentiality. In the same way, the parent participants may have been hesitant to respond due to outside negative influences and limited comprehension of the research process. While important, these limitations did not significantly alter the results in this study to a degree as to render the research invalid or unreliable.

Scope

The scope of this study included educators and parents in five Title I elementary schools in one specific school district located in the state of Texas. For this study information about the communication gap between educators and parents as well as their perceptions of its influence on the academic achievement of learners were collected. Only educators and parents associated with students in elementary schools participated in the study.

Delimitations

Students, auxiliary support personnel, and teacher assistants were not included as participants in the study. The Title I elementary schools in the participating school district serves students from prekindergarten to Grade 5; therefore, educators and parents of students enrolled in Grades 6 through 12 were excluded from being eligible to participate in the study. The goal of this study was to examine the developed barriers that influence the communication gap between educators and parents, review the perceptions of all participants as it related to communication, and identify the effects it had on the academic achievement of learners. Performing research in this area was necessary to assess the perceptions of participants that may have been overlooked in the past in the area of communication as it relates to school matters.

Data Analysis Results

Because of the problem regarding the gaps in effective communication between parents and educators, data were collected to understand and develop strategies for improving communication. This study employed both qualitative and quantitative

methods in order to understand the varying communication perspectives among educators and parents as well as ascertain other communication needs for supporting student academic achievement. The research questions for implementing a sequential transformative mixed method design were as follows:

RQ1: What are the barriers that contribute to the lack of communication between educators and parents?

RQ2: How do educators and parents perceive the relationship between communication and student academic success?

RQ3: What communication needs do educators and parents perceive that support student academic achievement?

Quantitative Results

The Epstein and Salinas (2001) survey was used to measure five parental involvement and five educator attitudes about parental involvement scales. The parent and educator survey questions, as detailed in Appendices B and C, elicited contributing factors associated with communication barriers, positives or negatives of existing communication methods being used, and other elements that might work to help improve communication. The items for both surveys were measured according to 4-point responses. The scales were calculated and data were analyzed using SPSS software.

There were 250 parent surveys distributed among the five participating campuses, but only 42 were completed and returned. The parent survey response rate was 16.8%. The educator surveys were distributed to 119 educators among the five participating elementary campuses, and 108 were completed and returned. The educator survey

response rate was 90.8%. The results for both surveys indicated reasons for the lack of parent participation in the study, as seen below. The parent and educator survey results sections offered the opportunity to analyze the data's relationships to each of the research questions presented within specific sections of the survey.

Findings from parent survey. As noted, the data collection yielded a low response rate for the parent survey, but the number of parent responses was greater than 30. Therefore, tests of significance were calculated to compare the sample to Epstein's norm group as seen in Table 2 (Salkind, 2013). Additionally, the Cronbach's alpha used was to measure the reliability of the parent survey scales. As seen in Table 1, the reliabilities ranged from good (.812) to excellent (.931). In addition, the data were adequate for understanding the participating parents' views about communication and for considering these results in sequential analysis with the qualitative results.

Table1 displays the results as descriptive statistics for the parent survey and includes the means (*M*), medians (*Mdn*), modes, and standard deviations (*SD*) for each of the five scales. The data met the assumption of normality using the skewness and kurtosis statistics as seen in Table 1. All scales demonstrated normal distributions because these statistics were less than absolute 1.0 in all cases (Salkind, 2013).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Parent Survey Scales

Statistic*	Parent Attitudes About Child's School	Parent Reports of School Programs of All Types of Activities	Parent Reports of School Program of Communicating Activities	Parent Involvement in All Types of Activities	Parent Involvement in Learning Activities at Home
Cronbach α	.812	.931	.869	.925	.898
M	1.561	2.798	3.208	2.455	2.524
Mdn	1.429	2.750	3.500	2.472	2.667
Mode	1.000	4.000	4.000	3.00	3.000
SD	.550	.738	.753	.444	.480
Skewness	.878	.193	-.743	-.488	-.742
Kurtosis	-.170	-1.226	-.399	-.626	-.691

Note. **n* = 42 for all statistics.

Figure 1 provides the distribution of scores for the scale assessing parents' attitudes about their children's schools. The score for this scale was derived from averaging each participant's responses to a group of items measured by 4-point Likert-type response options. As seen above, the mean for this scale was 1.561 with a standard deviation of .55. These values indicate that the parents demonstrated poor attitudes about their children's schools.

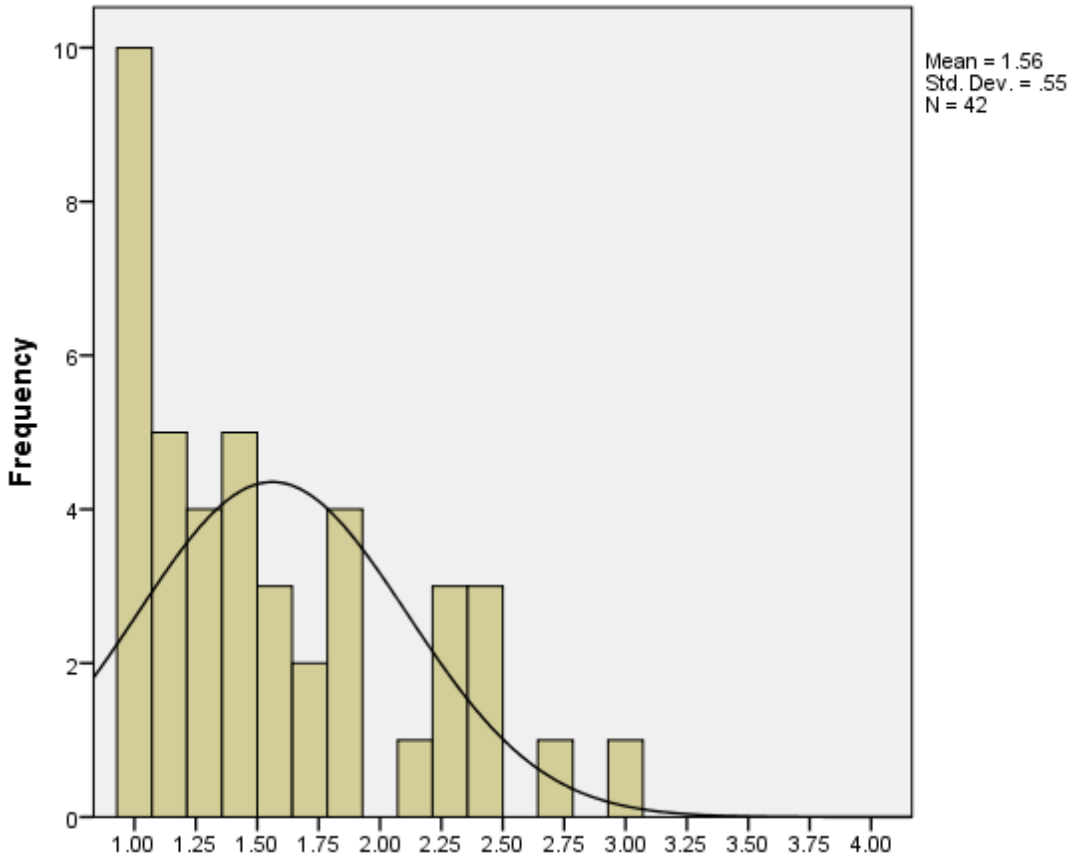

Figure 1. Histogram for the scale of parents' attitudes about their children's schools. Lower scale scores near 1 indicated poorest attitudes and higher scale scores near 4 indicated highest attitudes; for this scale, the highest scores were the mode of 1.0 with the mean at 1.56 and standard deviation of .55.

Figure 2 provides the distribution of Likert-scale scores for the scale of parents' reports about all types of activities related to school programs. The score for this scale was derived from averaging each participant's responses to a group of items measured by 4-point Likert-type response options. The mean for this scale was 2.798 with a standard deviation of .738. These values indicate that the parents displayed positive attitudes about all types of activities related to school programs. The mode of 6 for the rating of 4.0

represented 28.6% of the respondents as displaying very good attitudes about school programs.

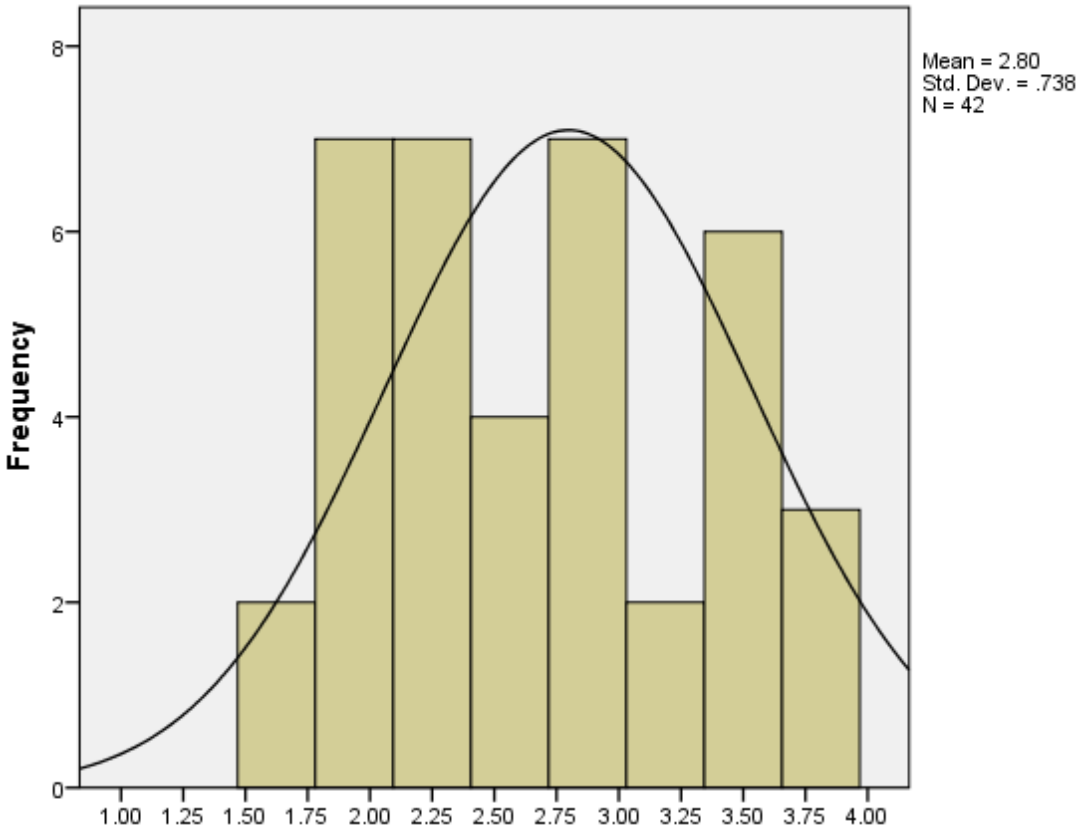

Figure 2. Histogram for the scale measuring parents' reports about all types of activities related to school programs. Lower scale scores near 1 indicated poorest attitudes and higher scale scores near 4 indicated highest attitudes; for this scale, the highest scores were the mode of 4.0 with the mean at 2.8 and standard deviation of .74.

Figure 3 provides the distribution of scores for the scale of parent reports of communicating activities as part of the school program. The score for this scale was derived from averaging each participant's responses to a group of items measured by 4-point Likert-type response options. The mean of this scale was 3.208 with a standard deviation of .753. These values indicate that the parents displayed positive proactive

attitudes about the schools' methods of communicating about activities. The mode of this scale was 4.0 (*n*= 6), indicating that over 10% of the respondents displayed a high level of positivity toward the schools methods of communicating about activities.

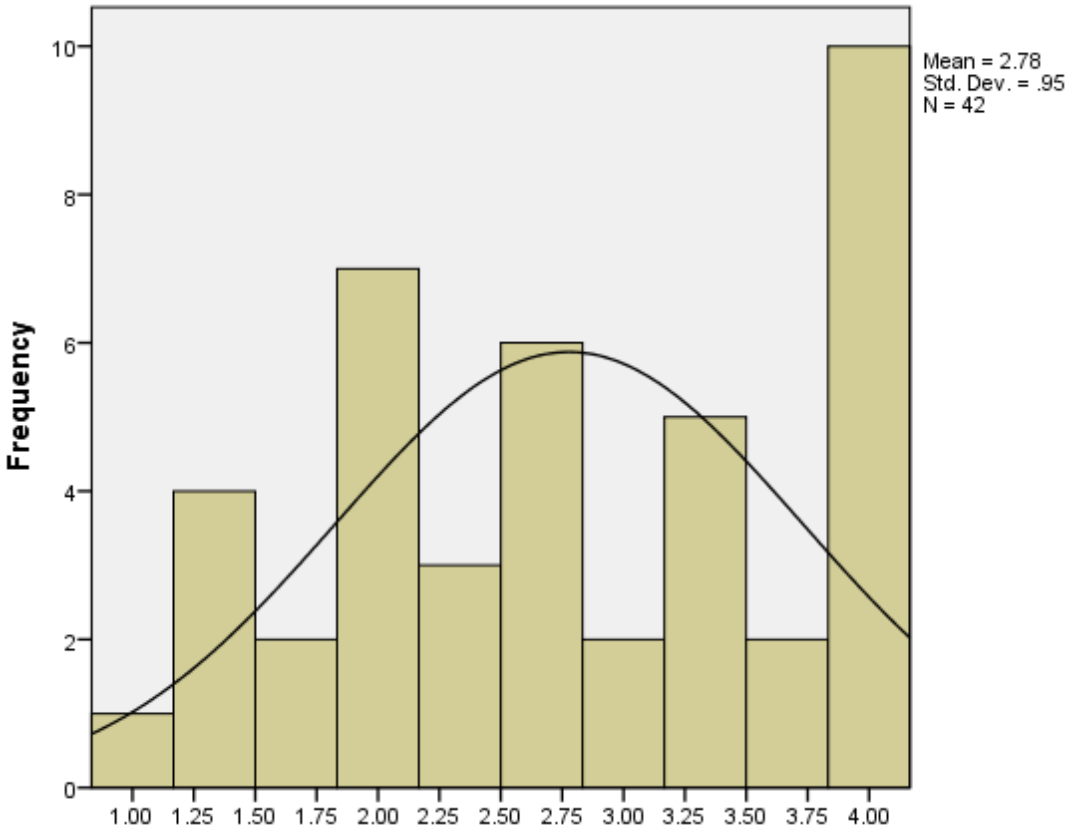

Figure 3. Histogram for the scale measuring parent reports of school program of communicating activities. Lower scale scores near 1 indicated poorest attitudes and higher scale scores near 4 indicated highest attitudes; for this scale, the highest scores were the mode of 4.0 with the mean at 3.21 and standard deviation of .75.

Figure 4 provides the distribution of scores for the scale of parent reports of parent involvement in all types of activities. The score for this scale was derived from averaging each participant's responses to a group of items measured by 4-point Likert-type response options. The mean for this scale was 2.455 with a standard deviation of

.444. These values indicate that the parents possessed extremely poor attitudes toward parent involvement in all types of activities.

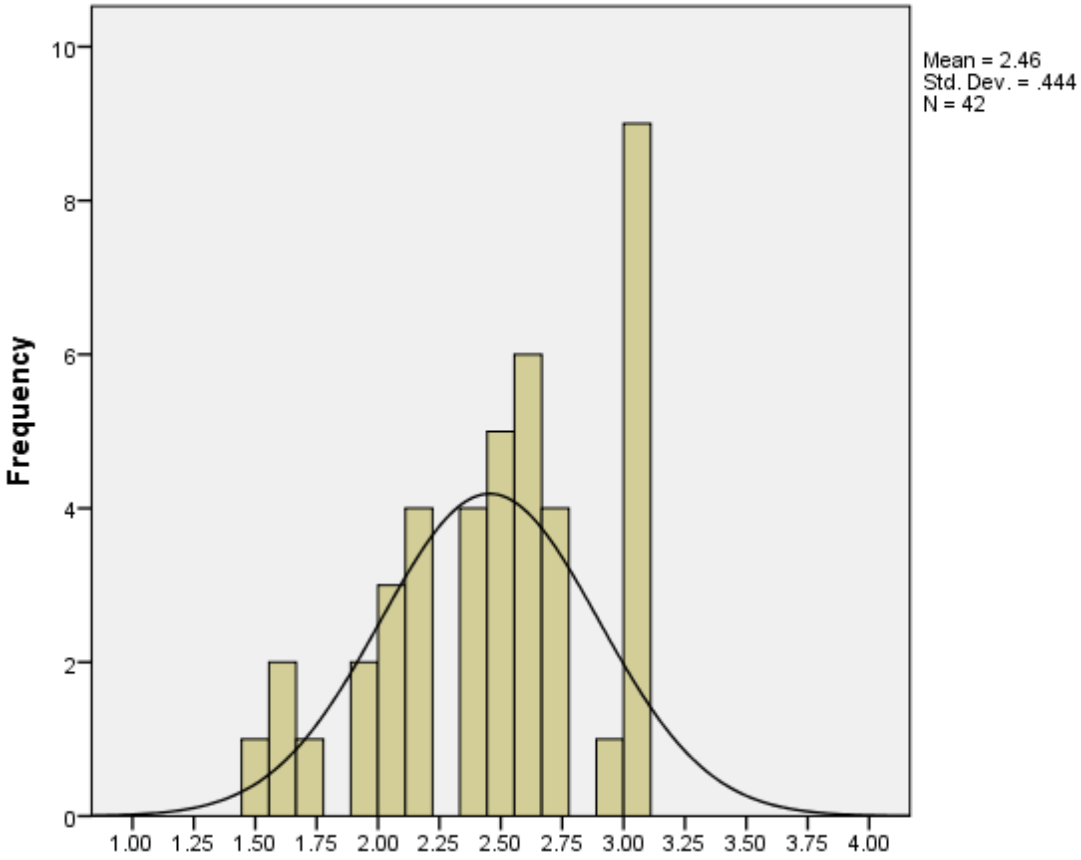

Figure 4. Histogram for scale measuring parent involvement in all types of activities. Lower scale scores near 1 indicated poorest attitudes and higher scale scores near 4 indicated highest attitudes; for this scale, the highest scores were the mode of 3.0 with the mean at 2.5 and standard deviation of .44.

Figure 5 provides the distribution of scores for the scale of parent reports of parent involvement in learning activities at home. The score for this scale was derived from averaging each participant's responses to a group of items measured by 4-point Likert-type response options. As seen in Table 1, the mean for this scale was 2.524 with a

standard deviation of .480. These values indicate that the parents displayed negative attitudes about parent involvement in learning activities at home.

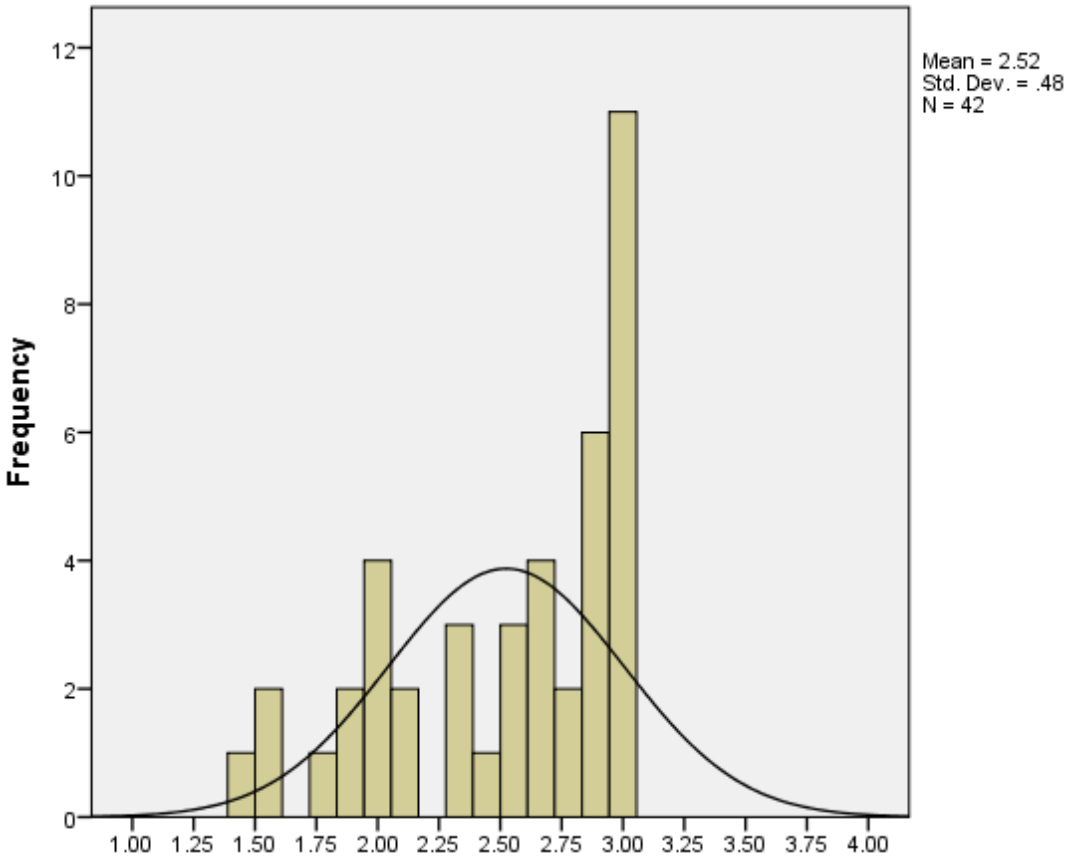

Figure 5. Histogram for scale measuring parent involvement in learning activities at home. Lower scale scores near 1 indicated poorest attitudes and higher scale scores near 4 indicated highest attitudes; for this scale, the highest scores were the mode of 3.0 with the mean at 2.5 and standard deviation of .48.

Table 2 provides the one-sample *t* test results for the five parent survey scales. All scales demonstrated statistically significant differences from Epstein's norm group of parents. For the first scale regarding parent attitudes about their children's schools, a statistically significant result occurred. The current sample of parents displayed significantly lower attitudes about the schools, $t = -21.212$, $df = 41$, $p < .0001$, than the parents of Epstein's norm group. The mean difference was -1.8, a large value for a 4-

point scale. The current sample of parents displayed also significantly lower attitudes than Epstein's norm group about parent involvement in all types of activities, t = -13.2, df = 41, p< .0001, and about parent involvement in learning activities at home, t = -14.247, df = 41, p< .0001.

Table 2

All Parent Scales' One-sample t Test Results

Parent Scale	*t*	*df*	*p*	Sample *M*	Test Value: Norm Group *M*	*M* Difference
Parent Attitudes About Child's School	-21.212	41	.000**	1.56	3.36	-1.80
Parent Reports of School Program of All Types of Activities	3.580	41	.001*	2.80	2.39	0.41
Parent Reports of School Program of Communicating Activities	5.667	41	.000**	3.21	2.55	0.66
Parent Involvement in All Types of Activities	-13.200	41	.000**	2.46	3.36	-0.90
Parent Involvement in Learning Activities at Home	-14.247	41	.000**	2.52	3.58	-1.06

* Significant at p < .01.**Significant at p< .0001.

Two scales demonstrated statistically significant differences higher than the norm group. The current sample of parents displayed significantly higher attitudes than Epstein's norm group about parent reports of all types of activities in the school program, t = 3.58, df = 41, p = .001. The second scale with a higher mean regarded parent reports of school program communicating activities, t = 5.667, df = 41, p< .0001. The significantly different scales' means could have been the result of the size of the sample

at 42 and limitations inherent in samples based on volunteers selecting to participate rather than samples based on random selection.

Findings from educator survey. Table 3 displays the results as descriptive statistics for the educator survey and includes the means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) for each scale. The scores for each of these five scales were derived from averaging each participant's responses to a group of items measured by 4-point Likert-type response options. The Cronbach's alpha used was to measure the reliability of the educator survey scales. The reliabilities ranged from acceptable (.764) to excellent (.937). The data were adequate for understanding the participating educators' views about communication and for considering these results in sequential analysis with the qualitative results.

Additionally, the data were determined to have met the assumption of normality using the skewness and kurtosis statistics seen in Table 3. Most scales demonstrated distributions that were considered normal because all values were near absolute 1.0. The teacher attitudes about family and community involvement scale yielded a high kurtosis statistic of 5.36, indicating the distribution was leptokurtic, but the skewness statistic of -1.37 for this scale was close enough to the absolute value of 1 to be treated as a normal distribution for statistical testing (Salkind, 2013).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for the Teacher Survey Scales

Statistic*	Importance to Teacher of All Practices to Involve Families	Teacher Reports of Total School Program to Involve Families	Teacher Reports of Parent Responsibilities	Teacher Views of Support for Partnerships	Teacher Attitudes about Family and Community Involvement
n	106	104	104	104	112
Cronbach's α	.905	.920	.937	.857	.764
M	3.26	2.79	3.55	3.03	2.99
Mdn	3.25	2.83	3.64	3.00	3.00
Mode	4.00	3.00	4.00	2.50[a]	2.91[a]
SD	.467	.57	.46	.53	.39
Skewness	-0.13	-.090	-1.30	0.03	-1.37
Kurtosis	-0.59	0.18	1.88	-0.79	5.36

[a] Multiple modes exist.

Figure 6 provides the distribution of scores for the scale of the importance to teacher of all practices to involve families. The mean for this scale derived from averaging each participant's responses to a group of items measured by 4-point Likert-type response options was 3.26 with a standard deviation of .47. These values indicate that the teachers displayed negative attitudes about the importance to teachers of all practices to involve families.

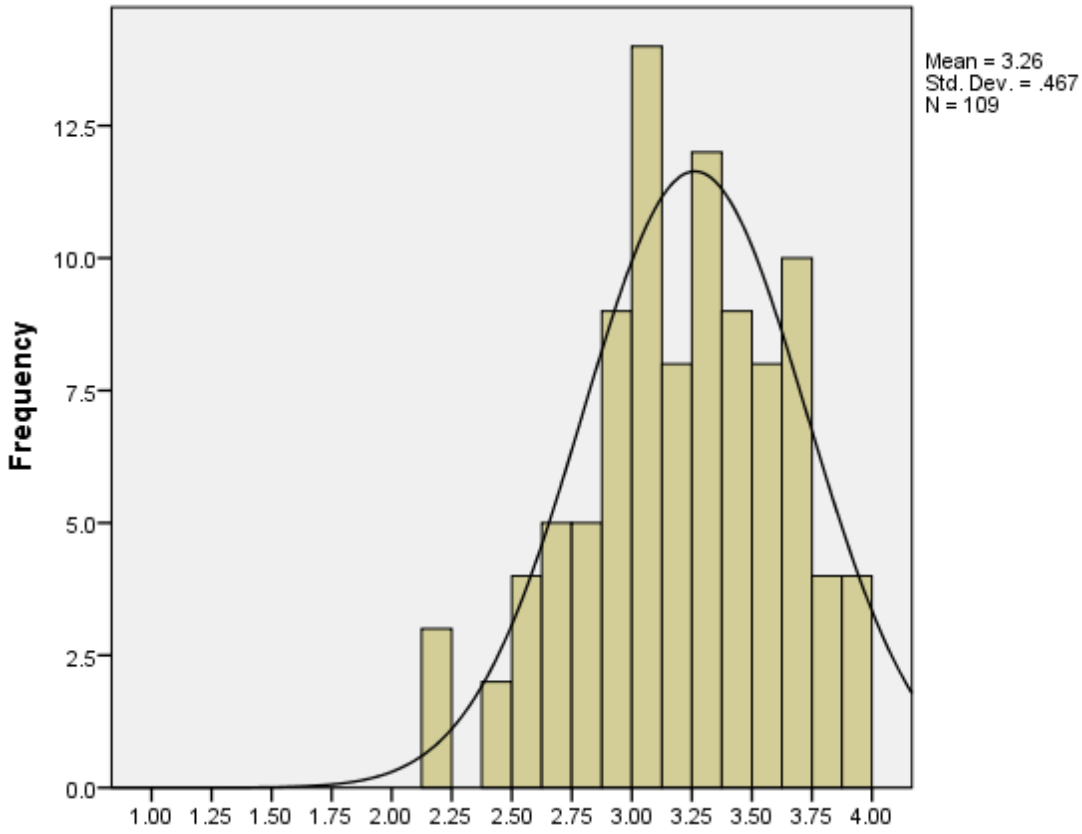

Figure 6. Histogram for the scale measuring the importance to teachers of all practices to involve families. Lower scale scores near 1 indicated poorest attitudes and higher scale scores near 4 indicated highest attitudes; for this scale, the highest scores were the mode of 3.0 with the mean at 3.26 and standard deviation of .47.

Figure 7 provides the distribution of scores for the scale of parent reports of parent involvement in learning activities at home. The score for this scale was derived from averaging each participant's responses to a group of items measured by 4-point Likert-type response options. The mean for this scale was 2.79 with a standard deviation of .57. The mean and standard deviation suggested the teachers displayed pessimistic attitudes about the total school program to involve families.

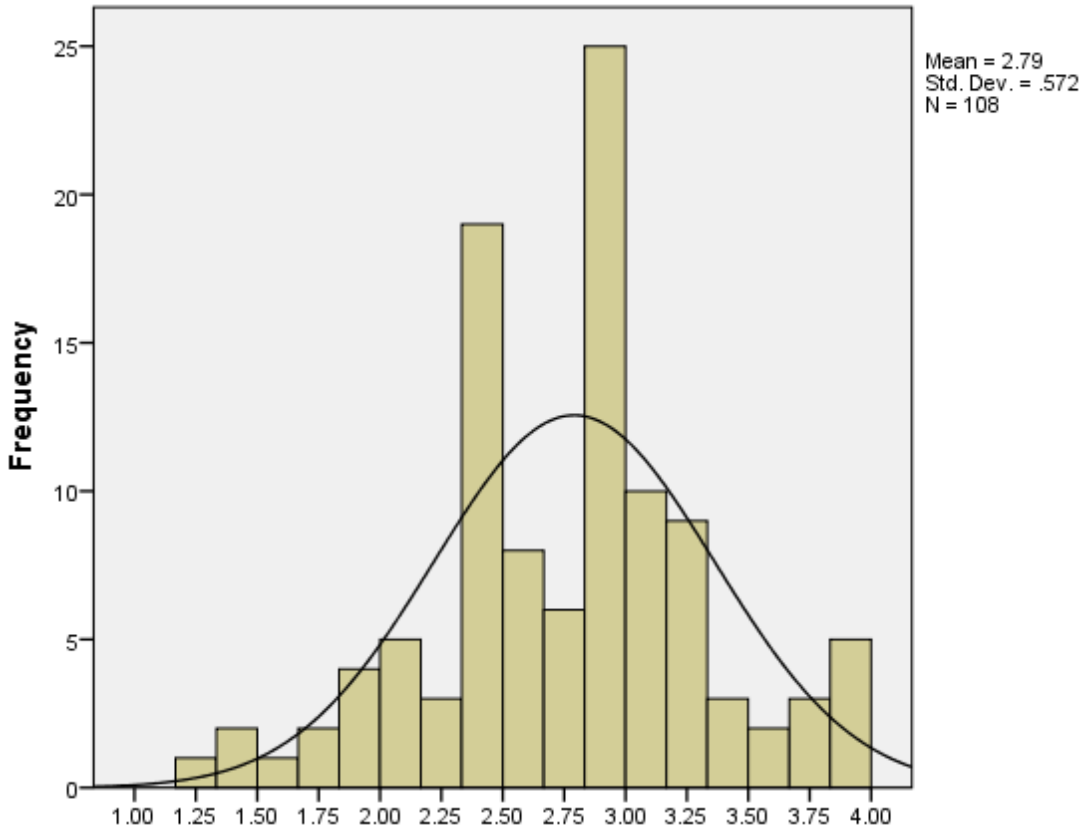

Figure 7. Histogram for the scale measuring teacher reports of total school program to involve families. Lower scale scores near 1 indicated poorest attitudes and higher scale scores near 4 indicated highest attitudes; for this scale, the highest scores were the mode of 3.0 with the mean at 2.8 and standard deviation of .57.

Figure 8 provides the distribution of scores for the scale of teacher reports of parent responsibilities. The score for this scale was derived from averaging each participant's responses to a group of items measured by 4-point Likert-type response options. The mean for this scale was 3.55 with a standard deviation of .46. These values indicate that the teachers displayed negative attitudes about the importance to teachers of all practices to involve families.

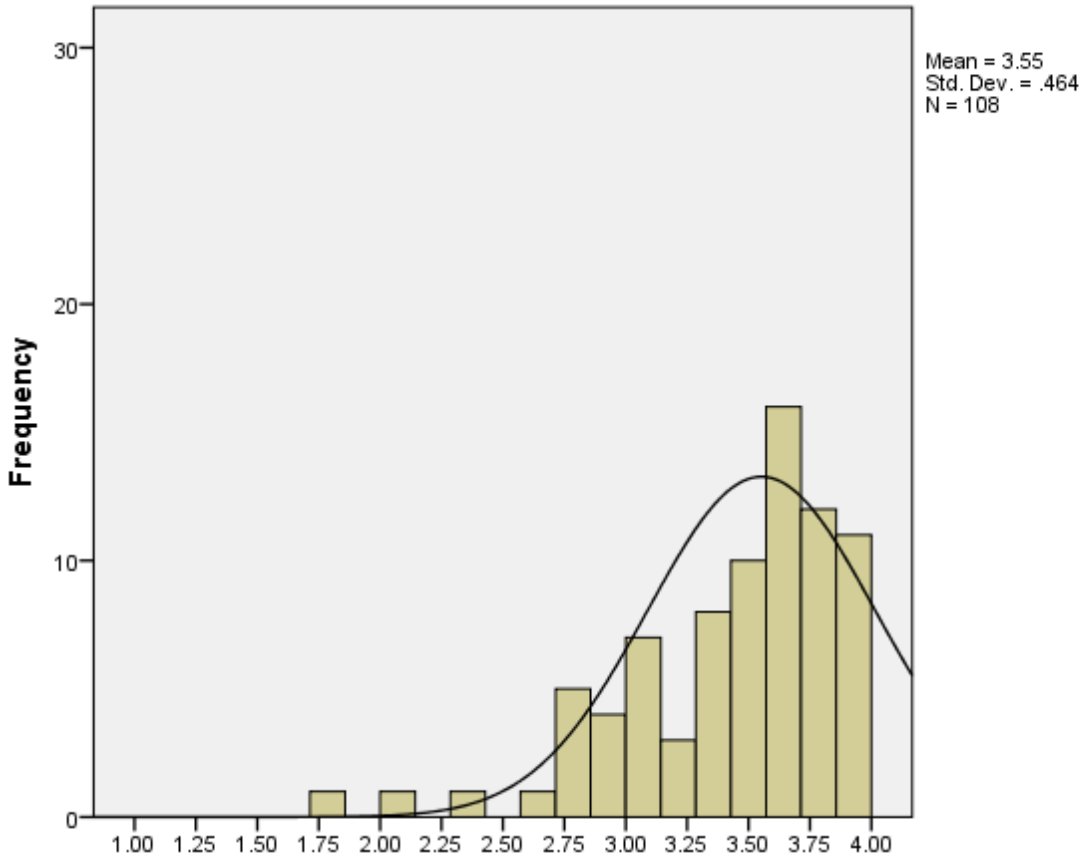

Figure 8. Histogram for the scale measuring teacher reports of parent responsibilities. Lower scale scores near 1 indicated poorest attitudes and higher scale scores near 4 indicated highest attitudes; for this scale, the mode was 4.0, and the mean was 3.6 with a standard deviation of .46.

Figure 9 provides the distribution of scores for the scale of teachers' views of support for partnerships. The score for this scale was derived from averaging each participant's responses to a group of items measured by 4-point Likert-type response options. As seen in Table 3, the mean for this scale was 3.03 with a standard deviation of .53. These values indicate that the teachers displayed negative perspectives about support for partnerships.

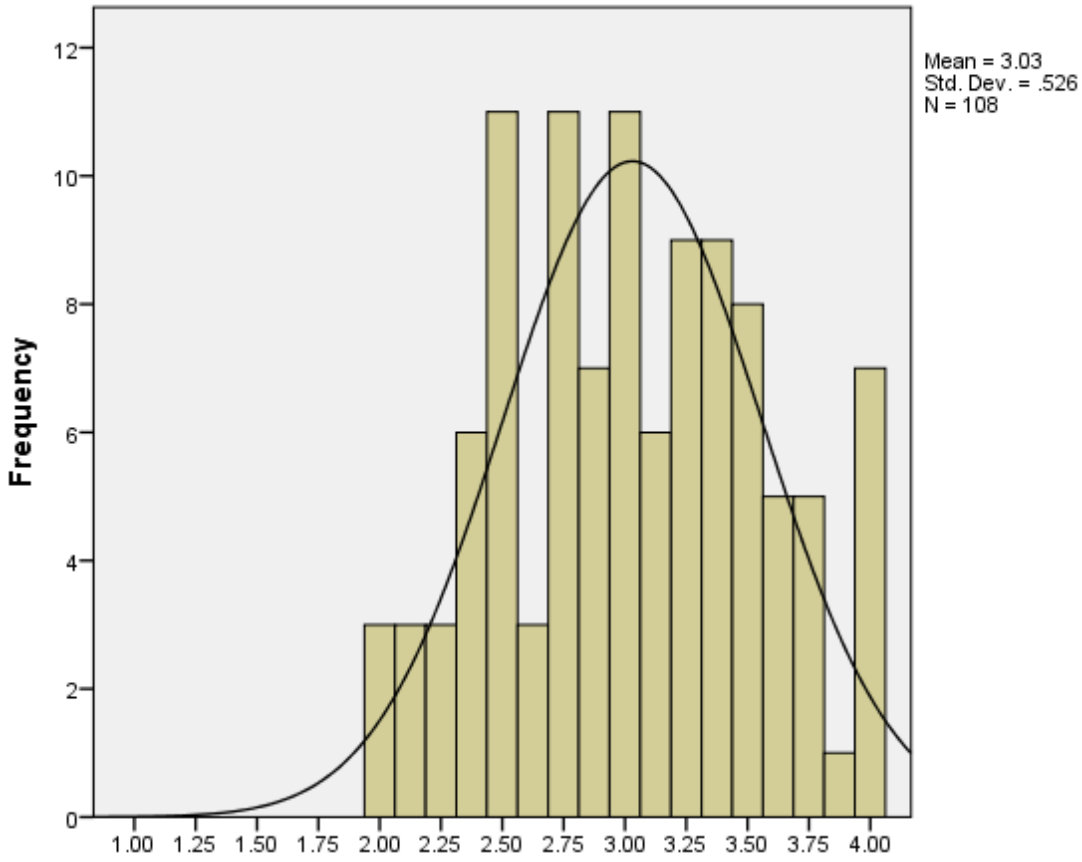

Figure 9. Histogram for the scale measuring teacher views of support for partnerships. Lower scale scores near 1 indicated poorest attitudes and higher scale scores near 4 indicated highest attitudes; for this scale, there were three modes of 2.5, 2.75, and 3.0, and the mean was 3.0 with the standard deviation of .53.

Figure 10 provides the distribution of scores for the scale of teacher attitudes about family and community involvement. The score for this scale was derived from averaging each participant's responses to a group of items measured by 4-point Likert-type response options. The mean for this scale was 2.99 with a standard deviation of .39. These values indicate that the teachers displayed extremely negative attitudes about family and community involvement.

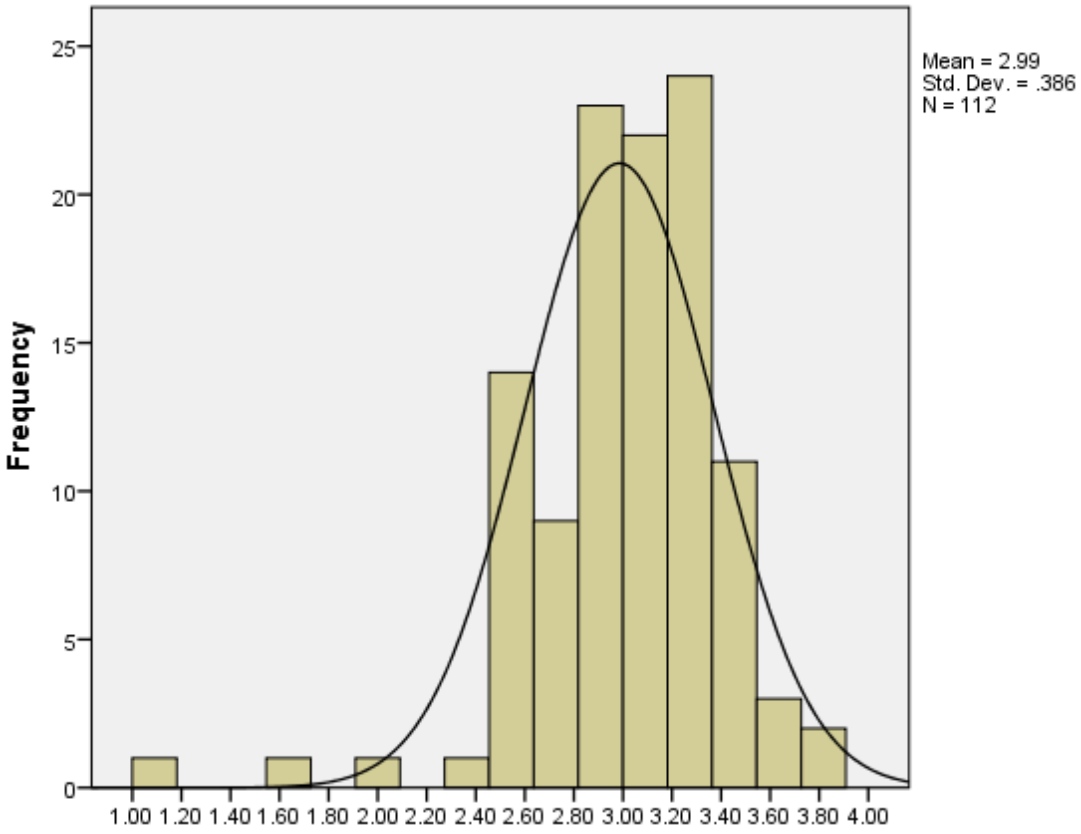

Figure 10. Histogram for the scale measuring teacher attitudes about family and community involvement. Lower scale scores near 1 indicated poorest attitudes and higher scale scores near 4 indicated highest attitudes; for this scale, there were two modes of 2.91 and 3.18, a mean of 3.0, and standard deviation of .39.

Table 4 provides the one-sample *t*-test results for the five educator survey scales. All but one scale demonstrated a statistically significant difference. The scale that did not differ from Epstein's norm group involved the teachers' attitudes about family and community involvement. In both the norm group and the current sample, teachers expressed equally negative attitudes. For the other scales demonstrating statistically significant differences from the norm group, all differences were negative. The current sample displayed less positive attitudes than the norm group for importance of all practices to involve families, $t = -4.426$, $df = 107$, $p < .0001$, the total school program to

involve families, t = -3.619, df = 107, p< .0001, reports of parent responsibilities, t = -5.777, df = 107, p< .0001, and support for partnerships, t = -2.565, df = 107, p = .012.

Table 4

All Teacher Scales' One-sample t Test Results

Teacher Scale	*t*	*df*	*p*	Test Value: Sample *M*	Norm Group *M*	*M* Difference
Importance to Teacher of All Practices to Involve Families	-4.426	108	.000**	3.26	3.46	-0.20
Teacher Reports of Total School Program to Involve Families	-3.619	107	.000**	2.79	2.99	-0.20
Teacher Reports of Parent Responsibilities	-5.777	107	.000**	3.55	3.81	-0.26
Teacher Views of Support for Partnerships	-2.565	107	.012*	3.03	3.16	-0.13
Teacher Attitudes About Family and Community Involvement	-1.498	111	.137	2.99	3.04	-0.05

* Significant at p < .05. **Significant at p< .0001.

Qualitative Results

The purpose of this project study was to explore the existence of the communication gap between educators and parents in Title I elementary school to support student achievement. Interviews and a focus group were the form of data collection implemented for this qualitative research study. I completed all data collection by two methods. First, I interviewed five educators and five parents from the selected Title I elementary schools. Second, I conducted a focus group with four educators and four parents present from the selected Title I elementary schools. The data were used to determine what communication gaps exist between educators and parents as well as possible improvements to promote positive social change.

The case study tradition was used for collecting and analyzing the qualitative data gathered through the 10 interviews and single focus group. Responses were analyzed for themes and categories using the analysis software NVivo 10 (2012). The results captured through the data analysis are presented as a narrative rather than a numeral representation. The data from the Session 1 surveys revealed that an educator and parent partnership is essential. In Session 2, the data from the qualitative session of the study completed the answers to the research questions with those themes explicated below.

Findings from the Interview Data. Through the analysis of interview data, themes emerged regarding parent and educators barriers, relationship between communication and student academic success as well as the communication needs that educator and parent perceive to support student achievement to address the three research questions. The themes for understanding the barriers that contribute to the lack of communication between educators and parents were accessibility to educators, educational trust, and parental educational knowledge. One primary theme emerged regarding communication and student academic success based on the beliefs of parents and educators relates to a collaborative partnership.

The theme for how educators and parents perceive the relationship between communication and student academic success addressed the collaborative partnership aligned with home support and accountability of the school system as well as from the parents. Two themes emerged from the interview data regarding the perception of effective communication between parent and educators. Finally, the themes for understanding the communication needs of educators and parents that support student

academic achievement were continuous communication and learning expectation guides. The narratives for the identified themes appear below. The codes used to identify the participants in the study are Parent 1, Parent 2, Parent 3, Parent 4, Parent 5, Educator 1, Educator 2, Educator 3, Educator 4, and Educator 5.

Theme 1: Lack of accessibility. The term accessibility refers to educators being available to communicate with parents during various times of the day. Parents 1, 2, 3, and 4 referred to not having accessibility to educators at various times. Parent 1 explained it was important for teachers to be accessible early in the morning when she arrived with her child to have face-to-face communication and provide them with vital information. Parent 2 referred to parents having an attitude when it comes to communicating with educators concerning their children. According to this parent, quite often, when meeting were scheduled, parents became defensive. Therefore, educators tended to avoid these situations a result which limited their accessibility. Additionally, Parent 3 emphasized the importance of communication between teachers and parents before a conference was called by the teacher:

> I don't think parents have easy access to talk to the teachers. When designated times such as planning periods or after school are overwhelmed with other duties or meetings, how are they actually supposed to communicate with parents to let them know what going on specifically with their kid?

Parent 4 shared similar thoughts as Parent 3 about communication's importance as follows:

> I feel like I can talk to my child's teacher any time after school because they are just there in the classroom; however, the reality is they are not available. Definitely finding time to meet with the teacher is an issue because sometimes on their planning period they are attending meetings. Just having that face-to-face communication is needed, so there are times when I find the need to ambush the teacher to get the answers I need to specific questions for my child.

Educators 4, 5, and 6 referred to the lack of accessibility to parents due to the conflicting issues occurring during school that limit their availability and time. Parent 3 and Educator 4 shared how educators are not accessible to collaborate with parents due to overwhelming expectations given by campus administrators and the school district. Due to other responsibilities, today's educators are expected to fulfill by the school or district administrator, they are limited in their ability to meet with parents during their designated planning period or after school. Parent 3 explained that parent and teacher communication is not at the level it should be because parents are not fully aware of what is taught in schools today. Educator 4 elaborated:

> Parents are constantly working so they have no time to actually communicate with the teachers. Letters are sent home with the students; however, it is not a guarantee the parents received it. In addition, parents are too tired to even realize or even care that their children's teachers are trying to communicate with them.

The theme suggests educator accessibility is one of the primary factors that contribute to the existence of a communication gap between educators and parents.

Theme 2: Educational trust. Interviewed participants discussed various barriers they believed have developed between educators and parents. Based on responses from both parents and educators, educational trust was a barrier that has created a communication gap. Educator 2 said it succinctly, "A lack of trust exists with parents with the educational system."

When it comes to understanding what is going on in the schools and what students are being taught, many of the parents were unclear. Quite often parents struggle with past educational experiences or how to support their children at home; therefore, limiting their levels of support for their children even in the primary grades. Educators and parents did not possess a fluid connection enabling them to communicate and understand how to bridge these gaps for children to be successful.

Educator 5 shared that parents distrust the educational system because all they hear about teachers involve complains about testing and comments on other inappropriate issues that teachers should not be discussing. When asked to explain this point further, Educator 5 sat straight up in the chair and replied, "Due to experiences and reports presented in the news, educators have gotten a bad rap, therefore causing parents not to trust the educational system." Educator 5 concluded with a final comment stating, "Not all educators honestly represent the profession and what it represents therefore creating distrust for educators within our society."

Educator 2 explained that parents do not trust the educators into whose hands they have placed their children. Educator 4 said, "Parents' feelings about school staff and administrators make them distrust what the school has to offer their child." Parents do

not feel comfortable due to experiences that have encouraged them to want to stay as far away from the school as possible.

Theme 3: Parent educational knowledge. In the context of this study, parent educational knowledge refers to parents' understanding of how the educational system works to ensure all children receive what they need to be academically successful. Educator 6 explained, "Parents have taken a hands-off approach to school partnership, allowing teachers to be the experts in academic development while they maintain the expertise at raising their child socially, physically, and morally." Educator 1 stated, "Lack of knowledge on the part of parents is a communication barrier." I asked some probing questions of Educator 1 such as why the educator thought parents' lack of educational knowledge steered them away from communicating with educators and whether the educator thought parents wanted to know what is going on or if parents do not care to know. Educator 1 replied to these probes as follows:

> Many of them don't know or they just figure it's the teacher's responsibility and the teacher knows; therefore, they are going to make sure they get it done. Some parents just leave it up to the teacher solely. Therefore, parents just do not ask questions. They do not know how to ask. They do not know what to ask. However, maybe if more training sessions are offered to inform parents, we can provide them with the information they need.

Educator 3 believed "parents are not aware of educational expectations in the classroom, school, state, or federal level." To understand the statement better, I asked Educator 3 this probing question, "Is the entire fault on the parents or are educators not

doing their job when it comes to informing the parents?" Educator 3 paused for a moment before responding then replied, "Parents look at the student's grade; however, they do not necessarily know what skills or concept their child is being taught in the classroom." Educator 4 said, "Parents with language barriers and lack of knowledge exist in the schools because they have not been made aware of the resources that are available." Educator 1 insisted, "Second language learner parents are apprehensive about communication with the teacher, because they feel like they can't speak to a teacher, and many times they are not sure what questions they need to ask, especially if their child is in an general education class." According to these interview results, parental educational knowledge is one of the three primary issues leading to the existence of a communication gap.

Theme 4: Collaborative partnership. Parents 1, 2, 3, and 4 and Educators 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 all referred to communication being necessary for the collaborative partnership that has to exist between parents and educators in order for students to be academically successful. Educator 1 shared the following:

> If the child understands that the parent and teacher are on the same page, students tend to excel at a greater speed. However, if the child even thinks that the teacher and parent are not working together, then they know they do not have to comply with the teacher's directive.

Parent 4 noted, "In an ideal world parents are active partners, and the educators wants them to be involved." Educator 4 also believed when educator and parent communication is effective the child's behavior, attitude, and achievement level changes

for the better: “Behavior affects the student’s academic performance.” Educator 2 stated, “If you are looking for students to possess scholarly achievement, real communication has to occur between educators and parents.” When asked to explain this statement further, Educator 2’s tone of voice raised to a higher level, and the educator stated, “When children understand that their achievement is important, they produce. When parents help to instill this value within the children that their academics are important, it leads to success; then you have it.”

Parent 2 explicitly said, “That parent should know what’s going on. Teachers and parents should be on the same page, whether or not it is positive or negative. If parents and teachers are on the same page, the parent needs to know what going on at all times.” Parent 3 emphasized, “When a student sees parents and teachers working together it tells the child my parent cares, my teacher cares, someone really cares about my education.” Parent 2 was overwhelmed with emotions when making the above statement because the parent wiped tears away from her eyes. Parent 1 explained:

> Parents speaking with their children on a regular basis about the importance of education helps to build collaborative relationship with educators that demonstrate respect. When the child sees their parents respect their teacher, it is letting the child know that both the teacher and parent are on the same page.

Educator 3 explained the educator side of this theme:

> The school needs parents help to children to understand the value of becoming career and college ready. If they want the student to understand it, it helps to

> make it easier for the child to buy into it; therefore you have that accountability piece for both the child and the parent, not just the teacher.

Educator 6 added to the explanation:

> Teacher and parent collaborative communication would reveal that student may not value the long-term goals of education; therefore this hypothetical student may need short-term goals to establish a connection of the importance of education on more of a concrete level.

Parent 1 noted, “Home support is needed from parents, and the teacher does not need to be the only one reinforcing the thirst for knowledge.” As Parent 1 expounded more on this statement, Parent 1’s usage of hand gestures help to emphasize what was said increased, suggesting Parent 1 felt passionate about what was being said:

> Parents and educators modeling a partnership that encourages home support and promotes academic success for children. Students need to see that their parents are involved in their education, and that it is part of their lives because your parents want to be here helping you achieve to the maximum of your success and ensure you get what you need when it comes to your education for the next 16 years.

Educator 5 acknowledged the limitations and extremes, “There are some parents that do provide home support, and there are a few that may tend to go overboard. However, on the most part, the lack of home support comes from all homes’ levels, not just broken homes.” Educator 5 continued to explain that parents play a major role in influencing student achievement, and educators need to get parents on board, but the

support is not available. Educator 2 summarized the theme, “Parents understanding the importance of home support makes it easier for students, and achievement is attainable.”

Theme 5: Continuous communication. All parents and educators stated that effective communication could be observed between educators and parents when a high level of continuous communication happened. Both parents and educators believed they needed to be heard to create a better support system for children. Each participant’s interview response targeted continuous communication. Some desired face-to-face talk, emails, or text-messages, whereas others expected weekly or monthly guides of upcoming learning timelines. Educator 4 stated, “If it is every day, communication should be short-snip explanations of the day’s activities, just as long as the parents are knowledgeable of what going on the classroom.” Parent 2 agreed, “Just being attentive to anything that is going in the classroom should be communicated to parent on a daily basis.” Parent 2 added, “If there are any changes in what’s going on in the classroom, yes, as a parent I should be notified. Positive or negative, all communication should be provided to parents, especially if it is connected to disciplinary action.”

Parent 3 discussed communication as “the ability to communicate openly with the children’s teacher through phone calls, emails, and text-messaging; however in person is the best way because you are able to see the facial expression of the person you are communicating with.” Parent 3 added the following details:

> When parents and educators meet face-to-face based on their reactions to the way they’re talking to them denotes if you have their support, or if they are even

> paying any attention to the current conversation; therefore I always feel like in-person is the best way to communicate.

Educator 5 shared the need for "open invitations for parents to visit the classroom as another form of continue communication." Educator 5 explained this parent invitation plan as allowing parents to come and visit the classroom whenever they want so that an open line of communication is maintained with the teacher. This plan enables the parent to know what is taught, how it is taught, and other specific academic activities that occur in the classroom.

Theme 6: Guides and blueprints for learning expectations. Learning expectation guides offer outlines that communicate the upcoming learning goals and activities that will occur in the class. Several of the participants' perceptions of effective communication were directed to receiving information. Parent 1 and Parent 4 expressed the importance of being informed ahead of time of what their children were expected to do or learn. Both parents believed "a learning guide or timeline" was necessary to receive so they could know of "upcoming learning expectations" in advance. Parent 1 noted the following:

> I definitely believe that parent's investment is crucial in their child development. If I am not aware of what he needs help with, I'm not able to give home support. Therefore some form of timeline is needed in order for me to help.

Educator 3, 4, and 5 agreed that learning expectation guidelines offer a clear form of communication to parents. Educator 4 noted that "providing parents with learning expectations has to be highly supported by campus administrators. Therefore encouraging

them to maintain continuous communication with parents about school issues through the usage of the website or a campus newsletter" should happen. Educator 5 discussed one method:

> The green sheet is a method utilized to communicate with parent to address everything academically and socially. This form of communication document is what goes home to explain to parents what is taking place in class for the week. It is sent home daily for the parent's signature and expected to be returned to the school daily.

Educator 3 stated that teachers are "always letting the parents know what's going on in the classroom as well as making themselves available is their way of demonstrating continuous communication." When asked to expound on that statement, Educator 3 added, "monthly surveys [could] determine how well they understand the homework assignments or how their student is doing in the classroom." I asked Educator 3, "What if the parent does not respond?" Educator 3 replied, "You cannot make parents respond; however, it will show in the student's work, and you will have documentation that you did try to do your part to communicate with the parent."

Findings from the focus group. The focus group session was audio-recorded and transcribed by a stenographer. The focus group consisted of parents and educators from the five Title I elementary schools participating in the study who previously completed the electronic parent and educator surveys. Participants who demonstrated a willingness to participate in a focus group by responding to the appropriate questions were invited to meet on the specific date and time they had selected as the availability date. The

participants were eager to participate, and none of them demonstrated any form of reluctance to take part in the focus group.

The discussion of the data gathered is presented according to alignment to the research questions. Participants were identified as Educator A, Educator B, Educator C, and Educator D and Parent A, Parent B, Parent C, and Parent D. The focus group participants were different from the educators and parents who participated in the interview session of the study.

Previously established questions by the researcher provided the agenda for the discussion for the entire focus group. The focus group's discussions centered on parent and educator communication expectations in relation to the academic success of learners in alignment with the third research question. The first two questions asked during the focus group were used to guide the discussion between parents and educators.

Parents were presented with the first question: "As parents what type of communication are you expecting to receive from the school?" Parent A replied, "As a parent, I want to hear from the school to be knowledgeable of my child's overall educational foundation: behavior, academic progress, and weaknesses." Parent A continued to explain that this knowledge offers the opportunity to work with the child at home to make improvements. Parent B agreed with Parent A concerning the importance of being knowledgeable of the child's overall academic foundation. Parent A commented that "the desire to work with the child is vital in the home; therefore, educators please communicate." In addition, Parent D agreed with Parent A concerning the importance of communication because Parent D's child had been identified as a special needs learner.

Parent D said, “Daily communication is essential to ensure appropriate consequences are implemented in a timely manner.” Parent B shared:

> Knowing about different activities that are going at the school when it has to do with the kid or may affect the kid. Just know about general issues such as homework for the day or week, tutoring availability, progress based learning level, or if the child needs more help.

The second focus group question was directed toward the educators: “As educators what type of communication are you expecting to receive from the school?” Educator A stated, “As educators we’re expecting supportive and collaborative communication, because we are molding the whole child which supports the child’s learning.” Educator D replied, “I think the information that I’m expecting from parents is relevant information that is going to affect the student’s learning.” Providing an example of relevant information, Educator D shared the following:

> If a child is taking any type of medication or has any learning disability, it is vital to make the educator aware of the situation to avoid the guess and check process. Completing specific paperwork and later finding out some issues had been dealt with previously; however as the parent, I choose not to give the child the medication.

Educator B added to Educator D’s statement by saying, “Share things with the school that may happen that may affect the child at school.” Educator B’s examples of what to share included “family situations, authorized individuals approved to pick up the child, sudden illness that may cause the child to be in the hospital.” Educator B pointed

out “here are things that the school can provide; however, if we don’t know, then we can’t assist.”

The next focus group question asked the following: “As partners working in the best interest of students, how can communication be improved?” Many of the group’s hands were raised, and several participants attempted to speak at the same time. All of the participants agreed to allow Parent D to speak first. Parent D began the discussion by saying, “Don’t be judgmental” in the effort to express the importance of accepting communicated information as well as to state the facts without assuming what happened in a given situation. Parent D added, “Parents and educators need to understand that they’re serving the same purpose when it comes to children [by] making decisions for the child’s best interest.” Educator C agreed with Parent D and added, “It’s about understanding.” Continuing to explain understanding, Educator C stated:

> As educators we need to understand the role of the parent and how it changes, especially in Title I homes. To understand the struggles in the home as a parent as educators we have to be the one, most the time the one, that’s being very professional. Sometimes parents don’t understand, and they are coming into the learning environment with a lot on their shoulders, and we explain to them that we are making decisions that are in the best interest of the child academically as well as mentally and socially. Therefore, as educators, we have to understand what parents in Title I homes are dealing with. Also, we have to understand that our role is not just to educate their child but to educate everyone in the classroom and remain sensitive to the roles of each other.

Educator C elaborated that “it is very important that we change with the times and understand that we have to meet parents where they are.” Educator C provided the following example:

> If parents are communicating through Facebook, we have to be on Facebook. If parents are not coming into the school, we have to go out in the community and see the parent and keep them secure, letting them know that school is not a threatening place for them or their child.

Educator C received nonverbal responses from other educators in the group that demonstrated they didn’t totally agree with this opinion about going into the community. Educator A expressed, “I will tell you that I’m not bold enough to go into the homes, but I will invite them into an area of learning and maybe some community place to try and help shape and communicate with them.” Educator B shook his head from side-to-side as a signal of disagreeing with connecting with parents through Facebook. Educator A agreed with Parent D’s statement for understanding parents; however, Educator A said support and being true to one another were important as follows:

> Educators and parents being true to each other and avoid playing the blame game help the child to see the partnership. When teachers are expressing a concern related to that child, it is vital for the Title I parent not to become defensive because we are not here to do a blame game, but we are here to resolve concerns with the child, be it academic or behavioral. My job is to teach the child; so I’m not trying to change a parent. I’m trying to have a parent to change the child. Educators and parents must come to a happy medium to avoid setting the child up

> for failure. Encourage one another to obtain a clear understanding creates a dynamic where we can support each other to ensure the child is successful.

Parent C strongly disagreed with Educator A's statement about only teaching the child and not changing the parent. Parent countered:

> Sometimes the school does have to teach the parent, because some parents don't know. There are some situations when you may have a young parent that had a baby when they were 12 or 14 years old; this parent has to be taught how to be a parent.

Educator A agreed "in that case you do need to teach the parent." Parent D pointed out another example of parents needing to be taught:

> With some of the changing schematics of the way things were taught, math, for instance, the way they are taught now, not the way we were taught. Therefore, the school is going to have to teach the parents the strategies that they are teaching the students.

Educator A responded, after taking a moment to reflect on a previous comment concerning teaching parents, as follows:

> I think you misunderstood my verbiage. I'm not talking about not teaching parents the academic piece, because my school offers parent workshops. I understand the parent piece has to be done; yes, you do have to teach the parents how the skills change.

Educator D provided a shift in perspective:

> We [must] have an understanding that the parents have to be taught, the way communication can be improved is by putting the walls down. Parents and educators bring both walls down, realizing we are on the same team, wanting the best for the student.

Educator B supported Educator D's statement concerning the agreement of educators and parents being on the same team when it comes to supporting students to ensure their success. Educator B asked, "What does wanting the same thing for student looks like?" Educator B also shared this perspective:

> You may think it looks like something else when, in reality, this is what it really should be. Sometimes when we talk to parents in a sense, we are educating them, because sometimes they don't know what we know in terms of what the education is or what the numbers means. Therefore, we have to explain things to them without being condescending, but explaining it with clarity. Again, as I stated previously we have to be more accepting as to where parents are coming from and what they know. We have to take under consideration what kind of past experiences they may have had in various stops along the way, and you have to do some work to clean up issues that occur somewhere else or they may come to you expecting something that they got somewhere else.

When it comes to improving communication, Parent B shared, "Respect for the educator as an educator as well as educators showing respect to parents is a definite way to offer improvements." Parent B supported Educator B's statement concerning bad

experiences that parents might have encountered with educators meeting with them to support them. In addition, Parent B explained, “Parents knowing that they are going to respect the educator and the educator is going to offer the same respect denotes the primary factors of everyone working in the best interest of the child.” Parent B reiterated and summed up the major thing from the focus group:

> Improving communication goes back to determine parents’ preferences for communication. Some parents prefer face-to-face communication, where as other parents might be open to email or text because they have two jobs or just a different lifestyle. Practicing respect from the beginning starts an effective method of communication between parents and educators.

Outcome

During the data collection session of this case study, I applied Epstein’s (1997) parent-educator framework in which communication is the primary focus for creating a bridge that connects educators with parents to develop a partnership that supports student achievement. Epstein’s five categories for communication included the following: (a) parenting, (b) volunteering, (c) decision making, (d) home learning, and (e) collaborating with the community (Keyes, 2002; Schumacher, 2007). Based on Epstein’s typology, communication is the linkage that supports the existence of a communication gap between educators and parents (Schumacher, 2007).

In this study, parents and educators reported their perspectives about communication and identified the barriers to and gaps in communication. Surveys, face-to-face interviews, and a focus group primarily focused on communication to reveal both

parents' and educators' positive and negative perspectives about educator-parent communication. The focus group participants discussed the positive factors of communication as well as solutions for bridging the communication gap and improving the parent-educator relationship to benefit student academic growth and development. Additionally, the findings indicated parents' and educators' mutual agreement about the importance of supporting student learning in Title I elementary schools.

The results corroborated Epstein's (1997) theory. Effective communication between parents and educators is necessary to ensure all learners attain academic success. According to the data gathered in this study, parents and educators agreed that communication benefits student learning. Data from the interviews and focus group suggested both educators and parents accepted the partnership as necessary and wanted to implement an effective and continuous communication plan to support each child's best interests. Participants recognized the importance of demonstrating respect as a priority to help learners understand that the educators and parents have the same goals for promoting academic success.

Based on the data retrieved from the parent and educator surveys the findings reveal the participant's contrasting perspectives about school programs. The 42 parent participants revealed extremely good attitudes about all school programs. The 119 educators' significantly exhibited pessimistic attitudes about total school program that involved families. Equally important educators also revealed negative attitudes about how important it is to involve families in all practices which promote parental involvement. Unlike the data from the educators' survey, the interview and focus group

participants strongly supported the need to communicate with parents at all times and for specific situations. Educators wanted to keep parents involved; however, the critical conflict arose when workshops or training events offered to present educational information and encourage family involvement yield a limited number of parents attending encourages family involvement.

The educator survey data demonstrated their negative perspectives about supportive parental partnerships. Parents and educators acknowledged that putting down their defensive walls to avoid focusing on past experiences should be the norm by which the educational environment functions. Parents admitted to expecting all educators to be the same and to holding all educators to the same standards as educators who role modeled their ideal learning atmospheres. For this reason both educators and parents acknowledged they wanted to be heard during any educator-parent conversation involving sharing children's classroom behavior and academic achievement information.

Of equal importance, educators admitted to judging all parents as the same without taking into consideration any other factors that influence home environments. In fact, educators admitted to casting judgment on parents as it related to parents' educational background and knowledge. Educators assumed parents' lack of education prevented them from providing assistance to their children. Educators mentioned the importance of understanding parents' roles as well as ever changing regulations that affected Title I schools. Followed by that educators acknowledged that parents had requested educators to use facts so that parents could be more accepting and communication could be effective.

The negative component highlighted by the parent participants during the interviews included lack of educator accessibility. The parents participating in the focus group expressed high interest for receiving information about academic expectations in alignment to state and district mandates. Parents did report observing educators judgments toward them and their children without basis in fact.

Both educators and parents agreed that the need to establish a partnership is preeminent. Primarily, the need existed to develop a stable partnership among parents and educators in order to communicate freely. The participants agreed on the need for using the following methods of communication: text messages, school-wide calling system, emails, phone calls, learning expectation guide for parents, and school or classroom newsletter. Many of the participating educators reported utilizing these different communication methods as well. However, some admitted they could do more to communicate more effectively with parents. In addition, the data from the parent survey revealed high positivity toward the schools' current methods of communicating activities and news.

Even though parents expressed strong support for school communication in the interviews and focus group, the data from the parent survey displayed negative outcomes in other areas. In comparison to the data received from the surveys, parents expressed poor attitudes about their children's schools. In addition, their attitudes were extremely negative toward parent involvement in school activities as well as regarding their children learning at home. The responses to the survey were consistent with the interview data. In the interviews, parents expressed having distrust in the educational system due to

experiencing educators' inappropriate behaviors toward them as well as other negative influences in the educational environment.

The negative attitudes captured from the parent survey mirrored the educators' negative attitudes about family and community involvement. Both the parents and educators results aligned on the negative spectrum regarding parent involvement within the community and home. This alignment suggests a foundation for the communication gap that currently exists between educators and parents.

To summarize the triangulation and synthesis of all sources of data, educators and parents agreed in some areas of parent-educator communication where as they diverged tremendously in other areas of parent-educator communication. Parents' and educators' perspectives were primarily focused on operating effectively and in the best interests of the children to ensure academic success. However, both educators and parents possessed personal as well as professional perspectives about how communication should be carried out in the learning environment. The findings from the interviews and focus group support the complexity of barriers that contribute to the development of communication gaps in Title I elementary schools between educators and parents found in the literature.

Conclusion

This section explained the research methodology used for this study. Mixed methods of data collection were used to understand the communication gap between educators and parents and identify influential themes affecting learners' outcomes in the Title I elementary schools. The surveys offered breadth and the interviews, alongside the focus group, offered depth of understanding about the problem. Overall, the findings

highlighted the need for developing and implementing programs to build positive partnerships between parents and educators in order to eliminate and bridge the communication gaps between educators and parents in Title I elementary schools.

The results of this mixed methods case study promote a supportive partnership between parents and educators in order to improve students' academic achievement. Educators' negative attitudes that were exhibited in the survey demonstrated high levels of frustration toward parent and community involvement in the Title I schools. The educators provided numerous forms of communication and opportunities for parents. However, parents failed to follow-up with the schools to address positive or negative concerns.

The six themes that emerged from the numerous interviews and the focus group were lack of accessibility, educational trust, parent educational knowledge, collaborative partnership, continuous communication, and a guide or blue print for learning expectations. It is evident that both parents and educators desire genuine and sincere communication that supports student achievement, but negative past experiences presented barriers that needed to be overcome. Additionally, educators had designed and offered parent workshops or training opportunities in the effort to demonstrate the multiple strategies they utilized in classrooms to stimulate learning. Likewise, in the training sessions, educators presented grade level targeted state mandates to ensure parents were aware of regulatory changes that influenced the learning environment as well as students' academic achievement.

Conversely, the 42 parental participants unanimously exhibited frustration with

the lack of accessibility between educators and parents based on perceptions of judgmental behavior. While the schools methods of communication were appreciated and received positively by parents, obtaining face-to-face individualized interaction with educators was what these parents desired as part of staying abreast of their students' academic successes or struggles. Both educators and parents expressed the need to develop stronger positive communication through a partnership that would work in the best interests of the students.

Even though both parents and educators desired an effective communication partnership to ensure schools serve the best interests of the children, both educators and parents possessed different perspectives of communication. The development of a communication partnership would occur through a three-session educator-parent cohort professional development training that would build communication and relationships among the educators and parents of the studied schools. The educator-parent communication partnership's primary goal was to articulate effective and respectful communication for promoting social change and enhancing the learning environment in support of student achievement.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

I conducted a mixed method project study in one large Texas urban school district by collecting data from five of its Title I elementary schools. This study was conducted to examine the communication gaps between educators and parents in Title I elementary schools. Surveys, interviews, and a focus group were the data collection tools used to gather data for this study. The genre selected for the culmination of this project study is professional development training. Educators engaged in collaborative professional development have the opportunity to explore new theories and new knowledge associated with educational trends. As educators receive new knowledge, they are expected to distribute all information to stakeholders and ensure improvements are directed toward successful educational trends (Epstein & Salinas, 1993). Parent training can be used in conjunction with educator professional development to create a partnership that positively influences communication and promotes high academic outcomes for children.

The purpose of this section is to examine literature from which I derived the parent-educator professional development training. I choose and designed this parent-educator training program to be implemented in Title I elementary schools and to establish a communication partnership between parents and educators that could be used to promote academic success for learners. The training program offers educators and parents with researched-based practices to build a base for effective collaboration within successful school partnerships (Appendix A).

Characteristics associated with the other project genres, such as evaluation studies, curriculum planning, and policy, are not as beneficial to the issue of parent-school communication. Communication building through professional development training requires immediate attention at the Title I schools in order to benefit these schools' children. Evaluation studies involve data collection during multiple stages of an intervention or curriculum deployment and tend to be used post intervention or post implementation as part of studying the effectiveness of ongoing or completed projects (United Nations on Drugs and Crime, 2015). Curriculum planning involves developing a sequence of courses and projects with specific learning and course objectives to be used through the instructional process (Oliver, 1977). The policy related genre involves developing a policy that can be agreed upon and implemented by stakeholders and whose effectiveness can be captured by some type of summation study (United Nations on Drugs and Crime, 2015). Each of these other genre types was considered, but none aligned with the goals affiliated with this project study of Title I elementary schools or with the need for social change to be produced more immediately.

The rationale for the implementation of the parent-educator training program involves presenting and collaborating best practices that offer the opportunity to eliminate existing communication gaps between schools' stakeholders as quickly as possible. The review of literature focuses on research and theoretical connections to support communication between educators and parents through professional lead training sessions. In addition, I discuss the project's implementation by addressing resources, responsibilities, and timetables. One of the goals of the project study was to generate the

opportunity for a partnership through the parent-educator training program and for genuine communication between stakeholders to promote cohesive decision making for the best interests of all learners at the Title I elementary schools. Section 3 concludes with an evaluation of this project study and a discussion of the implications for promoting positive social change.

Description and Goals

The proposed four-session parent-educator training is designed for Title I elementary schools. The study's findings indicated the need for the parent-educator training program to specifically support effective communication and student achievement. The goal of the parent-educator training program is to provide all participants with innovative methods to increase effective communication in Title I elementary schools by affording both educators and parents the opportunity to disclose perceptions and ideas and create an effective communication partnership. The length of the parent-educator training program will be exactly one semester of the school year. The participants will include the district's executive leaders, parents, campus's site-based decision making (SBDM) teams, and campus educators. The parent-educator training program involves using group collaboration methods as the primary form for developing a partnership among the participating educators, community members, and parents.

Rationale

The parent-educator training program enables potential success by decreasing barriers and communication gaps between educators and parents as well as bridging a partnership between stakeholders to support student achievement. The results presented

the perspectives of educators and parents. The demonstrated levels of frustration by participants depicted the existence of a communication gap among the participating Title I elementary schools' stakeholders. Both educators and parents within the urban school district possess their own perceptions about communication at the Title I elementary schools.

Educators seek parental partnerships for educating children. When educators provide students with individualized instruction, communication with parents is needed to ensure specific learning concerns can be addressed at home and parents are able to accommodate theirs students' academic development. Parents' perceptions of communication vary depending on the parents' levels of involvement as well as other factors that influence parental experiences with the educational system. Educator-parent and parent-educator communication directions are important and required to support student achievement successfully.

The specific purpose for designing the parent-educator training program is to employ innovative ideas associated with improving communication while subsequently developing a productive partnerships between educators and parents to support student achievement in Title I elementary schools. Parent training and educator professional development are used to target issues including communicating effectively about which district, educator, and parent stakeholders want to improve. Supportive partnerships can be used to ensure everyone's perspectives are heard, valued and to provide all participants with constructive knowledge to support social change within the learning environment.

Review of the Literature

The focus of this literature review is on the research-based best practices of incorporating a training program that promotes a communication partnership between educators and parents. Boolean searches were used in the Walden University Online Library using the following databases: ProQuest, EBSCOHost, Sage, and ERIC. The search terms included *communication training, parental-educational partnerships, Title I elementary schools, parent-educator training, communication improvement plan, educational workshops for parents, professional development for educators, cultural competency, training*, and *learning community partnerships*. I reviewed 25 peer-reviewed articles that addressed professional development studies involving parents and educators. However, to gain total saturation I analyzed and reviewed literature until I discovered information repeated. This literature review contains the literature about the genre of professional development and training that promotes school partnerships among educators and parents and addresses evaluations of the characteristics of such training programs.

Partnership Training

Family-professional educator partnerships in schools in the United States are seen as beneficial (Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2011; Coppell & Bredekamp, 2009; Dunst & Dempsey, 2007). Somunenu, Tossavainen, and Turunem (2011) discussed home-school collaboration training from the perspective of all stakeholders as contributing to students' educational foundation. In addition, Somunenu et al. communicated the essential structure and components necessary for promoting students' academic success and

development. Mandel (2008) explained that when parents and educators work together, they use unique methods to build, and sustain positive relationships. Adam, Womack, Shatzer, and Caldarella (2010) concluded that educators were more able to teach learning goals successfully when parents are active agents. Parent-teacher partnerships allow parents and educators to set goals for students together and to develop strong relationships that support student learning (Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2011). In fact, educators and parents collaborating in partnership training signifies teamwork, creates interaction situations, and encourages continuous communication (George & Mensah, 2010). Educator-parent partnership training in elementary schools presents opportunities for all stakeholders to respect and gain skills for working cohesively toward meeting the best interests of all learners (Shim, 2011).

An effective partnership offers cohesive communication and training for educators and parents about their perceptions of working together within the learning environment. Additionally, educator-parent partnerships enable educators to expand their appreciation of different cultures and economic circumstances when teaming up with parents to promote the success of all students (Epstein, 2011; Hong, 2011; Jeynes, 2011; McKenna & Millen, 2013). Partnership training with educators and parents involves teaching all participants how to work collaboratively and to address the critical concerns associated with communicating academic and social issues in order to increase learning (Jeynes, 2011). Training offers educators needed information to confront personal biases and to attain sensitivity toward parents within the educator-parent relationship as it relates to diverse classroom settings (Epstein, 2011). Open discussion between parents and

educators yields genuine conversation and promotes positive outcomes for these types of partnerships (Florian, 2012; Laughter & Adams, 2012). Many teachers speak of acceptance of cultural backgrounds in the learning environment; however, students as well as parents must see and hear cultural acceptance in practice to believe it exists (Marx & Moss, 2011).

Schools must emphasize the importance of teacher and parent training programs in order to successfully communicate the value of effective collaboration in encouraging ELL students' whole development (Shim, 2011). As in the case of the findings of the project study, continuously overlooking the communication needs of ELL parents negatively influences the structure and power asymmetry of parent-teacher relationships and hinders effective collaboration (Shim, 2011). Educators possess the responsibility for educating students from various backgrounds and experiences. This reality can lead to positive factors that build parent-teacher partnerships, and specifically, can enable parents and educators to collectively focus their communication improvement on the needs of each child as each partner supports students' increases in academic achievement (Stetson, Stetson, Sinclair, & Nix, 2012). For example, Yull, Blitz, Thompson, and Murray (2014) offered training for a family-school partnership that involved families of color. Yull et al.'s educator-parent partnership intervention training sessions addressed topics about racial history, sociocultural dynamics, and stakeholder partnerships known to impact academic achievement and revealed critical concerns to facilitate the successful implementation of strategically planned educator-parent collaboration.

The most significant application of ecological theory in educational settings is probably the development of parental-educator communication and emotional support in urban schools. Ecological theory suggests focusing on home-school relationships is important (Somunenu et al., 2011). Parents and educators collaborate within the context of classroom best practices. Interventions targeting emotional and cultural support work to meet the needs of stakeholders to ensure the full implementation of communication that facilitates academic success for all learners (McCormick, Cappella, O'Conner, & McClowry, 2013). Educator-parent training interventions may lead to successful outcomes such as effective communication and improved academic success among students in addition to greater cohesion in school-home relationships. Such outcomes are addressed in the next section.

Intervention Program Evaluation

Bartels and Eskow (2010) used parental-professional sessions to demonstrate the importance of families and school staff working together to process beliefs and improve communication in their relationships. In addition, Bartels and Eskow advocated partnership development as requiring both listening and action taking in order to yield realistic change in relationships between parents and educators. Similarly, Sornunenu, Tossavainen, and Turumen (2011) recommended parents, teachers, and other school personnel offer rewards and enrichment opportunities to students. Sornunenu et al. suggested that schools emphasize parental responsibility, provide environments that welcome students' families, offer pre-service training to teachers about collaborating

with parents at the beginning of the school year, and invite parents to training opportunities about collaborating with teachers.

Sormunen et al. (2011) communicated that parents agree that collaboration between home and school is very important but noted school personnel are responsible for building collaboration using diversified methods of communication. Parents also believe teachers are critical to building collaboration between home and school (Sormunen et al., 2011). Simply putting parents and educators together in the same room does not result in a positive communication partnership. Setting educators and parents up to spend time together can either promote or distract from effective interactions and the ability to inject meaning into parent-teacher conferences to the benefit of students (Cheatham et al., 2011).

Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, and De Pedro (2011) recognized the problems with simply forcing teachers and parents to talk without structured training and developed a collaboration program using Epstein's family involvement model. The program specifically highlights the parent voice and presence in charter schools and incorporates strategic communication for escalating educators and parents' mutual trust to support decision-making practices and home-school partnerships. Smith et al. sought to build and develop home-school communication and relationships through training. They recognized the challenges to the goal-setting role of the partnership come from pupils', parents', and educators' viewpoints. Therefore, training should include opportunities to for all stakeholders to develop an in-depth understanding of each other's priorities in order to establish strong demonstrations of communication that can be connected to

students' academic success (Cheatham et al., 2011; Petrakos & Lehrer, 2011; Sormunen et al., 2011).

Lareau and Munoz (2012) acknowledged the establishment of educator-parent programs focused on training parents about the role of the school system and educators' responsibilities. In addition, programs jointly connecting a more sophisticated conception of parental engagement in schools tend to emphasize respect toward administrators and strong learning community partnerships (Lareau et al., 2012; Selwyn, Banaji, Hadjithoma-Garstka, & Clark, 2011). McKenna et al. (2013) revealed home-school-community partnership training provides educators with expectations from stakeholders and an understanding about parental perspectives that tend to differ from educators' perspectives. In addition, home-school-community partnership training offers knowledge about relationships between parents, educators, and administrators that promotes the importance of respect between all parties and encourages each party to put aside negative assumptions and preconceptions in order to collaborate on supporting all students' academic success (McKenna et al., 2013). Therefore, to ensure the program yields maximum benefits, educators need effective professional development and parents require training for collaborating about what works or not and developing new suggestions that support total implementation.

Professional Development

In order to change parent and educator communication, parents and educators need to train together to collaboratively construct and implement a program that supports effective communication. Based on the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in

Education (2014), all stakeholders increase academically if learning is embraced through an educational and family connection. Desimone (2011) and Liu and Zhang (2014) argued that professional development is a key component to effective change in schools. Islas (2010) concluded the implementation of professional development offers an effective resource for evaluating home-school relationships and the influence these relationships have on the academic success of learners. Islas argued that implementation requires team building activities, discussions, and data reviews. In addition, parents and educators need to share responsibilities when designing a plan of action and for promoting team formation during professional development (Islas, 2010). Additionally, professional development that yields the desired modifications within educator's practices includes certain fundamental features (Desimone, 2011; Liu & Zhang, 2014). Klieger and Yakobovitch (2012) acknowledged the importance of teachers learning through inquiry into their practices, decision-making, and conversations.

Professional development sessions led by campus educators offer opportunities for synthesizing and integrating the colossal amount of resources relating to best practices (Pella, 2011). Educators are likely to implement action plans when they have autonomy in constructing and evaluating the professional development that demonstrates the best usage of the consequent plan (Smolin & Lawless, 2011). Likewise, when educators play an active role in designing program, they build a comfort zone that is critical to success during implementation (Pyle, Wade-Woolley, & Hutchinson, 2011).

According to Gonzales and Lambert (2014), teaching and learning influences changes to teaching practices that are better addressed when educators have an

opportunity to collaborate. Sparks (2011) and Smith (2012) elaborated on the positive effects of academic performance that follow from educators and parents attending professional development, because they gain awareness about academic engagement, goal setting, communication, and environment factors. Evans (2013) explained that professional development yields improvements in students' academic, social, and emotional development because of educators and parent forging partnerships that promote effective communication.

To ensure the effectiveness of professional development, essential components involving shared decision-making, goal-setting responsibilities, and positive collaboration create a sense of empowerment among educators and parents who operated in partnership with each other (Burke & Hodapp, 2014). However, without shared decision-making, goal-setting responsibilities, and positive collaboration, silence from both educators and parents ensues instead and increases lack of cooperation between parents and educators (Burke & Hodapp, 2014; Costley 2013). Governmental education authorities regularly require new programs to be implemented successfully, but often, teachers are not properly trained to implement the entire plan, causing the programs to fail (Clampit, Hollifield, & Nichols, 2004; Costley, 2013). Equally important, school districts need to use follow-up with evaluations to determine if a program has been effectively implemented and if the practices taught during professional development training reflect a productive change. Strieker, Logan, and Kuhel (2012) reported gaps in the implementation of programs occur when insufficient professional development training happens. Poorly implemented professional development content lacks specific

information, inhibits educators' understanding of the information and highlights the challenge of training ineffectiveness during the action taking stage. Al-Behaisi (2011) called for any type of training to be in alignment with a school's common vision, to support the relevance of an academic program, and to promote consensus within the parent-educator partnership.

Implementation of the Parent-Educator Relationship Improvement Plan

The parent-educator training program is planned to occur during the preplanning period prior to the school year start. This period occurs during the third week of August each year. The participants include the campus SBDM team. Due to other training events occurring during this week of August, I requested that this proposal be placed on the SBDM agenda for August.

The parent-educator training program is a semester long project implemented through a four-session process that includes an implementation component during the third session. After the educator-parent collaboration groups develop ideas to incorporate into the improvement plan, the expectations for the total campus implementation are presented. Then, the implementation occurs during a month long experience. Followed by the parent-educator training program implementation period, aspects of the plan's execution are evaluated in preparation for presenting the overall outcome to the campus SBDM team. Based on the information gained from the implementation period and the recommendations offered from all project participants, components of the plan are modified before further implementation efforts.

Potential Resources and Existing Support

The resources and support for this project include the school district's executive team and Title I elementary school campuses' SBDM teams, educators, and parents. Information is presented during Session 1 to participants through the effective communication of a PowerPoint presentation, group activities, and discussions. Participants attend all four sessions of the parent-educator training program. Each participant attends all the required sessions and works in cooperative groups. Each group's members are expected to cater to one another's personal schedules and maintain flexibility as members' other obligations may lead to conflicts. The resources needed include availability of several classrooms one night per month over 3 months, Epstein's parent involvement framework, paper, pens, chart paper, markers, Internet accessibility, LCD projector, and at least one computer per room.

Potential Barriers

To accomplish all four parent-educator training program sessions, I need the district-wide school year calendar. The first potential barrier for this project includes scheduling the meeting time for each session to occur without interfering with any other district activities, scheduled holidays, instructional training sessions for educators, as well as parents' personal circumstances and schedules. Second, if both educators and parents do not deem the training and professional development sessions to be important or beneficial to improving communication and supporting student achievement, they may not put forth any effort to participate. All participants need to buy into the overall goal of the project as an opportunity for being valued and able to influence social change. Third,

valid attendance of the participants during three of the four sessions is necessary and lack of attendance may prohibit success. Fourth, possible differences among participants could discourage collaboration in the group sessions and inhibit the parent-educator training program's success.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The parent-educator training program's implementation requires a full semester. A full semester within the public school system ranges from 14 to 20 weeks, depending on breaks, vacations, and unexpected situations such as inclement weather days that may occur within that time span. During Session 1, the project study results and the parent-educator training program rationale are presented to the SDBM team's parents, educators, and community partners. Also, I explain the parent-educator training program project as well as articulate information regarding the remaining three sessions. Session 1 involves structuring the educator and parent groups to convey expectations for the upcoming sessions.

In Session 2, four collaboration groups composed of educators and parents meet with each other. The collaboration groups meet simultaneously over a 3-hour period. Educator and parent participants discuss the primary barriers to good communication between them as well as how the barriers influencing student achievement. Session 3 operates in two parts. The first step of Session 3 involves all the educator and parent groups convening with their assigned groups to discuss the primary topics generated during Session 2. At this time, the participants discuss communication barriers and generate innovative factors to improve communication. The second part of Session 3

involves the groups' presenting their ideas. The parent-educator training program is constructed to cultivate extended communication awareness and articulate an educator and parent partnership plan to bridge the communication gap between educators and parents in Title I elementary school to support student achievement. Between Sessions 3 and 4, the campuses' the parent-educator training programs are implemented on the Title I elementary school campuses for 1 month. Table 5 provides an overview of the professional development training.

During the execution of the month-long parent-educator training program, information is captured and data about effectiveness are collected. The results are presented to all the participants who contributed to the parent-educator training program at the end of the SBDM team meeting. Finally, Session 4 of the parent-educator training program project involves making the final presentation about the month long implemented process in a 2-hour session with district executives, campus educators, parents, and the campuses' SBDM teams. At the conclusion of the presentation, the campus SBDM team will determine if the parent-educator training program needs modification or may continue to be implemented on the Title I campuses in its current forms.

Table 5
Parent-Educator Professional Training Time Table

Session	Week	Participants	Event/Activity
1	1	Administrators SBDM Committee Community Partners Educators Parents	1. Discuss and share project study results based on collected data 2. Explain the parent-educator professional development training program 3. Structure the parent and educator groups with conveyed expectations for upcoming events
2	2-4	Collaborative Parent & Educator Groups	1. Discuss the primary barriers to good communication 2. How the barriers influencing student achievement
3 Part 1	5-6	Parent & Educator Groups	1. Groups discuss the primary topics generated during Session 2
3 Part 2	7	Parent & Educator Groups	1. Presentation of ideas/plan of action
Plan Implementation	8-16	Title 1 School Administrators Educators Parents	1. Implementation of constructed communication plan designed from parent-educator professional development training program
4	17-18	Administrators SBDM Committee Community Partners Educators Parents	1. Recap of project study 2. Debriefing of the parent-educator professional development training program 3. Evaluation

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

The students attending the Title I elementary schools participating in the parent-educator training program project have no role or responsibility in the process of implementation. The school district's executives, parents, campus educators, and the campuses' SBDM teams are encouraged to attend as many of the four scheduled sessions as possible. Participants are encouraged to work in cooperative groups to generate innovative ideas and promote effective communication on the Title I elementary campuses. During Session 3, participants share ideas developed during Sessions1 and 2 to

the whole group as part of developing the parent-educator training program that is integrated into the campus site-based decision-making parent involvement plan for one month. Throughout the various sessions of the project, all participants are expected to respect one another and practice active listening as they work to achieve the same goal of improving student achievement.

Project Evaluation

The project evaluation will take place at the end of Session 4 of the parent-educator training program process. Each educator and parent in attendance at the session will receive an overview evaluation questionnaire. This type of evaluation allows the participants to return their responses immediately following the implementation of the project. Completion of the questionnaire is optional for educators and parents and their feedback will determine the effectiveness of the project. To protect the privacy of participants, they may remain anonymous by no putting their names on the questionnaire. All educator and parent evaluations are analyzed and a final report is presented to the campuses' SBDM teams via an email sent 2 weeks after the conclusion of Session 4.

This study has demonstrated a collaborative teaching model of implementing effective communication between educators and parents in Title I elementary schools to support student achievement. The participating schools want to maintain continuous communication with parents to ensure a communication partnership that works in the best interest of all learners. The overall goals of the parent-educator training program evaluation involve determining if the semester long the parent-educator training program exposed both educators' and parents' communication perceptions and if both parents and

educators generated and agreed on innovative ideas through the parent-educator training program partnership to support student achievement. Increasing the number of current parents participating and increasing educators' attitudes toward parental involvement could lead to an increase in student achievement and a stable communication partnership between educators and parents.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

The goal for this study was to addresses the need for educators and parents to bridge communication gaps in Title I elementary schools by implementing a communication partnership that supports student achievement. From the information captured from the parent and educator surveys, varying communication perceptions existed among educators and parents. In addition, the perceptions revealed negative communication factors influenced educator-parent relationships.

Unexpected events occur in life and cause various lifestyle experiences to alter what parents have planned for their children. These challenges influence daily living within children's homes and can overflow into their learning environments, necessitating effective communication partnerships between educators and parents. Educators and parents constructively learn how to communicate with each other respect each other's perspectives, and embrace all methods communication supporting student achievement. Therefore, implementing the parent-educator training program enables the opportunity to grow effective educator-parent relationships that benefit students' achievement levels. Social change comes from the themes presented in the interview and focus group data

and the ideas captured during the implementation of the parent-educator training program.

Far-Reaching

On a local level, this project study encourages and empowers educators and parents toward more communication with each other. Educators and parents work collaboratively in learning how to communicate effectively to eliminate communication gaps that influence student achievement as part of the parent-educator training program. The overall importance in a larger context involves sharing the parent-educator training program intervention with Title I schools located in other school districts within the public educational system. The project produced information about positive educator-parent communication designed to influence positively and support student achievement. The results of the parent-educator training program interventions bear sharing within Texas and beyond Texas.

In the larger context, the current intervention promotes the elimination of known communication gaps in the learning environment and may benefit Title I schools other communities. As the positive results of the parent-educator professional development training program become apparent, participants may choose to discuss the affirmative and exciting results throughout their professional and social networks. Educators can discuss their strategies for effective communication with parents in relation to individual students' needs strengthens, and weaknesses and show how they work with parents to generate in-home learning support with their students. Parents can discuss improvements they experience with teacher accessibility and having continuous communication that

allows them to stay abreast of events within the learning environment. As student data continue to demonstrate increasing academic achievement in Title I elementary schools due to the parent-educator training program intervention, other schools within the district may choose to investigate the strides made toward achieving these improved results. The results may persuade districts and schools to implement their own the parent-educator training program as part of assembling an effective communication partnership between educators and parents that supports student achievement.

Conclusion

This section detailed the Parent-Educator Relationship Improvement Plan developed to promote effective communication between educators and parents to support student achievement. A semester-long project was designed based on the findings captured in the mixed-method project study discussed in Section 2. The parent-educator training program is implemented in four sessions with each session emphasizing as well as allowing parents and educators opportunities to work collaboratively to design a communication plan based on the needs of each specific Title I elementary school. In Session 3, the collaboratively developed plan is implemented on participating campuses to determine the pros and cons of the plan. The fourth session of the project allows the participants to disclose all of the positive and negative aspects of the month long implementation so that the results may be shared with each campus' SBDM team following the end of the semester. The parent-educator training program project represents an attempt to expand the knowledge of both educators and parents regarding effective communication that supports student achievement as well as to create a

cohesive partnership within the learning environment. The following section discusses my reflections on and conclusion of the project study.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

Section 4, the reflections and conclusions chapter, is the final step in this project about bridging the communication gap between educators and parents in Title I elementary school and supporting student achievement. The parent-educator training program was constructed to allow influential adults of students the opportunity to work collaboratively and develop a partnership plan of action to support communication and drive academic success for all learners. The success of the parent-educator training program requires openness between educators and parents. This section includes an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the parent-educator training program at the studied school district. This final section concludes with self-reflection as well as discussions about the implications of social change and the direction for future research on the topic of bridging the communication gap between educators and parents in Title I elementary school that support student achievement.

Project Strengths

The strength of this improvement plan is that it directly addresses the concern of communication between educators and parents in Title I schools to support student achievement. The participating educators and parents form a partnership through effective collaboration to increase student's academic performance. The improvement plan offers the educators and parents the opportunity to express their perceptions of effective communication and offer suggestions for constructing a trustworthy partnership within the learning environment to support student achievement.

One of the weaknesses of the parent-educator training program is a dependency on voluntary participation from both parents and educators. Parents and educators participating in parent-educator training program are volunteers and members of the SBDM team and the PTA. Voluntary participation allows individuals to withdraw from participating in the parent-educator training program during any phase of implementation. After the completion of the parent-educator training program, other components of the improvement plan may require modification to ensure the finalized action plan continues to align with the participating school's vision and goals for student success and effective social change. Any alterations to the parent-educator training program process could result in less effective communication and limit or complicate the effort the ensure student achievement.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

This project may have specific limitations if parents and educators, including administrators, fail to collaborate effectively or maintain openness and trust. To ensure positive social change, it is vital for the campus administrators and educators to establish a progressive relationship with participating parents and community partners. Setting a stable foundation through a stable relationship sets the tone for the parent-educator training program process. For this purpose, the necessity for overtly discussing and modeling the expected norms during collaborative sessions from the beginning of the parent-educator training program process has been found.

Building a parent-educator relationship helps to make a positive difference in the educational environment (DeFur, 2012). Therefore, both parents and educators must be

empowered to share their perspectives. Sharing is essential to understanding why communication gaps have developed and how to establish strategies to improve communication and student achievement. It will be critical for educators to listen to parents and parents to listen to educators through active listening. By hearing each other with open minds, both parents and educators may genuinely understand the importance of the partnership and maximize communication opportunities. Throughout the sessions, parents and educators have time to discuss factors contributing to communication gaps and to provide innovative remedies. In addition, the sessions help with establishing strategic methods by consensus to be used in the action plan. My presence as session facilitator may help encourage participants to remain focused on obtaining the overall goals of the educator-parent partnership.

The probability of developing alternative strategies that might not have been considered as a result of the study results or the initial the parent-educator training program sessions to support effective communication among educators and parents is likely to be high in the aftermath of the month long implementation of the parent-educator training program between Sessions 3 and 4. Concerns about strategies or potentially positive strategies may come to light and cause the parent-educator training program process to undergo adjustments. Possible factors may include specific ideas removed from the plan and replaced by other ideas that tended to work in the best interest of the students during the month long implementation. Effective communication and trustworthiness within the educator-parent partnership is the overriding component to

eliminating the communication gap in Title I schools and increasing all learners' academic success.

Scholarship

Scholarship is identified as the process of the advancement of knowledge, achievement of the independence of inquiry, and development of the full ability to investigate (Boyer, 1990). In addition, scholarship involves taking any acquired knowledge from an investigation, applying the discovered outcomes, and moving toward engaging with the knowledge (Boyer, 1990). This project study characterized the scholarship process with clarity. The research and the parent-educator training program design required identifying the problem; researching current research-based, peer-reviewed articles directed toward the concern; and implementing an action-oriented project to solve the problem. Both educators and parents demonstrate dismissiveness and negatively about the influence of educator-parent communication in the learning environment. It is vital for educators and parents to understand the importance of developing stable communication partnerships that support students' academic success in Title I elementary schools.

To begin my project study, I intensively examined materials from the Walden library website. I read all articles relevant to bridging the communication gap between educators and parents in Title I elementary schools and supporting student achievement. During this review process, I kept reflective notes in a research journal. In addition, I generated audio-recorded notes after periodically reviewing peer-reviewed articles in order to review material and make connections between current research articles. I

engaged with other readings about educational research by Creswell (2009), Lodico et al. (2010), Glesne (2011), and Merriam (2009).

After completing the literature review, asking multiple questions to my chairperson, and using the suggestions offered from my second committee member, I made the decision to implement the case-study methodology. Exploring current research, I identified a viable problem and formed a purpose. I determined that communication concerns between educators and parents needed to be addressed in Title I schools to ensure student's academic success, and based on the data I obtained, I found communication concerns and gaps occurred in the Title I schools of the case study.

Project Development and Evaluation

The most important characteristic of completing this project study was presenting the facts concerning the existence of any communication gaps and discerning methods for developing a productive educator-parent partnership. During the process of the project's development and evaluation, I realized that this effort to bridge gaps occurs annually, however informally, within the studied schools. I reviewed past campus improvement plans to identify previous goals directed toward increasing communication among educators and parents and artifacts such as school documents to investigate events that focused on school partnerships. All of my data may drive the future of the parent-educator training program in the studied school because a formal process of bridging the gaps in communication may yield more sustainable results for the Title I schools.

Once the contributing factors were revealed in my collection of primary data, they specifically pinpointed the communication gap in the Title I schools. As a result, I

formulated the parent-educator training program to provide educators and parents with the opportunity to develop a constructive partnership. My next consideration was identifying workable solutions to the problem. I explored a number of different avenues as to how to accomplish this task. During this process, I continuously read and evaluated peer-reviewed, research-based literature and reflected on various improvement strategies, including curriculum-based programs. I created the parent-educator training program as a parent-educator communication improvement plan with constructive feedback from various educators as well as instructional design experts. I realized every aspect of the plan required action with immediate attention to details in order to explicitly explain the nature of an effective partnership and ensure the parent-educator training program could work for the best interests of all learners in Title I schools.

Leadership and Change

Exemplary leaders in urban school districts focus on the continual gains in students' achievement levels. School leaders quite often strive for dramatic changes in order for students to attain their highest potential (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). To ensure the learners' progression in academic attainment, leaders must embrace change to generate positive educator-parent partnerships in the learning environment. Educational leaders must share in the partnership to positively influence the educational discussion concerning effective communication between home and school.

The parent-educator training program project I developed offers one model for a parent-educator communication improvement plan to school leaders, educators, and parents. The parent-educator training program is based on current data relevant to Title I

campus demographics. The parent-educator training program offers collaborative group discussions and enables all stakeholders to participate in reviewing the campus improvement plan. The decision for this plan's development was made after collecting and analyzing the primary data collected through surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Three of the emergent major themes involved concerns from both parents and educators that included educational trust issues, lack of accessibility, and collaborative partnership needs. I determined these themes must guide the overall focus for the parent-educator training program. The original findings leading to the parent-educator training program were used to assist participants during in-group collaboration sessions in the development of the action plan. Using the action plan during a month long implementation phase enables stakeholders to determine the parent-educator training program's pros and cons and form strategies for modification before adopting any final plan. Reviewing the outcome of the implemented action plan provides participants the time needed to make necessary adjustments and strengthen or maintain the partnership in support of student academic success.

The process of completing this parent-educator partnership project has provided me with the opportunity to extend my professional growth as an educational leader. The personal growth that occurred as a result of this opportunity has helped me to understand my determination in spite of obstacles to overcome and accomplish an ultimate goal. As an educational leader, I modeled how to complete a long-term task with multiple components in the effort to improve a communication issue that influences students' academic success and have developed a viable partnership action plan. During the

research of this project I been inspired and empowered. Therefore, I will continue to research, review, and study within the educational system and use my knowledge as an educational leader to promote positive social change.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

As a Walden scholar, I have learned through prior readings and coursework how knowledge expands the mind infinitely. The interconnections I explored have yielded the completion of this project study. Through completion of the early coursework for the program, I embraced online learning, creatively managed my time, and developed conceptual awareness by asking specific questions. In addition, I learned how to explore, locate, access, incorporate, and use the Walden library website. I can now proficiently identify as well as analyze educational problems, locate current peer-reviewed literature, and develop research questions that specifically target an educational concern. As a professional instructional leader, I used my skills to serve as a mentor and role model for other students in the cohort. Equally important, I can now discern the steps for conducting research, the nature of interacting with and learning from participants, and the procedures for analyzing various forms of data.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

Throughout this process, I have learned a sufficient amount about myself as a practitioner. I have worked as an educator for 20 years and in educational leadership for 5 years. During the past 5 years, I committed to actively engaging in learning about communication gaps in schools and effective methods for transforming troubling relationships between educators and parents.

Throughout this project's process, I learned how to conduct research and implement strategies to solve communication issues present within Title I elementary schools. Presently, I share with parents and educators the importance of effective communication in the learning environment and promote the development of productive partnerships to decrease, and if possible, eliminate communication gaps. This project study journey has allowed me to gain empowerment for advocating with both educators and parents to promote student success.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

Throughout this project study, I grew professionally. When I started the Walden teaching and learning specialization program, I envisioned an opportunity to grow as a lifelong learner and embraced the resources that brought me the knowledge for helping others. The professional goals I set for myself helped me grow as to accomplish this project study.

In today's learning institutions, the ultimate task is to decrease the achievement gap among students from diverse cultures. As an educator, I learned gap closure is attainable when both educators and parents come together in an effective partnership working in the best interests of all students. Of equal importance are my new abilities in examining raw data, forming conclusions, and aligning the findings with current educational research trends, particularly in relation to building strong communication lines between educators and parents for the purpose of improving student achievement. Likewise, I have learned how to bring educators and parents together collaboratively and develop a plan of action for their schools by incorporating the effective strategies I

learned about through this project study and my coursework at Walden. With knowledge built upon all of these components, I have become a more effective educational leader.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

The project's ability to influence social change is immeasurable. This study's components offer educators and parents' factual and current data regarding the existence of educator-parent communication gaps. This doctoral project study may guide the improvement of communication among educators and parents seeking to ensure growth in students' academic achievement. An implication for social change from the project involves improved understanding of communication gaps within the learning environment leading to change in how parents and educators react to factors that promote and inhibit students' academic success. Parents and educators may come together more openly and effectively to collaborate and gain a comprehensive understanding of their varying perspectives among themselves as they seek to adjust for factors influencing student achievement. By sharing their purpose for student achievement with each other through openness, they can enable truly sincere communication to take place.

District and community partners may find this study's findings and the parent-educator training program empowering as parent-educator communication efforts expand, and student achievement increases. This project study provides parents and educators the opportunity to collaborate and identify how to influence the academic performance of economically disadvantage students enrolled in urban elementary schools. Both educators and parents must choose to continue working collaboratively implementing various strategies to maintain a constructive partnership to promote student

academic achievement after the initial implementation of the parent-educator training program.

In addition, sharing this new understanding of how educators and parents working as true partners may support the learning environment makes this study significant by fostering an important angle for addressing issues that negatively influence the learning atmosphere and may be found across the United States. Stakeholders in school districts with similar student demographics may possibly identify with the varying perspectives present among the educators and parents who participated in this project study. They may use this project for addressing their parental communication concerns and developing productive partnerships for increasing educator to parent and parent to educator communication as well as student achievement.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Important factors associated with this doctoral study involved the stability it offered to the case study's Title I schools. The project enabled the establishment of a stable parent-educator partnership for eliminating elementary school communication gaps and influencing the academic success of students. Study findings addressed the communication concerns parents and educators attributed to the problem of a gap in communication and parental involvement. Further, researched evidence supported the development of the parent-educator training program as an intervention to produce more positive communication and collaboration. School districts with similar school demographics are encouraged to implement the parent-educator training program as part of encouraging and empowering stakeholders and increasing academic achievement.

Implications for future research includes a follow up study with the school district hosting the case study to understand the long term effects of involving administration, community, parent, and educator partners in the project. Likewise, future researchers seeking to examine communication concerns in Title I elementary schools need to involve all stakeholders associated with the organization, including community partners. While this study was directly focused on communication in Title I elementary schools, future study could be extended to non-Title I schools. For example, a comparison of parent-educator communication effectiveness between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged elementary schools may provide beneficial information that enables adjustments to an implementation of the parent-educator training program. In addition, a future study could also be used to explore communication between parents and educators at secondary schools.

Conclusion

This project study resulted in identifying the existence of communication gaps in Title I elementary schools between educators and parents. Findings from the study revealed relevant justification for improving the communication between educators and parents. The presented data indicated an essential need for parents and educators to work collaboratively in partnership to strengthen relationships and promote the academic success of all learners in Title I elementary schools.

Parent-educator partnerships represent necessary teamwork and eliminate communication gaps. Partnerships represent the presence of a productive environment conducive to learning. District and campus administrators must comprehend the

contributing factors that negatively influence communication between educators and parents in Title I elementary schools. Equally necessary, administrators must understand the communication perspectives of both parents and educators to ensure and increase students' academic achievement. The parent-educator partnership is a sustainable solution in Title I elementary schools. Working to build collaborative relationships will help eliminate communication gaps and improve student academic success.

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Appendix A: Parent-Educator Relationship Improvement Plan Agenda

Purpose: To provide all participants with an innovative method to increase effective communication in Title I elementary schools by allowing both educators and parents the opportunity to disclose perceptions and ideas to create an effective communication partnership.

Introduction

Welcome Statement

-PowerPoint presentation displaying communication concern
(research data results, supportive graphics, participants needed)

-Overview of Parent-Educator Relationship Improvement Plan

- Timeline (14 to 20 weeks)
- Collaboration groups
- Establishment of plan
- Implementation & review of implemented plan
- Evaluation of plan

Session 1—September

- ❖ Parents and educators review data and themes
- ❖ Share perspective concerning communication
- ❖ Explore school academic and align with strategic methods offering improvements

Session 2---October

- ❖ Review communication concerns with recommended strategic methods
- ❖ Develop communication improvement plan collaboratively for upcoming month long implementation

Session 3- Implementation of Action Plan---November

- ❖ Issue materials to parents and educators school-wide
- ❖ Incorporate adopted communication action plan for 1 month
- ❖ Gather data and capture feedback from educators and parents

Session 4---December

- ❖ Review of month long implemented action plan
- ❖ Modifications/adjustments to action plan (agreed by majority)
- ❖ Evaluation THE PARENT-EDUCATOR TRAINING PROGRAM

Parent-Educator Relationship Improvement Plan

Fact or Myth

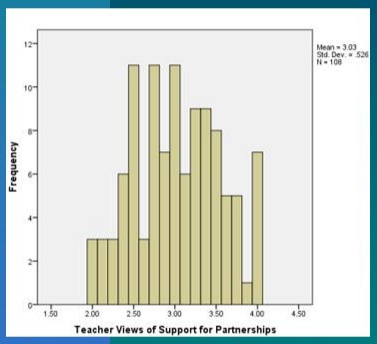
Why develop a relationship?

- Research Study
  - Bridging the Communication Gap Between Educators and Parents to Support Student Achievement
- Participants
  - 5 Title 1 elementary schools
  - 42 parents
  - 119 educators
- Data Collection
  - Participant survey (educators & parents)
  - 10 face-to-face interviews (educators & parents)
  - Focus group with 4 educators and 4 parents

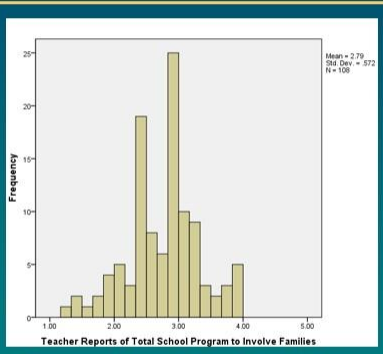
Results--Educators

- Educators revealed negative attitudes about involving families in all practices that promote parental involvement.
- Educators demonstrated negative perspectives about supportive parental partnerships.
- Educators admitted to being judgmental toward parents due to the assumption “parents lack education.”
- Limited numbers of parents attend school activities.

Review the Data--Educators



These values indicate that the teachers displayed extremely negative attitudes about family and community involvement.

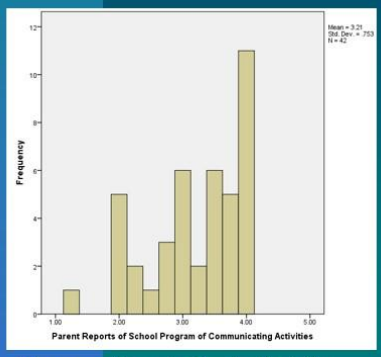


These values indicate that the teachers displayed negative attitudes about the importance to teachers of all practices to involve families.

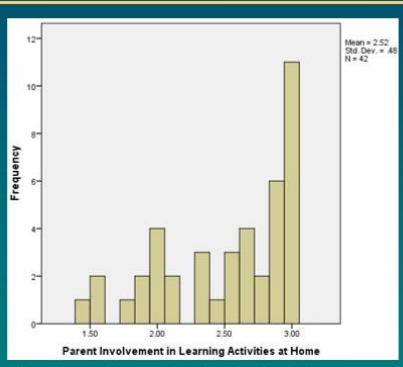
Results--Parents

- Highly positive toward schools' current methods of communication.
- Parents expressed poor attitudes about schools.
- Strong levels of negativity from parents regarding children learning at home.
- High interest for receiving information about teachers' academic expectations.

Review the Data--Parents



These values indicate that the parents possessed extremely poor attitudes toward parent involvement in all types of activities.



These values indicate that the parents displayed negative attitudes about parent involvement in learning activities at home.

Results---Both (agreement)

- Interview & focus group data strongly support the need to communicate in the best interest of the children.
- Being heard and valued during educator-parent conversation is important.
- Establishing a partnership is preeminent.
- Negativity regarding parent involvement within community and home is a problem.
- The barriers that contribute to the development of communication gaps are complex.

Emergent Themes

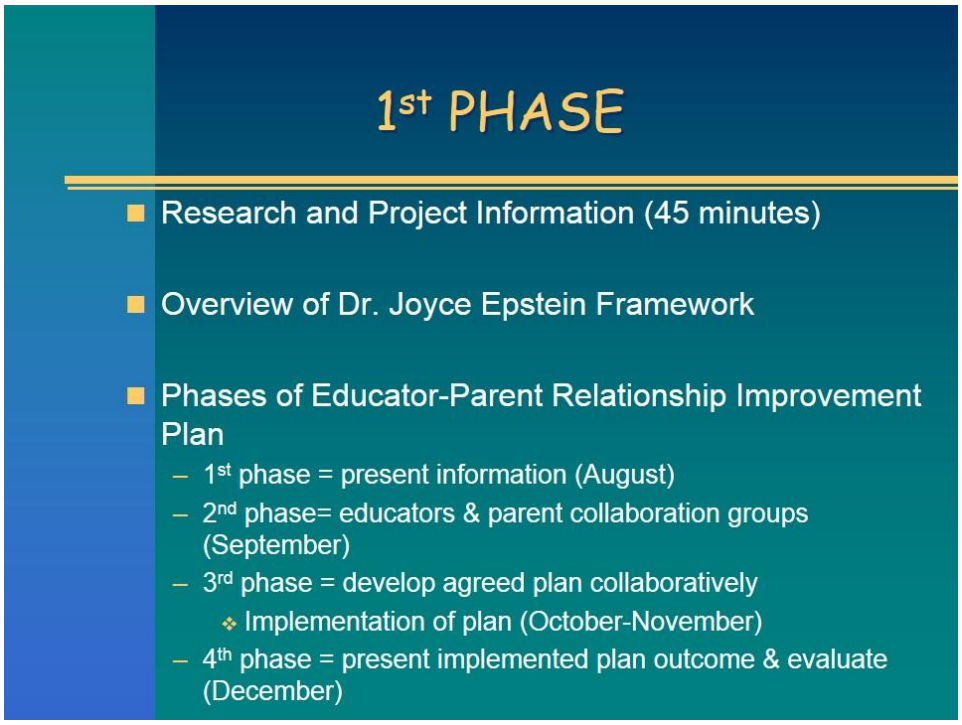
- Lack of teacher accessibility
- Educational trust
- Parent educational knowledge
- Collaborative partnership
- Continuous communication
- Guides and blueprints for learning expectations

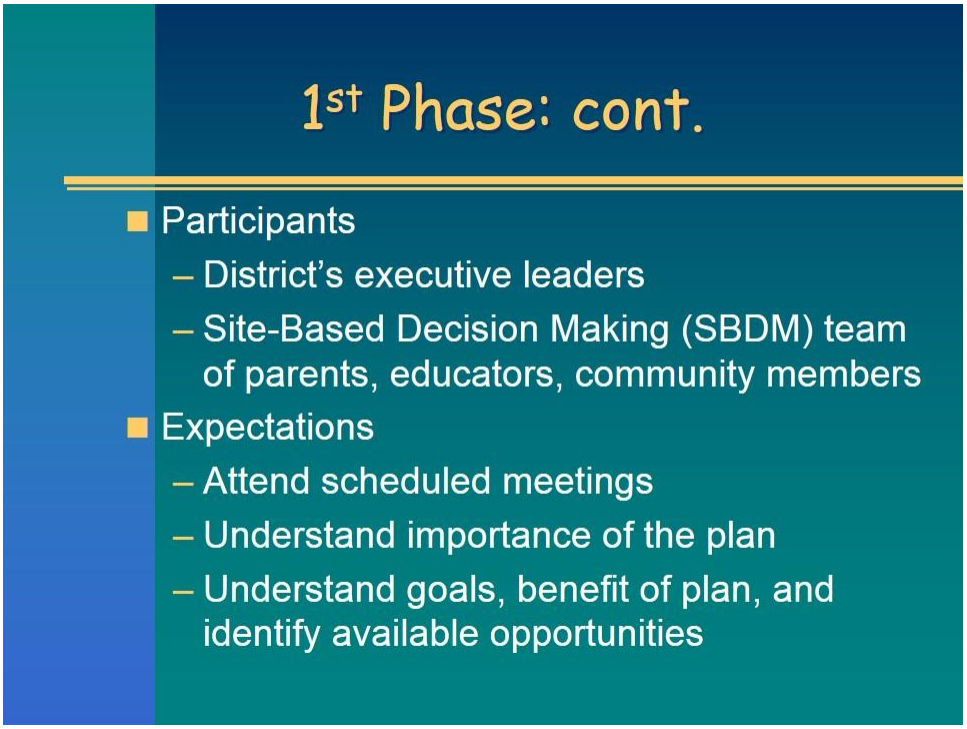
Improvement Plan

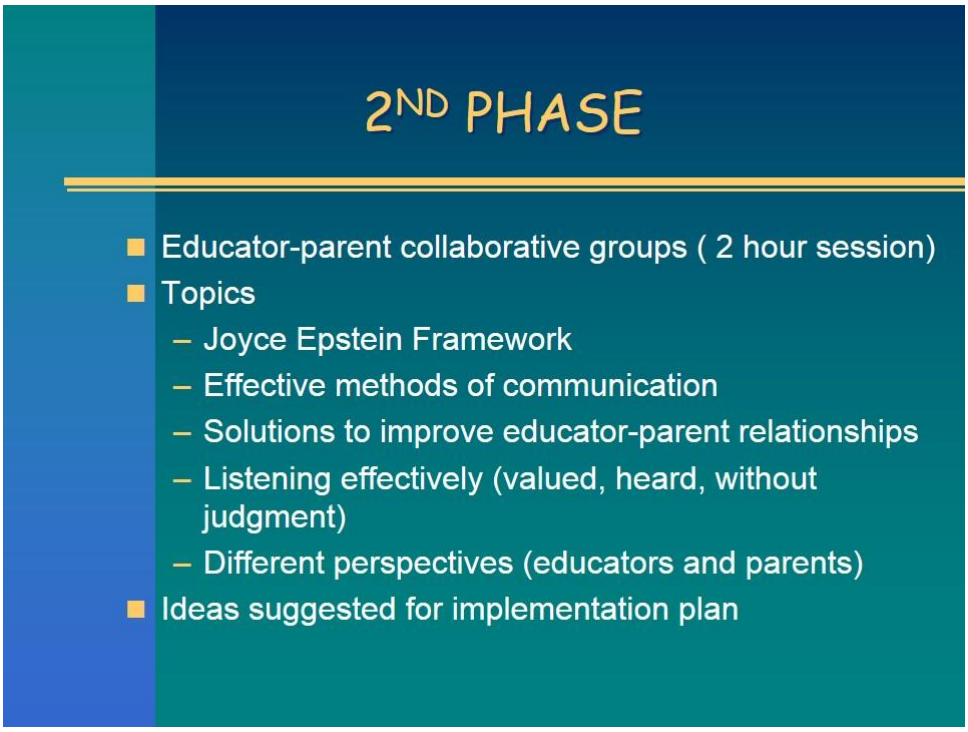
Collaboration Groups

Establishment of Plan & Implementation

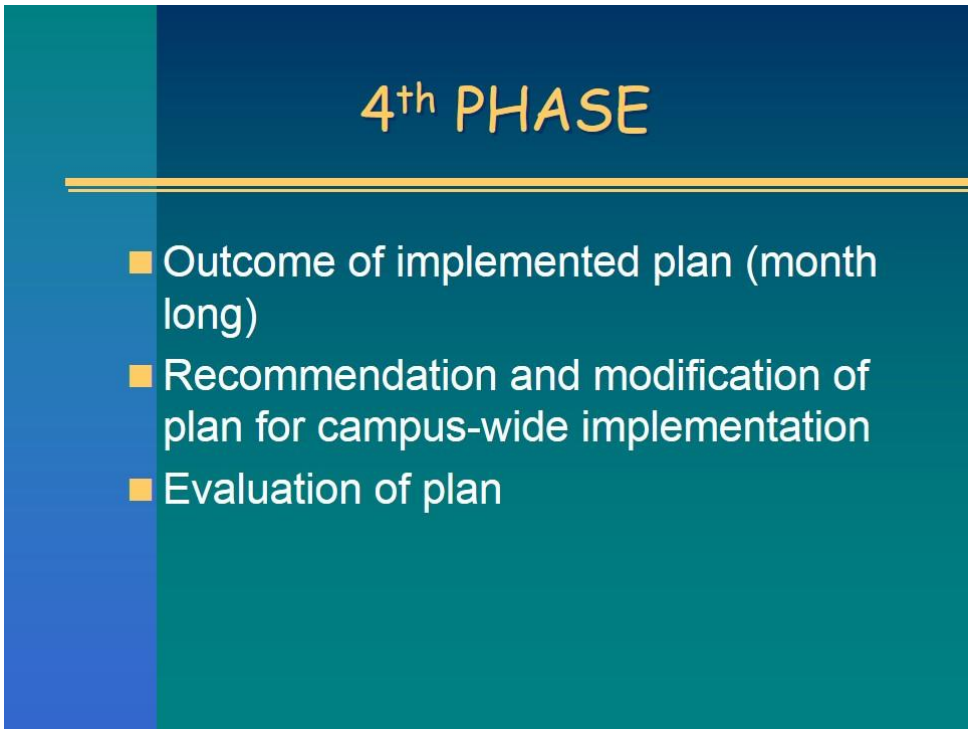
Review Outcome & Evaluation of Plan

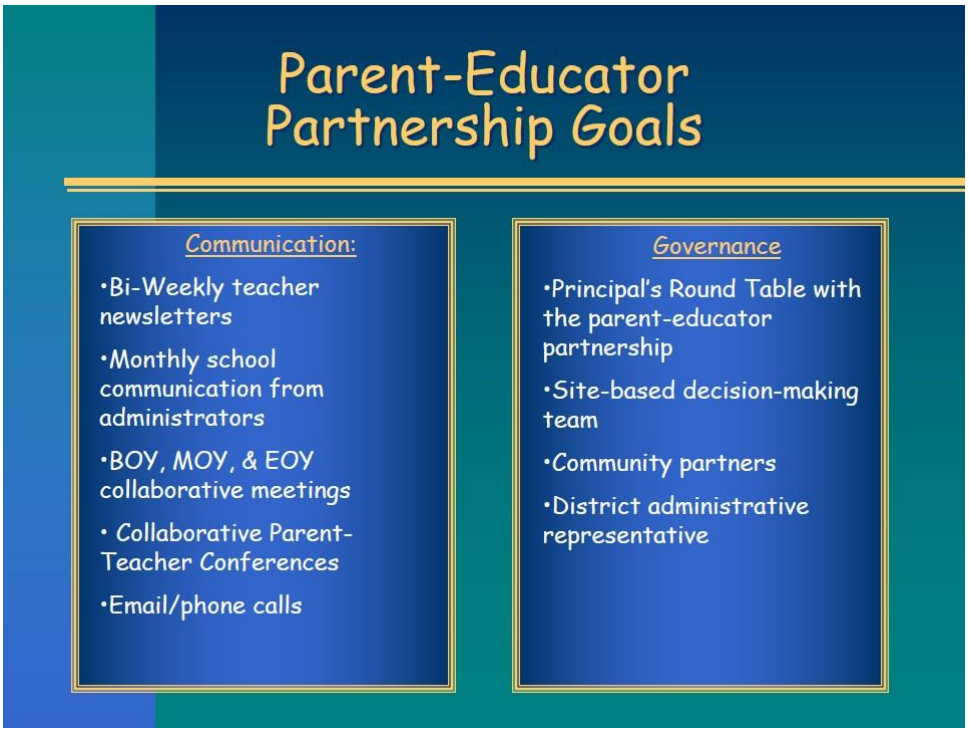

1st PHASE
Research and Project Information (45 minutes)
Overview of Dr. Joyce Epstein Framework
Phases of Educator-Parent Relationship Improvement Plan
1st phase = present information (August)
2nd phase= educators & parent collaboration groups (September)
3rd phase = develop agreed plan collaboratively
Implementation of plan (October-November)
4th phase = present implemented plan outcome & evaluate (December)


1st Phase: cont.
Participants
District's executive leaders
Site-Based Decision Making (SBDM) team of parents, educators, community members
Expectations
Attend scheduled meetings
Understand importance of the plan
Understand goals, benefit of plan, and identify available opportunities


2ND PHASE
Educator-parent collaborative groups (2 hour session)
Topics
Joyce Epstein Framework
Effective methods of communication
Solutions to improve educator-parent relationships
Listening effectively (valued, heard, without judgment)
Different perspectives (educators and parents)
Ideas suggested for implementation plan


3rd PHASE
Collaborative groups convene (2 hour session)
Establishment of action plan (Blueprint)
Participants
Materials
Expectations
Written documentation
Month long implementation on each campus


4th PHASE
Outcome of implemented plan (month long)
Recommendation and modification of plan for campus-wide implementation
Evaluation of plan


Parent-Educator Partnership Goals
Communication:
•Bi-Weekly teacher newsletters
•Monthly school communication from administrators
•BOY, MOY, & EOY collaborative meetings
• Collaborative Parent-Teacher Conferences
•Email/phone calls
Governance
•Principal's Round Table with the parent-educator partnership
•Site-based decision-making team
•Community partners
•District administrative representative

What makes a good educator communicator?

- Knowing **WHEN** and **HOW** to communicate:
  - Thinking twice about timing and content

  Example 1: Emails are great, but very black and white. They can often be misread and misunderstood.

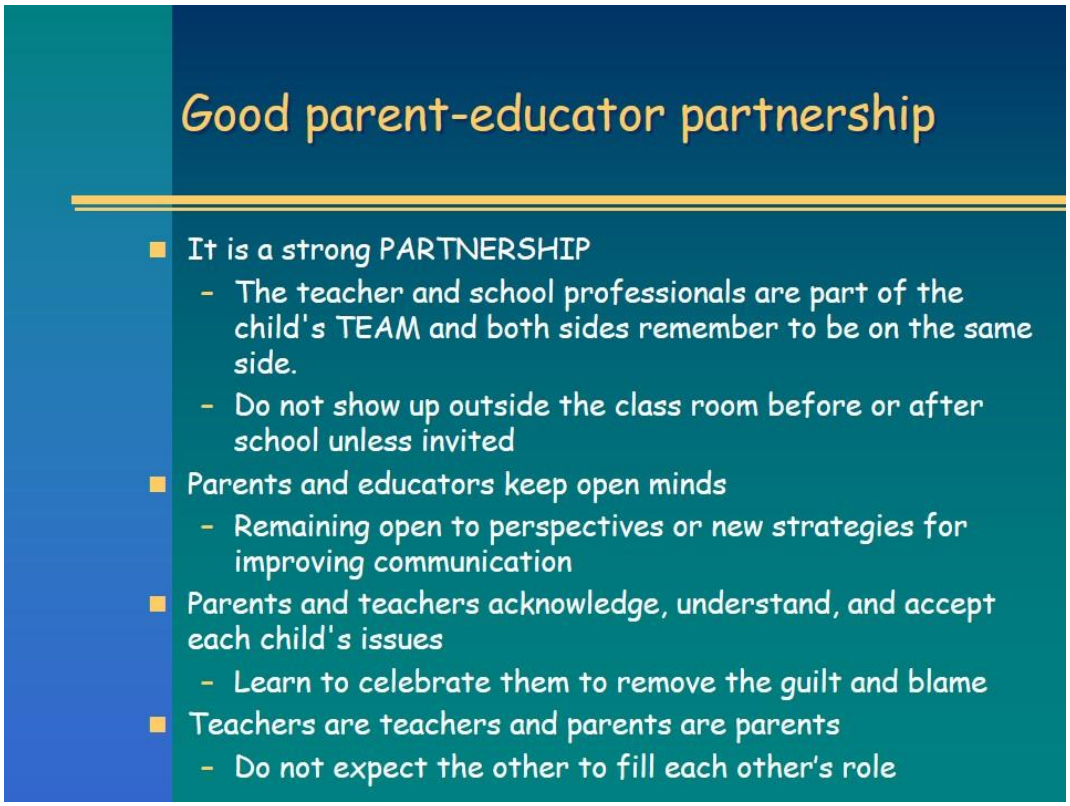
  Example 2: A call often leads to frustration and worry. Negativity shouldn't be the only reason for contacting parents. Ensure all phones calls are returned.
- Teachers should listen and work to understand parents' work situations and perspectives and avoid communicating with parents who are at work unless the situation is very important.

LISTEN TO WHAT IS BEING SPOKEN
HEAR WHAT IS BEING SAID

What makes a good parent communicator?

- Home Life
  - Views home-school relationship as vital to child's success
  - Stays connected to school receiving frequent updates
  - Shares a partnership with school and has a MAJOR role in child's life
  - Informs the teacher about the needs of the whole child
    - Shares sensitive and confidential information

LISTEN TO WHAT IS BEING SPOKEN
HEAR WHAT IS BEING SAID


Good parent-educator partnership
It is a strong PARTNERSHIP
The teacher and school professionals are part of the child's TEAM and both sides remember to be on the same side.
Do not show up outside the class room before or after school unless invited
Parents and educators keep open minds
Remaining open to perspectives or new strategies for improving communication
Parents and teachers acknowledge, understand, and accept each child's issues
Learn to celebrate them to remove the guilt and blame
Teachers are teachers and parents are parents
Do not expect the other to fill each other's role

Appendix B: Questionnaires for Teacher in the Elementary and Middle Grades

School and Family Partnerships: Questionnaires for Teachers and Parents In Elementary and Middle Grades

Joyce L. Epstein
Karen Clark Salinas

1993
Johns Hopkins University
Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships
Johns Hopkins University
2701 North Charles Street, Suite 300
Baltimore, Maryland 21228
nnps@jhu.edu

Q-1. The first questions ask for your professional judgment about parent involvement. Please CHECK 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.				
b. Most parents know how to help their children on schoolwork at home.				
c. This school has an active and effective parent organization (e.g., PTA or PTO).				
d. Every family has some strengths that could be tapped to increase student success in school.				
e. All parents could learn ways to assist their children on schoolwork at home, if shown how.				
f. Parent involvement can help teachers be more effective with more students.				
g. Teachers should receive recognition for time spent on parent involvement activities.				
h. Parents of children at this school want to be involved more than they are now at most grade levels				
i. Teachers do not have the time to involve parents in very useful ways.				
j. Teachers need in-service education to implement effective parent involvement practices.				
k. Parent involvement is important for student success in school.				
l. This school views parents as important partners.				
m. The community values education for all students.				
n. This school is known for trying new and unusual approaches to improve the school				
o. Mostly when I contact parents, it's about problems or trouble.				
p. In this school, teachers play a large part in most decisions.				
q. The community supports this school.				
r. Compared to other schools, this school has one of the best school climates for teachers, students, and parents.				

Q-2. Teachers contact their students' families in different ways. Please estimate the percent of your students' families that you contacted this year in these ways:

	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
a. Letter or memo									
b. Telephone									
c. Meeting at school									
d. Scheduled parent-teacher conference									
e. Home visit									
f. Meeting in the community									
g. Report card pick-up									
h. Performances, sports, or other events									

Q-3 Teachers contact their students' families in different ways. Please estimate the percent of your students families that you contacted this year in these ways:

A. In my **CLASSROOM**, volunteers …		B. In our **SCHOOL**, volunteers	
	(a) I do NOT use classroom volunteers …		(a) Are NOT USED in the school now
	(b) Listen to children read aloud		(b) Monitor halls, cafeteria, or other areas
	(c) Read to the children		(c) Work in the library, computer lab, or other area
	(d) Grade papers		(d) Teach mini-courses
	(e) Tutor children in specific skills		(e) Teach enrichment or other lessons
	(f) Help on trips or at parties		(f) Lead clubs or activities
	(g) Give talks (e.g., on careers, hobbies, ect.)		(g) Check attendance
	(h) Other ways (please specify) _____		(h) Work in "parent room"
			(i) Other ways (please specify)

THIS YEAR, how many volunteers or aides help in your classroom or school?

C. Number of different volunteers who assist me in a typical week = _____.

D. Do you have paid aides in your classroom? ____ NO ___ YES (how many? _____)

E. Number of different volunteers who work anywhere in the school in an average week = _____ (approx)

Q-4 Please estimate the percent of your students' families who did the following THIS YEAR:

	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	100%
a. Attend workshops regularly at school								
b. Check daily that child's homework is done								
c. Practice schoolwork in the summer								
d. Attend PTA meetings regularly								
e. Attend parent-teacher conferences with you								
Understand enough to help their child at home f. … reading skills at your grade level								
g. … writing skills at your grade level								
h. … math skills at your grade level								

Q-5 Schools serve diverse populations of families who have different needs and skills. The next questions ask for your professional judgment about specific ways of involving families at your school. Please CHECK the one choice to tell whether you think each type of involvement is.:

NOT IMPORTANT	NOT IMP	(Means this IS NOT part of your school now, and SHOULD NOT BE.)
NEEDS TO BE DEVELOPED	DEV	(Means this IS NOT part of your school now, and SHOULD NOT BE.)
NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED	IMPRV	(Means this IS part of your school, but NEEDS TO BE STRENGTHENED.)
A STRONG PROGRAM NOW	STRONG	(Means this IS a STRONG PROGRAM for most parents AT ALL GRADE LEVELS at your school.)

TYPE OF INVOLVEMENT AT THIS SCHOOL	NOT IMP.	DEV.	IMPRV	STRONG.
a. WORKSHOPS for parents to build skills in PARENTING and understanding their children at each grade level.				
b. WORKSHOPS for parents on creating HOME CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING.				
c. COMMUNICATIONS from the school to the home that all families can understand and use.				
d. COMMUNICATIONS about report cards so that parents understand students' progress and needs.				
e. Parents-teacher CONFERENCES with all families.				
f. SURVEYING parents each year for their ideas about the school.				
g. VOLUNTEERS in classrooms to assist teachers and students.				

h. VOLUNTEERS to help in other (non-classroom) parts of the school.				
i. INFORMATION on how to MONITOR homework.				
j. INFORMATION for parents on HOW TO HELP their children with specific skills and subjects.				
k. Involvement by families in PTA/PTO leadership, other COMMITTEES, or other decision-making roles.				
l. Programs for AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, recreation, and homework help.				

Q-6 Teachers choose among many activities to assist their students and families. CHECK one choice to tell how important each of these is for you to conduct at your grade level.

HOW IMPORTANT IS THIS PRACTICE TO YOU	NOT IMPORTANT	A LITTLE IMPORTANT	PRETTY IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT
a. Have a conference with each of my students' parents at least once a year.				
b. Attend evening meetings, performances, and workshops at school.				
c. Contact parents about their children's problems or failures.				
d. Inform parents when their children do something well or improve.				
e. Involve some parents as volunteers in my classroom.				
f. Inform parents of the skills their children must pass in each subject I teach/				
g. Inform parents how report card grades are earned in my class.				
h. Provide specific activities for children and parents to do to improve students' grades.				
i. Provide ideas for discussing TV shows.				
j. Assign homework that requires children to interact with parents.				

k. Suggest ways to practice spelling or other skills at home before a test.				
l. Ask parents to listen to their children read.				
m. Ask parents to listen to a story or paragraph that their children write.				
n. Work with other teachers to develop parent involvement activities and materials.				
o. Work with community members to arrange learning opportunities in my class.				
p. Work with area businesses for volunteers to improve programs for my students.				
q. Request information from parents on their children's talents, interests or needs				
r. Serve on a or other school committee.				

Q-7 The next questions ask for your opinions about the activities that you think should be conducted by the parents of the children you teach. CHECK the choice that best describes the importance of these activities at your grade level.

PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES	NOT IMPORTANT	A LITTLE IMPORTANT	PRETTY IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT
a. Send children to school ready to learn.				
b. Teach children to behave well.				
c. Set up a quiet place and time for studying at home.				
d. Encourage children to volunteer in class.				
e. Know what children are expected to learn each year.				
f. Check daily that homework is done.				
g. Talk to children about what they are learning in school.				
h. Ask teachers for specific ideas on how to help their children at home with class work.				
i. Talk to teachers about problems the children are facing at home.				
j. Attend PTA/PTO meetings.				

k. Serve as a volunteer in the school or classroom.				
l. Attend assemblies and other special events at the school.				
m. Take children to special places or events in the community.				
n. Talk to children about the importance of school.				

Q-8 The next questions ask how you perceive others' support for parent involvement in your school. Please check one choice on each line. How much support does each give **<u>now</u>** to parent involvement**.**

	Strong Support	Some Support	Weak Support	No Support
a. You, personally				
b. Other teachers				
c. The principal				
d. Other administrators				
e. Parents				
f. Others in community				
g. The school board				
h. The district superintendent				

Q-9 Over the past two years, how much has the school involved parents at school and at home?

_____ (1) School involved parents **less this year** than last

_____ (2) School involved parents **about the same** in both years

_____ (3) School involved parents **more this year** than last

_____ (4) Do not know, I did not teach at this school last year

The last questions ask for general information about you, your students, and the classes you teach. This will help us understand how new practices can be developed to meet the needs of particular schools, teachers and students

Q-10. YOUR STUDENTS AND TEACHING

A. (a) What grade(s) do you teach THIS YEAR? (Circle all that apply.)

PreK K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

(b) If you do not teach, give your position:
_____

B. How many different students do you teach each day, on average?

Number of different students I teach on average day = _____

C. Which best describes your teaching responsibility? (CHECK ONE)

_____ (1) I teach several subjects to ONE SELF-CONTAINED CLASS.

(2) I teach ONE subject to SEVERAL DIFFERENT CLASSES of students in a departmentalized program

_____

(3) I teach MORE THAN ONE subject to MORE THAN ONE CLASS in a semi-departmental or other arrangement

_____

_____ (4) Other (please describe): _____

D. Check the subject(s) you teach in an average week (PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY):

_____ (a)	Industrial Arts	_____ (e)	Reading	_____ (i)	Advisory	Other (describe)	
_____ (b)	Language Arts/English	_____ (f)	Math	_____ (j)	Health	_____	
_____ (c)	Physical Education	_____ (g)	Science	_____ (k)	Art		
_____ (d)	Home Economics	_____ (h)	Social Studies	_____ (l)	Music		

E. (a) Do you work with other teachers on a formal, interdisciplinary team? ___ Yes ___ No

(b) If YES, do you have a common planning time with all of the teachers on your team? ___ Yes ___ No

F. (a) On average, how many minutes of homework do you assign on most days? None 5-10 25-30 35-45 50-60 over 1 hour

(b) Do you typically assign homework on weekends? ___ Yes ___ N

G. About how many hours each week, on average, do you spend contacting parents?

_____ (a) None

_____ (b) Less than one hour

_____ (c) One hour

H. About what percent of your students are:

_____ % (a) African American

_____ % (b) Asian American

_____ % (c) Hispanic

	(d) Two hours	%	(d) White
	(e) Three hours or more	%	(e) Other
		100 %	

I. About how many of your students are in (circle the estimate that comes closest):

	0%	10%	20%	30-50%	60-80%	90-100%
(a) Chapter 1						
(b) Special education						
(c) Gifted and Talented						
(d) Free or reduced lunch						

Appendix C: Parent Survey

Survey of Parents in Elementary and Middle Grades

Dear Parent or Guardian: Date: _____

Our school is working to improve ways that schools and families can help each other and help all children succeed in school. We would like your ideas about this. We will use your responses to plan new projects. To do the best job, we need ideas from EVERY FAMILY.

Your answers will be grouped together with those from many other families. No individual will ever be identified. Of course, you may skip any question, but we hope you will answer them all. We will share the results with you in a summary report.

We are counting on your ideas so that our projects will be useful to all families.

Please have your child return this booklet to the teacher TOMORROW or AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. If you have more than one child in this school, please return only ONE BOOKLET for the family.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH for your help!

Sincerely,

_____

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

Who is filling in the booklet?

____	(1)	mother	____	(5)	aunt	____	(9)	guardian
____	(2)	father	____	(6)	uncle	____	(10)	Other relative
____	(3)	stepmother	____	(7)	grandmother	____	(11)	Other (describe)
____	(4)	stepfather	____	(8)	grandfather			_____

1.2 HOW MANY CHILDREN in your family go to <u>this</u> school THIS YEAR? (Circle how many.)

1 2 3 4 5 or more

1.3 What GRADES are they in? CIRCLE ALL of the grades of your children in this school.

PreK Kindergarten Grade 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

If you have more than one child at this school, please answer the questions in the booklet about your **OLDEST CHILD** at this school.

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

a. About what percent of your students are:		b. About what percent of your students are:	
%	a **Above average** in achievement	%	a Promptly deliver memos or notices home from school
%	b **Average** in achievement	%	b Complete all of their homework on time
%	c **Below average** in achievement		

Q-1YOUR EXPERIENCE AND BACKGROUND

A. What is your experience? …

_____ (a) Years in teaching or administration

_____ (b) Years in **this school**

100 %

B. In our **SCHOOL**, volunteers

_____ (a) Male

_____ (c) Female

c. What is your highest education?		d. How do you describe yourself?	
	(a) Bachelor's		(a) African American
	(b) Bachelor's + credits		(b) Asian American
	(c) Master's		(c) Hispanic American
	(d) Master's + credits		(d) White
	(e) Doctorate		(e) Other (describe)
	(f) Other (describe)		

Q-2 We would like to know how you feel about this school right NOW.

This will help us plan for the future. Please MARK one choice for each statement

YES	Means you AGREE STRONGLY with the statement.
yes	Means you AGREE A LITTLE with the statement.
no	Means you DISAGREE A LITTLE with the statement.
NO	Means you DISAGREE STRONGLY with the statement.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THESE	YES	yes	no	NO
a. This is a very good school.				
b. The teachers care about my child.				
c. I feel welcome at the school.				
d. This school has an active parent organization (e.g., PTA/PTO).				
e. My child talks about school at home.				
f. My child should get more homework.				
g. Many parents I know help out at the school.				
h. The school and I have different goals for my child.				
i. I feel I can help my child in reading				
j. I feel I can help my child in math.				
k. I could help my child more if the teacher gave me more ideas.				
l. My child is learning as much as he/she can at this school.				
m. Parents at this school get involved more in the younger grades.				
n. This school is known for trying new programs.				
o. This school views parents as important partners.				
p. The community supports this school.				
q. This school is one of the best schools for students and for parents				

Q-4 Families get involved in different ways at school or at home. Which of the following have you done this year with the OLDEST CHILD you have at school? Please MARK one choice for each statement

NEVER	means you do NOT do this or NOT YET this year
1 – 2 TIMES	means you have done 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.

		NEVER	1 – 2 TIMES	FEW TIMES	MANY TIMES
a	Help me understand my child's stage of development.				
b	Tell me how my child is doing in school.				
c	Tell me what skills my child needs to learn each year.				
d	Have a parent-teacher conference with me.				
e	Explain how to check my child's homework.				
f	Send home news about things happening at school.				
g	Give me information about how report card grades are earned.				
h	Assign homework that requires my child to talk with me about things learned in class.				
i	Send home clear notices that I can read easily.				
j	Contact me if my child is having problems.				
k	Invite me to programs at the school.				
l	Contact me if my child does something well or improve.				
m	Ask me to volunteer at the school.				
n	Invite me to PTA/PTO meetings.				

o Ask me to help with fund raising.				
p Include parents on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, and school improvement				
q Provide information on community services that I may want to use.				

Q-5 Schools contact families in different ways. MARKE one choice to tell if the school has done these things THIS YEAR. Please mark ONE choice for each statement

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.

	DOES NOT DO	COULD DO BETTER	DOES WELL
(a) Talk to my child about school.			
(b) Visit my child's classroom.			
(c) Read to my child.			
(d) Listen to my child read.			
(e) Listen to a story my child wrote.			
(f) Help my child with homework.			
(g) Practice spelling or other skills before a test.			
(h) Talk with my child about a TV show.			
(i) Help my child plan time for homework and chores.			
(j) Talk with my child's teacher at school.			
(k) Talk to my child's teacher on the phone.			
(l) Go to PTA/PTO meetings.			
(m) Check to see that my child has done his/her homework.			
(n) Volunteer at school or in my child's classroom.			

(o) Go to special events at school.			
(p) Take my child to a library.			
(q) Take my child to special places or events in the community.			
(r) Tell my child how important school is.			

Q-6 Over the past two years, how much has the school involved parents 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

Q-7 Some families want to attend WORKSHOPS on topics they want to hear more about. CHECK THE ONES that interest you . . . or suggest a few . . . .

____ (a) How children grow and develop at my child's age

____ (b) How to discipline children

____ (c) Solving school problems and preventing dropping out

____ (d) Preventing health problems

____ (e) How to deal with stress

____ (f) Raising children as a single parent

____ (g) How to help my child develop her/his talents

____ (h) Helping children take tests

____ (i) Understanding middle schools

____ (j) How to serve on a school committee or council

____ (k) Other topics you want?

_____

(1) In the past year, did you attend a workshop at the school?

_____ No _____ Yes On what topic?

_____

Q-8 All communities have information that would help families. Which services in your community would you like to know more about? CHECK the information you want.

_____ (a) Health care for children and families

_____ (b) Family counseling

_____ (c) Job training for parents/adults

_____ (d) Adult education

_____ (e) Parenting classes

_____ (f) Child care

_____ (g) After-school sports activities

_____ (h) After-school tutoring

_____ (i) Other after-school clubs or lesions to develop talents

_____ (j) Community service that children can do

_____ (k) Summer programs for children

_____ (l) Information on museums, shows, and events in the community

_____ (m) Other (describe the community information you need)

_____

The last questions will help us plan new programs to meet your family's needs.
(Please answer these questions about your oldest child in this school)

Q-9 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 25-30 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 25-30 35-45 50-60 over 1 hour

c. How much time could you spend working your child if the teacher showed you what to do?

Minutes I could spend: none 5-10 25-30 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 _____

Q-10 ABOUT YOUR CHILD AND FAMILY

a How is your <u>oldest child at this school</u> doing in schoolwork

_____ (1) TOP student
_____ (2) GOOD student
_____ (3) OK, AVERAGE student
_____ (4) FAIR student
_____ (5) POOR student

b How does your <u>oldest child at this school</u> like school this year?

_____ (1) Likes school a lot
_____ (2) Likes school a little
_____ (3) Does not like school much
_____ (4) Does not like school at all

c How often does your <u>oldest child at this school</u> promptly deliver notices home?		d How does your <u>oldest child at this school</u> complete all homework on time?	
	(1) Always		(1) Always
	(2) Usually		(2) Usually
	(3) Once in a while		(3) Once in a while

	(4) Never		(4) Never

e. WHEN can you attend conferences, meetings, or workshops at the school? Check all that apply.

_____ Morning _____ Afternoon_____ Evening _____ Cannot ever attend

f. How many adults live at home? _____ Adults (include yourself)

g. How many children live at home? _____ Children

h What is your highest education?

_____ (1) Did not complete high school
_____ (2) Completed high school
_____ (3) Some college or training
_____ (4) College degree

i Are you employed now?

_____ (1) Employed full-time
_____ (2) Employed part-time
_____ (3) Not employed now

Appendix D: Survey Order Form

NATIONAL NETWORK OF Partnership Schools JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

NNPS Model | Success Stories | Research | Professional Development | Publications | TIPS | Join NNPS

Survey Order Form

Item No.	Item Description	Price	Quantity	Cost
P-8-3	***Parent and Student Surveys on Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades***. (2007) S. B. Sheldon & J. L. Epstein **Surveys and Summaries: Questionnaires for Teachers and Parents in the Elementary and Middle Grades**. (1993) J. L. Epstein & K. C. Salinas **Reliability Reports** **CD of 2007 Surveys**	$20.00		
P-8-4	**High School and Family Partnerships: Surveys for Teachers, Parents, and Students in High School**. (1993) J. L. Epstein, L. Connors-Tadros, & K. C. Salinas **Reliability Reports**	$10.00		
			TOTAL COST $_____	

**Prices include shipping & handling.

SHIPPING INFORMATION:

Name: _____ Tel: _____

Mailing Address _____

_____

METHOD OF PAYMENT: **Please do not send cash.**

☐ Enclose check or money order made payable to: Johns Hopkins University

☐ Indicate Purchase Order # _____

☐ Credit Card (circle one): VISA MASTER CARD DISCOVER

Credit Card Number: _____

Expiration Date: _____

Signature: _____

To place order, fill in requested information, enclose payment (check, money or purchase order, or credit card info), and fax (410-516-8890) or mail to:

National Network of Partnership Schools
Attn: Jenn Ganss
Johns Hopkins University
2701 N. Charles Street, Suite 300
Baltimore, MD 21218

Questions? E-mail nnps@csos.jhu.edu or call Jenn Ganss at 410-516-2318.

Appendix E: Letter of Permission

Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships
Johns Hopkins University • 2701 North Charles Street, Suite 300 • Baltimore MD 21218
TEL: 410-516-8800 • FAX: 410-516-8890 • nnps@jhu.edu

May 30, 2013

To: Jacqueline B. Taylor

From: Joyce L. Epstein & Steven B. Sheldon

Re: Permission to use:

- Sheldon, S. B. & Epstein, J. L. (2007). Parent and Student Surveys on Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades. Baltimore, MD: Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University.
- Epstein, J. L. & Salinas, K. C. (1993). Surveys and Summaries: Questionnaires for Teachers and Parents in the Elementary and Middle Grades. Baltimore, MD: Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University.
- Epstein, J. L., Connors-Tadros, L., & Salinas, K. C. (1993). High School and Family Partnerships: Surveys for Teachers, Parents, and Students in High School. Baltimore, MD: Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University.

This letter grants you permission to use, adapt, or reprint the surveys noted above in your dissertation study.

We ask only that you include appropriate references to the survey and authors in the text and bibliography of your reports and publications.

Best of luck with your project.

Appendix F: Invitation to Participate in Research Study

Date: _____

Dear Parents and Teachers:

I am an Educational Doctoral Degree candidate at Walden University. This Ed. D. program involves research. I have chosen to study the communication gap between educators and parents in Title I elementary school to support student achievement. I would like for you to take part in a survey for my research. This survey will ask you questions about your participation in your child's schooling as it relates to communication. Then I would like to conduct a face-to-face interview with you and finally ask you to participate in a focus group with others parent and teachers.

Research show parents and educators have different views when it comes to communicating with school. Parent and educators need to understand where one another are coming from. This will help parents and educator work together to support student achievement.

You do not have to take part in the survey, interview, or focus group. 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 Dr. Glenn Penny my Doctoral Chairman. You can reach me at XXXXXX You can contact Dr. Penny at XXXXXX

Please complete the information below and sign to indicate that you will complete the on-line survey. If you have more than one child in this school, please only complete the survey once. Thanks you very much for your help!

Sincerely,

Jacqueline B. Taylor
Researcher

____ Yes, I will complete the survey

____ No, I will not complete the survey

Print Full Name: _____

Name of School: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix G: Interview Guidelines & Questions

Note to Researcher
Welcome and brief all participants.
Provide a brief explanation of the study and answer any questions the participant may have concerning the study.
Make participant aware that the interview will be taped recorded and transcribed. Then he/she will be permitted to review for accuracy.
Remind the participant of the interview time and thank him/her in advance.

Interviewee's Number: _____ School Name: _____

Interview Date: _____

1. What are some barriers that have developed to cause a communication gap to exist between educators and parents?

2. What is you perception of effective communication between educators and parents?

3. Do you believe parent –educator communication is essential to support student achievement?

4. Do you see communication as a form of parental involvement?

5. What are some improvements that can be implemented to encourage communication between educators and parents?

Specials Notes:

Appendix H: Focus Group Guidelines

Focus group participants it is helpful to let everyone know the guidelines to make the group proceed smoothly and respectfully. List below are the guidelines or ground rules that will help us establish group norms.

- Only one person talks at a time.
- It is important for us to respect one another ideas and opinions.
- Confidentiality is assured.
- Both positive and negative side of the issue will be discussed therefore it is essential for us to listen to one another.
- It is vital for all parent's and educator's ideas to be equally represented and respected.

The ground rules will remain on display throughout the focus group discussion, on a flip chart in a clear visible location. All participants are expected to follow, honor, and obey the focus group guidelines.

Appendix I: Focus Group Questions

1. As parents what type of communication are you expecting to receive from the school?

2. As educators what type of communication are you expecting from parents?

3. As partners working in the best interest of students how can communication be improved?

4. What type of programs, workshops, or trainings do you think should be implemented to improve communication between educators and parents in Title I elementary schools?

5. Is there anything else you would like to add about bridging the communication gap between educators and parents in Title I elementary schools?

Appendix J: Focus Group Note Taking Form

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Participants: _____ Parents _____ Educators

Instructions: Use this form to record extensive and accurate notes to reflect the content of the discussion, as well as nonverbal behavior, including facial expressions, body language, group dynamics, and noticeable observations.

Key Area/Question 1:

Key Area/Question 2:

Key Area/Question 3:

Key Area/Question 4:

Key Area/Question 5: