

2016

Strategies for Increasing Parental Involvement for Elementary School Students

Amanda Nunnery Compton
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Amanda Compton

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Walden University

2016

Abstract

Strategies for Increasing Parental Involvement for Elementary School Students

by

Amanda N. Compton

MEd, University of Memphis, 1991

BS, University of Memphis, 1982

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2016

Abstract

Students are more successful in school when their parents are involved in their education; This concept is especially true for students living in poverty. The school staff of the elementary school studied in this project study identified the need for improved parental involvement to help close the student achievement gap. In this explanatory sequential mixed methods study, surveys were used to determine the ways parents were involved in their children's education followed by interviews with parents to learn how the school could improve parental participation and family engagement. The research was based on Epstein's model of parent involvement, which includes 6 elements of parental involvement: family obligations, obligations of schools, involvement at school, involvement at home, involvement in decision making, and community involvement. The quantitative phase consisted of 76 parent surveys, and the qualitative phase consisted of 11 parent interviews at the school site. The data were calculated and coded according to the 6 types of parent involvement. From the descriptive statistics used to report the quantitative data, it was evident that all 6 types of parent involvement were important in engaging parents in the education of their children. Communication and learning at home were more of a focus in the qualitative phase of this study. The results showed that schools should plan more effectively to help parents understand how to aid their children at home and to communicate more effectively for purposes of improving student achievement. Professional development will result in positive social change by causing school staff to improve upon the practices they use to engage parents in schools. The improved family engagement will benefit students' academic abilities and social skills.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to my family for their support of me throughout this doctoral journey. To my husband, Craig, for always being there for the support and to our daughter, Laura, for providing the inspiration for me to achieve my goals. Most importantly, to my mother for the encouragement and example that you set for me. A sincere thank you to my sister, Cathy for filling in while I was consumed with this project and to my cousin, Sharlie, for your tenacious editing skills and support. I am grateful to all of you for supporting my lifelong goal of achieving my EdD.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Definition of the Problem	2
Rationale	6
Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level.....	6
Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature.....	8
Definition of Terms.....	12
Significance.....	13
Guiding/Research Questions.....	15
Review of the Literature	16
Introduction.....	16
Conceptual Framework.....	17
Importance of Family Engagement.....	18
Planning for Improvement of Family Engagement	25
Innovative Strategies.....	40
Conclusion	53
Implications.....	53
Summary	54
Section 2: The Methodology.....	57

Introduction.....	57
Research Design.....	57
Setting and Sample	59
Data Collection Strategies.....	62
Quantitative Data Collection.....	62
Qualitative Data Collection.....	64
Role of the Researcher	65
Data Analysis	65
Ethical Consideration.....	68
Protection of Human Subjects	69
Limitations	69
Data Analysis Results	70
Quantitative Surveys.....	71
Findings for Quantitative Surveys	74
Findings for Qualitative Interviews	78
Findings for Qualitative Interviews	80
Conclusion	85
Section 3: The Project.....	88
Introduction.....	88
Description and Goals.....	88
Rationale	90
Supporting Data	91

Review of the Literature	93
Introduction.....	93
Professional Development	95
Parenting	100
Communicating.....	102
Volunteering	105
Learning at Home	107
Decision Making.....	109
Community Involvement	111
Future Exploration	112
Summary	114
Implementation	114
Potential Resources and Existing Supports.....	115
Potential Barriers	116
Proposal for Implementation and Timetable.....	117
Roles and Responsibilities of Others	119
Project Evaluation.....	119
Implications Including Social Change	121
Local Community	121
Far-Reaching.....	122
Conclusion	123
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	125

Introduction.....	125
Project Strengths.....	125
Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations.....	126
Alternative Approaches	128
Scholarship.....	129
Project Development and Evaluation.....	130
Analysis of Self as Scholar	131
Analysis of Self as Practitioner.....	132
Analysis of Self as Project Developer	133
The Project’s Potential Impact on Social Change.....	134
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research.....	134
Conclusion	135
References.....	137
Appendix A: The Project	153
Appendix B: Epstein Parent Survey Letter.....	237
Appendix C: Permission to Use Survey.....	238
Appendix D: Voluntary Interview Sheet	240
Appendix E: Parent Interview.....	241
Appendix F: Action Plan Worksheet	243
Appendix G: Session Evaluation	244
Appendix H: Session Agendas.....	245

List of Tables

Table 1. Quantitative Survey Results of Parental Involvement by Section.....72

Table 2. Qualitative Interview Results by Type of Parent Involvement.....73

List of Figures

Figure 1. Types of parent involvement.....	18
Figure 2. Level of parent education versus projected level of student education.....	73
Figure 3. Demographic results of quantitative surveys	74
Figure 4. Demographics of qualitative interview participants.....	79

Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Across the United States, there is an achievement gap between students who are economically disadvantaged and their more affluent peers (Morgan, 2012). These economically disadvantaged students fail to make the same rate of progress throughout their years of school, and the gap often tends to widen rather than to close. I addressed some possible solutions for helping to close this achievement gap. I also examined the perceptions of parents to help determine what strategies seem to be the most effective to encourage involvement of parents and families.

In this study, I explored the concept that students are more successful in school when their families are engaged in their education (Schueler, 2014). In this section, I define the problem and explain justification for the study. In typical schools in the United States, students who enter school disadvantaged are more likely to be lagging in skills compared to their more affluent peers, according to Gaynor (2012). Gaynor illustrated that if students enter school ready to perform academically, they will outperform their peers who are less ready for school. This achievement gap will continue to widen without significant interventions at the school level. Gaynor concluded that there are three factors that contribute to closing this achievement gap. These factors are teacher effectiveness, leadership within the school, and community and parent involvement. While there may be many factors that affect the achievement gap, in this study I focused on the involvement of parents and the community to positively impact the learning of all students. To illustrate the impact of the parental involvement at a local level, it was

appropriate to describe a specific school environment that has been negatively affected by students who were economically disadvantaged as compared to the progress made by their more affluent peers.

Definition of the Problem

The elementary school described in this project study is one of 167 schools that have been identified as focus schools according to the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE, 2012a). A focus school is characterized by having one or more student subgroups with low achievement according to the U.S. Department of Education, (USDOE, 2015). This distinction in Tennessee was due to the lack of gap closure among students in the non-White and economically disadvantaged subgroups as compared to the “All” subgroups on state mandated assessments. The All subgroup consists of the total group of students that are tested according to the TDOE. According to the school report card for accountability, the data consisted of achievement assessment results for students scoring proficient or advanced for the three previous years. In Tennessee, all school achievement data are archived on the state department website (TDOE, 2015a). At the elementary school described in this project study, the problem was more widespread among students in poverty because the majority of non-White students were also living in poverty. Because the lack of parent involvement is a more widespread issue with students in poverty (Payne, 2013), the study focused on the needs of students in the economically disadvantaged subgroup as it related to engaging parents and families. Many of the students who are economically disadvantaged also fall in other classifications such as

students with disabilities or English language learners (ELLs) according to the Tennessee School Improvement Plan (TDOE, 2015b).

The elementary school described in this project study was comprised of a total enrollment of approximately 450 students, with 215 students in the tested grades of third through fifth during the 2012-2013 school year. At the time of this research, 170 students were non-White in the tested grades. According to the State of Tennessee, students in the racial subgroup (BHN) were those identified as African American (B), Hispanic (H), Native American (N), or those of multiple ethnicities. The state of Tennessee classified students who are Asian or Pacific Islanders in the White subgroup for testing and accountability purposes. As indicated in Hawley and Nieto (2010), students in the BHN racial subgroup are more likely to score nonproficient on state-mandated assessments. Cuthrell, Stapleton, and Ledford (2010) suggested that students living in poverty are far more likely to enter school with lower language skills, which puts them at a disadvantage on standardized assessments.

According to the TDOE (2012b), during the 2012-2013 school year the school described in this study was Title 1 designated, with 80% of the total school population living in poverty and eligible for free or reduced priced meals and fee waiver funding support. This percentage was steady across all grade levels including those students in tested grades. This percentage of students living in poverty had increased by 5% from the previous year. During the 2011-2012 school year, 75% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. As indicated in Jensen (2013), students living in poverty also historically are less likely to score proficient on state mandated assessments.

Tennessee's Report Card (TDOE, 2012c) further indicated that the methods and interventions implemented had been unsuccessful in helping to close the gap between the All students category and the non-White subgroups. In math, the students in this school declined by 11.5% for math proficiency. The growth goal was 3.5% for 2012. In reading, the growth goal was 3.1% but students grew only 2.6% for the 2011-2012 school year. Likewise, according to Tennessee's Report Card, the final student data of the state assessment for the 2011-2012 school year indicated that of the 200 students tested, the percentage of students in the below proficient category in math increased from 13.7% in 2010 and from 12.2% in 2011 to 16.0% in 2012. In reading/language arts, the percentage of students in the below proficient category decreased from 11.5% in 2010 to 10.4% in 2011 to 16.6% in 2012, which further widened the achievement gap.

According to the TDOE (2012b) during the 2011-2012 school year, the faculty and staff of the school were experienced. The majority of certificated staff (47%) had been in the teaching profession for 11 to 20 years. Many of the teachers (19%) had been educators for more than 21 years. While the professional staff in the school had been in the profession for many years, the majority of teachers (61%) had only been at the school between 4 and 10 years. While use of data from 2011-2012 was somewhat dated, it serves as the foundation for the need for change in this school. These data served as the inspiration for this project study.

The 2012 student achievement data listed the school among the focus schools, and the school officials needed to take an honest look at where and how they failed. Most notably, according to the school's principal (personal communication, September 18,

2013), the school administration failed to monitor intervention to ensure that instruction was appropriate, consistent, and of high quality for all students. Related to this problem was inconsistency in providing support for interventions. During the 2011-2012 school year, a new educator evaluation model was implemented district-wide. During the first year of the evaluation model, the administration did not provide adequate and meaningful feedback for teachers. According to the school administration in the above communication, the principal had been very generous and lenient in scoring against the evaluation rubric. However, they shared that their feedback did not include genuinely constructive suggestions that would promote teacher improvement of content instruction. According to personal communications with school administration, the intent was to provide constructive criticism but the rubric was used with a broader interpretation than was intended by the district. As a result, the overall scores for student growth were much below the individual teacher evaluation scores according to the value-added reporting (TDOE, 2015b). In Tennessee all value added assessment reports are archived on the state website by year.

Various changes had been made by the school administration prior to the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year to ensure that the above measures were rectified. Analysis of the 2011-2012 data revealed that adjustments were needed in many areas to improve instruction of the content of the Tennessee state content standards and Common Core State Standards. It was necessary to analyze the teaching strategies used as well as weaknesses with the instructional program and leadership deficiencies. The school administration made changes in teaching assignments, tailored schedules for intervention,

and constructed plans for monitoring instruction and intervention. Additionally, some changes in leadership due to attrition and significant training were provided to administration in regard to the evaluation process of teachers.

The school staff and administration began to look for other ways to improve the academic performance of students. It became necessary for them to examine many areas beyond direct instruction. One of the areas that school staff chose to improve was that of the engagement of the families of their students.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The school administration recognized their lack of oversight in previous years and committed to improving their actions to support teachers and students. The first area to improve was evaluation methods by providing support and feedback to teachers, reviewing what was expected of them, and monitoring what was mandated by the state and the school district. Additionally, the administration implemented a school-wide behavioral intervention program that rewarded students for appropriate behaviors and provided consistent consequences for poor or inappropriate behaviors. To assist teachers and better utilize intervention techniques, the school leadership team examined their overall organization and master schedule. In addition, the school administration obtained support from the district level to gain input and provide feedback on lessons, instructional techniques, materials, and procedures.

A need identified through the TDOE (2015b) was parent involvement. Involving and engaging parents of students in the non-White and economically disadvantaged

targeted subgroups served as the major focus of this study. The foundation of this study was the assertion that students benefit greatly when their parents support their education to the best of their ability (Quezada, 2014). The school staff strived to help the parents recognize the importance of their support. Professional development was provided to staff in regard to specific intervention for students in poverty. One strategy for improving parent involvement in the educational process was to increase staff knowledge of the challenges of students living in poverty.

The intent of this study was to explore parent involvement in the school for purposes of finding ways to improve the relationships with parents and increase their participation. In order to explore ways that the school failed to close the achievement gap, it was necessary to reexamine the shared vision. As identified in the school improvement plan developed by stakeholders at the elementary school described in this project study, stakeholders will continue to provide a family friendly environment that supports the diversity of the student population and provides a climate where students will succeed at their greatest academic and social potential (TDOE, 2015b). The school's mission stated a goal for success for every student and the motto encouraged students to believe in their ability to achieve. The mission and motto were routinely used in communication and stated daily during morning announcements.

Faculty and staff of the elementary school described in this study had indicated their genuine desire to improve their instruction to enable all students to become successful in life. According to the school's principal (personal communication, October 3, 2013), many of the faculty had stated that they would rise to the challenge of

improving student achievement, closing the achievement gap, and redefining who they were.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

The foundation for this research was rooted in the work of Epstein (1986) and Epstein and Dauber (1991). In her 1986 report, Epstein explored family and school connections, and the effects of parent involvement on students, parents, and teachers in the school environment. A major finding in this report determined that all parents have similar objectives and aspirations for their children's education, even if they originate from very different economic backgrounds. Parents of students who are economically disadvantaged are less likely to know how to help their children at home than those of more affluent home environments. Epstein illustrated that parents of economically disadvantaged students are also less likely to understand the policies, procedures, and practices of the school.

Epstein and Dauber (1991) outlined and validated five types of parent and family involvement: basic obligations of families, basic obligations of schools, involvement at school, involvement at home, and involvement in decision making. Epstein and Dauber further explored connections between programs that promote the engagement of parents and families in both elementary and middle schools. They provided suggestions for schools to implement in order to encourage parent involvement. These suggested steps include establishing a beginning point for implementing parent involvement, setting goals for involving parents, assigning tasks and duties, evaluating progress, and establishing support for future actions and programs. They also illustrated that students are more

successful in school when their parents are involved. The framework evident in these two studies formed the basis for this research. Unless otherwise indicated, the following studies listed in this section consist of a review of the literature.

The literature evidenced in this review is presented to support the framework described by Epstein (1986) and Epstein and Dauber (1991). In a more recent work by Epstein (2009), the framework described previously also includes community involvement as a practice that promotes family engagement for support of student achievement. In a more focused study, Voyles (2012) recommended that a school conduct a needs assessment to determine what families want rather than what educators perceive these families need when planning for parent involvement and community collaboration. Voyles further explained through the results of a case study that the perception of what is needed to build parent involvement is different from the perspective of educators as compared with the perceptions of parents through this needs assessment. Often, it seemed that parents do value education but their perception is that schools are more focused on more affluent and involved families. Voyles continued that schools often sent mixed messages about how parents should be involved. Use of community support can help to bridge these differences in the perceptions of both families and educators.

Considerable research exists to indicate that parent involvement is influential in regard to student achievement growth. Crosnoe (2009) analyzed the findings of the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), which indicated that when parents are involved and engaged in their child's learning, including sharing in activities within the

school environment, joining in discussions with school personnel, and most importantly, by supporting their child's growth, development, and learning at home, students can show dramatic improvement in their academic skills growth. In the NELS, the random sample consisted of students from 1,052 schools beginning in 1988. Follow-up data were collected in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000 when the students in the initial study had been out of high school for 8 years. Crosnoe further explained from this longitudinal study that while students grow from this nurturing support, it is equally important for schools to collaborate with parents in order to learn more about students as individuals to teach them effectively. Crosnoe suggested that the connections between school and home are instrumental in maximizing student learning.

Moles and Fege (2011) maintained that throughout the evidence in literature, the engagement of the families of students in Title I schools promotes improved student achievement and more social success for students in the community. Engagement can denote a wide variety of activities, actions, and interventions both in the school environment and in the home setting. In addition, according to this report from the USDOE, schools receiving Title I funds must involve parents in developing a plan for increasing the parent involvement in the school. Within this parent involvement plan, schools have a responsibility to partner with parents to gain their support to improve student achievement. In addition, through a meta-analysis study Dervarics and O'Brien (2011) suggested that a prevalent characteristic of effective parent involvement is that students gain higher achievement when their parents support their learning at home. In their study, Dervarics and O'Brien summarized information from the works of Epstein

(2009) as well as government reports. Their finding indicated that educators often have a different interpretation of what parent involvement looks like. This research indicated that parents want to be involved in their child's education and that this involvement will positively impact their child's academic growth.

Bartel (2010) explained that the achievement gap actually was a separation of opportunities for learning. The author further suggested that academic skills of students are strengthened when their parents are involved in their education. Bartel concluded that parents in a higher socioeconomic level were more involved in the education of their children than those parents of lower socioeconomic status. Bartel emphasized that schools must understand the socioeconomic status of parents when developing activities to involve parents. Bartel further explained that by understanding the needs of students some potential barriers can be avoided that could possibly widen the achievement gap. Bartel indicated that when teachers solicit support from parents, their students improve academically. Further discussion of implementing purposeful strategies for parent involvement was revealed in Toldson and Lemmons (2013). They explained that by making small changes, parents may become more involved and educators can begin to understand their parents from a different perspective. Overall, through these examples, there was consensus for improved parent involvement within the school but a plan was needed to help the staff increase the involvement and engagement of parents and families. Further, it was evident that it was necessary to develop an organized action plan to improve relationships with parents.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the opinions of a variety of parents, not just those who are economically disadvantaged. Within the limits of this study, I was unable to identify those parents who were economically disadvantaged. I was able to determine that the participating school district served 80% of their students in poverty. It was probable that the majority of respondents would be economically disadvantaged to some degree. I was unable to determine which participants were living in poverty, so I decided to explore the perspective of all parents through quantitative and qualitative measures. The focus of this study was to gain perspective on what parents' view as important in regard to parent involvement. Limited information was available to know if parents were indeed economically disadvantaged or not. Parents from any background were invited to participate in this study through quantitative surveys and/or qualitative interviews. Within the parameters of this study, demographic information regarding family income was not requested.

Definition of Terms

Throughout the literature, the terms *parent involvement* and *parent engagement* appeared interchangeably. Constantino (2016) described the role of families as being crucial to the success of students. Families are defined in the terms below and may refer to parents of students or any significant adults in the lives of students.

Parent: For purposes of this study, the term *parent* is in reference to any adult family member that is important to a student as described by Constantino (2016). Glueck and Reschly (2014) implied that the term *parent* can relate to any family member who plays a meaningful role in a child's life through discussion of the engagement of families.

Often, uncles, aunts, and cousins, as well as grandparents or other meaningful adults are influential in the lives of students.

Parent involvement: In this study, the term *family engagement* is a synonym for parent involvement. These terms define the support that parental units provide to their children in the school setting as well as at home as described by Constantino (2016). Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, and Pedro (2011) defined parent involvement as actions of families both at home and at school. In addition to the above terminology, the researchers suggested the term *school-family partnerships* as a term used synonymously with parent involvement. In their qualitative study of parent involvement in charter schools, Smith et al. suggested that, while the terminology is similar, there may be a continuum or hierarchy of levels of parent involvement to family engagement.

School improvement plan: The State of Tennessee requires that every public school develop a plan to refine the goals of the school based on student performance on state-mandated assessments. This plan includes goals that are developed with input from all stakeholders (TDOE, 2015b).

Significance

The school described in this project study had an existing plan for parent involvement, but, according to the school administration, there was only a core group of parents who were involved in the school. The principal of the school indicated that the school staff were seldom able to reach parents of struggling students. This study will be useful to the local educational setting because parents will provide strategies that the administration and teachers can use to support parental engagement in the school and

their children's education. Schools receiving Title I funds are required to engage families of the students who they serve according to Evans and Radina (2014). In a qualitative analysis study, Evans and Radina reminded educators that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 stated that schools receiving Title I funds are required to have a written parent involvement policy that is developed in collaboration with parents and the community. While the effects of parent involvement are mandated in NCLB, Evans and Radina indicated that an environment of mutual respect of parents and educators is needed to develop good working partnership. The ways that parents should be involved in their children's education are not as easy to determine, but the process should be ongoing. Evans and Radina supported the concept that without involving parents, students are much less likely to be successful. This research indicated that involving parents in the process of gaining their support will benefit the local school setting.

Ingram, Wolfe, and Lieberman (2010) maintained that students who struggle with academic skills would benefit from better family support. They further suggested that the more parents are involved in a child's learning, the more successful that child will be in school. Their descriptive survey study of 220 parents of students in three high performing schools in Chicago, where the students were considered to be at risk due to the makeup of over 50% economically disadvantaged and minority students, revealed that some aspects of parent involvement are more closely related to student academic growth than other areas. In their study, Ingram et al. noted that at-home parenting activities and learning-at-home activities have a greater impact on student achievement. Parent involvement

activities at the school and in the community seemed to have less impact on student growth.

Innovative strategies to engage families emerged from a study conducted by Smith et al. (2011). Through their qualitative study, which included interviews with school leaders in 12 charter schools across six states, the authors noted that there are differing perceptions of what parent involvement means in each school. These charter schools all held policies requiring a parent involvement plan. Each school had a diverse student population with a significant number of students who were economically disadvantaged. School leaders were interviewed to determine which parent involvement practices are used in their schools. Among these strategies, the most influential finding was training programs to teach parents how to be involved and engaged in their children's education. Smith et al. also noted that overall parent involvement is increased when parents of minority students are included in the decision making of the school. Results indicated that schools were successful in increasing parent involvement when the task was a priority in every aspect of the school.

Guiding/Research Questions

Evidence throughout the literature indicated that when parents are actively engaged in their children's education academic scores improve overall. To effectively close the achievement gap between students who live in poverty and their more affluent peers, it is necessary to involve their parents in their children's education.

The following two research questions were the basis for this study:

1. In what ways are parents currently involved in their children's education?
(quantitative)
2. What can the school do to improve the participation and support of parents in their children's education? (qualitative)

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Current literature contains plethora of information in regard to ways to involve and engage parents in the school environment. A search of literature published from 2009 to 2015 was completed to highlight key pieces of current literature. Key words used in this search included *parent involvement* and *family engagement* through use of the Thoreau Multi-database search.

Some seminal works of literature were published earlier than this timeframe and contributed to the framework and discussion, but most of the research appeared within the last 5 years. This review includes factors that contribute to the effectiveness of parent involvement in schools including school climate, effective leadership, perceptions of parent engagement, characteristics of students living in poverty, understanding cultural differences, and differentiated methods of parent engagement. Other factors in this review include the challenges of engaging parents of students with special needs or ELLs, technology and communication concerns, parent training, and types of parent involvement. For purposes of better explanation, this literature review was organized into three sections from the categories above: the importance of family engagement, improvement planning, and innovative strategies for parent involvement.

I determined that saturation was reached when I realized that much of the literature reviewed and highlighted the same details. I determined that effective strategies for family engagement are unique to the needs of each school and are determined through planning with stakeholders.

Conceptual Framework

The foundation for this study was based on the framework of parent involvement surveys developed by Epstein (2009). Epstein's framework is founded on six types of involvement to engage parents and families in the education of their children. These six types of involvement are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. All six types of parent involvement described in this framework pose unique challenges for school staff. According to Epstein, the culmination of many research studies was summarized to outline the six types of parent involvement included in this survey. These types of parent involvement are illustrated with the use of a tree map design in Figure 1 (ThinkingMaps, 2014).

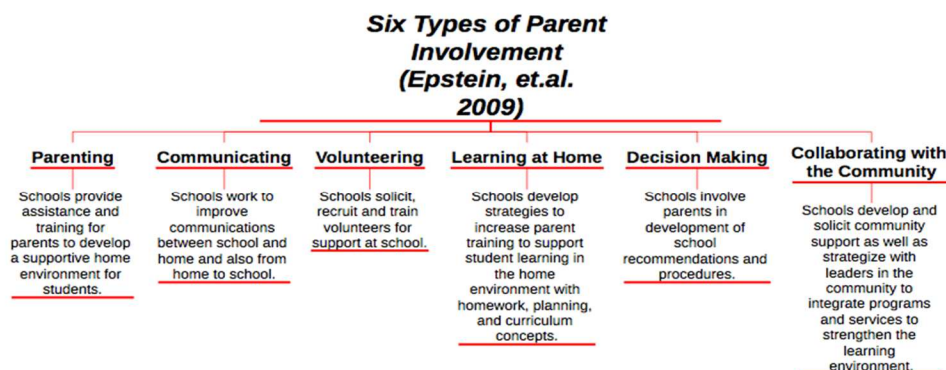


Figure 1. Types of parent involvement.

Importance of Family Engagement

Dervarics and O'Brien (2011) stated that researchers have agreed that parent involvement positively impacts student achievement. This meta-analysis by Dervarics and O'Brien synthesized the works of Epstein and the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) report. The research indicated that parents do want to be involved in their child's education but this involvement may vary in each school environment. Their work implied that the importance of parent involvement is one factor of which most researchers have been overwhelmingly supportive. The survey illustrated that most all researchers and educators agreed that parent involvement positively impacts student achievement.

Students who are economically disadvantaged are more likely to be behind their same age advantaged peers in language development when they enter kindergarten, according to Mohler, Yun, Carter, and Kasak (2009). The importance of family engagement could be more critical for students who are behind in their language development (Mohler et al., 2009). Their longitudinal study involved 22 preschool

classrooms from eight locations in southern California in an inner city school district over a 2-year period as these students transitioned into kindergarten. The study consisted of 24 teachers and more than 1,000 preschool students enrolled in half-day preschool programs. All students in these programs were economically disadvantaged. The authors described a *readiness gap* that often exists between students who are living in poverty and those students who are more advantaged. Mohler et al. indicated that this gap is significant because students from homes that are more advantaged may have heard as many as 10 million more words than those students who are economically disadvantaged when they begin school. Implications from this parent involvement study indicated that schools should consider providing instruction to parents of students who are economically disadvantaged to help build their child's vocabulary skills.

Sheppard (2009) discussed that educators should consider the perspective and experiences of parents when enlisting their support to improve attendance for students in the targeted subgroups. This comparative experimental quantitative study involved 57 students who were 12 to 13 years of age for purposes of studying student attendance. Sheppard communicated that before a student enters school the socioeconomic background of parents is an accurate predictor of student achievement. According to Sheppard, students from a low socioeconomic level typically exhibit poorer academic performance than do students from a higher socioeconomic level. This information indicated that it would be helpful to better involve the parents and families of the students to support their education. Sheppard suggested that training parents to understand how to support their children at home is effective in improving the academic performance of

students. The results of this study indicated that students who are economically disadvantaged are more likely to have poor attendance than students from more privileged backgrounds. These students also indicated that they did not like school as much as more affluent students.

In contrast, Young, Austin, and Growe (2013) illustrated that the involvement of parents is more important than the effects of the family income to affect student achievement positively. This concept was discussed in a grounded theory research study that centered on establishing a clear definition of the role of parents in the lives of their children in the educational setting. While the number of participants in their study was not evident, Young et al. collected data from participants in professional development sessions. These participants were asked to define *parent involvement* in their own words. Through their study, Young et al. recommended that schools clearly define their expectations of parents as it relates to being involved with their children's education. The researchers concluded that there are many perspectives on the definition of parent involvement. An additional key point in their study was that communication between home and school should be effective to improve relationships between parents and educators.

Just as one teaches each student through differentiated instructional methods, it is important to understand that their cultural differences also have an impact on the way that students learn when considering the importance of parent involvement (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). Hawley and Nieto (2010) explained that by disregarding students' race or ethnicity and trying to teach the same way to all students, educators are less effective.

Hawley and Nieto illustrated that realistically, race and ethnicity do affect student learning because of the manner in which students react to instruction and the presumptions made by educators of how students learn. In this research, it was evident that these beliefs were not viewed as discrimination but as reality. Students from varied ethnic backgrounds learn differently and these differences should be considered when planning instruction. From this research it can be surmised that communications with parents should be varied based on the needs of each student.

In regard to cultural differences, students living in poverty present unique challenges to schools because of the increased incidence of behavioral difficulties (Anderson, Houser, & Howland, 2010). Anderson et al. (2010) suggested that the culture of the family and the climate of the school should also be considered when involving families. The exploratory research by Anderson et al. illustrated that often parents of students who are economically disadvantaged typically report that their experiences with a school are often based on negativity, which could make parent involvement efforts more difficult but not less important. In this study, the implementation of behavioral intervention services was practiced to address the psychological and social needs of students. Coordinators of the program implemented supports and training for parents and additional behavior intervention for students. The intervention strategies improved the relationship between parents and educators. These support strategies included partnering with school staff to increase the success of students living in poverty by providing interventions for students in crisis, establishing counseling sessions, and allocating support and resources from mental health professionals outside the school. Coordinators

in this study provided professional development for educators and served as a resource for working with students and their families.

Students from other cultural backgrounds can also pose unique challenges to schools. According to Panferov (2010), it is important for educators to be aware of the unique factors that parents of ELLs may face to enlist their support. Gaining parent support of ELLs may be difficult if the parent has had unpleasant educational experiences or if their understanding of English is limited. From this case study research involving parents and ELLs, Panferov recommended that educators strive to engage parents in collaborative relationships. These relationships should be respectful of the parents' cultural heritage and mirror the learning experiences of parents. These factors are vital to building relationships with families of ELLs, which will increase the involvement of parents of these students.

Forms of parental involvement may also vary greatly. Jeynes (2011) illustrated that parent involvement can take various forms and need not always be in the form of visiting the school and participating in activities within the school. This meta-analysis indicated that any involvement from parents is important to student success and that parent involvement has evolved in recent years to become more varied. Previously, educators perceived that parents were involved in their child's education if they engaged in activities such as volunteering within the school and participated in events. This meta-analysis revealed perceptions that parents are involved in much more understated ways. This study revealed that parents viewed involvement at home to be more valuable than their involvement at school. Jeynes surmised that both parents and teachers recognized

that the most important way for parents to be involved is to ensure that their children attend school regularly. This research indicated that the perceptions of teachers vary in regard to parent involvement. Many teachers may feel that parents are not involved unless they are visible in the school. Additionally, many teachers do not feel they have adequate time to build relationships with parents. These differences in perceptions are a barrier to the involvement of families. Jeynes further suggested that educators should reach out to parents with subdued methods such as increased respect and sensitivity and improved communication to better engage the families of students.

Similar findings were expanded in results from a study completed by Ingram et al. (2010). Their descriptive survey study conducted in high poverty schools indicated that parent efforts such as volunteering in the school or attending school functions have less impact on student achievement growth than parental support at home. Of the 1,000 surveys sent to 800 families in three schools, 220 surveys were completed. Ingram et al. found that professional development training for staff with consideration of working with parents may be necessary. Ingram et al. also noted that often parents do not feel they have time to be involved with their children at school. Their research suggested that it is important for parents to be involved with their children even if only at home.

Sukys, Dumciene, and Lapeniene (2015) also explored the effects of parent involvement on the academic success of students. Through a quantitative survey study, they revealed that when educators work closely with parents their involvement increases and students benefit academically. This study was conducted with 170 parents of 12- to 16-year-old students with special needs in inclusive education classes in secondary

schools in Lithuania. The results of their study were reported to be similar to findings in other countries as related to students with special needs (Sukys et al., 2015). The findings indicated that parents assisting their children with homework made a positive impact on the performance of students. The researchers suggested that often parents may need assistance in finding ways to help their child with homework. Sukys et al. upheld the belief that students achieve more in school when they do their homework. The implications from their study suggested that parents who assist their children with homework contribute to their success in school, but they may need support in understanding how to help their child at home.

The educators within the school may perceive parents who may not be able to visit the school easily as uncaring or less involved than parents who do visit the school often (Smiley & Helfenbein, 2011). These negative perceptions may interfere with the working relationship between parents and schools. To begin to overcome these negative perceptions, Smiley and Helfenbein (2011) conducted a qualitative study in which they explored perceptions among the value systems associated with various socioeconomic groups and ethnicities of students. Their study was comprised of data collected from two preservice teachers enrolled in training programs. The researchers concluded that while there are cultural differences between these subgroups, it is most beneficial for educators to recognize and build upon the skills and qualities of each family to encourage their engagement in their children's education. They further suggested that by understanding the differences of families, and one's own prejudices, negative perceptions can be prevented and students can still benefit from the involvement of their parents.

Families of students have changed in recent years and techniques for engaging parents should adjust to meet their needs. Kosaretskii and Chernyshova (2013) researched the practices of schools in several countries by focusing on the belief that parents of today are quite different than those of years ago. Because of this change, Kosaretskii and Chernyshova noted that it is necessary for educators to adjust their communication strategies to improve relationships with families of their students. In their research, the authors noted that the family structure has evolved in recent years and the effects of society have greatly impacted the family unit. Complicating these changes are that while families want to be engaged, there is limited time available for involvement in school activities. In their research, parents recognized that their support of their children is necessary to their success. Kosaretskii and Chernyshova concluded that the shift in families and the expectations that are required of most parents can often cause guilt among parents for not being as involved as they feel is necessary.

Based on this review of literature that indicated that family engagement is vital to the achievement success of students and due to changing needs of families, it is necessary to explore the concept of schools developing a plan for improvement.

Planning for Improvement of Family Engagement

Just as educators plan for effective instruction, it is equally important to plan for successful parent involvement. Schools should identify the needs of students and develop an action plan that is based on these needs. Through a quantitative survey study, Vera et al. (2012) reported that school climate was critical to inviting better parent involvement. This research illustrated that a school climate that is perceived as welcoming to all

students is related to good communication efforts by the school staff. In addition, a good school climate contributed to community relationships and positive school experiences by students and their families. Vera et al. suggested that educators should concentrate on a positive school climate and effective communication to improve relationships with parents. In regard to school climate, Vera et al suggested that school staff understand the needs of diverse families and explore their unique circumstances. Communication efforts should be varied and considerate of the needs of diverse families. Above all, families should feel welcome in the school and educators should work to gain their perspective in the governance of the school.

According to Wegmann and Bowen (2010), it is evident that the climate of the school contributed greatly to the perception that parents have about the school. These researchers explored the relationship that students develop within the school environment. Most notably, they stressed that students and parents need to feel that they are a part of the school. Four elements were described that heavily influence the development of a successful relationship between schools and families: approach, attitudes, atmosphere, actions and activities. These four elements should be included in any plan for parental involvement. The “approach” element describes that schools must make an effort to reach out to parents and invite them in the school. Educators should be fair and consistent in communicating with parents to present appropriate “attitudes”. “Atmosphere” is also important to ensure that parents are welcome in the school and greeted in a warm and friendly manner. School staff also need to provide “activities” that

are conducive to the needs of parents as well as “actions” that ensure positive collaboration between schools and families.

Similarly, Schueler, Copotosto, Bahena, McIntyre, and Gehlbach (2014) also suggested through a review of literature that a positive school climate should exist for students to promote academic and social success. These researchers promoted the concept that educators should strive to improve parents’ perception of the school in order to increase parent involvement. When planning for parent involvement, schools should consider ways to improve the climate of the school. For example, personnel within the school can provide a nurturing support system for students. The school should also be safe for students, staff and parents. Opportunities should be provided for teachers to learn through professional development as well as for students to grow academically. These focus areas should utilize existing resources within the school to promote a positive learning environment for students and their families. Schueler et al. concluded that when a positive climate exists for teachers, students and parents, the environment is enriched for all stakeholders.

In a further examination of educational environment climate, student data were reviewed and analyzed through research conducted by Strayhorn (2010) to determine the extent of school environment, the perspective of staff, and the involvement of parents on achievement scores of African American male students. Strayhorn analyzed aspects of the educational setting that impact achievement. It was noted that students who have parent support with homework make greater gains in math achievement. In addition, when students had support of their teachers through challenging expectations and a

positive school climate, they earned higher results in math assessments. These aspects of support should be reviewed as school staff plan for improved parent involvement. Based on the results of his research, school staff should consider implementing supports for parents to improve communication, increase opportunities for conferences and search for ways to provide instruction to help parents know the most effective ways to help their children learn at home to improve the involvement of parents.

Developing relationships between parents and school staff can offset any negative associations that may impact the parents' perception of the school. Getting to know students and their families individually will provide teachers with knowledge of unique cultural differences in order to improve communication and to aid in planning for parental involvement. These concepts were discussed by Murray (2009) who further elaborated that by building these relationships, a sense of trust could be developed between teachers and parents, which will strengthen communication efforts. This quantitative research investigated the correlation between the relationship between parents and students and parents and teachers of students who are economically disadvantaged. The study consisted of 129 youth in a large city in the Midwest. The majority of participants were Hispanic/Latino or African American of whom 99% of participants qualified for free or reduced priced meals. The students were in grades 6 - 8 and over half of the participants were female. Participants were administered the Research Assessment package for Schools (RAPS) that is used to determine the engagement of students in school. Findings from this research indicated that students who felt that they had little support from either parents or teachers had a lower perception of

their abilities in school. From this research, it can be suggested that educators should receive training in how to communicate with parents to enlist their support.

A common thread in the literature in regard to parent involvement is that school personnel should be understanding and tolerant of the unique cultural differences of families to improve communication. Through an analysis of existing literature, Bang (2009) focused on the need for school personnel to be more aware of cultural differences, especially when parents originate from countries other than the United States. Additionally, Bang stressed that educators should ensure that parents know what to expect and there should be clear channels of communication, especially when communicating with parents of students from different cultures. It can be determined from the research that by becoming aware of differences of students, educators can better understand how to communicate with their parents. In addition, communication efforts should also be part of the planning process in engaging families.

Furthermore, it is also necessary to consider parents of all students in the school environment when planning for effective involvement strategies. The difficult task of involving parents of students with disabilities was described by Staples and Diliberto (2010). Through a review of current and historical research, Staples and Diliberto examined fundamental elements of building a rapport with parents of students with disabilities for purposes of engaging them in the education of their children and building effective communication. The concept of collaboration and sharing in the educational decisions of students are the foundation of the federal legislation that governs students with disabilities. Although there is no federal law to require involvement of parents, we

can learn from the experiences of parents of students with disabilities that students make much better progress when schools collaborate with parents and a plan of action is developed. From their research, it can be surmised that by involving parents of any students in collaboration, an impression is given to students who a team of educators and parents are working together to provide support.

Educators often use varying methods to reach students with diverse and unique needs in the classroom setting. Similarly, it may also be effective to examine the unique and diverse needs of parents to improve their involvement in the education of their children. This concept is illustrated in Weasmer and Woods (2010) who explored the attitude that educators may have toward students with unique needs. Suggestions were developed that included ways to interact and communicate with parents of students with disabilities that will encourage a positive working relationship. Weasmer and Woods suggested that teachers should communicate with other professionals to determine best practices. They further stated that it is important to interact with parents to gain an understanding of their perspective in regard to their child's education. Teachers should also observe the student to form their own understanding and to set priorities and develop procedures to implement the most effective program for students. Weasmer and Woods further explained that continued professional development is also critical to stay current with new trends in the field of study. From their research it can be surmised that these practices can also be applied to involving and engaging families of students in the targeted subgroups and should be included in planning for family engagement.

A descriptive survey study that explored the impact of parent involvement on student math achievement performance was conducted by Sheldon, Epstein, and Galindo (2010). Although the study was conducted in regard to student achievement in math, the effectiveness of school administration was also explored. The researchers collected data from 41 different schools. Their surveys consisted of information that explored the math activities performed by families as well as the cooperation between families and educators in the schools. Through their survey research, Sheldon et al. indicated that the effectiveness of the leadership in a school also impacts the involvement of parents. Additionally, Sheldon et al. explained that there is a relationship between parent involvement and student performance. The school administration in the study did impact the climate of the school. The researchers further illustrated that a positive school climate improved the involvement of parents. Results indicated that school leaders should continue to improve school climate in order to improve the involvement of parents in the school. As suggested in Sheldon et al. school leaders can encourage positive relationships between parents and educators by improving school climate.

It appeared from the initiative practiced by all staff in Rule and Kyle's study (2009) that the school administration set the standard and implemented procedures for involving and engaging parents in the school environment. To improve communication, Rule and Kyle implied that by improving communication among faculty and staff, efforts to involve parents could also be strengthened. One of the interesting challenges described in their study involved helping parents learn to interact with each other in a very diverse setting in spite of their own differences. The focus in their study was on improving school

climate, which in turn helped parents learn to interact not only with the school staff but also with each other. School climate and parent interaction should be part of a plan for engaging families. The term *respect* was the center of the strategies to improve school climate not only among the faculty but in relating to students and their families as well.

Parents may not have the tools or knowledge to help their child in school and they may not have a clear understanding of the schools' expectations of them as parents according to van Otter (2014). Participants in the longitudinal study participated in surveys and interviews. Public data were also reviewed over a long period of time for purposes of studying parental aspirations in relationship with their economic level. The majority of the participants were mothers as the primary caregiver. Results of the research indicated that parent involvement is related to student performance. If parents understand that their children are performing well, they are more likely to be involved parents according to van Otter. Conversely, van Otter suggested that if students seem to need more help in school, then parents also are more likely to be involved. There may be a disconnect with average performing students. From the research, it is suggested that parents need more information about what is expected of their children in school. The success of students in their education is linked to the parents' belief that their children can succeed according to van Otter. From the research, it can be suggested that parents may need additional supports to know how to help their children be successful in school. When planning for parent involvement, it can be understood from the research, that communication efforts should include expectations for parents that are clearly stated and

explained as well as supports for parents to know best practices for assisting their children in school.

To begin any reconstruction or reorganization, it is necessary to develop a systematic plan for intervention as suggested in Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010). Additionally, their research indicates that educators dissect student assessment data to drive instruction and differentiate to individual learners. To better involve parents and families in the instructional process, it would be beneficial to follow the principles of backward design in order to develop a plan for what the school identifies as their intended outcome in regard to involving families in the educational process (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). According to Wiggins and McTighe (2007), backward design is a process by which educators should know what they want the outcome to be when developing lessons or goals for students. While this reference is outside of the search parameters, the concept of backward design is critical to planning for involving parents and families because it is important for educators to visualize the end result to monitor implementation. Wiggins and McTighe described the importance of developing a plan for school reform, which can be applied to the quest of engaging parents in student learning.

The task of engaging parents and developing lasting relationships can be a unique challenge for schools. Constantino (2016) stated that schools are more likely to lose parental support and family engagement as students grow older and move to middle and high school. His research consisted of the development of a family engagement program that could be implemented in virtually any school. The text provided information for schools to develop strategies for engaging families in the school environment.

Recommendations from his research revealed that parents of students in middle school and high school are less supportive than parents in elementary schools so it is beneficial to build lasting relationships with families in order to support students throughout their school career. Constantino emphasized that school staff should customize interventions and collaborate effectively to engage parents as their children progress through each grade level. Most specifically, results from his research indicated that schools should be welcoming and friendly to all parents in order to be more successful in involving parents in the school environment. From the research, it can be suggested that by supporting students throughout their education, we would be helping to nurture a new generation of parents that support education.

Planning for technology and communication. Mitchell, Foulger, and Wetzel (2009) explored technology options for enhanced communications and stressed that educators should search for multiple ways to communicate with all parents and families. Their research implied that communication should be a major component of any plan for parent involvement. To provide communication to families with limited access to internet use, the strategies suggested in their research indicated that school staff should continue to utilize traditional methods to communicate with parents, including hard copies. It was further indicated that care should be given to communicate with parents in their home languages as much as possible. They further emphasized that some parents may have limited access to technology so methods should be explored to develop communication with all parents and families. Like other skills, their research suggested that it may also

be necessary to provide additional instruction to parents regarding how to use the technology available to them.

Planning for fostering positive relationships. When counselors and administrators foster positive relationships with parents of students that are at risk for failure, the academic success of these students greatly increases according to Williams, Greenleaf, Albert, and Barnes (2014). They utilized the role of counselors to create an environment of partnerships for families of students. Counselors linked parents with teachers to help offset any negative connotations of poverty and mistrust that may have developed within the school. This process helped connect student learning with real life experiences for students. According to Williams et al., the role of school counselors can expand to help staff learn how to collaborate effectively with parents of students who are less resilient or disadvantaged. According to this research, parents of students who are economically disadvantaged typically view communication with the school negatively due to the perceptions of educators regarding their economic situation. Counselors can help to bridge the communication between parents and educators and these counselors should be involved in the planning for developing collaboration between parents and school staff.

Planning for the effects of poverty and diversity. The effects of poverty on students and their families are discussed in Jensen (2013) in that the engagement of parents and families of students living in poverty can be especially challenging for schools. Jensen outlined seven principles that impact achievement and performance of students living in poverty. Implementing strategies based on these seven principles will

promote achievement growth for students living in poverty. These seven principles consist of building nutrition through physical activity, introducing and using vocabulary to build student knowledge, building respectful relationships with students and families, providing supportive learning by equipping students with task specific feedback and goal setting, building students' cognitive capacity, monitoring progress and interventions to build academic skills, and developing organizational and functional tools. Jensen suggested that educators should take the initiative to communicate that they care about students in every communication with parents. Perhaps the greatest lesson to be gained from his review of principles is that educators should recognize the unique characteristics of families of students living in poverty and to plan for developing innovative strategies for engaging them in the learning environment.

According to Deverics and O'Brien (2011), an important component of building student achievement using a backward design method discussed by Wiggins and McTighe (2007) is that school staff should identify the academic areas where students are most deficient to focus on improvement. The report indicated that interactive homework is an important way to bring parents and students together in support of education. Their discussion of homework interaction can be simple but should include a portion of the students' homework to be completed with their parents. Further, interaction and communication can also help to improve student attendance at all grade levels. From the research, it can be concluded that by developing a plan for targeting intervention, school staff can gain the most effective support from involving parents in homework activities to improve student achievement to a greater extent. A plan for involvement should involve

input from parents and should include activities that are recognized as needed based on areas of deficit.

Padak and Rasinski (2010) outlined many suggestions for improving communication with parents and families. The authors emphasized that it is necessary to gain input from a committee of stakeholders and to regularly review procedures in order to promote a positive impact on family involvement. Their suggestions offered in their collection of research findings are not complicated or time consuming but should be planned in collaboration with teachers, parents, and the community. Padak and Rasinski explained that even very small ideas and changes could help to make a big difference with improving communication with families. Padak and Rasinski suggested that collaboration between parents and school staff will help to identify the most appropriate solutions to improve communication within the school environment.

School staff should work to build trust with parents to gain their support (Barone, 2011). Barone stated that parents of Latino students often feel disconnected with schools and that the disconnect impacts collaboration efforts between home and school. Barone also stressed the importance of building trust among parents of economically disadvantaged and non-White parents for purposes of increasing effective collaboration. Their suggested collaboration could also result in developing activities for engaging families in the promotion of literacy within the school. The project described in Barone's research was developed through working closely with parents to initiate a literacy program in the school that promoted parent involvement as well as improved student mastery of literacy skills.

To develop a climate that is conducive to collaboration, it is necessary to establish a school or classroom environment that promotes family engagement as outlined in Kosaretskii and Chernyshova (2013). Through a review of literature from studies of schools in several countries, their research implied that families of current times have changed greatly in recent years. Implications from their research support the notion that school personnel should closely examine the changing needs of families to address issues that are most critical of the families of their students to encourage appropriate communication strategies. The authors stressed that school personnel should collaborate with families regarding their involvement, and continuously reflect on the progress of family engagement along with all stakeholders. Collaboration and reflection could be managed through the development and implementation of a plan for parent involvement. From their research, it should also be understood that collaboration should be conducted on a regular basis to further address the changing needs of families.

Building trust with parents is a critical component in developing a positive working relationship with the families of all students. Adams (2009) concluded, through a quantitative analysis, that when parents distrust the educational professionals in the school, the effects could be detrimental. Data were collected from a random sample of 79 schools in the Midwest for purposes of measuring the trust between parents and schools. The schools included 22 elementary, 30 middle schools and 27 high schools. The majority of participants were classified as White (64%). Native American (17%) were the next largest subgroup and African American (11%) were the third largest subgroup of participants. Participants who were of Hispanic or Asian descent comprised the

remainder of participants. The researchers maintained that trust is required for positive working relationships from both educators as well as families for the partnership to develop. According to the research, school staff are not predisposed to mistrust among parents even if the students and families are of low socioeconomic and multiethnic origins. Additionally, trust could be built by offering multiple opportunities for families and educators to collaborate and by engaging all of the faculty and staff into the efforts of building trust among the families of all students. Adams indicated that collaboration should be part of a plan developed to encourage positive communication and to develop relationships between home and school.

Likewise, Souto-Manning (2010) provided a review of literature and suggested that educators plan for ways that parents can become involved without having to come to the school. The review explained that schools should seek to understand the culture of the family and search for creative ways to encourage involvement in order to better engage them in the school setting. Equally as important is the need for true collaboration between parents and schools. Corngold (2009) stated that the relationship between school staff and parents of students should be a partnership rather than educators dictating how parents should be involved in the education of their children. An illustration of the term *collaboration* is evident in this research in that parents should have a *give and take* type of partnership with school staff. Corngold indicated that educators should provide clear expectations of assignments but should be open to questions from parents as well as accepting of their suggestions. The relationship should be a collaborative partnership rather than a one- sided entity.

In summary, school staff should develop a plan that includes innovative and unique methods and strategies to build relationships with families. This plan should encourage family engagement for purposes of increasing student academic proficiency. These methods should include strategies for building a positive school climate, improving communication, and collaborating effectively. Both parents and educators should review and revise this plan regularly. Methods should also be adapted to the varied needs of families and should be modified and adjusted as needed.

Innovative Strategies

Throughout the literature, communication is consistently evident as an important strategy that impacts parent involvement in the school setting. It is also important to get to know the families of students to better understand their needs and perspective. While recognizing the need to involve parents in the school environment, Shim (2013) stated that educators should improve communications with parents to promote positive relationships and increase collaboration. According to Shim's qualitative research teachers are generally not proficient in understanding how to communicate well with the parents of their non-English speaking students. Parents with limited English proficiency often become frustrated with communication with school staff and they may feel uncomfortable collaborating with educators. Shim described the results of qualitative interviews that were held with six parents of students with limited English proficiency in a middle school setting in a central southwestern state. The perspective of parents with limited English skills was explored with three common themes that emerged. Shim illustrated that parents felt that they were often misjudged by their children's teachers and

that it was difficult for them to have any impact on decisions made in the school. In the research, parents also were concerned that their child might be mistreated if the parents disagreed with the school staff. Shim concluded that educators should take precautions to ensure that they communicate effectively with all parents.

An additional innovative strategy that can be used to improve parental involvement is that of technology which can be an effective tool to communicate with families. Although families have changed in recent years, technology has changed even more quickly. Mitchell et al. (2009) explored ten strategies through literature that schools should implement to develop communication with parents. Their strategies included developing and maintaining a website for both the school and for each classroom. Through the classroom website that was described, various activities could be posted that would promote family engagement. Mitchell et al. suggested that email communication should be utilized and provisions should be made to instruct parents in how to utilize this technology as well as making the technology available to parents.

Effective strategies for parent and family involvement should include a plan for good communication. Descriptions of elements of good communication were also described by Staples and Diliberto (2010). The researchers stressed that schools should strive to build relationships with all types of parents as well as to involve families in varying types of activities over the course of the school year. Their research described the specific needs of involving parents of students with disabilities. Staples and Diliberto explained that according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, school staff are required to have an annual review of the program for any student receiving special

education services. Their research illustrated that these annual meetings offer a unique opportunity for educators to collaborate regarding the needs of these individual students. Their research further stated that it is critical for educators to consider the perspective of parents of students with disabilities during meetings.

Strategies for increasing family engagement should also include provisions for communicating with parents of non-English speaking students. Often, students become more proficient than their parents in English skills and are asked to serve as interpreters. Through a case study of children in two families, Panferov (2010) further explained that education in other countries might differ greatly from schools in the United States, which may impact the perceptions of parents of ELLs. Panferov stressed that educators should strive to build communication methods with non-English speaking parents to get to know them as individuals and to build positive working relationships with them. Panferov suggested that it is also necessary for school personnel to make an effort to speak to parents of non-English speaking students and poverty level student as often as they do to parents of students who speak English and may be more affluent. Shim (2013) further discussed that teachers of non-English speaking students may not have the training to know how to communicate with parents effectively. From the qualitative study, it can be surmised that teachers may be more likely to contact parents of English speaking students more often than those parents of non-English speaking students. Implications from the study suggested that educators search for ways to communicate with parents of non-English speaking students more effectively.

While communication is a key element to engage parents, school staff must also be welcoming to parents and families. Padak and Rasinski (2010) suggested that some small changes could be implemented to make a school more welcoming to parents and families. Padak and Rasinski stated that these suggestions centered on a means to improve communication between school and home. One of their suggestions included a fact card with school contact information that would be distributed to families during registration and could provide a ready and inexpensive resource for parents. Additionally, Padak and Rasinski suggested that friendly signs could help parents and visitors to navigate the school to find important locations such as restrooms, bookstore, cafeteria or library. Constantino (2016) explained that even very small changes can be implemented that will make a difference in making the school more welcoming and supportive of families to encourage engagement.

School staff should also teach parents how to interact with each other. While most educators make a common practice of communicating with parents, it is much less common for school personnel to promote the practice of parents working together, especially in schools with a high rate of poverty level students (Bower & Griffin 2011). It is helpful for schools to demonstrate how parents can respectfully interact with other parents from different cultures. In their case study research, Bower and Griffin proposed best practices such as integrating characteristics of the strengths of each family into parent activities. Their research highlighted the use of the Epstein model of parent involvement in an elementary school that was largely poverty level with a large minority student population. Other practices such as forming parenting teams for various school

events and encouraging collaboration among parents were encouraged to build efficacy among parents. Payne (2013) suggested that an additional way to communicate with parents who either cannot or are reluctant to come to school is to provide a ‘welcome recording’ that can be checked out by students to watch with parents at home.

Williams et al. (2014) provided suggestions for strategies that could improve the barriers of working with students living in poverty through an exploratory research study. The researchers indicated that students living in poverty are usually less resilient and may have different needs. They suggested that staff receive specific instruction in learning to address these unique needs. Williams et al. utilized the school counselor to provide the necessary professional development to staff to better address the needs of students living in poverty. They further indicated that students who are economically disadvantaged are much more likely to demonstrate emotional difficulties as well as learning problems than are their more affluent peers. The school counselor can assist in changing the attitudes of educators that may have a negative perception of families living in poverty. The school counselor can also help to bridge the communication gap between parents and educators within the school. Williams et al. stressed that professional development is critical in helping staff to understand the unique needs of students living in poverty.

Similarly, practical solutions for developing methods for engaging parents of students living in poverty were offered by Cuthrell et al. (2010). Specifically, Cuthrell et al. stated that there is no *one size fits all* way to involve families in student learning and those schools must search for innovative ways to involve parents in the learning environment. In addition, Cuthrell et al. indicated that multiple strategies should be

implemented to engage parents of all students but strategic planning is necessary to gain input from all stakeholders. Their review of literature stressed that the needs of students in poverty are different from those of their more affluent peers. From their review, it can be maintained that the strategies to engage parents of students who are economically disadvantaged may be more challenging, but are vital to the academic success of students living in poverty.

To explore innovative strategies for purposes of increasing parent involvement it is necessary to revisit some previous points of this literature review. Hawley and Nieto (2010) highlighted the importance of families being engaged in the education of their children. However, it is also important to note that Hawley and Nieto further stressed that it is critical to understand and recognize the cultural and ethnic differences not only in how students learn but also in how they are taught. Their research explored both non-productive teaching practices that do not support student growth and ways to foster supportive teaching practices. Hawley and Nieto emphasized that school staff cannot afford to ignore race and ethnicity when developing interventions to improve student performance. Strategies for intervention should include provisions for differences in race and culture according to Hawley and Nieto. Their research suggested that just as we modify instruction to meet the needs of all students, we must also modify the interventions for engaging families of students who are economically disadvantaged.

Wildenger and McIntyre (2011) maintained through descriptive survey research of parents of students transitioning to kindergarten from early childhood programs in an urban school district that educators should be diligent in reaching out to parents of

economically disadvantaged students to build a connection and gain their support.

Common themes were evident in their research in that parents need information about expectations for their children in kindergarten as well as how their child is performing in school. Implications from their research indicated that parents often did not understand the expectations of the school. Overall, effective communication was found to be critical in easing the anxiety of families of students transitioning to kindergarten. Wildenger and McIntyre explained that it may be necessary for school staff to show parents how to engage in activities with their children. Results from their study indicated that parents of students who are economically disadvantaged were much less likely to be involved in transitioning activities from early childhood programs to kindergarten programs.

Wildenger and McIntyre indicated that school staff should work diligently to develop partnerships with parents of students who are economically disadvantaged to improve their transition to kindergarten. Literacy activities were practiced and demonstrated by a bilingual facilitator in research completed by Barone (2011). Barone illustrated that the effects of providing instruction and communication for parents in their first language can greatly enhance literacy skills as well as student achievement growth. According to Barone, school staff should provide information and materials to parents in their language so that the skills can be easily understood. If a bilingual staff person is unavailable, educators should collaborate to plan ways to reach parents who have a limited understanding of English.

A strategy that is prevalent in the literature in regard to students living in poverty is that of training parents to help their children. Parent training can be an effective tool to

promote family involvement. In a longitudinal study, Gatt (2010) stressed that schools should work with communities to improve the education of students. This research was conducted in a primary school over a three-year period in Malta with 275 students ranging in ages from 7-12. While in a foreign school the characteristics mirror many of our schools in the United States. The school was in a community with high rates of unemployment and single parent households. Gatt provided suggestions for practices that schools can utilize to promote changes in education and engage families by gaining input from the community. One suggestion included activities in which parents and students receive instruction after school hours to improve their writing skills in a more casual environment that engages them in learning together. Gatt also suggested that if the students have special learning needs, providing a setting where parents can learn alongside their child would help both the student and the parent to grow.

Alameda-Lawson, Lawson, and Lawson (2010) enlisted the support of school social workers to help train parents to help each other. Their research was conducted in a Title I elementary school in a western state and studied parents that were involved in a parent involvement program for 6 months. The authors described that parents developed a sense of efficacy and empowerment by providing support for each other. The parent training was successful in part because parents were able to identify with each other and they were able to understand their similar needs. The study also aided in developing community support because of the commonalities of the needs of these parents under the guidance of the school social workers. In their participatory research method, the authors shared that a controversial method was utilized in which parents were provided with a

weekly stipend to offset the effects of their poverty level. This study explored an alternative method for involving parents that allowed parents to become partners with educators and not just become volunteers for the school, which proved to be beneficial for the families as well as the school.

Ingram et al. (2010) proposed that efforts should be made by school personnel to improve parenting skills, enhance learning activities in the home setting, and to build community support. Their study examined results from survey data collected from 220 parents of students in three elementary schools in Chicago. These schools were comprised of mostly minority students who were also economically disadvantaged. According to their descriptive survey research, these factors greatly contributed to the academic success of students. Through their research, it was suggested that the interactions of parents with their children in the home greatly impacts student performance at school. Their study also indicated that schools would benefit through improved student achievement by procuring resources to improve the involvement of parents. In Xu, Benson, Mudrey-Camino, and Steiner (2010) students improved their academics more when parents received training in how to help their children with homework across all grade levels. Their longitudinal research indicated that often parents either do homework for their children or they do not know how to help their children effectively at home. Their research analyzed how parent involvement impacts student self-learning in reading achievement over time. Results indicated that students may develop a more positive perception of homework when their parents are involved in the process. Xu et al. further indicated that parental support could be damaging if the parent

provides the answers or does the homework for the student. Implications from their research illustrate the importance of helping parents learn appropriate ways to assist with homework.

Dervarics and O'Brien (2011) also stated that school staff should not rule out the importance of homework to help parents become engaged with their children. Their research indicated that often, parent training or instructions for completing the homework are necessary in gaining their support or engagement. Additionally, when students are provided with homework that requires them to work with a parent the interaction can be effective in gaining support for students from their families. Their research illustrated that while parents of students who are White are more likely to attend an event at the school, parents of students who are African American or Hispanic are more likely to assist their children with homework. Findings from their research also indicated that overall, parents want to be involved in the education of their children. Implications from their research indicated that schools should develop strategies to help parents become involved effectively.

For involvement of all parents, it is necessary to consider the specific needs of students. While the majority of research centered on the implementation of differentiated instruction techniques for purposes of engaging learners, Weasmer and Woods (2010) also synthesized that the same techniques of differentiating instruction contributes to promoting parent involvement as well. They developed suggestions that included ways to interact with parents of students with disabilities that will encourage a positive working relationship. They further emphasized the importance of establishing a collaborative

relationship between teachers and parents. Weasmer and Woods further stated that schools should not rule out the importance of professional development for staff to promote appropriate ways to engage families.

To begin to develop strategies for effective family engagement, it is necessary for school staff to work as a team along with parents and the community to promote a collaborative effort. Wegmann and Bowen (2010) explained that educators who work more effectively with parents also usually demonstrate qualities of good teamwork. The teamwork is then effective both within the school and with parents and the surrounding community. In addition, their literature review and compilation of strategies for promoting parent involvement provided tips for improving four components of the school culture: approach, attitudes, atmosphere, and actions-activities. To summarize each of these elements, school staff should become aware of how they are first perceived by parents and families as well as to create a welcoming school environment. Additionally, school personnel should recognize the many ways parents can be involved and to be innovative in gaining input from families to strengthen school and family connections.

Rule and Kyle (2009) described an innovative method of leadership using varied approaches to building community and parental support. Their strategies included home visits, faculty mentoring, and classroom interventions. The key to their approach was that a wide variety of methods were used to increase parent and community involvement. Their research involved a description of strategies used in a magnet school in the Deep South where racial differences were strongly evident. School staff in their research were able to adjust to the differences of the faculty and parents as well as the students. It

appeared from the initiative practiced by all staff in the school that the administration set the standard and led the procedures for involving and engaging parents in the school environment. Their research suggested that the attitude of the staff within the school must be accepting of changes that are needed for interventions to be successful.

Parents of students with special needs can provide unique challenges for parent involvement. A case study completed by Patterson, Webb, and Krudwig (2009) explored the practices and strategies that should occur during Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team meetings with parents of students with disabilities. Their research compiled data from 22 special education teachers, 16 general education teachers, and 51 full time students in undergraduate teacher preparation programs for a total of 89 educators. Of these participants, 23 were in their first 3 years of teaching and most were White females. IEP team meetings were simulated in their study to help participants learn best practices to develop collaboration with parents. Findings from their study indicated that if the environment is friendly in the school, parents and school staff could work together more effectively to promote student progress. Implications from their study also illustrated that it is important for all teachers, not just special education teachers, to be aware of the benefits of collaboration with parents of students receiving special education services.

Pescaru (2010) provided suggestions for school leaders to promote involvement of the families of their students. Factors such as poverty and young single parents can impact how involved parents can be within the school setting. Pescaru illustrated five common pitfalls that educators often demonstrate that negatively impact parent participation. These five factors consist of arrogance of educators, making parents feel

guilty, stereotyping, indifference or apathy, and ignoring the perspective of parents. The research explained the importance of getting to know individual families to determine their unique characteristics to promote engagement. Pescaru advocated that educators, especially school leaders, should foster a community of mutual trust and respect to encourage family engagement. The research also promoted the concept of establishing an inviting school climate where families are valued to develop collaboration.

According to the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA; 2009), it is necessary for schools to develop a team of stakeholders to assess the needs of the school in regard to parent and family engagement. The PTA further recommended that schools collaborate with the community, parents, and staff to develop an action plan to engage families and community members. Esa, Razzaq, Yasak, and Omar (2010) recommended that school teams should analyze why the parents of their students are not involved to develop strategies that will effectively engage parents. Their research was conducted in Malaysia and focused on teachers' perception of parent involvement in school activities. Participants included 274 teachers in six primary schools that had ample experience in working with parents. Their descriptive survey research suggested that school staff should be enterprising in building relationships with parents. Even though their research was conducted in Malaysia, the problems with engaging families are similar to concerns of educators in the United States. Their research suggested that building collaboration between parents and educators will improve the perceptions of teachers toward the parents of their students.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the literature reviewed above is consistent and its implications are clear. While communication is vital to the success of engaging families, educators should also understand the needs and perspective of the students and their families. It may be necessary for school teams to provide training for parents to help them understand the most effective ways to support their children's education. Equally important are the needs of each school as well as the unique needs of families when planning for communication and effective strategies for engaging parents.

Implications

Implications for study include the premise that parents want to be involved in their children's education. The level of involvement depends on various factors. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) provided a foundation for future study by explaining that external demands on families interfere with their level of involvement. Additionally, their own level of ability and confidence influences their involvement. While their research is quite dated, the concept of time and external demands is still relevant and could serve as the foundation for future research.

It is evident that school staff generally operate from the mindset that uses the social mores of individuals who are in the middle socioeconomic class while many of the students in their schools may be living in poverty. There are different values and social mores that are expected in homes that are in the lower socioeconomic levels. Payne (2013) described hidden rules that are exhibited in both middle class and in poverty that impact the ways that parents and schools are perceived. These perceptions may vary but

should be understood by educators in order to have a more effective working relationship with parents. Payne suggested that staff within the schools should strive to understand the social norms and characteristics of students and families living in poverty, with the goal of leading to better family engagement.

I designed, as the project, the development of a professional training workshop that will provide tools for a team of parents and educators to collaborate for purposes of building family engagement in their school. This project will allow a school team to develop an action plan to communicate the importance of family engagement with parents and the importance of planning will be stressed with school staff. In addition, the project provides effective strategies that should be implemented to positively impact the school community by increasing parent and family engagement. This completed project is exhibited in Appendix A.

As the result of this research, I learned some effective strategies that may better involve the parents of students who are economically disadvantaged. These strategies could serve to provide needed assistance to students living in poverty to help close the achievement gap that exists between these students and their more affluent peers. This information could be useful for schools that serve students who are economically disadvantaged.

Summary

Through this study, I explored ways to encourage collaboration and alternate forms of engagement. The literature consistently supports family involvement as important to the academic success of all students but it is perhaps more important that the

parents of students who are economically disadvantaged learn to support their children's education. The literature review also underscores planning for family engagement as important. Just as schools plan strategically for effective instruction, planning should also be as detailed for purposes of engaging families in their children's education. Effective communication with parents can greatly contribute to the development of productive collaboration between parents and educators. Equally as important is that the school should become a welcoming place for parents to encourage family engagement. All stakeholders should be involved in assessing the needs of the school in regard to engaging families and an action plan should be developed and implemented. Additionally, this plan should be routinely evaluated and revised.

This literature review also illustrated that schools should look for and design innovative strategies to engage the families of students living in poverty. These strategies can improve the involvement of parents and families for purposes of improving the academic skills of economically disadvantaged students who can help to close the achievement gap that exists between these students and their more affluent peers.

In conclusion, there appears to be research consensus that parent involvement is a critical component to the academic success of students. The literature revealed common threads that are important components to the success of engaging families in the school environment. These common factors are that the school must be welcoming to families and should agree on the importance of family engagement. Educators should also collaborate with parents to develop an action plan to determine the most effective strategies to engage families for purposes of supporting students academically. Finally,

this plan should be adjusted and revised as needed. All of the above factors support the Epstein framework of parent involvement (Epstein, 1986).

In Section 2, I describe the approach for research that helped to gain input from parents to help design a plan for improving parent and family involvement. Throughout the next section, I explored family engagement from the perspective of the parents that actually experience the hardships of families that struggle to provide for their families. By gaining their perspective, it was my objective to develop some effective strategies to help these parent support their children's education more successfully.

In Section 3, I describe a project that I have designed that provides a template for providing professional development for school teams to improve the engagement of the families of the students that they serve. This project study incorporates the data gathered and analyzed in Section 2 and I applied the knowledge I gained to the development of a 3 day professional development workshop to help school teams identify the needs of the school. From this training, school teams should be able to devise an action plan to better engage the families of their students.

In Section 4, I explain that my foundation for this project study comes from personal experiences. In this section, I shared how my reflections have enabled me to grow as an educator and my research recommendations can be applied to further study.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

In order to explore the question of how the elementary school described in this project study can better involve parents of economically disadvantaged students for purposes of improving achievement scores, it was beneficial to gather a large data set that allowed me as the researcher to obtain perceptions of many parents in these subgroups. The research focused on data from parents to learn their perspective of how they are involved with their children's education and to understand the aspects of the school environment that can be adjusted to improve engagement of parents and families. For quantitative information, it was beneficial to collect survey data from a larger sample. It was also essential to gather qualitative data from a smaller sample to further explore the perceptions of specific families in greater depth. When collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, it was necessary to explore two basic ideas: how are parents currently involved in their children's education and what changes can be made to improve parent involvement. Effective strategies that can be implemented in the elementary school setting that promote family engagement were explored. These strategies were examined from the perspective of parents.

Research Design

An explanatory sequential mixed methods design using surveys and interviews was applicable to this study for the specific problem of low parent involvement in the school environment. According to Creswell (2012), the use of both qualitative and quantitative data can provide a deeper understanding of the strategies that are most

appropriate to influence family engagement. Quantitative research provides a great deal of information if multiple stakeholders are surveyed to gain their insight into what parental involvement strategies have been effective in schools with similar demographics. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voetgle (2010), qualitative research does not reveal generalization to larger populations, but for the purposes of this school environment, it was desirable to gain effective strategies for the engagement of parents that could be adapted to the needs of the school. Creswell explained that quantitative research methods would provide statistical information that I could use to better analyze trends and compare methods that are effective in engaging families of students in the targeted subgroups.

Lodico et al. (2010) identified characteristics of qualitative research that allowed the researcher to conduct interviews in schools with similar demographics in order to imitate everyday practice. This practice helped me to understand the strategies that are most effective to engage parents and families of students in the targeted subgroup of students who are economically disadvantaged. By conducting interviews, as described by Lodico et al., I detailed the perceptions and interpretations of individual experiences of parents and families of students in these subgroups.

To explore the most effective measures to gain parent and family engagement for students in the targeted economically disadvantaged subgroup an explanatory sequential mixed methods design using surveys and interviews was the best design. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in a school similar to the setting described in this study. Data were collected sequentially, beginning with the quantitative data.

Quantitative data consisted of information gained from survey instrumentation. This information was followed by the collection of qualitative data consisting of individual interviews with parents within the school. Surveys for quantitative data were distributed through the school and interviews for qualitative data were conducted in the school. The survey instrument was developed by Epstein (2009), and the parent letter that I created to introduce the survey is included in Appendix B. The necessary permission to use the survey is exhibited in Appendix C; however, because I did not have permission to reprint the survey I did not include it in this document.

Lodico et al. (2010) described the value of mixed methods research. They suggested that quantitative data, or surveys, that were collected could be enhanced by the addition of qualitative data, or interviews. In this study, the impact of strategies that were practiced to encourage the engagement of families was examined to review and determine the most effective methods for increasing the participation and support of families of students in the targeted subgroups.

Analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data collected was conducted off-site in a private setting where confidentiality could be maintained. The quantitative and qualitative approaches were integrated to define effective strategies for engaging families in the education of their children.

Setting and Sample

Due to my close association with staff, parents, and students in the school described in this study, it was necessary to obtain the sample from a different site. Participants for this study were chosen using a convenience sample. Specifically, a

survey was sent to all parents or families of students enrolled in a Title I school that is near the school described in this study within the same school district. This school has approximately 800 students enrolled. Participants were the parents of students in Grades 3 through 5 in the school. Information gained from the review of literature indicated that parents tend to be more involved in their child's education when their children are younger (Constantino, 2016). For this reason, it was more beneficial to obtain input from parents of older students. In Grades 3 through 5 of the participating school, there were approximately 370 students and survey packets were distributed to parents of all of those students. The approximate number of potential parent respondents was 370 participants. This sample consisted of 76 completed quantitative surveys followed by 11 parent interviews. While the sample was large enough to provide statistical inference with a 95% confidence level, the margin of error was 11.24%. These data provided information from parents of students in the upper elementary grades. Surveys were sent to all students in Grades 3 through 5 to include all potential participants and not to exclude any parents from the survey sample.

To gather qualitative data, 11 participants who were in the targeted subgroup from the school were interviewed to further discuss the information in the general survey. According to Macefield (2009), 10 to 12 participants often produce adequate qualitative data, as well as a good baseline range. A voluntary interview sheet was distributed to allow parents to provide additional information to me for qualitative data through individual interviews following the collection of quantitative data. This additional voluntary interview sheet was also included in Appendix D. I received 32 forms returned

of participants who were willing to meet with me for qualitative interviews. Of these returned contacts, 14 provided incorrect or illegible contact information. Three contacts received were written in Spanish and I was unable to translate effectively to make arrangements with those parents. I was unsuccessful at making contact with three of the parents and one shared with me that she simply had changed her mind about allowing me to interview her. I was able to arrange interviews with 11 parents. These participants were provided with a consent form and were also informed that they could withdraw from the project at any time at their discretion.

Surveying parents of students in Grades 3 through 5 enabled me to gain input from parents who have some experience with school procedures. Participants who returned the survey provided information about their involvement in their children's education and the concepts of parent involvement they felt were most important. It was possible that these parents who participated in the surveys would still engage in their child's education, but as supported by the literature, parents do tend to become less involved as students get older. With the survey, a statement of participation and intent of the research was clearly outlined and included a letter of explanation from me. A letter of explanation was included with the paper survey distributed to all participants. The information provided by the surveys helped me formulate the interview process. I also explained the purpose of this study to those parents who participated in the interview process.

In a final step of the process for participants, I informed them of the findings of the survey results in a letter of follow up. In this letter, I thanked them for their participation and I invited them to contact me if further information was desired.

Data Collection Strategies

Data for this research were collected sequentially. Creswell (2009) explained that in using this type of explanatory strategy for research, quantitative and qualitative data were separate yet still connected. By collecting data sequentially, I was able to use the survey results to form the structure of interviews. The quantitative data were collected first and the qualitative data expanded on those results. Data collection began with a meeting with teachers at the school site and survey packets were provided for them to distribute to all parents in Grades 3 to 5. Each survey packet contained a letter of explanation, a consent form, quantitative survey, request form for qualitative interviews, and a self-addressed stamped envelope for returning survey results to me. Teachers and administration were supportive of my research and willingly helped.

Quantitative Data Collection

The first phase of this research consisted of quantitative data collected through a survey developed by Epstein (2009), with permission from the author. The parent survey letter and permission to use the survey follow in this document in Appendix B and C respectively. This survey was based on the six types of parent involvement identified by Epstein. This survey is designed to gain perspective from parents regarding the ways they are involved with their children's education. This survey was developed for the purposes of exploring parent involvement based on the works of Epstein and associates. This

survey is based on six types of parent involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

The process for completion of the surveys by parents required teachers in Grades 3 through 5 to distribute the surveys to their students for parents to complete. Parents completed the surveys and mailed them to me in self-addressed stamped envelopes. For the surveys that were returned to the school, they were collected by the teachers and turned in to a school administrator to be held in a confidential location until I could retrieve them.

According to the survey literature, items were tested for internal reliability on parents in both elementary and middle grades. Epstein (2009) stated that the reliability coefficient of these scales is Cronbach's alpha: .841. Epstein further stated that the reliability coefficients of these scales did not vary greatly for parents of either elementary or middle grades. These scores determined the perception of parents toward the six types of parental involvement described above. Scores from this survey were initially intended to be analyzed using the SPSS statistical software program (Green & Salkind, 2011). Following the collection of quantitative data, it was determined that a statistical analysis was not necessary to achieve the results needed for this project study. A less technological approach was used to illustrate trends in the results. By using a simple structure for analysis, I was able to focus on the specific areas that illustrated the strongest results rather than by examining the results for each item of the survey.

Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative interview questions that were used to interview parents for more in depth information regarding parent involvement are included in Appendix E. Procedures for gaining access to participants were included with the original quantitative survey distribution. A letter explaining the process for further qualitative interviews was sent to parents along with the survey questionnaire. An example of this letter is included in Appendix D. Respondents indicated on their survey cover letter that they would be willing to discuss their views of parent involvement in further detail and would be contacted by me to arrange a mutually convenient time to meet. The interviews were held in mutually convenient time and location. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were recorded with the consent of the participants. In order to relate to the research, interview questions were designed to determine the perception of the parents regarding the school as well as their understanding of what being engaged or involved means to them. In addition, these questions explored the ways that educators can help to train parents regarding ways that they can become involved in their children's education. I assigned an open code to pieces of data and then grouped the open codes. Merriam (2009) described this process as axial coding.

I transcribed the responses to determine common themes and topics through selective coding also described in Merriam (2009). These themes and patterns were color coded with multiple highlighters by common words or ideas to determine in which of Epstein's six areas of parent involvement the information was best categorized. The words that were coded related to each type of involvement. After the words or phrases

were highlighted, the total of each category was tallied to determine the number of comments for each area.

Role of the Researcher

The role of this researcher was significant in this project study for both the quantitative and the qualitative phases. I assumed the tasks of communicating with the district as well as the school where research was conducted. I ensured that the school was well informed of the procedures and I communicated with participants to convey their role and understanding of the process. I had no supervisory influence over any of the participants; however, some participants were familiar with me due to my living and working in the same community. I also had no supervisory capacity over anyone in the participating school but have developed relationships with some of the employees in the school. I was an employee of the district and I worked in the community for more than 30 years.

Data Analysis

According to Lodico et al. (2010), use of a mixed methods project that uses surveys and interviews provided two unique forms of data that complement each other in the results. Quantitative data were collected through Likert scale surveys followed by the collection of qualitative data in the form of interviews. This method of sequential data collection of qualitative data allowed for adjustments to be made prior to the interview stage of this explanatory design. Additionally, this method helped to ensure triangulation since there were multiple forms of data collected. As explained in Lodico et al., these

data were analyzed sequentially for an explanatory study. Steps in analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data are described as follows:

1. Following the collection of quantitative survey data, the information was organized into the six categories of parent involvement.
2. Survey data were organized using a low-tech method to choose an indicator in each section that related to each of the six types of parent involvement identified in Epstein (2009).
3. Likert scale questions along with the rich data gained from interview transcripts were analyzed and compiled to determine effective strategies for involving and engaging parents.
4. Responses to the open-ended survey questions and comments were organized into general themes of the six types of parent involvement. These themes were reviewed and contributed to the structure of qualitative interview questions. Open-ended question responses were documented in order to explore effective strategies and perceptions. Through organization, coding, and analysis of open-ended question data and interview results, effective practices for parent involvement in this school environment were identified.
5. Thank-you letters were distributed to participants and to the staff at the participating school for their assistance with the quantitative survey phase.
6. Participants were contacted and interviewed at a mutually convenient time and location. These interviews were recorded with the consent of each participant.

Following the interviews of 11 participants, the qualitative data collected were coded to determine themes or categories of information.

7. In this study, qualitative data were first collected in the form of a survey based on the six types of parent involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community from Epstein (2009). These data were collected to refine the quantitative results from Epstein's survey. This rich data were gathered through interviews to gain the perspective of these parents in regard to the six types of parent involvement.
8. The format of interview questions was adjusted slightly following the collection of quantitative measures and the interview questions are included in Appendix C. Changes to these questions were approved through Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to administration.
9. Qualitative data were coded to determine themes or categories of information that established patterns of strategies that are effective in encouraging parents to be more involved in their children's education. Coding was initially intended to be conducted using a software program but I opted for a low-tech approach instead. Six different colors of highlighters were used to identify comments relating to each of the six types of parent involvement identified by Epstein (2009).
10. The data gathered were organized into broad categories of Epstein's (2009) six types of parent involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering,

learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. As expected, under each category, additional unique themes develop. These themes were organized into meaningful techniques and strategies for improving parent involvement from the perspective of parents. Coding and data analysis were managed through use of a spreadsheet database.

11. Thank-you letters were sent to participants of the qualitative interview phase as well as to the assisting staff at the participating school.

Ethical Consideration

Because of the small community, anonymity could have been of concern to some of the participants. Some of these participants could have been reluctant to provide their own perceptions of strategies that encourage them to participate in their children's education. Extra consideration and assurance to ensure confidentiality were provided to all participants both in the quantitative and in the qualitative research to promote their honest and informal responses to the surveys and interviews. For example, surveys were kept confidential and the identities of participants were not revealed to anyone in the school or the district. A letter was included with the survey that explained the purpose of the study (see Appendix B). Additionally, this letter stated that the survey was voluntary and would not impact their child's learning or grades in any capacity. The consent of participants was implied by completion and return of the surveys for the quantitative data. Interviews were conducted with those participants who gave consent for additional discussion with me. These participants were told prior to the interviews that their participation was purely voluntary and that they could opt out at any time. A consent

form was provided with the survey to explain the purpose of the qualitative information and to obtain their contact information.

Protection of Human Subjects

This study included human participants and therefore required the approval from the IRB of Walden University. Collection of data began following approval from the district as well as the Walden University IRB. The IRB approval number for this project study is as follows: 12-11-14-0232640. Surveys for the quantitative portion of this mixed methods research did not contain any personal information of the participants. Qualitative data collected from the interviews also did not include any personal data and original scripting and coding was kept in locked file and any data stored on computer was password

Limitations

There were several limitations associated with this project study. One limitation evident was that there was no way to ensure that participants in the quantitative survey phase did not complete the study for someone else in the family. For example, it is unknown if the participants were actually parents or guardians of the students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 of the school. In addition, there was no way to determine if participants provided accurate information, perhaps due to their protection of privacy. It is also unknown how truthful their responses were in regard to the survey questions. While a return rate of 20% is quite positive, another limitation is that of why 80% of the possible participants did not complete the survey.

Limitations in the qualitative phase of the survey are also evident. While there

were approximately 25 respondents who indicated they would be willing to meet with me for an interview, I was only able to make contact with 11 people. It is unknown if the other respondents ever intended to meet with me, or if they had simply changed their mind. While I would have preferred to interview a more diverse group of participants to gain more varied perspective, I was limited to the parents who responded to my invitation and were actually willing to meet with me for interviews. It is also possible that some of these participants had completed the contact information and returned without truly reading and comprehending the form. A limitation from this phase is that it is unknown what other data would have been received if additional interviews had been arranged. As expected from the survey, most of the responses were favorable toward the parents. The parents who took time to complete the surveys would probably be more likely to be the type of parents that are more involved with their children.

Another limitation to both the surveys and in the interviews is that there were no provisions for non-English speaking participants so the data collected may not adequately represent parents of students who are ELLs. In addition, because participation in both survey completion and interviews was purely voluntary, it is not known if more information could have been obtained or if these findings are an accurate representation of the total participants.

Data Analysis Results

As stated previously, approval was obtained for this research through the Walden University IRB and from the school district. Survey packets were distributed to the parents of approximately 370 students. I began to receive completed surveys through the

mail after about a week. The surveys were steadily received for a couple of weeks and then began to taper off in frequency. I sent a reminder letter to teachers to distribute to parents after three weeks. I received a total of 76 completed surveys, which is a return rate of 20%. According to Lodico et al. (2010) a return rate of 20% is favorable.

Along with the completed surveys, I received 25 forms indicating that parents were willing to meet with me for follow-up qualitative interviews. Some of the contact information was incorrect and I was simply unable to make contact with some of these participants. I was able to conduct interviews with 11 people, which was roughly 3% of the total participants. While I would have preferred a larger number of interviews to obtain more detailed data from parents, I was successful in conducting interviews with these participants.

Quantitative Surveys

The results of qualitative surveys are illustrated in Table 1. This table includes highlights of the results from each section of the survey.

Table 1

Quantitative Survey Results of Parental Involvement by Section

Type of Parenting	Item	Well	OK	Poorly	Never	Total Responses
Parenting	Helps me understand my child's stage of development.	44%	42%	10%	4%	73
Communicating	Sends home news about things happening at school.	71%	20%	7%	2%	76
Volunteering	Asks me to volunteer at the school.	28%	32%	12%	28%	76
Learning at Home	Assigns homework that requires my child to talk with me about things learned in class.	47%	33%	14%	6%	76
Decision Making	Includes parents on school committees, such as curriculum, budget, or improvement committees.	32%	38%	12%	22%	76
Collaborating with the Community	Provides information on community services that I may want to use with my family.	33%	42%	10%	15%	73

As I began compiling results from quantitative surveys, I also tabulated the results in Section "E" regarding the participants' family demographic structure. Of the 76 completed surveys only two respondents left this section incomplete. Most (71%) of the persons completing the surveys were mothers of the students. Other respondents were: fathers (12%), grandmothers (10%), stepmothers (5%), and stepfathers (1%).

The respondents indicated that 30% of them had obtained college degrees and 24% had some college experience. Of the other respondents, 14% had achieved some high school; 10% had obtained a high school diploma, vocational or technical college, or

obtained graduate degrees, respectively. Interestingly, when these respondents indicated what they thought their child would obtain, 37% predicted that their child would earn a college degree and 33% predicted that their child would earn a graduate degree. These results are illustrated in Figure 2.

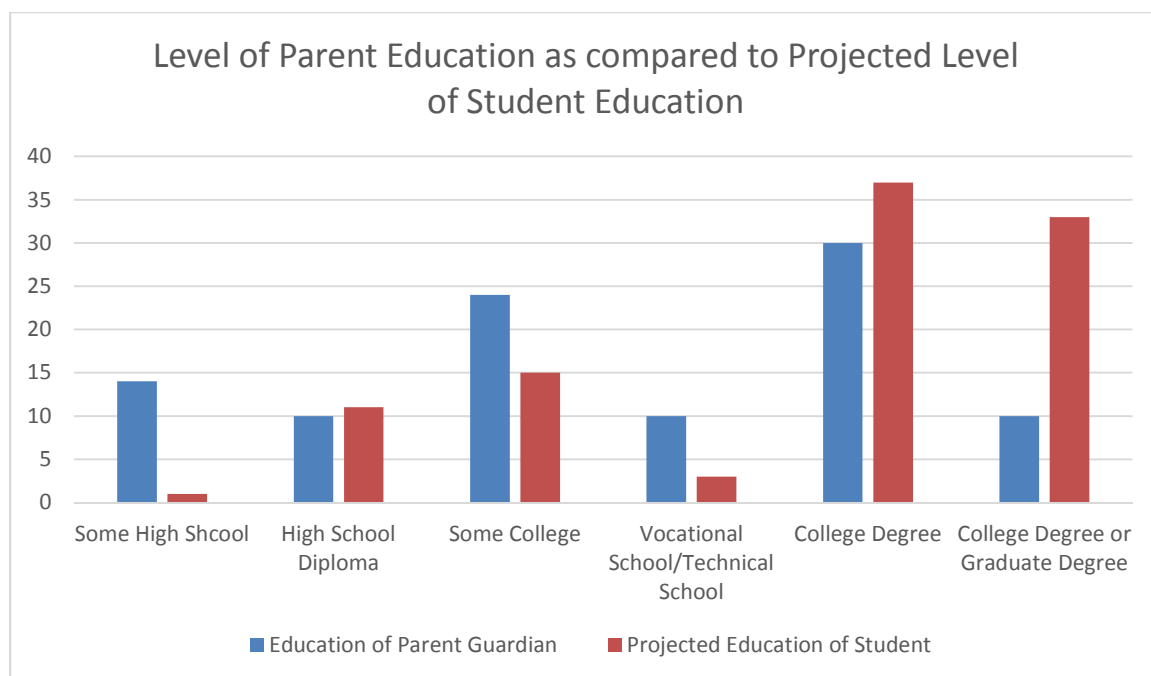


Figure 2. Level of parent education versus projected level of student education

The majority (53%) of respondents reported that they are White or Caucasian and 25% indicated that they are Black or African-American. Those respondents that indicated they are of Hispanic origin were 18%. Most of the respondents (89%) reported that their families speak English in the home while 10% indicated that Spanish is spoken in the home. Married parents comprised the majority of these respondents, while 28% indicated that they were divorced, separated or were never married. Respondents that worked full time comprised 42% of these results, while 69% indicated that their spouse or partner was employed full time. Demographic results are illustrated in Figure 3.

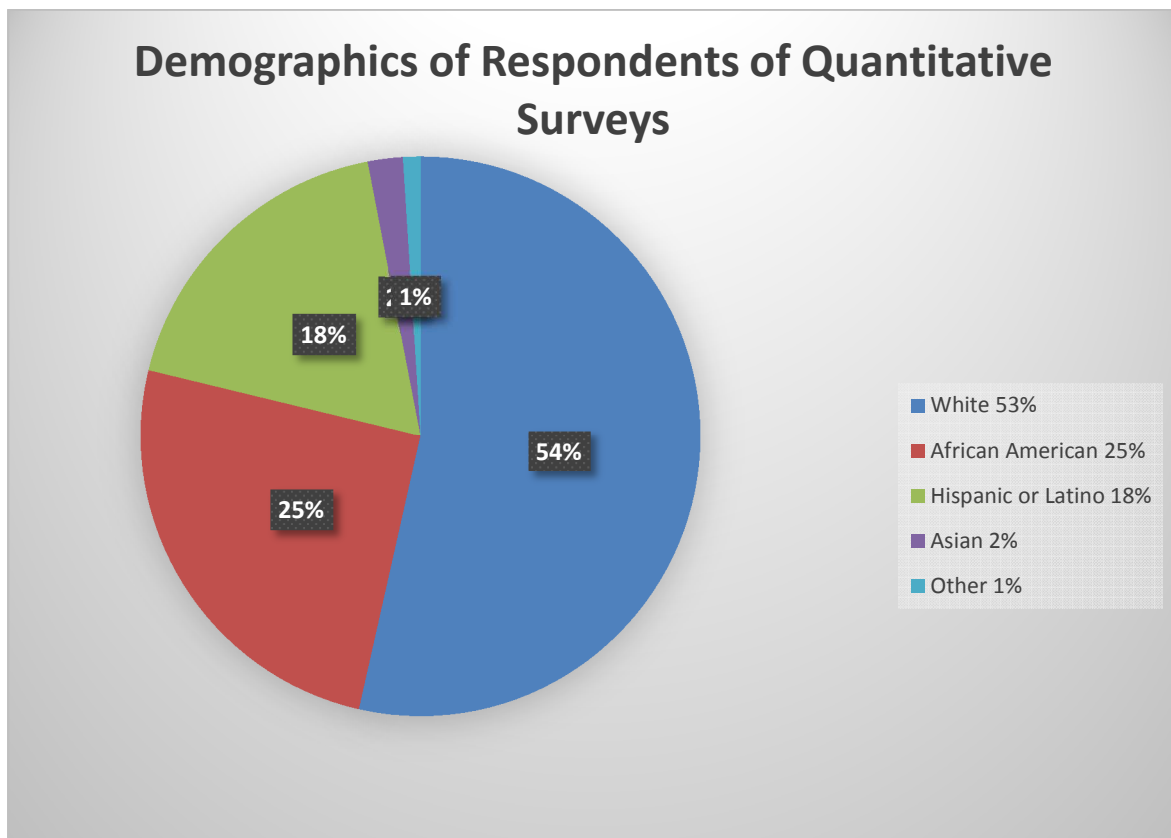


Figure 3. Demographic results of quantitative surveys

Findings for Quantitative Surveys

The quantitative research question of this project study was, In what ways are parents currently involved in their children’s education? In exploring how parents are currently involved in their children’s education, it was beneficial to examine the results of surveys in numerical form. The results of quantitative surveys were compiled into a spreadsheet for easy calculations. The amount of data received was vast and not all of the information was relevant to my needs. I decided to focus on a few items from each section of the survey that provides needed information to determine and report findings.

Section A of the quantitative survey included components from each of the six

types of parent involvement as identified by Epstein (2009). I chose to focus on one item from each of the six areas to highlight for this project study. Each of these items are the most relevant to address the needs described in this research.

Parenting. To learn how parents are presently involved in their children's education in the area of parenting, it was necessary to gain their perspective from surveys. This area of parent involvement relates to how the school provides assistance and training to parents to develop a supportive home environment for students. The item most relevant to parenting is item "a" – "Helps me understand my child's stage of development." Based on the survey results, 32 or 44% of the respondents indicated that the school did this *well*. When combined with the respondents that felt the school was *OK* in this area the results increased to 86%. Only 14% of respondents indicated that the school *poorly* or *never* helped them understand their child's stage of development.

Communicating. The area of communication was addressed to explore the quantitative research question of how parents are currently involved in communication was included in several items in this section on the quantitative survey. Item "e" – "Sends home news about things happening at school" seems to be more inclusive than the other items. Of these respondents, 54 or 71% indicated that the school did *Well* in this area. When combined with respondents that indicated the school did *OK* in this area, the results increased to 91%. Conversely, only 9% of respondents indicated that the school did *Poorly* or *Never* sends home news about things happening at school.

Volunteering. To explore the quantitative research question, it was also necessary to gain perspective of parents in regard to how they are presently involved in the area of

volunteering. This component of parent involvement deals with schools soliciting, recruiting, and training volunteers for support at school. Item “C” –“Asks me to volunteer at the school” from the quantitative survey represented this area most appropriately. These results were more evenly distributed among the four indicators. Those respondents that perceived that the school did *Well* in this area were only 21 or 28%, but when combined with the respondents that chose *OK* for this indicator, the results increased to 60%. The same number of respondents, 28%, chose *Never* for this indicator as they did the *Well* indicator. When combined with the *Poorly* indicator, the results increased to 40%.

Learning at home. Parent perspective to illustrate how parents are presently involved as indicated in the quantitative research question is necessary to determine how parents are involved in the home with their children. In this area of parent involvement, schools are developing strategies for parent training that will support student learning at home with homework, planning and curriculum concepts. The item that most appropriately represents this type of parent involvement is item “i” – “Assigns homework that requires my child to talk with me about things learned in class.” Based on the results for this item, 36 or 47% of the respondents indicated that the school did this *Well*. When combined with the respondents that felt the school was *OK* in this area the results increased significantly to 80%. Yet 21% of respondents indicated that the school *poorly* or *never* assigned this type of homework for their child.

Decision making. Parent perspective on how they are involved in the decision making aspect of the school is also necessary to explore the quantitative research

question of how parents are currently involved in this process. This area of parent involvement revolves around schools including parents in the development of procedures, policies, and recommendations at the school level. The item “m” – “Includes parents on school committees, such as curriculum, budget, or improvement committees” is the best representation of this area of parent involvement. The respondents that indicated the school does *Well* in this area were 24 or 32% of the total respondents but combined with those that agreed the school did *OK* in this area the results increased to 70%. More significantly, the respondents that felt the school did *Poorly* in this area or that parents were *Never* included were 34% of the total respondents.

Collaborating with the community. Perspective of parents in the community relations was also necessary to explore the quantitative research question to determine how they are involved in the community. Schools that develop and solicit community support and cooperate with other community leaders to combine programs and services to enhance the learning environment are increasing their parent involvement. The item that most closely aligns with this area of parent involvement is item “g” – “Provides information on community services that I may want to use with my family.” The respondents that indicated the school performed *Well* in this area were 24 or 33% of the total respondents but combined with those that indicated the school did *OK*, the results increased to 75%. The respondents that felt that the school performed *Poorly* or *Never* provided information on community services were 25% of the total respondents.

Findings for Qualitative Interviews

I was only able to interview 11 parents with questions related to the six types of parent involvement described by Epstein (2009), however, I was able to gather some very useable qualitative data. Each interview was transcribed into a word processing document and the narrative for each question was stated verbatim. The findings were then sorted using six different colored highlighters and marking comments that were related to each of the types of parent involvement. Many comments were highlighted for each of the six areas but I chose to focus on those that were the most relevant or that provided a unique perspective in regard to parent involvement. I began by highlighting comments that were related to parenting and then moved through each of the six types of parent involvement focusing on general comments in each area. I allowed some time to lapse between each of the examinations for coding the types of involvement to allow a fresh appraisal for each review. Then within each of the six areas, themes began to emerge. I have provided examples of themes in each of the subsequent sections.

Conclusions are presented in both table format and in a narrative structure so that results from open-ended questions and interview data are effectively explored. Results were compiled by recording the number of comments relating to each type of parent involvement. These comments are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Qualitative Interview Results by Type of Parent Involvement

Type of Parent Involvement	Number of comments	Percent
Parenting	62	12%
Communicating	214	42%
Volunteering	46	9%
Learning at Home	109	21%
Decision Making	48	9%
Collaborating with the Community	32	6%
Total number of comments	511	

Demographics of qualitative interview participants are illustrated in Figure 4.

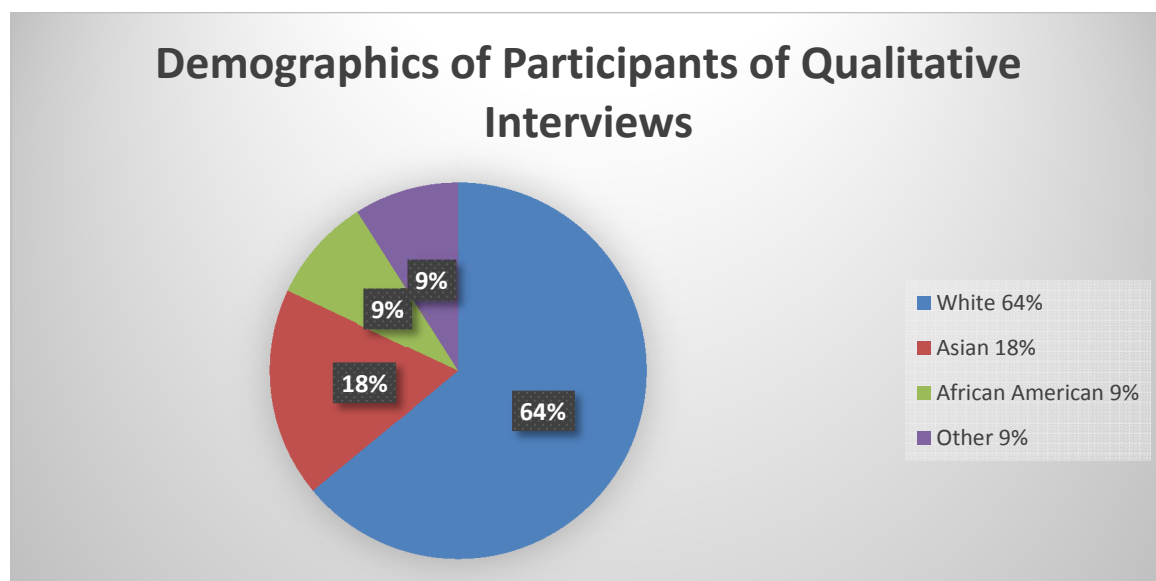


Figure 4. Demographics of qualitative interview participants

Findings for Qualitative Interviews

For each of the six areas of parent involvement, comments that participants made during qualitative interviews were highlighted to illustrate the number of statements that were made regarding each type of involvement. Some of the specific comments in each of the areas are described in detail below. Parent comments were coded and identified by Parent 1 through Parent 11 (P1-P11).

Parenting. Comments in the interview phase that related to the school providing supports for parents in developing a supportive environment at home for their children were highlighted in blue. Throughout the surveys there were 62 comments (12%) that related to the parenting category of involvement. Most of these comments stated positively that the school provided supports to improve their ability to provide a supportive home environment for their child. Specifically, these themes that emerged related to teachers providing support for completing homework and helping parents to nurture their children at home. Most of the comments involved teachers sending packets of completed work home and instructions for homework and projects. Several parents stated that they often used the student management system for monitoring their child's grades. By knowing how their children were performing at school, parents were better able to provide a supportive environment at home. One parent in particular stated, "We try to do things at school as a family" (P2, Qualitative interview 3-22-15). This comment was an excellent example of the Parenting type of Parent Involvement because this parent was involved with his children and he wanted the family to all support each other even in simple events at school.

Communicating. By far, the greatest number of comments in the qualitative interviews related to communication between home and school. Comments in this area of parent involvement were highlighted in green. In these interviews there were 214 comments relating to communication, which was 42% of the total comments. Some of the comments were positive and stated that the school communicated effectively with parents while some of the comments indicated that the communication from the school was lacking. Common themes that became evident revolved around print communication such as notes and flyers and electronic communication including emails, texts, and social media. One parent expressed frustration that the school Facebook page and website was not updated regularly (P4, Qualitative interview, 4-2-15). It was difficult to determine a specific number of positive and negative comments from these data due to the number of comments as well as the subjective interpretation of each comment. The comments appeared to be rather evenly divided from positive to negative comments. About half were supportive comments toward communication from the school and the other half were more critical. It seemed to depend on the perspective of each parent and how they interpreted the question as to how they responded. One parent even confided that “Sometimes I fuss about so much paper that comes home” (P11, Qualitative interview 6-8-15)! Yet another parent stated, “I guess they do what they can do to communicate. They don’t send notes home very much and I don’t see his (communication) notebook” (P5 Qualitative Interview 4-2-15). Each person that was interviewed provided a different perspective in regard to communication when responding to each of the questions. With both positive and negative comments regarding communication, the most resounding

theme that emerged was that all of the parents interviewed indicated that communication was the most critical component of engaging parents and families in the education of their children. Some parents shared how they communicate with the school. Most comments included use of notes and emails. Some parents shared that they are able to communicate with their child's teacher through use of text messaging. One parent shared that he checks his daughter's homework and "I make sure that everything is signed and ready to be turned in for the next day" (P3, Qualitative interview 3-31-15). This comment was a good example of ways that parents can communicate effectively with their child's school and teacher.

Volunteering. Participants interviewed indicated that the school did encourage parents to volunteer. Comments in this area of parent involvement were highlighted in orange. There were 46 comments shared in regard to volunteering within the school, which were 9% of the total comments in these interviews. Most of the comments related to volunteering were unfavorable in that the parents felt that they did not have adequate time to volunteer within the school due to their own work schedules. However, one parent stated that she volunteered very often in the school. Her responses appeared to be somewhat inflated because she shared very positive comments about herself and her abilities. She stated, "I am usually in the building 20-30 hours per week. There were some days I got here at 7:00 AM and didn't leave until 7:00 PM" (P8, Qualitative interview 6-1-15). On the other extreme, a different parent did not want to volunteer at all within the school because she did not care for her child's teacher (P9, Qualitative Interview 6-1-15). Both of these respondents were at opposite ends of the spectrum in

regard to volunteering. The other nine respondents provided more typical responses. Of these comments, the most common theme to emerge was that of limited time available for parents to volunteer. These parents wanted to volunteer more but were unable to commit their time to volunteer. One parent stated, “We try to make a showing at the school. I wouldn't say we volunteer a lot. We both work full time and we don't have a lot of spare time to be at the school” (P6, Qualitative interview 6-2-15). A similar comment was made by a different parent when he stated, “I can't be at school as much as I would like because of my work schedule” (P3, Qualitative interview, 3-31-15).

Learning at home. In this aspect of parent involvement, schools support the efforts of parents by providing training and instruction of concepts to equip parents with tools needed to help their child with instruction at home. Comments in this area of parent involvement were highlighted in yellow. Of the responses in the qualitative interviews, there were more comments in regard to learning at home. Second only to communication, this area revealed more comments than other types of involvement with 109 responses or 21% of total comments. The most common theme that became evident was that parents understood that helping their child with homework was critical to their child's progress and success. The majority of comments indicated that parents felt very involved with their children when they are able to help them with homework and instruction at home. Some of the parents indicated that they felt comfortable with homework at this level but others stated that they had difficulty knowing what was expected in regard to homework. Most of the parents indicated that they were receptive to the school's efforts to help them learn skills to help their child at home. From the comments that some parents made, it can

be determined that many parents want to help their children at home but they lack the necessary skills.

Decision making. Like the area of volunteering, only 9% of the total comments were related to the school involving parents in the development of procedures and decisions within the school. Of the parents that were interviewed, there were 48 total references to decision making. Comments in this area of parent involvement were highlighted in pink. In regard to this area of parent involvement, it is uncertain if parents felt that the school made attempts to involve them or not. There were only 48 comments so it is likely that more information is needed to determine if the parents felt that the school involved them effectively in the school decision making effectively in this particular school. The most prevalent theme to appear was that parents did not understand many of the school policies and procedures. One parent shared that he was concerned about a procedure within the school in regard to scheduling, but when “the administration explained the reasons for the procedure, I understood” (P7, Qualitative interview, 4-2-15). This comment was an example of a way schools can clarify procedures to help parents that may be disgruntled with a situation within the school. It seems that sometimes the situation can be resolved with a simple conversation.

Collaborating with the community. This area of parent involvement entails the school soliciting the support from the community to integrate services and programs to enhance the learning environment. Comments in this area of parent involvement were highlighted in purple. Only 6% of participants made comments about collaborating with the community in their qualitative interview sessions. There were only 32 total comments

in regard to community collaboration. More data are needed to determine if these participants felt that the school made efforts to solicit community support. A clear theme did not become evident in this area of parent involvement in the data that were collected from these interviews. The interview questions for these qualitative data may not have included appropriate questions to obtain information in this area of parent involvement. Many of the parents did not seem to support the notion of collaborating and networking with other parents. One parent shared that most of his contact with other parents and the community was supported “through church and sports events such as his son’s baseball team” (P7, Qualitative interview 3-22-15)

Conclusion

This research included quantitative survey data that allowed for information to be collected from 76 participants or 20% of the entire pool of possible participants. Qualitative interviews were held with 11 parents or 3% of the total participants. The data collected from quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews were used to gain the perspective from parents about their parental involvement with their own children. These data enabled me to decide that it would be very beneficial to develop a program to help school staff and parents work together to improve their collaborative relationships. From the review of literature and the collection of data, it was evident to me that each school would have unique needs. The professional development provided for school teams should be customized to the needs of each school community. For this reason, the professional development should be divided over a longer period of time with bridge to practice activities between sessions. By providing time for the school team to implement

the action steps from each session the team will learn to monitor and adjust their goals for effectiveness. These data provided the necessary input for me to develop a project to guide professional development for school staff, parents, and community leaders to better engage parents in the education of their children. Through the initial quantitative data collection, there was no way to determine if participants were economically disadvantaged. However, the sample population was approximately 80% poverty level. Therefore, it was probable that the majority of participants would also be economically disadvantaged. Various strategies that have been effective from the views of parent participants were explored. The perspective of parents of students who are economically disadvantaged may differ from parents who are more affluent. The need to engage families of students in the ED subgroup was desirable because of the risk to their academic success. It was expected that these parents would provide a unique view of methods that would prove to be effective in engaging their families in the school environment.

From the data collected in the quantitative phase of this study, it was evident that each of the six types of parent involvement is important in engaging parents and families in the education of their children. It was evident that the areas of Communication and Learning at Home were more of a focus in the qualitative phase of this study. All of the areas of parent involvement do play a role in engaging families but it appears that parents do want to be involved in their child's education but they may need support in knowing how to be involved. Overwhelmingly, according to the data collected, it is clear that

schools should strive to communicate much more effectively to engage and inform parents.

Section 3 of this document concerns the development of a project to engage parents in the education of their children through the design of a professional development program for educators. The goals of this project are included in the following section as well as a review of supporting literature regarding the implementation of this project.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

I am proposing a professional development project that will outline a plan for increasing and improving family engagement in an elementary school setting by establishing a team consisting of staff and parents from the participating school. The school team will participate in a 3-day training that occurs over the course of the school year (see Appendix A). The implementation of this project will assist the school team in developing an action plan to engage families in the school. This project will include techniques and suggestions for enlisting parent support in the six areas of parent involvement identified by Epstein (2009). Based on these types of involvement, the strategies presented will include suggestions for providing parent training, improving communication, enlisting volunteers, supporting student learning at home, involving parents in decision making at the school level, and collaborating with the community.

Description and Goals

The project will consist of the formation of a family engagement committee within the school. This committee will consist of parent representatives, support staff, teachers, administration, and student representation. A 3-day seminar of professional development will be provided to this committee. The first day of training, held within the first month of the school year, will be a development stage that will help to organize the committee and aid them in creating a clear mission and vision for the work they will oversee during the school year. The committee will review and analyze the data of survey results that were completed by parents during the registration process. On Day 1, this

committee will then develop a plan to engage parents that will address specific needs of the school. The committee will then oversee the implementation of the plan and evaluate as needed throughout the school year. The project will provide an outline of targeted areas that have been identified as needs in the research data. The committee will complete Day 2 of professional development training with bridge to practice activities and strategies to implement in the school.

Day 2 of professional development will be held at the beginning of the second quarter of the school year. Day 2 will consist of review and evaluation of the strategies already implemented. The committee will discuss the strategies implemented following the initial day of professional development training. The committee will explore more deeply into the needs of the school and determine where changes are needed to increase parent involvement on Day 2 of training.

Day 3 of professional development will be held near the end of the third quarter of the school year for purposes of evaluating the process of parent involvement. During Day 3, the committee will set goals for the coming year and structure a plan for improving engagement over time.

Goals of this project are listed below:

- Provide structure and strategies for the committee to develop and implement strategies to provide training for parents in helping with homework, and ways for parents to support their children's learning at home.
- Develop ways for the committee to achieve effective communication strategies for improved communication with parents and families.

- Provide a plan for enlisting and maintaining parent and community volunteers for effective use in the school setting.
- Explore ways to enable the committee to search for ways to help families better support their children at home.
- Enable the committee to equip parents with decision making capabilities in the development of school related procedures and policies.
- Develop strategies to enable the committee to help the school collaborate effectively with the community.

Rationale

My research was conducted in a neighboring school with a similar demographic structure as the school described in this research. This project was designed to improve the engagement of families in the targeted school in hopes of improving the academic skills of students. The process of professional development will have far-reaching implications by training a committee consisting of administration, staff, parents, and community leaders. This project has potential to extend beyond the boundaries of the committee. For example, as this committee is trained and begins to implement successful strategies, the impact of the initial training has potential to evolve as the needs of the school change. When new families move into the community and as new students and staff enter the school, it will be interesting to gain the perspective of these additional stakeholders. It is probable that the needs of the school will change over time, and the long-term effect of this training is the reason I chose to develop a professional development training program for this project study.

Developing a family engagement committee within the school can establish a model to improve parent support, which should, in turn, improve student growth and achievement. According to school district policy, schools are required to establish and maintain a “school-parent compact” for parental and family involvement. This professional development project will aid the school in meeting this district policy requirement. As suggested in Shillady (2014), families can be provided with surveys to complete at the beginning of the year to indicate their needs and interests in regarding family engagement. Shillady also revealed that schools should work as a team to improve the involvement of parents and families.

Supporting Data

Quantitative data analysis indicated that the school is effective in communicating events within the school. From the 76 surveys received, 71% of parents stated that the school did well in sending home communication about activities and events that were happening in the school. From these same data, however, only 58% of the respondents strongly agreed that they felt welcome at the school. While there is a difference of only 13 percentage points, there seems to be a slight difference in the message communicated by the school. When including the number of participants that agreed that the school makes them feel welcome, the percentage increased to 90% of respondents that either strongly agreed or agreed that they felt welcome in the school.

Qualitative results indicated that parents were eager to help their children at home with their homework. The parent involvement topic of learning at home was mentioned in 21% of the total comments that were shared during these interviews. Communication

was mentioned in 42% of the total comments. The overall thread of these comments were that parents rely on effective communication from the school and it is extremely important for parents to feel comfortable contacting the school and for the school to seek innovative ways to communicate with parents. In addition, parents want to help their children at home but they do not always know how to do so.

This project is being organized to facilitate a change in the methods used to engage parents and families in the school. This change is needed to better engage parents of all students and, hopefully, to improve the involvement of parents of student that are economically disadvantaged. From the magnitude of the data collected, it is evident that the school should strive to communicate effectively with parents to keep them informed and to welcome their returned communication and participation. It is also apparent that parents do want to help their children at home but they may need supports to know how to help them effectively.

An efficient method to promote family engagement is to provide professional development for school staff. Rodriguez, Blatz, and Elbaum (2014) stated that parents are more likely to become involved when educators seek their participation and input. This research continued to illustrate that parents were more likely to be supportive of the school when the educators initiated the contact. In this mixed methods research and data analysis, parents displayed negative perceptions of the school when they had to initiate the communication with school staff. For this reason, the data suggested that it was favorable to work with school staff to influence their methods of engaging families because schools should take the initiative to engage parents in the educational process. It

is preferable to provide instruction to school staff through professional development so that more staff are impacted at the same time in training sessions. By training more staff, educators can hopefully impact more families to gain their involvement.

The purpose of this project study was to gain information regarding the perceptions of parents of the factors they feel are important to promote family engagement. It is also important for educators to understand what parents need to help them be more involved in the education of their children. This project study revealed that parents want to be involved in their children's education but they often do not have a clear understanding of how to help their children at home. The project study also revealed that school staff need to practice effective communication skills with parents and to keep the information current and relevant.

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Perhaps the most telling outcome of this collection of data is that there are steps the school should take to improve their impact on parent involvement. It would be beneficial for schools to reflect on their current practices to begin to know where to improve. Summer and Summer (2014) shared that educators should practice reflection to better facilitate improved relationships with parents. Summer and Summer further stated that schools should maintain open communication and work to foster trust with families to engage their support. There are personal vignettes included by the authors in this review of literature that highlighted some very helpful tips to improve engagement of the families of their students. Summer and Summer stressed the importance of getting to

know the families of students to incorporate their unique characteristics into the educational setting. In addition, Summer and Summer shared that educators and parents collaborating beyond the classroom will help to encourage parents to become lifelong learners and their children will learn by example.

The search for literature included works published in the previous 5 years. Specifically, the years from 2010 through 2015 were explored to use information from current sources. Key words used in this search included *professional development*, *parent involvement*, and *family engagement* through use of the Thoreau Multi-Database search. The search genre involved finding references that supported the use of professional development to provide instruction for school teams to plan and implement action steps that would improve family engagement in their schools. Due to limited literature on professional development in regard to parent involvement, I relied on general professional development strategies to be applied in the area of parent training. This literature review section is organized by supporting references based on the six types of parent involvement identified by Epstein (2009). The review begins with literature regarding the importance of professional development to improve the involvement of parents in the school setting. The remaining references support data findings from this study and are organized by type of parent involvement for ease in referencing the results from quantitative and qualitative data review. These references shape the components that are needed in the professional development project.

Professional Development

It is unknown how much training for educators is provided in schools in regard to parent involvement. There was limited available literature that addressed the topic of professional development for purposes of building parent involvement. Andes and Claggett (2011) illustrated that professional development empowers teachers to become independent in the skills they need for instruction through professional development training. The educators in Andes and Claggett's study became proficient in the skills that they learned as a team through formal training. This process exemplified that with instruction and practice, teachers can be successful in their classroom delivery strategies. Teachers became so proficient with the program that they began to provide instruction and training to other professionals (Andes & Claggett, 2011). It is hoped that the project I have proposed has potential to carry on beyond the realms of this individual school project. I propose that by providing training for a team of administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders, I can help to provide a platform for future learning and growth with which to better engage families in the educational process.

There is need for professional development to train school staff in several aspects of engaging parents in their children's education. Lemmer (2011) explained that for efforts to engage parents, it is critical for teachers to be instructed in skills and techniques of best practices in a professional manner. In a grounded theory study, Lemmer discussed that these efforts to train teachers would benefit the entire school by engaging parents in the school environment. The educator participants in Lemmer's research initially perceived that parents were indifferent toward the school and their children's education.

Parent participants also considered school staff as disinterested in their opinions. In this research, participants adjusted their perceptions and all gained a sense of unity. By improving attitudes and perceptions of both educators and parents, schools can begin to increase the involvement of parents.

Teacher training programs and ongoing professional development can provide significant supports for educators. Marschall, Shah, and Donato (2012) explained that when training is provided for teachers in the areas of dealing with race, ethnicity, and different cultures in schools, then student achievement is increased. Their study of data illustrated that a quickly growing population in US schools is that of immigrants. Marschall et al. shared that professional development will help to enable educators to make effective connections with this rapidly growing group of parents.

Polly (2011) illustrated that teachers and students learn skills more effectively when they are participating in the task rather than by hearing or seeing the instruction. Polly further discussed that collaboration of teachers in regard to learning strategies is critical to integrating techniques in their classrooms. The concept of participation in instruction was used during professional development training for teachers to learn use of technology skills. From Polly's research, it can be concluded that educators would benefit from experiences in professional development sessions that involve hands on learning and collaboration techniques.

Educators must quickly learn strategies to work with parents who are very demanding or argumentative (Ferrara, 2009). Ferrara (2009) stated that educators often learn to resolve issues with parents of students that present unique problems in the

school, such as parents that are from different cultures. The concept of ways that parents can add significant engagement to the educational environment is also explained by Ferrara. In this study of preservice training for teachers, Ferrara explained that educator training programs should include strategies for enabling future teachers to learn to collaborate with parents of their students. Ferrara described a 3-semester program that provided instruction for teachers in the areas of engaging parents in sincere involvement in their child's learning environment. The instruction included exploring resources and research on family engagement, dissecting data about parent involvement, and field work or hands on practice with educators and parents. Ferrara illustrated that professional development for educators in the area of parent involvement is crucial to the engaging parents into the educational setting.

Just as teachers are trained on best practices for effective instruction to improve academic success of our students, it is important that teachers receive coaching on effective methods for engaging parents in the educational environment. Daniel (2011) suggested that the concept of developing family partnerships was found to be lacking in teacher preparation programs. It can be determined from Daniel's research, that educators should be trained in techniques and best practices for engaging parents and families to improve the relationship with their students. By improving relationships and increasing collaboration with families of our students, it is hoped that students will improve their academic skills, as well as, their self-concept.

A project of professional development for school teams can be addressed by equipping the team with the same skills used in coaching. Marzano and Simms (2013)

describe the role of an educational coach as a way to become more in touch with the needs of students. The coaching concept can be applied to the role of school teams that are promoting parent involvement by coaching the school team to work and collaborate together to build relationships in the school that will facilitate parent involvement.

Marzano and Simms described a continuum model for coaching that helps a mentor work alongside an educator to build instructional skills. The concept was used to develop my project to encourage and facilitate a gradual shift in the role of coach. More specifically, this project will begin with me leading the school team to determine the needs of the school in regard to parent involvement. Gradually, over the stages of each session of professional development, the team will assume more of the leadership role. It is hoped that the school team will then facilitate this learning to spread among their stakeholders. Marzano and Simms suggested use of differentiation when coaching educators by determining the skill level of educators, reviewing their past experiences, and understanding their desire to accept change. These concepts were also incorporated into my professional development project by coaching the school team in assessing the needs of the school stakeholders. The school team will then develop an action plan to address these needs. The members of the team will share their experiences and skills with each other and then pass their knowledge to others in the school environment.

In this project study of increasing parent involvement, I will be training school staff in developing relationships with parents in order to increase their involvement. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) presented an explanatory model of professional development training for both preservice and practicing teachers to facilitate these educators'

understanding of the unique circumstances that each family brings to the educational setting. Hornby and Lafaele discussed that many factors influence families and their perception of a school environment. For purposes of this project, it is critical that schools participate in professional development training to begin to comprehend the perspective of parents in their school. By understanding the unique views of our parents, we can better work in collaboration to gain their support in our schools.

Whitaker, Whitaker, and Lumpa (2013) implemented professional development activities to motivate and inspire teachers in the school environment. The authors suggested ways to build staff morale that were incorporated into my professional development project. Specifically, Whitaker et al. explained that school staff should treat parents with respect and demonstrate a caring attitude toward students in order to build trust with parents and the community. Additionally, the authors suggested that parents and other stakeholders have an opportunity for input into school decisions and a way to offer suggestions. Communication is vital to the success of the climate within the school according to Whitaker et al. and they recommended that school staff search for ways to communicate more effectively with all stakeholders. These concepts should be applied to a professional development training project for school teams. By incorporating these concepts into the action plan component of the training project, teams should be more successful in developing an effective plan for engaging parents.

Necessary components of effective presentations were discussed in Whitaker and Breaux (2013). The recommendations were practical for use in various presentations and professional development training sessions. Specifically, Whitaker and Breaux suggested

use of personal experiences and relevant activities to provide a connection that builds on prior knowledge of the participants. The authors also explained that the information presented should be practical and easily implemented by the participants. Most importantly, the training should include some type of feedback and the comments made should be used to modify the program as needed. The concepts should be included in the presentation to school teams to engage the members of the team. By engaging the team members with these skills it is hoped that they will be better equipped to develop an action plan and implement the goals generated by the team. Whitaker and Breaux shared that participants are much more likely to apply the knowledge they gain through professional development if they can relate to the skills presented and find a way to implement the strategy in their own situation. The project should contain these recommendations to successfully train school teams to promote parent involvement.

Parenting

School staff should also consider providing support and instruction for parents to help their children with homework. As stated previously, parents that were interviewed shared concern that they did not always know how to help their child with homework but they understood how important it was to see that their child understood these homework skills. In a comparative case study, Shifman (2013) illustrated that schools should increase the efficacy of parents in their basic skills to enable them to have tools necessary to support their child learning at home with their homework. Shifman highlighted that parents often want to help their children with homework but they lack the skills necessary to do so. For example, parents who had difficulty themselves with literacy or numeracy

skills would likely be more hesitant to assist their child with homework in these areas.

Shifman shared that this problem may be more of a factor with parents of limited English proficiency. A parent who has limited skills may be more reluctant to help with homework, which could cause anxiety regarding skills that could impact the student's confidence to complete these homework tasks.

Post (2015) stated that in order for students to achieve, participation by their parents is mandatory. She stated that this concept is especially critical in gaining literacy skills. Post further suggested that it is difficult for many parents to know what to do at home so it would be beneficial for schools to promote a culture of literacy in their school environment. She further emphasized that it is not adequate to tell parents to read to their child. It is especially challenging for parents to help their children with literacy skills at home when their own reading and writing skills may be lacking. Post explained that many of the parents interviewed shared that they supervise homework but often do not have ideas for what to do to help them beyond their homework tasks. From the literature review provided by Post, it was recommended that schools take a leadership role in providing instruction for parents in how to assist their child in literacy skills. This instruction will then overlap into other aspects of parent involvement and schools must support all efforts of parents to encourage their support and involvement. By building the literacy skills of our parents, we can promote improved literacy skills in our students.

Parents of all students in the school should be included in efforts to improve their involvement, including parents of students with disabilities. Students on the autism spectrum demonstrate unique challenges and it is imperative that their parents are

involved in their education and training for these students to be successful learners. This concept is evidenced in Solish, Perry, and Shine (2015) and the authors stated that parents should become immersed in the intensive behavioral training for their children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Solish et al. further concluded through a survey measure that many parents are unable to participate in such intensive training methods due to other family obligations and the stressors involved in for a family member with ASD. Through this survey, Solish et al. concluded that parents of students with ASD can be encouraged to be involved in alternate ways of education with their children. Some of the alternate ways that were suggested are for parents to promote generalization across other areas of the child's environment, other behavioral training exercises, and participation with other parents and agencies. It can be concluded that parents of children with ASD pose unique challenges but schools can work to help these parents become involved to the extent they are able to endure.

The components of parenting discussed in this section, should also be included in the professional development project. Specifically, the project should include provisions for training parents in basic skills needed to equip them with strategies that will enable them to improve parenting skills. Additionally, the project should also include supports for parents of all students in the school, including students with disabilities.

Communicating

Much of the data that were gathered from parents in my project study related to communication. For example, 71% of the total survey respondents felt that the school did *well* at sending communication about things happening at school. However, many

comments in the quantitative results indicated that there was limited information in communicating with parents about other aspects of their educational programs. In addition, only 58% of respondents *strongly agreed* that they felt welcome at the school. Within the qualitative interviews, 42% of the total comments involved the topic of communication. From these results, it can be determined that these participants felt that communication was an important component of parent involvement. Olmstead (2013) explored the concept that communication that is meaningful between parents and school staff helps to promote that learning is critical. Olmstead explained that educators use technology to communicate with parents much more than parents use this communication by means of technology.

An example of this concept is that most teachers utilize websites to communicate with parents while only some parents seek their communication from school using this method. Most parents still seem to rely on printed media or use of the telephone to obtain information from schools. Olmstead (2013) suggested that parents often find it frustrating that the electronic media is often not updated regularly and the information is not communicated in a timely manner. In relation to Olmstead's research, my own study results illustrated this point in that some of the comments in the qualitative interviews related to frustration that posts and website details were not updated regularly. Olmstead explained that use of email was preferred by both parents and teachers. Olmstead further suggested that school staff survey parents to better determine the preferred method of communication among parents but it is recommended that school staff experiment with all types of communication to reach a broader range of parents. From the research, it can

be surmised that schools should use all means of communication to reach every parent in some way.

Communicating with parents of students with disabilities can pose additional challenges to schools. When the parents also are disabled, more challenges can exist. Utilizing a case study method, Stalker, Brunner, Maguire, and Mitchell (2011) explored communication methods between schools and parents with disabilities. Through their study, it is evident that schools make a concentrated effort to comprehend the needs of the parents to better understand how to structure communication with them. Stalker et al. discussed that care should be taken to practice confidentiality in building trust with parents with disabilities but that schools should have frank discussions with parents to understand their needs. In their study, some simple solutions were offered, such as providing notes in a larger font for a parent who was visually impaired or helping with specific skills instruction for a parent who was learning disabled to enable her to help her son with homework at home. Parents who experience physical disabilities may simply need assistance accessing the campus but they could also be enlisted to mentor other parents. From their research it can be surmised that schools should reach out to communicate with parents and listen to their needs. Through collaboration with parents, solutions can be developed to work through specific barriers.

A unique method for increasing students' social skills was presented by Adams, Forsyth, and Mitchell (2010). In their research, a program of two-way communication was implemented in a school of 20 teachers, 146 parents, and 383 students. Their program was designed to improve social skills in students and the basic principle was that

parents were instrumental in helping to promote appropriate social interaction among their children. The results indicated that with collaboration among parents, teachers, and students their progress in social skills was much more pronounced than without parent participation. Through effective communication, specific social skills were presented at routine intervals and students were able to generalize the skill in settings both at home and at school. A major key to the success of their study was effective communication and collaboration between home and school.

In this project, I will work with school teams to help define specific needs of each school and facilitate the development of an action plan to address those needs. Specifically, this project should include provisions for improving communication of all types, including print media, technology, and personal contacts with parents of all students.

Volunteering

Sawyer (2015) indicated that parent involvement may look different in every school and may differ from family to family. It was revealed in the qualitative interview data that each parent had a unique perspective of how they were involved in the educational process of their child. Many parents were very apologetic that they were not volunteering in the school and they seemed to feel guilty about their limited amount of time. From this data, it would be important to make parents aware that there is no “one size fits all” when it comes to parent involvement. Sawyer stated that what parents have been accustomed to in regard to parent involvement and attending school events is somewhat obsolete. Parent involvement can take the form of many different support

activities. Sawyer outlined several terms that incorporate strategies that are effective for building family engagement. Sawyer used the term “B.R.I.D.G.E.S” to define each of these strategies. The “B” represents “Build” and involves building trust and making connections with families. The “R” represents “Recruit” and encompasses use of surveys and communication to develop a rapport with parents. The “I” represents “Individualize” and entails differentiated techniques to tailor involvement to the needs of each student and their family. The “D” represents “Dialogue” which calls for conversing with parents in ways that they can understand and in using various forms of communication. The “G” represents “Generate” which means that educators should attempt various ways to develop and encourage ideas and strategies for use with families at home. The “E” represents “Empower” which provides knowledge for parents of how to help their children at home with their individual specific needs. The “S” represents “Strengthen” which requires celebrating the small steps that will tighten the bond between families and the school. Each of these strategies are crucial in the process of increasing family engagement. Each school team should consider each of these components when developing an action plan.

In my professional development project, I will facilitate the development of volunteer programs by encouraging school teams to examine the specific needs of the school and to plan the most effective methods to build trust among all stakeholders, recruit and retain volunteers, and to plan for individual concerns. Additionally, I will help school teams to begin long term planning to enable parents to become comfortable with their role in the school environment and to plan for sustainable actions over time.

Learning at Home

One characteristic evident in the data collected in my project research is to note that each parent brings their own experiences to the school. During my qualitative interview phase, parents shared unique experiences and their perspective had been shaped by the encounters they had with school staff previously. These experiences were also evident in the data collected in the quantitative surveys phase of my project. To illustrate this concept, a focus group study by Yull, Blitz, Thompson, and Murray (2014), revealed that schools must recognize the differences in parents and embrace their diversity. Their study illustrates that the impact of racism cannot be ignored. As stated in Yull et al., the effects of racism impacts families from all economic levels. In addition, parents of students living in poverty have a unique perspective that effects their participation in parent involvement efforts. Yull et al. indicated that it would be helpful for schools to involve participants from all ethnic and economic backgrounds to discuss their unique perspective in the development of family engagement strategies. Further implications revealed in Yull et al indicated that schools should have specific discussions and training on cultural competency. From their study, it can be inferred that schools should involve parents and community members from all backgrounds as well as having frank discussions about the message that is conveyed to parents from the school.

Just as students are all individual, parents are equally unique. Each family differs and this concept was evident in the variety of the comments and responses in the quantitative and qualitative data collected in my project research. An example of this concept is evident in Smitt and Brooks (2014). They described a holistic curriculum for

students to develop their own free choice of learning opportunities that expand all aspects of their development. Smitt and Brooks further explained that parents perceive that schools only strive to prepare their children to pass tests rather than teach the whole child. This concept was evident in the survey and interview data collected in my project research that parents truly wanted to help their children with learning at home but often they did not feel they had the knowledge or support to understand the best ways to help their child. It can be surmised that parents can be called upon to help with learning at home to fulfill some of the free choice activities that will enhance the learning concepts taught at school. Parents can be an extension of the classroom to help with the development of the whole child through their desire for supports in learning at home.

In my project research, several parents expressed some frustration with the topic of motivating their children to do homework in the qualitative interview data collected. Some parents shared that the homework sessions do not always go well and they become frustrated with helping their child. They further shared that their children often become frustrated with the task of completing homework. To clarify this thought, Cunha et al. (2015) conducted a phenomenographic study that explored the involvement of parents with their children in completing their homework. In their study, most parents shared positive aspects of assisting with homework while others shared that the task of helping with homework was often very frustrating. Cunha et al. suggested that schools should provide supports in helping parents learn to assist with homework through collaboration and parent training. These efforts will help to strengthen the relationship of parents and their children, which should ultimately improve students' academic skills.

From the literature discussed above, I will work with school teams to include these components in my project. I will encourage the participants in my professional developments to offer guidance and support to help parents know what to do at home to improve student knowledge by extending the amount of time that students have for learning. School teams will be prompted to provide training for the development of creative learning opportunities at home. In my professional development project, I will encourage school teams to thoroughly examine their image and message that is portrayed to parents through careful and honest reflection. It is hoped that these efforts will help to strengthen the relationship of parents and their children, which should ultimately improve students' academic skills.

Decision Making

In order to promote support from parents in the school it is beneficial to involve parents in decision making processes as much as possible. If the process is not followed routinely, then there should be some type of substitution that would be an incentive for promoting the involvement of parents in the school. This concept is evidenced in Ross (2012) where parents were not involved in decision making in a Catholic school but they were actively involved in other aspects of the school. Ross explained that the district imposed rigid policies and the school was limited in autonomy in school-based decisions. In the school where he conducted research, parents had limited input in decisions that impacted the building operations. Ross compared another school that greatly involved parents in the decision making process. In this Jewish religious school, parents were invited to become actively involved in school-based decisions. While parents were

actively involved, and they developed ownership in the school operations, there was an overlap of parents and educators which interfered with the dynamics of the school. From the research, it can be surmised that parents should be involved in school-based decisions to promote their involvement, but there should be some boundaries on these decisions from parents.

Barg (2012) discussed that it is more common for parents of more affluent students to indicate interest in school-based decisions than it is for parents of economically disadvantaged students. Barg explained that when students were required to choose a secondary education track. Parents that were more affluent were more likely to show interest and become involved in these decisions. Parents were also more likely to be involved in the decisions of the school in Barq's longitudinal study. From the research, it can be concluded that schools should work to involve parents of economically disadvantaged students in the decision making process of the school.

One way to engage parents in the development of school procedures or policy making decisions is to extend surveys to reach a broad base of parents that might not be available to come to the school easily. From the surveys, invitations can be extended to host focus groups to discuss school issues. These strategies are discussed in Smith et al. (2011). In their qualitative research, parents in an urban charter school were interviewed to determine their interest in the administrative aspects of the school as well as other areas of parent involvement to comply with the application process for a charter school. Trends in the communication from parents were used to develop procedures within the school. It was noted in Smith, et. al. that if parents provided input it was more effective if

their suggestions were actually used to influence the procedures established. From their research, it can be concluded that serious consideration should be given to suggestions from parents when school procedures are developed.

In my project, I will facilitate the discussion by school teams to design an action plan to involve parents in the decision making process of the school. The school team will determine the level of decision making that is appropriate to meet the unique needs of their school but from the research above, it is necessary to involve parents in this process with specific parameters for voicing their concerns and providing input to the school leadership.

Community Involvement

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges educators face is that of promoting literacy skills in meaningful ways. Phillips (2015) described ways to encourage improved reading and language skills by involving the community in the school setting. Phillips explained that the classroom or school environment can be enriched by bringing in families of students and leaders from the community to engage with students regarding their own skill set or expertise. One example of this concept is to invite family or community members into classrooms for shared stories generated by story ideas cards. Another idea shared by Phillips is that of developing story journals that travel between school and home. Phillips also encouraged classes to get out into the community to explore the area surrounding the school through the arts, agriculture, businesses, government, as well as the unique individual residents of the area. Phillips encouraged schools to become immersed in the community to enrich the literacy skills of students.

Based on these examples, it will be necessary to include discussion of ways to include community leaders in the school setting in my professional development project. As each community displays their own unique characteristics, the involvement of community leaders will differ in each school. I will facilitate school teams to identify ways that individuals from the surrounding community can become involved in the school to enrich the environment. The involvement will vary depending on the needs of each school that will be identified by each school team.

Future Exploration

To expand on the concept of parent involvement in future research, an area that parents may require additional intervention is to provide supports for parents to teach their children to deal with bullying concerns. For the 'Parenting' type of involvement, school staff can help to educate parents on bullying prevention through workshops and a myriad of training venues. In the 'Communication' area of parental involvement, school staff can help provide a two-way communication tool to help parents and students report incidents of bullying as well as to communicate with stakeholders about ongoing trainings mentioned above. This communication can be through electronic media and could also be anonymous. Volunteers can also be recruited to help students learn to avoid bullying behaviors and to stand up for their peers in the 'volunteering' form of parent involvement. Just as instruction of teaching academic skills at home is provided by school staff, Kolbert, Schultz, and Crothers (2014), explained that instruction for the prevention of bullying can also be provided to parents in the 'Learning at Home' type of parent involvement. Parents can also be recruited in developing school procedures and

policies regarding bullying in the ‘Decision-Making’ type of parent involvement. Leaders from the community could be enlisted to mentor students that are bullied as well as to aid in training parents in preventing behaviors associated with bullying in the parent involvement area of ‘Collaborating with the Community’.

Future research could be implemented in the area of parent involvement strategies specifically with Latino families. While survey packets and opportunities for interviews were sent to all students, 18% of the total respondents indicated that their family was Hispanic or Latino. This survey was only provided in English and there was no translator available for interviews. The data were not categorized into respondents of various ethnicities because many of the participants did not complete that section of the survey. O’Donnell and Kirkner (2014) described a project that greatly encouraged involvement of parents of Latino students. Their project involved components that included most of the six areas of parent involvement Epstein (2009). While their research was not compared to the six types of involvement, future research could explore the ways that the needs of parents of Latino students can be immersed in each of these areas. O’Donnell and Kirkner described how a collaborative program for Latino families helped to improve their engagement in their children’s education. Their collaborative program was successful in improving the academic skills of the students of the families that participated in the project. It was suggested from their research that schools should develop programs in conjunction with community organizations and presented to Latino families to encourage their participation in programs at school.

Summary

From the review of literature, it can be determined that parent involvement is critical to the success of students in all areas of involvement as described by Epstein (2009). By developing relationships with parents, schools can collaborate with parents effectively to greatly enhance the success of students. From the research regarding professional development, it is recommended that schools implement a training program for educators to improve and explore best practices for engaging parents in the school environment.

The role that parents play in the development of their children from birth cannot be ignored due to the impact these relationships have on students as they enter school. This thought is illustrated in Mohd-Radzi, Abd-Razak, and Mohd-Sukor (2010) in that partnerships were developed with families to bridge the transition to school with young children. School and home are two unique environments for children and it will be beneficial for both parents and teachers to work together and collaborate to develop the best setting to help students achieve success.

Implementation

A professional development presentation will be provided on 3 days throughout the school year in order to plan and implement a year long process of an effective parent involvement program. An organizational day near the beginning of the school year will be arranged to lay the groundwork for the parent involvement team.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Resources for this project will begin with the formation of a committee within the school comprised of administration, teacher leaders, parents and community representatives. More specifically, the team will consist of at least three teachers that are leaders within the school. These teachers will represent a various grade levels such as one from PreK or Kindergarten, one from second or third grades, and one from fourth or fifth grades. A school administrator will be included, as well as, three support staff such as the plant manager or custodial/cafeteria worker, a para-professional, and a secretary. At least three parents will be selected for this committee and will be representative of the school population in regard to heritage or ethnicity. Community leaders included will be interested persons from the nearby community and they will have ties to the school through relatives or friends. The committee will total 12-15 members total and these persons will serve voluntarily but they must be willing to commit to the training for the duration. Participants will be included for participation on the school team that are receptive to the implementation of a program to engage parents and foster an atmosphere of family and community involvement. Support from the district will be obtained and arrangements for stipends for instructional staff will be solicited to allow for the time required out of hours for additional study and preparation. Additional funding for meals and snacks will be obtained through the district to provide support for the participants. Additional funding for classroom coverage for staff on training days will also be solicited from the district if outside of district and state mandated professional development days. It is preferable to hold trainings outside of instructional days to limit the disruption of the

academic setting. For this reason, payment of stipends for school staff will be requested before requesting fees for class coverage with substitute teachers.

Training facility will be arranged for each of the sessions. These trainings will be held in a meeting room of the school large enough to seat approximately 15 participants comfortably. A projector and screen are needed for the presentations as well as tables with comfortable seating. Three round tables will be arranged as opposed to a large conference table to encourage small group interaction during discussions. Wall space to hold chart paper around the room will also be arranged for group work, ideas, goal setting and evaluation purposes.

Potential Barriers

There are a few potential barriers that may be a factor in implementation of this program. Time and funding are the most obvious potential barriers, but sustained interest and commitment are also factors that could pose problems to the implementation of this program.

As with all adults, time to complete required duties is a challenge. Each person on this parent involvement committee must agree to participate for the duration of the program and beyond. The work will take time from each member and must be a priority for all participants. Time outside of the professional day will be as minimal as possible but some off-duty time is likely inevitable.

Funding for this project may be a potential barrier because of limited resources available for professional development at the district level. Discussions and permissions will be obtained to solicit funding from the district to distribute stipends to professional

staff. Private donations from community agencies and business partners will also be recruited to offset the cost of the training sessions.

Lastly, because of the time between trainings, participants may lose interest or become unable to participate due to personal or professional obligations. Care will be taken to plan these training sessions that will not interfere with outside influences to enable participants to continue through all three days of training. The participants will be chosen by their willingness to commit to the project for the long term.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

Proposal for the project will be presented to the district during the summer of 2016 prior to the beginning of the new fiscal year in July. Implementation will begin almost immediately at the target school where initial problems with a student achievement gap were identified. Steps in the timeline for implementation are listed below:

1. Findings from this research and an initial overview of the project will be presented to district officials for approval and funding support.
2. Approval for the project will be obtained from the school administration along with securing use of the facility.
3. Identification of possible committee members will be completed with school administration.
4. Identify dates of training and plan with district calendar to avoid conflicting dates.
5. Obtain contact information for possible participants.

6. Invite all possible participants and respond to any questions regarding the project and the commitment required.
7. Distribute needs assessment survey to parents in the school during registration.
8. Obtain materials needed for presentations: chart tablets, post-it notes, markers, pens, notebooks, dividers, etc.
9. Arrange for meals, snacks, and drinks for participants on training days.
10. Discuss with participants the expectations of participation in the project.
11. Print materials for each session and compile in a notebook for individual participants.
12. Ensure that each participant understands their bridge-to-practice between sessions.
13. The first day of training will be held within the first month of school and will consist of goal setting and establishing a format for a needs assessment.
14. Following each session, provide an evaluation sheet for feedback to improve the training.
15. Adjust presentation as needed prior to next session.
16. Training module number two will be held on a day in the fall of the school year to review the needs assessment and outline a plan for the implementation of the parent involvement program.

17. The third day of training will consist of an evaluation overview in the spring of the school year to review the process and effectiveness of the program and to adjust the objectives as needed.
18. Following final session, review evaluations from participants to determine effectiveness of training.

Roles and Responsibilities of Others

The project was fully developed by me and I will oversee each step of the project as well as present and facilitate each session. Identification of the school parent involvement committee is critical to the success of this training. Participants must be identified by their willingness to commit to the project and their openness to building good parental and community support. I will work closely with district level supervisors and school administration to determine appropriate participants to invite to join this project. Participants must commit to attending each of three training session throughout the school year as well as bridge-to-practice field work between sessions.

It is important that these sessions be in person rather than by distance or online module learning to allow me to facilitate the dynamics of each participant and expand on ideas provided. The role of each participant will be to attend each session and complete assignments between sessions. Participants will also be requested to complete evaluations of each session and to be honest in their responses throughout this project.

Project Evaluation

The long term goal of this project is to establish a school team that will develop, implement, and oversee a plan to improve family engagement within the school setting.

The initial project goals will be adjusted by the team after they determine and review the needs of the school. However, I will facilitate the professional development sessions to equip the team members to plan for short and long term goals that will increase parent involvement in their school. Specifically, the team will assess the needs of the school and develop an action plan in regard to parent involvement based on the Epstein's (2009) parent involvement framework and they will assess the needs of the school for this project in the first session. Formative evaluation from each session will be submitted at the conclusion of the day with participants providing feedback. These formative evaluations will be made available to the school administration and district supervisors. A formal unit plan for project implementation is included in Appendix A of this document.

The summative evaluation of the program will ultimately be measured through improved student achievement scores overall. Use of the Tennessee report card data can be used to track the school's achievement and growth data through public records on the state department website (TDOE, 2015a).

Formative evaluations will be completed following each of the days of professional development training with a summative evaluation at the end of the final day of training. These evaluations are embedded in the professional development presentation at the end of each training session. Qualitative results of this program will be measured through the session evaluations as well as informal discussions with school administration, teachers, staff, parents and students, as well as community leaders. It is designed that this program will be ongoing for many years to come as the dynamics change and adjust with new students, staff and parents evolving. It will be recommended

that the school maintain a family engagement committee to continue goal setting with the needs of the school reviewed annually. These goals should be adjusted on a regular basis and modified as needed. Evaluation of a family engagement program by design is reiterative and must be an ongoing process.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

Historically research has indicated that the involvement of parents is critical to the success of students (Ferrara, 2011; Reece, Staudt, & Ogle, 2013). The importance of this concept is referenced throughout this document. The need for engagement of families has far reaching implications for schools. Even small changes can have a profound impact on the environment within a school. Cheatham and Santos (2011) explained that schools should be friendly and lend a listening ear to parents and families. This is a simple concept but it should be noted that even a small change from one person can make a difference to even one parent. If we are successful for even one student and their family then this program is considered effective. This professional development project should be implemented in a school setting with a team of parents, community leaders, and school staff. The implementation of this project can impact social change one school at a time.

Educators can gain support one parent at a time. Over time, this support has potential to grow exponentially if the school continues to make parent involvement a priority. McQueen and Hobbs (2014) described that it is important to ask any family what is important to them to establish a connection. Parents need to feel that someone in the school is listening to their needs and McQueen and Hobbs suggested that if these simple

principles are followed then the effects can extend far beyond one family. From this concept, if school staff continue to evaluate their practices of parent involvement routinely, then the impact can greatly exceed the effects of parent involvement of one school. By teaching parents the benefits of being involved with their children's education, students can learn appropriate actions when they become parents themselves. This basic involvement has the potential to impact schools and families for generations.

Far-Reaching

Educators are responsible for providing the same type of education for all students regardless of their experiences including race, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, cultural background, or level of functioning. The experiences that are brought to school by students impact them in the educational setting (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). Based on these experiences of students and their families, the needs identified by each school will vary from year to year (Constantino; 2016). Because of the need for individualized goals for each school, it will be necessary for school teams to develop an action plan to address these needs.

The success of this action plan will be contingent on the cooperation and collaboration of the team and their willingness to implement the plan with fidelity. It is critical that the plan be developed by a team all of whom have a shared vision for the outcome. In addition, this team will monitor and adjust the action plan as the needs of the school fluctuate. The team members must also be committed to the success of the students and the engagement of their families.

The implications in this project have the potential to reach far beyond an individual school. By developing school teams to review and develop action plans to better engage the families of their students, support can extend to other communities. School staff have an obligation to help their students rise to their fullest potential. However, with the families of these students becoming more engaged, their achievement should be greatly improved. With successful implementation, ultimately, students will grow into engaged parents when their own children become students in school.

Conclusion

Section 3 provided a foundation for the school to develop a philosophy that has the potential to greatly impact students. The program described in this section begins small and grows to impact families throughout the school and the community. By developing a committee of educators, parents, and community members, and facilitating a plan to build collaboration, the effects can be far-reaching. This committee will need some initial training to equip them with the tools to plan, organize, and implement strategies needed to improve parent involvement in the school. The training developed through this project study will provide the coaching and guidance needed to instruct the team to carry out the goal of increasing family engagement. The committee will then begin to train others and review the impact of the program at routine intervals as the needs of the students and the school changes. Through this process, both parents and educators learn to set a good example for their children to teach them the importance of parent involvement. This discussion will continue through Section 4 as I reflect on this

process as the project creator. Section 4 will conclude with the impact that this project will have on social change and some implications for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

My vision for this study came from personal experiences. My own school was reeling from the effects of being listed as a focus school and I was searching for answers and solutions to help the problem with the gap in achievement gains between non-White economically disadvantaged students and White and more affluent students. I was not only disappointed, I was humiliated. After taking a hard look at my practices, I began to look at what I could do differently. My personal goal became that of increasing the involvement of the parents of the school described in the study to better engage them in the process of educating their children. At the time, I was not reaching parents of students who were economically disadvantaged to engage them in their children's educational experiences. The idea for this project came from the frustration I felt with struggling to close the achievement gap. It was my hope through this project study that by finding out what parent perceived as important regarding parent involvement and what changes could be made, we would have a greater success in engaging the families of our students.

Project Strengths

The potential for lasting impact is the strength of this project in regard to examining the problem with limited parent involvement. This project has potential to impact the school in positive ways for many years to come. By providing professional development training to a team of people who are interested and committed to changing the school environment, growth can continue far beyond the boundaries of this project. The initial committee of administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders

working collaboratively to examine the needs of the school regarding parent involvement will provide short-term solutions to increase family engagement. The committee will also be prepared to continue making adjustments as the needs of the school change.

Perhaps the greatest strength of this project is that the research presented in the literature reviews of Sections 1 and 3 clearly supported the importance of involving parents in the education of their children. The importance of parent involvement is a topic on which it seems all researchers have emphatically agreed. From this concept, it can be stated that even small increases in involvement by parents will help students to be successful. The research previously presented also clearly supported that parents and educators should work together to maximize the effectiveness of the school environment. By developing a team of committed individuals, and providing guidance and support, the effects of their efforts will be both positive and lasting.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

Perhaps the limitation that has the most influence on this project is the commitment of time for the participants. Asking parents, educators, and community leaders to surrender 3 days to participate in professional development is asking a great deal of their time. To remediate this concern, it will be critical to identify people who are committed to change to serve on this committee. It will also be critical to follow the needs of the school when facilitating discussion and solutions. Each member of the team will be asked to provide input from their own perspective to address the needs of the school in regard to parent involvement. By seeking individual input from each team member, the problem can be addressed from multiple perspectives. With input from all

committee members, I hope that the participants will feel that their perspective is important and their time is not wasted.

If participants lose interest in the project over time, it will be necessary to reinforce the interest in the cause. By distributing the professional development over 3 days at integral points through the school year, the process of coming back together for additional tasks and collaboration will help to keep the interest level constant. During the second and third day of professional development training, the committee members will evaluate their progress to date. When these committee members witness the success that has been made and the impact that has been made, my intention is that they will begin to feel proud of the efforts they have made by implementing this project. By achieving even small positive changes, the participants will see that the time they have committed to the changes will be time well spent.

Throughout this professional development training, staff should be made aware that even small changes can positively impact the school. For example, it does not take any time or funding for one to be friendly and welcoming. Cheatham and Santos (2011) stated that by welcoming parents in a friendly manner and listening to their needs, educators could ensure that parents will be more likely to become involved. Each small gesture we can make toward a parent has the potential to encourage that one parent to become more involved in the education of their children. The impact would be smaller but if we are successful with one parent and family then the positive outcome remains.

To make the greatest impact on engaging parents, it is necessary to be more strategic in our efforts at the school. With the formation of a committee, commitment to

changing our strategies, and evaluating our progress, these efforts will be successful. The changes will be made by providing professional development and facilitating collaboration among the committee and beyond.

Alternative Approaches

While reviewing methods to increase parent involvement, it became evident that there are many ways to provide intervention for engaging families. Through the research presented in the literature reviews in Sections 1 and 3, it became evident to me that just as each student is different, so is each family and each school. Because of such differences, one solution will not be applicable to all school settings.

Based on the data, this problem could be addressed by implementing a parent training program to help parents with learning skills to help their child at home. There would need to be a needs assessment conducted to determine which areas were needed for additional supports. Educators within the school could also examine and dissect the academic skills data to determine deficit areas school-wide. The parent training sessions would then be designed to improve parental support in those areas.

There are many ways to increase parent involvement as exhibited in the literature. Alternative solutions to the problem of improving parent involvement would be unique to the needs of each school. Each school may have a different plan to implement that will increase engagement, but the means to arrive at improved parent involvement would vary greatly in each school community.

Scholarship

Perhaps the most humbling moment of reality for me through this process was when I submitted a document for review and it was returned to me with the appropriate criticism that the words that were written indicating my opinion meant nothing without the supporting research. It sounds simple, but the reality was quite helpful. I realized that even though I am an educator with many years of experience, my opinion meant very little. Scholarship for me has meant that I needed to take my opinions and desire for learning to a much deeper process. I found a topic that inspired me to become a better educator through research. I quickly gained respect for peer-reviewed research and I learned that my original ideas only scratched the surface of the topic of parent involvement. Each article or bit of research took me in a different direction by providing yet another perspective.

Eventually, I learned that my experiences are also important to this process. From the many experiences with parents that I have had as an educator, my own perspective was mirrored in the literature, even if from different sources. I found it reassuring when I discovered research that supported my own experiences. Through this research, I was able to explore my opinions at a deeper level to gain an understanding of why these strategies are effective or ineffective.

While gathering data from both the quantitative and qualitative phases of my research, my own opinions were again reinforced as I explored the experiences of parents through the surveys and interviews. Through this collection of data, it was evident to me that one's experiences really do shape who they are as both parents and as educators.

Perhaps the most valuable lesson that I learned from the data collected was that one must listen to the input from all of the parents he or she encounters and strive to understand their perspective. I learned from both research and collection of data that involving parents in their children's education is a process that should be ongoing and revisited often to be effective in engaging families.

Project Development and Evaluation

Through my experiences as a special education teacher, district supervisor of special education, and as a school-based administrator, I have had countless opportunities to work with parents. Many of those experiences were positive and effective, but some were very unpleasant. I have always had a passion for bringing parents and educators together to support students. In my opinion and based on my experiences, the student gains so much when his or her parents are involved in the educational process.

I learned that educators must plan appropriately to deliver effective instruction for students as well as for teachers and parents. Teachers are evaluated on many indicators. Planning is one component of this evaluation process. In the rubric used by my district to evaluate teachers, planning for effective instruction must include evidence that the plans build on prior knowledge and are relevant to students in their everyday lives (TDOE, 2015c). This concept is true even if the students are adults. Learners have a better understanding of the material presented if they have a point of reference. The concepts presented should relate to their own life experiences in order for them to gain mastery or understanding.

Based on these principles, I have learned that to have an effective project to better engage the parents of students into the local school, we need to develop the project based on the unique needs of our school. For this reason, a team of dedicated parents, educators, and community leaders will be able to participate in professional development to facilitate the engagement of families. The development of this project must help this committee connect to their own experiences and unique needs of the school to be effective.

I have learned that the leadership within the school must set the standard for change. In most cases, the change will occur over time rather than happen quickly. Slow change can be frustrating but students will benefit even from small changes. Even minor changes can evolve into more significant changes as the progress begins to snowball. These types of changes will seep into the minds of students and continue to be effective for years to come. These changes will likely only benefit students rather than have a negative impact. I have learned through the research, that the leadership within the school must set the example for the staff, parents, and the students to initiate change.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

Before I began this project, I considered myself a life-long learner. I took this term to a new level through the project study. I learned much more about myself than thought I could ever know. I learned that I am stronger than I originally thought. I was discouraged much of the time and I found that I could only blame myself. Truly, the concept that I can only control the actions of myself became evident. There were times through this process when I was not an effective scholar but I also learned to work

through those unproductive times to remain focused and to see the project to fruition. Throughout this project, I have become aware that I am a stronger leader and educator because of the experience.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

I have become a more focused educator at the conclusion of this experience. I have learned to look for small changes that can be made to improve the school environment that will have an impact on the involvement of parents with their children. The most important message that I can send to parents is to stop feeling guilty if they are unable to attend events at school. Being an involved parent often means simply ensuring that your child gets adequate rest and nutrition before they come to school and ensuring that they attend school regularly.

As a researcher, I learned that I like to see what the data reveal. At the beginning of this project, I thought that I would have enjoyed the qualitative interviews more than the qualitative survey results. My preference actually surprised me because I enjoyed the quantitative component of this project much more than I thought I would. Initially, I was intimidated by the calculations of the data but I really got excited watching the surveys arrive in the mail. I did not know the participants so I could read the results with a fair and impartial view. Once I realized that I could look at the data from a low-tech approach, I relaxed and allowed myself to analyze the data on my own. I was surprised that I did not really enjoy the qualitative interviews more. One of the interviews really spoiled the effect of the qualitative interview process for me because I felt that the parent was only trying to impress me and she did not provide information that was helpful. I did,

however, enjoy talking with the other parents and I learned a great deal from their responses. I am no longer intimidated by the research process and I know that I will continue to grow as a researcher.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

I was able to design a project for implementation with parents, educators, and community leaders that will help to engage parents in the education of their children. This project will promote change within my own school and will grow to impact the total school climate. I learned that I still continue to struggle with the technological aspects of project development but I am strong in the area of practical application.

Initially, I will be confident in leading this professional development training in my own school with a committee of parents, teachers, and community leaders. I will help to make changes within my school based on the data we receive from surveys. I also will effectively facilitate the discussion from the committee to develop an action plan for our school to increase the involvement of our parents. I am optimistic that by having multiple perspectives on the topic, we will develop a very effective plan that will ultimately benefit our students.

I also will be comfortable in presenting this professional development to other schools in my district as well as disseminating and facilitating this project in other school districts. The project is based on research and I can easily see how beneficial the impact can be on schools and ultimately on student growth and achievement.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

The impact of this project within my local school will be very beneficial to our staff, students as well as the surrounding community. The professional development offered through this presentation will provide the tools for the committee to grow as leaders and to develop a plan for the school to improve our relationships with parents. Ultimately, students will benefit from the improved family engagement in their academic abilities and their social skills.

The effects of this professional development project can also extend throughout the school district and beyond as I obtain permission to present the training to other schools. Professional development is needed in virtually any school that desires to improve its relationships with parents and the surrounding community. The presentation can be adapted to be communicated at conferences to explain the process of forming a parent involvement committee.

Perhaps the most important result of this project is that of our students. It is hoped that by increasing the involvement of parents in their children's education, we can instill the importance of this engagement on future generations. If children are exposed to appropriate and supportive parent involvement, then they are more likely to become more involved with their own children as adults. Good family engagement has the potential for impacting students and education for generations.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The research collected in this project has influenced professional development that can be adapted to meet the needs of each individual school. The quantitative and

qualitative data collected revealed several incidents of bullying behaviors that were troubling to parents and students. Future implications for research would be to explore how bullying impacts involvement from parents and how it affects the school climate. This presentation could be used to help schools to develop a committee to investigate strategies that can prevent bullying behaviors.

This research also did not explore the involvement of non-English speaking parents. The professional development project could be modified to include translated materials and expanded to include parents of ESL students by applying the same principles of professional development and training, using a school-based committee to develop an action plan, and by reflecting on the importance of the work and what was learned. In the field of public education, it is likely that the students who speak English as their second language will continue to improve. Future research is needed in this area to better involve parents in the education of their children.

Conclusion

This project was developed based on peer-reviewed research and on the results of the quantitative and qualitative data collected. Each school is unique and needs are different so it is critical to remember not to generalize these strategies from school to school. It is important to note that a committee of people can examine virtually any problem and work together to resolve the issue. From this process, I have learned that we must have a plan for determining the most effective method for solving a problem. Listening to the needs of the school and the individuals involved in the process will only help to resolve the issues more effectively. It is also critical that the school routinely

continue to review the effectiveness of parent involvement plan as the needs of the school change. Students learn from our example. By providing an effective example of parent and educator collaboration, we are training our students to become involved and engaged parents when their own children begin school.

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Appendix A: The Project

Developing a Plan for Increasing Parent Involvement

Project Objective and Purpose: To develop an action plan for increasing parent involvement in the school setting.

- Team will assess the needs of the school by reviewing survey data collected during student registration. Any school survey could be used but the questions should relate to the six areas of parent involvement.
- Team will establish goals for the development of action plan based on needs assessment.
- Team will develop an action plan – including short/long term goals, duty assignments, materials needed, evaluation components. .(Worksheet included in Appendix F)
- Team will develop a timeline for review of the action plan.
- Team will evaluate each session .(Evaluation included in Appendix G)
 - Team (12-15 members) will be established consisting of:
 - A school administrator
 - 3 to 4 teacher leaders:
 - 1 - PreK, Kindergarten, or 1st grade
 - 1 – 2nd or 3rd grade
 - 1 – 4th or 5th grade
 - Specialist (counselor, librarian, art, music, or PE)
 - 3 support staff (plant manager, secretary, custodial worker, cafeteria worker, or a para-professional)
 - 3 parents or extended family members
 - 3 community leaders
 - Setting – a room within the school that can seat 12-15 people comfortably
 - 3 round tables with comfortable chairs
 - Wall space that is adequate for holding multiple pieces of chart paper
 - Materials needed for presentation:
 - PowerPoint PD presentation including trainer notes
 - Projector
 - 3 colors of Blow pops – 15 total
 - 3 copies of local newspaper
 - Paper
 - Markers
 - Chart paper
 - Deck of playing cards
 - Index cards 3x5 or 4x6
 - 2 Balls of yarn – contrasting colors

- Notebooks (1 per participant)
- Pens
- Scissors - 3 pair
- Copies of presentation for each session (1 per participant)
- Copies of survey – blank
- Copies of survey results
- Copies of evaluation form for each session
- Copies of Action plan – blank pages
- Copies of corrected Action plan for sessions 2 & 3
- Snacks
- Drinks

Input and facilitation

- Through discussion, and activities, team members will learn about types of parent involvement and will determine the best ways to implement changes within the school. (Agendas for each session included in Appendix H)
 - collaborate to determine the areas that are strengths
 - design ways to improve areas of concern

Guided Practice

- Team members will collaborate on steps of action plan during each session
- Through discussion and activities, team members will design methods to improve parent involvement that are unique to the school

Independent practice

- Each team member will leave each session with assigned bridge to practice activities.

Closure

- Distribution of revised action plan for each area of parent involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community)

Evaluation-Check for Understanding

- Each team member will complete an evaluation of each of the 3 sessions

Method-Outline

- Prior to professional development – obtain necessary permissions from school and school district for implementation of the PD program
- Prior to PD -Distribute and collect parent surveys during student registration and tabulate results
- Specific times for sessions and activities are included in PowerPoint
- Session 1 –Arrange for PD during 1st month of school year
 - Introductions
 - Icebreaker – get to know team

- Background and overview of philosophy
- Review of survey results
- Establish rules and norms
- Team building activity
- Framework and research review
- Develop action plan for each area of Parent Involvement
 - Area of need
 - Action to be taken
 - Priority or ease of change
 - Materials needed
 - Target date of completion
 - How will team evaluate success?
- Evaluation of Session 1
- Session 2 – Arrange for PD 4-6 weeks after 1st training day
 - Review of Session 1
 - Icebreaker
 - Discuss progress on action steps from each area of parent involvement - Barriers, problems, successes, adjustments needed
 - Parenting
 - Communicating
 - Volunteering
 - Learning at Home
 - Decision Making
 - Collaborating with the community
 - Assess the following areas:
 - Progress made to this point
 - How are we serving the needs of all students?
 - Areas of strength
 - Areas to grow
 - Facilitate ideas for the following questions in each area of Parent Involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community):
 - What is working in this area of parent involvement?
 - What do we need to change in this area of parent involvement?
 - Who will be responsible for changes?
 - What is the timeline for completion?
 - How will we know if we are successful?
 - Evaluation of Session 2
- Session 3 – Arrange for PD 4 months after 2nd training day
 - Review of sessions 1 & 2
 - Icebreaker
 - Reflection of progress
 - Activity to determine the success of action plan in each type of parent involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering,

- learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community)
- Activity to determine the areas that still need improvements in each type of parent involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community)
- Identification of barriers and brainstorm solutions
 - What can we change?
 - What cannot be changed & how to work around this barrier?
- Develop long term action plan for each type of parent involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community)
- Identify ways to sustain the progress made through the year
 - Assign long term duties,
 - Develop and implement procedures to continue the progress
 - Establish timeline for team to continue meeting beyond the project parameters.
 - Determine ways to bring in new team members as original team moves on.
- Evaluation of session and project

Slide 1



Welcome all to the training. Introduce myself and background. Discuss the inspiration behind the project.

Materials needed for presentation:

3 colors of Blow pops – 15 total

3 copies of Local newspaper

Paper

Markers

Chart paper

Deck of playing cards

Index cards 3x5 or 4x6

2 Balls of yarn – contrasting colors

Notebooks

Pens

Scissors at least 3 pair

Copies of presentation for each session

Copies of survey – blank

Copies of survey results

Copies of evaluation for each session

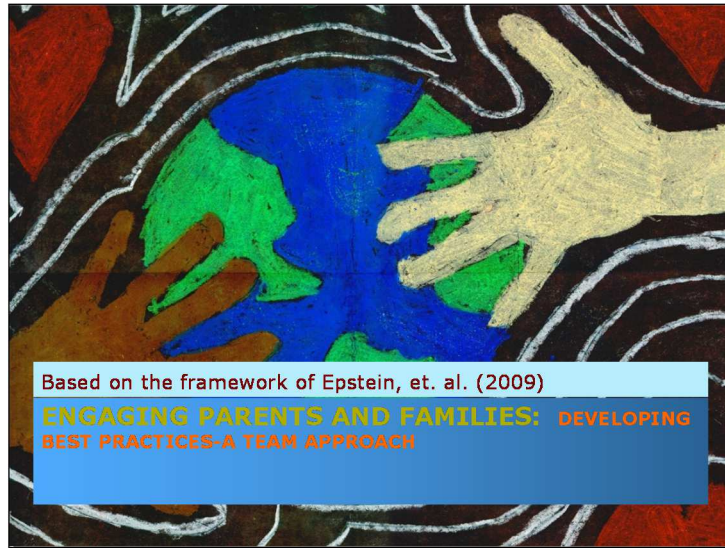
Copies of Action plan – blank pages

Copies of corrected Action plan as needed

Snacks

Drinks

Slide 2



Say: This project study has been my vision for a long time and I am excited to share it with a team of people to begin to make a difference in our school for our students.

Slide 3

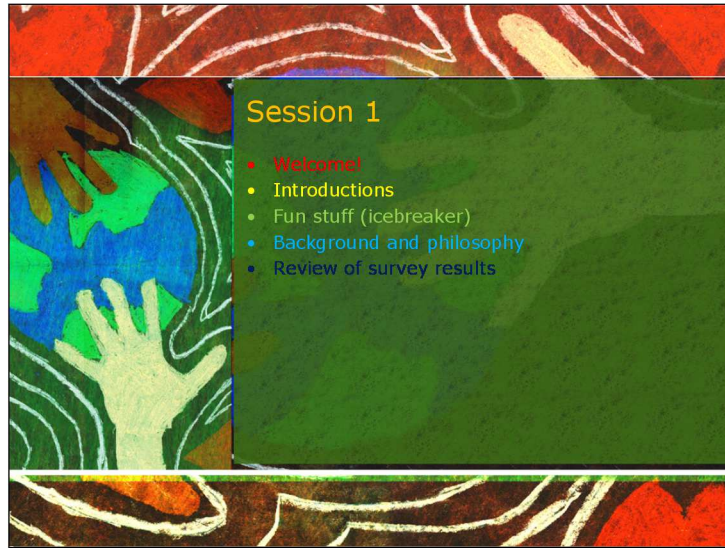


Overview of training:

- Session 1 - Getting started
 - Forming our team
 - Discussing needs assessment
 - Developing an action plan
 - Bridge to practice
- Session 2 - How are we doing?
 - Review progress so far
 - Next steps
- Session 3 - Moving forward
 - Where do we go from here?
 - Maintaining and improving

Briefly describe the components of each session.

Slide 4

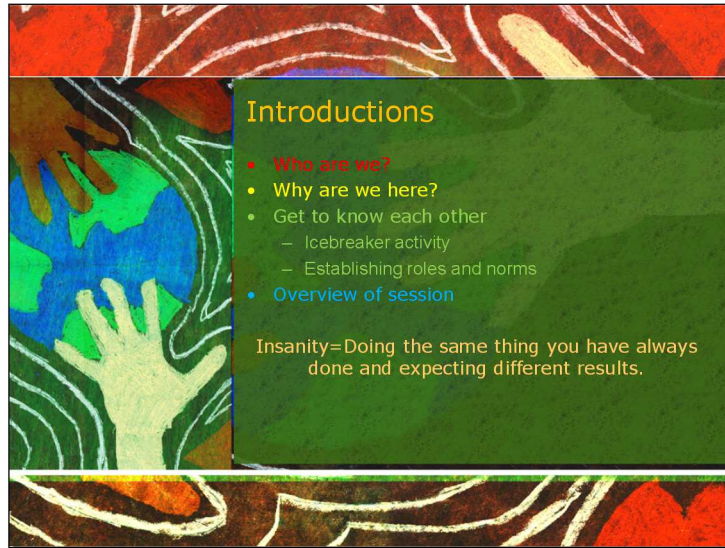


Introduce participants and ask them to tell:

1. name,
2. what they do for a living,
3. what their connection is with the school.
4. something interesting about themselves.

I will then provide an overview of the day.

Slide 5



Say: Now we know WHO we are – but WHY are we here?

We all share a common desire to improve our relationships with parents to help our students.

We have some activities to follow today but our main focus is that we must change what we are doing in order to get better results.

Say: Now we know WHO we are – but WHY are we here?

We all share a common desire to improve our relationships with parents to help our students.

We have some activities to follow today but our main focus is that we must change what we are doing in order to get better results.

Slide 6



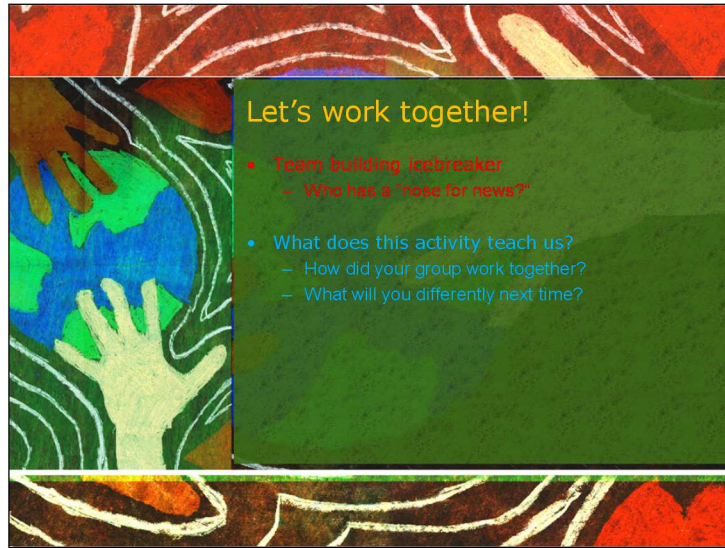
Rules and Norms

- Together we will develop our procedures for how we will interact with each other throughout these sessions.
 - Breaks
 - Questions
 - Phone calls
- What if I disagree with someone?

As a whole group, work together to establish how we will relate to each other. (ex. Established breaks or as needed breaks, how to handle questions or phone calls-, interruptions) Also, discuss what to do if participants disagree.

Important note – if everyone has the same opinion, then a group is not needed. We would only need one person to make all of the decisions.

Slide 7



Give each participant a choice of 3 different flavors of “Blow Pops.”

The color of pop will determine the group in which they will participate.

After teams are chosen, have them move to a separate area of the room to spread out the groups.

Give each group a copy of the most recent edition of our local small town newspaper. For this activity, each team will have the same edition of the paper and they will be instructed to work together to follow a scavenger hunt in the paper.

The teams will be instructed to find 5 different articles or key pieces of the paper, rip it out, and turn in to the facilitator.

Items in the paper would be pre-determined by the facilitator).

The group with the most found items is deemed the winner of that event.

The purpose of this event is to dissect the strategies that each group used to find the items.

Slide 8



The WHY of our sessions...

- Research
 - Most of this project is based on the results of the work of Joyce Epstein.
- Epstein, J.L. (1986). *Toward an integrated theory of school and family connections*. (Report No.3.). Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools.
- Epstein, J. L., & Dauber, S. L. (1991). School programs and teacher practices of parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, 289-305.
- Epstein, J.L., et al. (2009). School, family and community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. In *School, family and Community Partnerships: Your handbook for action*, 3rd ed. (Larson, L. & Bartlett, D.A., Eds.). California: Corwin Press. pp. 9-30.

Introduce the research of Parent Involvement.

Epstein (1986) This primary research provided the groundwork for most current research on Parent Involvement and is referenced in almost every study on the subject of parent Involvement.

Secondary research - Epstein & Dauber (1991) – 5 types of parent involvement were identified.

Secondary research – Epstein, et al. (2009) – 6 types of parent involvement were identified and serve as the basis of this project.

Slide 9



Name & describe the 6 types of parent involvement.

Slide 10



Parenting

- In this type of parent involvement:
Schools provide assistance and training for parents to develop a supportive home environment for students.

Epstein, et. al. (2009)

Say: As a team, we will propose some ways that schools can provide supports for parents to sharpen their skills at home in order to help their children with skills.
Facilitate discussion.

Slide 11



Communicating

- In this type of parent involvement:

Schools work to improve communications between school and home and also from home to school.

Epstein, et. al. (2009)

Say: As a team we will evaluate our present methods of communication, as well as developing a plan for ways we can improve our communication.
Facilitate discussion.

Slide 12



Say: Many of our parents are unable to spare time to volunteer within the school. Also, we cannot easily have volunteers in the school without appropriate background checks. As a team, we need to help find ways to let parents know that it is OK for them to not feel like they have to volunteer physically within the school. We will brainstorm some ways that parents can volunteer their available time in creative ways. Facilitate discussion and comments.

Slide 13



Say: Many parents really want to help their children at home but they lack the skills to feel confident to help with academics. Usually, homework is simply reinforcing skills the student should know and parents need to ensure only that the work is completed. But, parents need to feel confident in their skills in order to help if their child does not understand something. Most parents feel that schools are teaching skills only in order to help children pass tests. We also need to help parents understand the requirements of testing.

Facilitate discussion and ideas.

Slide 14



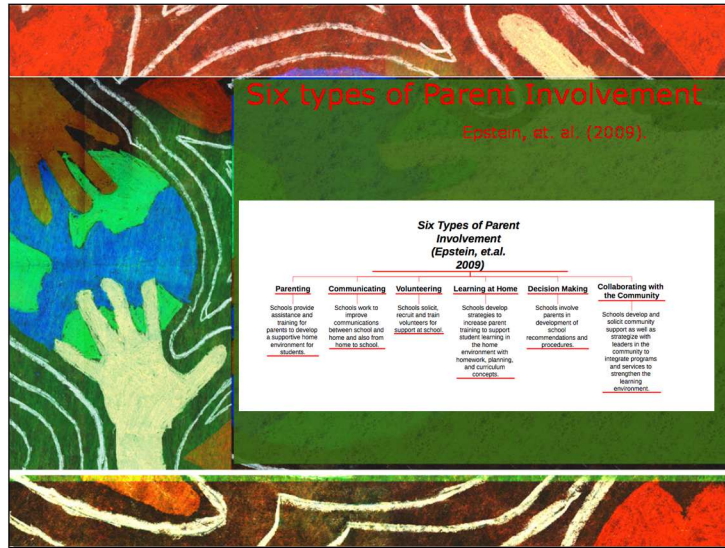
Say: Parents feel more secure when they can understand the policies and procedures of the school. When they can be involved in the planning of these policies and procedures that's even better. How can we make that happen? As a group we will need to plan for some ideas to better involve our parents in the decisions of the school.
Facilitate discussion and comments.

Slide 15



There is an old saying that educators often use: “It takes a village to raise a child” (author unknown). This statement has never been more true than it is today. Schools need all the help we can get to support instruction for our students. As a team, we will strategize how to better involve our community in our schools and our parents into the community...
Facilitate discussion and thoughts

Slide 16



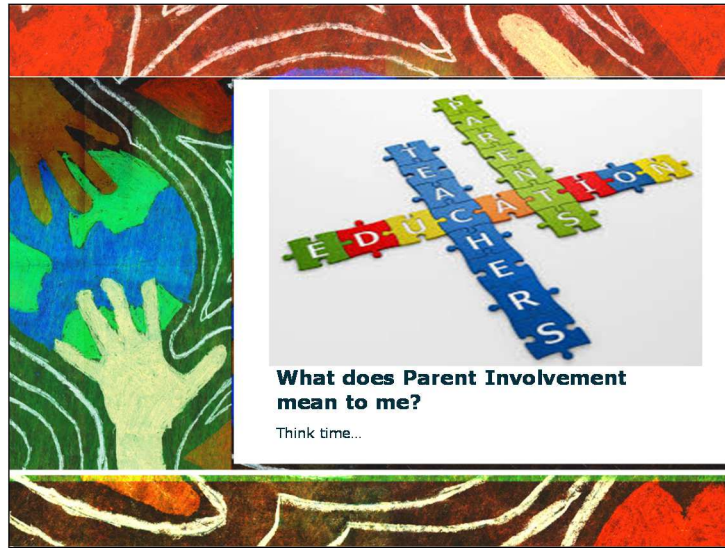
Say: To recap – ALL 6 types of parent involvement are important and necessary to improve the total school environment.

Slide 17



Allow a 15 minute break.

Slide 18



Say: Think about this statement. “What does Parent Involvement mean to me?”

Participants will write a phrase or phrases to describe their thoughts and ideas.

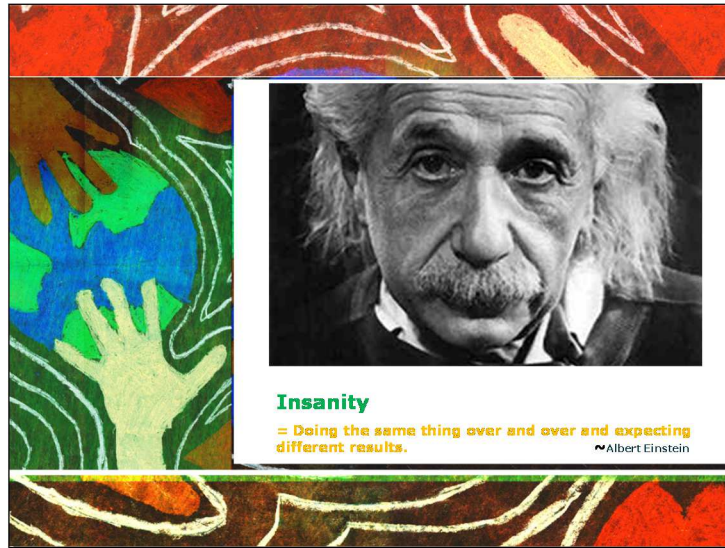
Allow participants to work for up to 3 minutes independently.

Then go back to original groups from the morning activity and, as a group, brainstorm some common thoughts on chart paper for each group. Each group will work for another 3-5 minutes and report to the whole group.

Next, together as a group find some common themes. Highlight common responses from each group; and as a whole group, develop a few responses that are common to all.

Develop common responses on chart paper that can be agreed upon by all. This step might take awhile and may need some gentle shaping to get everyone to agree. There may be multiple common beliefs.

Slide 19



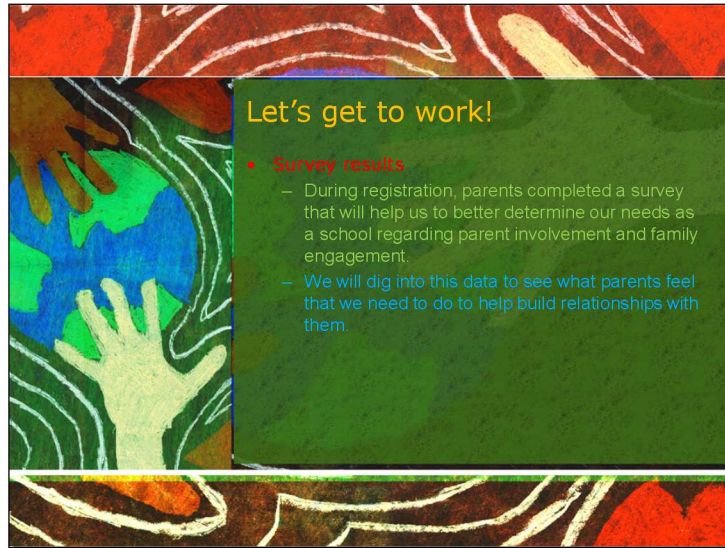
Say: So obviously, based on the common beliefs, we must change some of the procedures we are following to obtain different results.

Slide 20



Provide instructions for where participants will go to get their lunch and where to eat.

Slide 21



Let's get to work!

- **Survey results**
 - During registration, parents completed a survey that will help us to better determine our needs as a school regarding parent involvement and family engagement.
 - We will dig into this data to see what parents feel that we need to do to help build relationships with them.

Distribute survey results to group.

Divide up into 3 groups and discuss the results. (Lunch will be before or after this component depending on the length of time other activities have taken.)

I will not know the results of the survey until they are completed. I will tally the results after the surveys are received and provide the results to the team. Actual surveys will not be displayed but a list of all comments will be compiled into one document before the group meets the first time.

Slide 22



Say: Let's examine the results of our surveys.

Slide 23



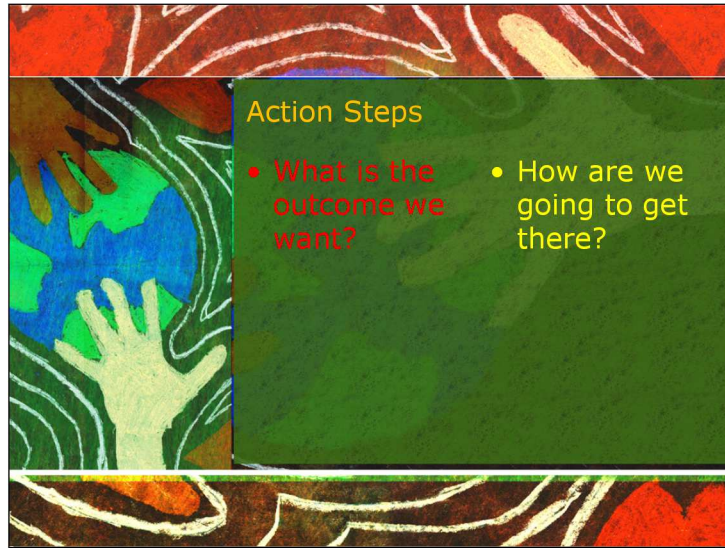
The school will provide surveys to parents during the registration process. Results will be tabulated prior to this workshop. Survey results will be inserted here before the presentation begins. Survey results will also be distributed in a hard copy to the participants.

Slide 24



Say: Together we will develop a plan for how we need to intervene to build relationships with parents.

Slide 25



Divide up into the same 3 working groups.

Hand out action step forms.

Each group will take 2 types of parent involvement and the survey results to work together to develop action steps for those 2 areas.

Facilitate discussion within the groups to encourage them to dig deep and to understand that some steps will be easily developed and others may occur over time.

This step should take about an hour to effectively develop action steps.

Slide 26



While the group is on break, make copies of the action steps developed to share with the whole group. Colored pens should be provided to allow each member to edit and make suggestions/changes to the step developed by each group.

Slide 27



Bring the whole group back together following the break. Each group will share the action steps developed while each participant edits his/her draft copy. Appoint a recorder to edit the “Master copy.” The “Master working copy” will be copied and distributed to all before they leave for the day.

Slide 28



Before dismissing participants, determine who will take responsibility for each action step. (This step may take some prompting to assign each task to a participant.)
Exchange contact information. (This information will be provided in a list to all participants).
Set a realistic timeline for each step.

Slide 29



Evaluation

- Let me know your thoughts!
 - Be honest
- What went well today?
- What should we do differently next time?
- Please complete the session evaluation and turn it in before you leave.
- Suggestions?

Distribute session evaluation to all participants. Allow time for reflection and completion of the session evaluation forms. Participants will need privacy to complete evaluation forms. Provide a place to submit evaluations that will protect their anonymity.

Slide 30

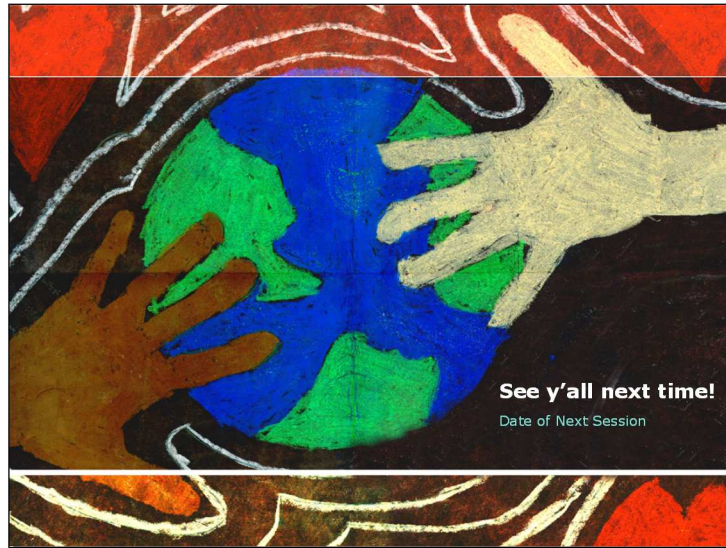


What's next?

- Session 2 – Preview
 - Fun stuff
 - Report on progress
 - More fun stuff
 - What are our challenges?
- Where do we need to make adjustments?
- Adjusting the action steps

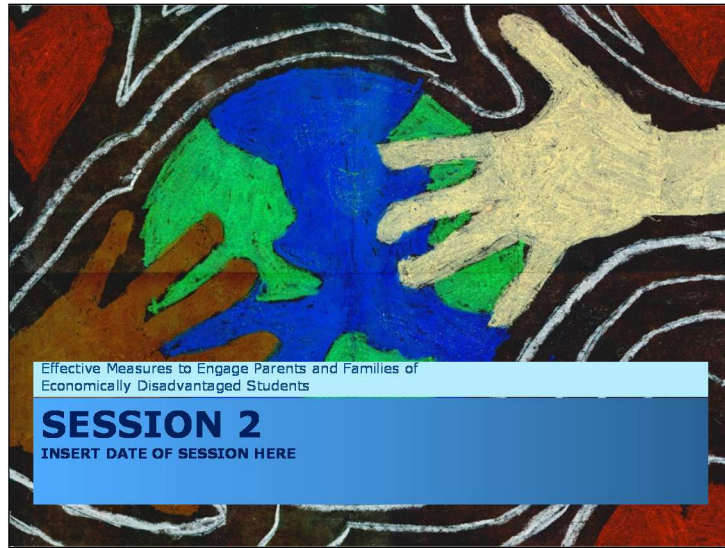
Review the plan for Session 2

Slide 31



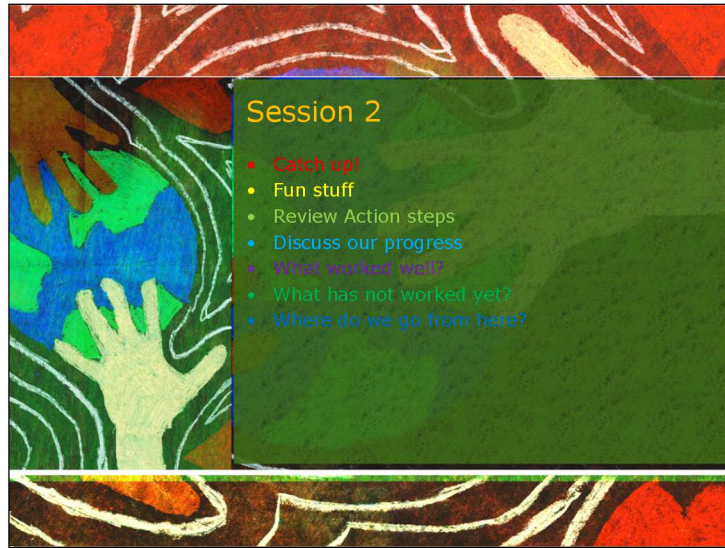
Before the next session – re-type the action steps with corrections into a more readable document and send by email to all participants. Also, add revisions into the presentation.

Slide 32



Welcome everyone back to session 2. Insert date of session into presentation when the date is finalized.

Slide 33



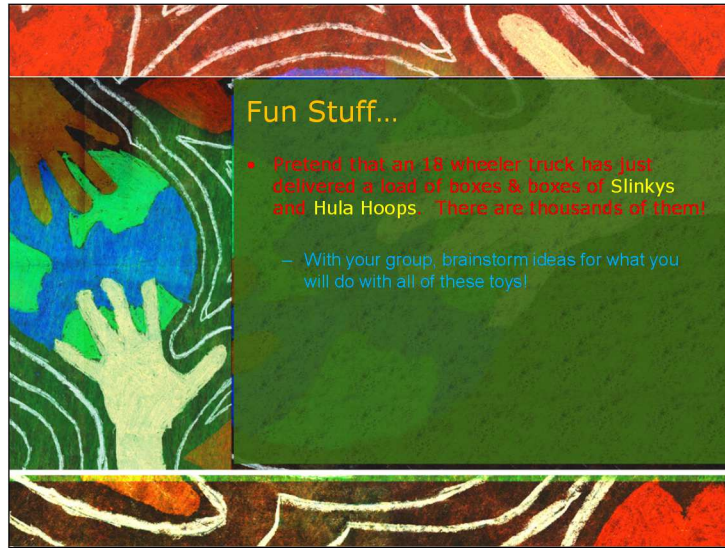
Introduce session 2. Today will be more of a work session as we sort through the Action Steps from Session 1 and determine where we need to go from this point.

Slide 34



To divide into groups, have participants choose a card from a deck of playing cards placed face down. As cards are revealed, have red group move to one table and black group move to the other table. If groups are uneven, choose the highest numbers to move to the smaller group.

Slide 35



Fun Stuff...

- Pretend that an 18 wheeler truck has just delivered a load of boxes & boxes of Slinkys and Hula Hoops. There are thousands of them!
- With your group, brainstorm ideas for what you will do with all of these toys!

Team building exercise: Each group should be given markers and chart paper. Instruct each group to appoint a “recorder” and that person will list brainstorming ideas from each of the other group members. Set a timer for 3-5 minutes and walk around to facilitate responses. Encourage each group to keep their ideas quiet so that the other group does not hear their responses. Give each group a chance to share ideas with the whole group. Remind participants that there are no right or wrong ideas!

Slide 36



Now back to our real concerns...

- **What do we remember from Session 1?**
- In your group, list as many facts, ideas, or strategies as you can remember from our last session.
- **Let's SHARE!**

Provide each group with markers and chart paper and ask each of the 2 groups to appoint a recorder. Groups should spend 3-5 minutes brainstorming some of the ideas generated from Session 1. Then ask each group to share with the whole group the information they remember from Session 1.

Slide 37



Allow a 15 minute break.

Slide 38



Following the break, bring everyone back together to whole group and distribute the corrected action steps. Make sure everyone has copies of their notes from Session 1.

Slide 39



Action Steps for: Parenting

- **Action Steps**
 - List Action Step 1 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 2 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 3 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 4 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 5 here following input from Session 1
- **Discuss the status of each Action Step**
 - **Barriers?**
 - **Problems?**
 - **Successes?**
 - **Tweaks?**

Following Session 1 enter each action step from each area of parent involvement in the presentation. As a whole group, discuss the status of each Action step and any “Tweaks” or changes that may be needed for each action step in each area of parent involvement.

Slide 40



**Action Steps for:
Communicating**

- **Action Steps**
 - List Action Step 1 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 2 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 3 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 4 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 5 here following input from Session 1
- **Discuss the status of each Action Step**
 - **Barriers?**
 - **Problems?**
 - **Successes?**
 - **Tweaks?**

Following Session 1 enter each action step from each area of parent involvement in the presentation. As a whole group, discuss the status of each Action step and any “Tweaks” or changes that may be needed for each action step in each area of parent involvement.

Slide 41



Action Steps for: Volunteering

- **Action Steps**
 - List Action Step 1 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 2 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 3 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 4 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 5 here following input from Session 1
- **Discuss the status of each Action Step**
 - **Barriers?**
 - **Problems?**
 - **Successes?**
 - **Tweaks?**

Following Session 1 enter each action step from each area of parent involvement in the presentation. As a whole group, discuss the status of each Action step and any “Tweaks” or changes that may be needed for each action step in each area of parent involvement.

Slide 42



**Action Steps for:
Learning at Home**

- **Action Steps**
 - List Action Step 1 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 2 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 3 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 4 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 5 here following input from Session 1
- **Discuss the status of each Action Step**
 - **Barriers?**
 - **Problems?**
 - **Successes?**
 - **Tweaks?**

Following Session 1 enter each action step from each area of parent involvement in the presentation. As a whole group, discuss the status of each Action step and any “Tweaks” or changes that may be needed for each action step in each area of parent involvement.

Slide 43

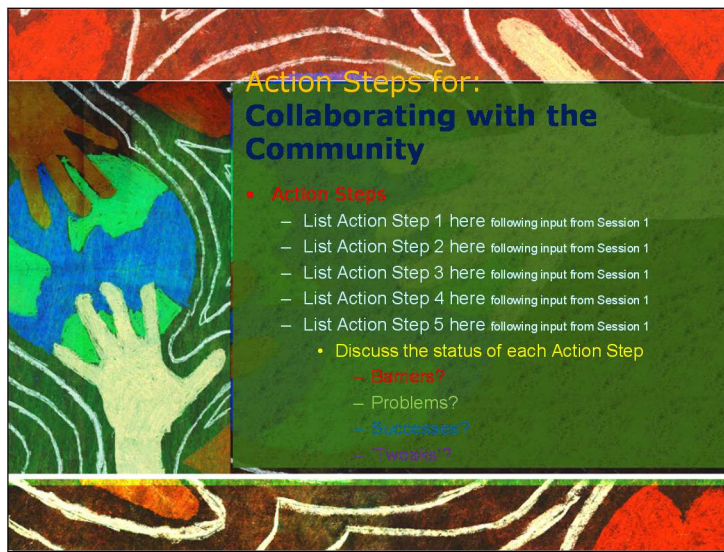


**Action Steps for:
Decision Making**

- **Action Steps**
 - List Action Step 1 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 2 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 3 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 4 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 5 here following input from Session 1
- **Discuss the status of each Action Step**
 - **Barriers?**
 - **Problems?**
 - **Successes?**
 - **Tweaks?**

Following Session 1 enter each action step from each area of parent involvement in the presentation. As a whole group, discuss the status of each Action step and any “Tweaks” or changes that may be needed for each action step in each area of parent involvement.

Slide 44



**Action Steps for:
Collaborating with the
Community**

- **Action Steps**
 - List Action Step 1 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 2 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 3 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 4 here following input from Session 1
 - List Action Step 5 here following input from Session 1
 - **Discuss the status of each Action Step**
 - Demers?
 - Problems?
 - Successes?
 - Tweaks?

Following Session 1 enter each action step from each area of parent involvement in the presentation. As a whole group, discuss the status of each Action step and any “Tweaks” or changes that may be needed for each action step in each area of parent involvement.

Slide 45



Provide instructions for where participants will go to get their lunch and where to eat.

Slide 46



Engaging our Families

With your table partners - answer the following questions:

- Both generally and specifically, how are we doing?
- To what degree are we serving the needs of ALL students?
- What are we good at, and where do we need help?

Following lunch to bring everyone back to task. This activity is just for reflection. Facilitate discussion of the group as a whole.

Slide 47



Facilitate discussion to strategize about the next steps.

Slide 48

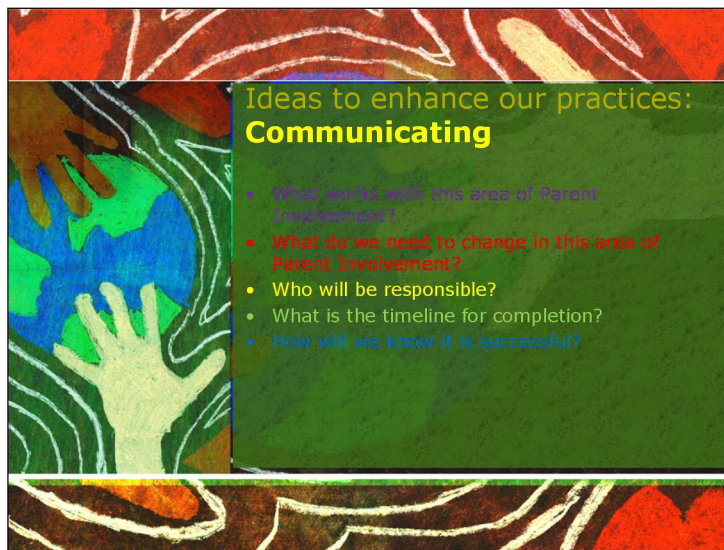


Ideas to enhance our practices:
Parenting

- What works with this area of Parent Involvement?
- What do we need to change in this area of Parent Involvement?
- Who will be responsible?
- What is the timeline for completion?
- How will we know it is successful?

With each area of Parent Involvement, facilitate discussion of the 5 questions and modify the Action Plan. Add steps to plan as needed.

Slide 49



Ideas to enhance our practices:
Communicating

- What works with this area of Parent Involvement?
- What do we need to change in this area of Parent Involvement?
- Who will be responsible?
- What is the timeline for completion?
- How will we know it is successful?

With each area of Parent Involvement, facilitate discussion of the 5 questions and modify the Action Plan. Add steps to plan as needed.

Slide 50



**Ideas to enhance our practices:
Volunteering**

- What works with this area of Parent Involvement?
- What do we need to change in this area of Parent Involvement?
- Who will be responsible?
- What is the timeline for completion?
- How will we know it is successful?

With each area of Parent Involvement, facilitate discussion of the 5 questions and modify the Action Plan. Add steps to plan as needed.

Slide 51



Allow a 15 minute break.

Slide 52

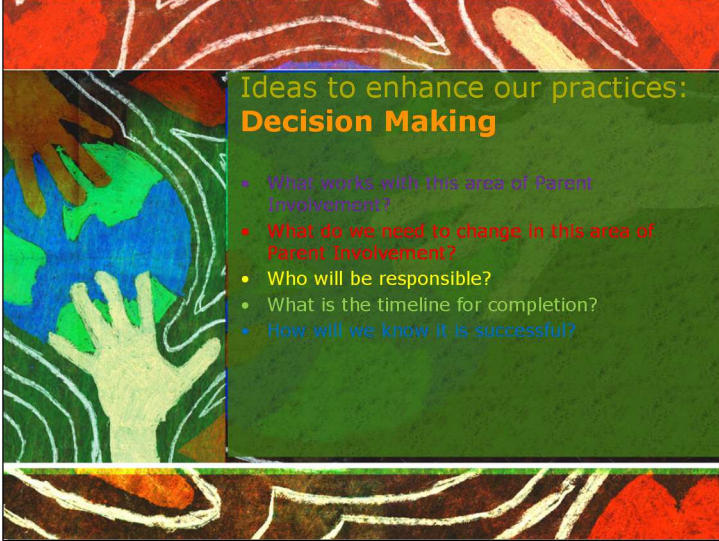


Ideas to enhance our practices:
Learning at Home

- What works with this area of Parent Involvement?
- What do we need to change in this area of Parent Involvement?
- Who will be responsible?
- What is the timeline for completion?
- How will we know it is successful?

With each area of Parent Involvement, facilitate discussion of the 5 questions and modify the Action Plan. Add steps to plan as needed.

Slide 53



Ideas to enhance our practices:
Decision Making

- What works with this area of Parent Involvement?
- What do we need to change in this area of Parent Involvement?
- Who will be responsible?
- What is the timeline for completion?
- How will we know it is successful?

With each area of Parent Involvement, discuss the 5 questions and modify the Action Plan. Add steps to plan as needed.

Slide 54



Ideas to enhance our practices:
Collaborating with the Community

- What works with this area of Parent Involvement?
- What do we need to change in this area of Parent Involvement?
- Who will be responsible?
- What is the timeline for completion?
- How will we know it is successful?

With each area of Parent Involvement, facilitate discussion of the 5 questions and modify the Action Plan. Add steps to plan as needed.

Slide 55




Evaluation

- Let me know your thoughts!
 - Be honest
- What went well today?
- What should we do differently next time?
- Please complete the session evaluation and turn it in before you leave.
- Suggestions?

Distribute session evaluation to all participants. Allow time for reflection and completion of the session evaluation forms. Participants will need privacy to complete evaluation forms. Provide a place to submit evaluations that will protect their anonymity.

Slide 56



What's next?

- Session 3 – Preview
 - Fun stuff
 - Report on progress
 - More fun stuff
 - What are our challenges?
- Where do we need to make adjustments?
- Developing Long Term Plans

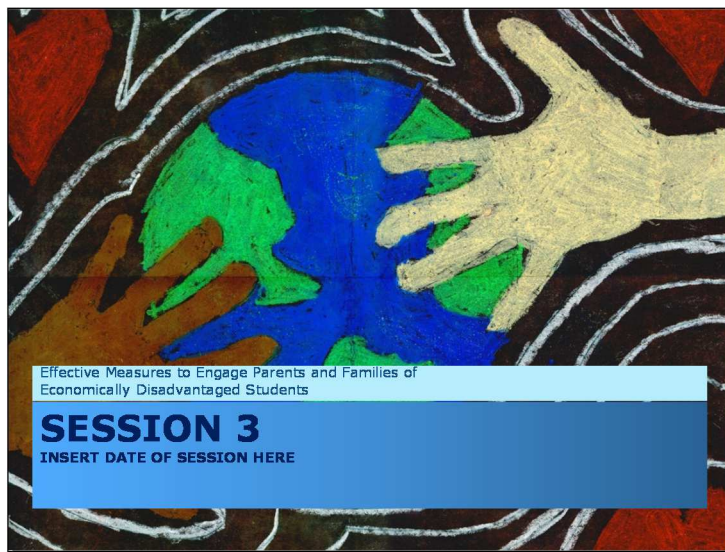
Review the plan for Session 2.

Slide 57



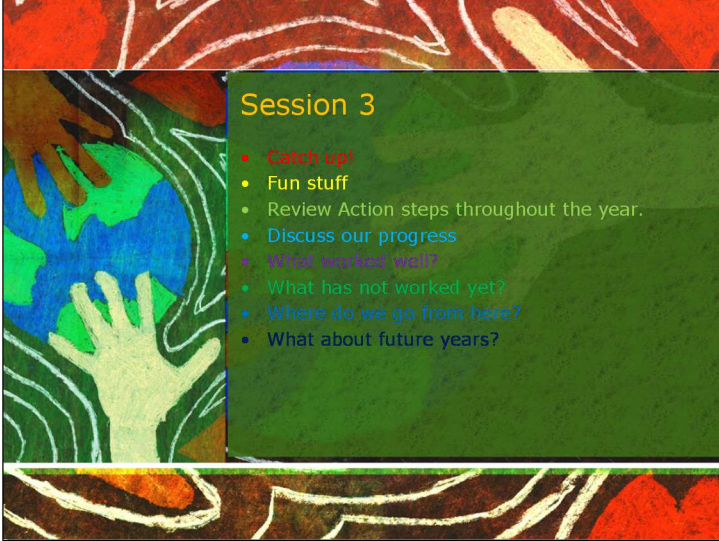
Before the next session – re-type the action steps with corrections into a more readable document and send by email to all participants. Also insert corrections additions, and modifications into the presentation.

Slide 58



Welcome everyone back to session 3. Insert date of session into presentation when the date is finalized.

Slide 59



Session 3

- Catch up!
- Fun stuff
- Review Action steps throughout the year.
- Discuss our progress
- What worked well?
- What has not worked yet?
- Where do we go from here?
- What about future years?

Introduce session 3. Today will be another work session as we sort through the Action Steps from Sessions 1 & 2. We will develop a long term plan for future years and discuss modifications to the plan. We will determine where we need to go from this point.

Slide 60



Pass out index cards and markers to participants.
Have participants think of a number between 1 & 50 and write it on their index card.
Without talking, they should line up in numerical order around the room.
There will be gaps in numbers and some possible duplicates.
Then divide the group in half to form 2 groups.
Participants should then relocate to be seated in those groups.

Slide 61



What we know...

- **What do we remember from Sessions 1 & 2?**
- In your group, list as many facts, ideas, or strategies as you can remember from our last two sessions.
- **Let's SHARE!**

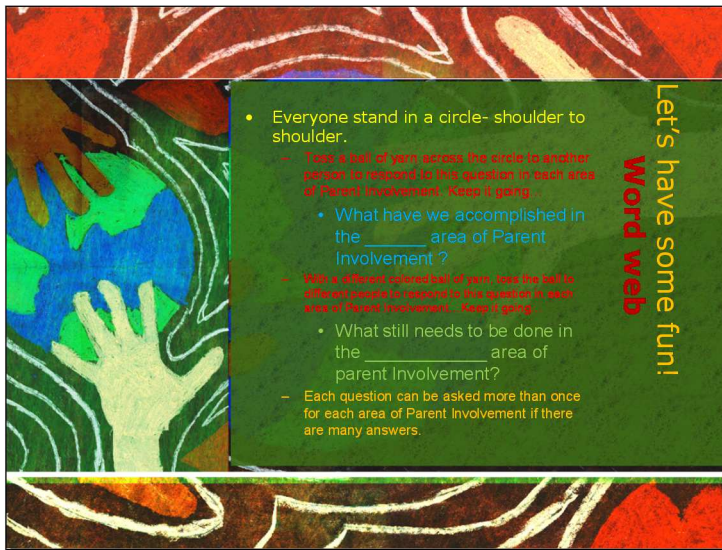
Provide each group with markers and chart paper and ask each of the 2 groups to appoint a recorder. Groups should spend 3-5 minutes brainstorming some of the ideas generated from Sessions 1 & 2. Then ask each group to share with the whole group the information they remember from both sessions.

Slide 62



Provide each group with markers and chart paper and ask each of the 2 groups to appoint a recorder. Groups should spend 3-5 minutes brainstorming some of the ideas generated from Sessions 1 & 2. Then ask each group to share with the whole group the information they remember from both sessions.

Slide 63



Let's have some fun!
Word web

- Everyone stand in a circle- shoulder to shoulder.
 - Toss a ball of yarn across the circle to another person to respond to this question in each area of Parent Involvement. Keep it going.
 - What have we accomplished in the _____ area of Parent Involvement?
 - With a different color ball of yarn, toss the ball to different people to respond to this question in each area of Parent Involvement. Keep it going.
 - What still needs to be done in the _____ area of parent Involvement?
 - Each question can be asked more than once for each area of Parent Involvement if there are many answers.

Assemble all participants into a circle standing shoulder to shoulder.
Using one color of yarn begin with one participant answering the 1st question for “Parenting” and toss the yarn to a person across the circle.
That person responds to the same question for Parenting.
Continue in “Parenting” until it seems that all ideas have been communicated.
Then change to each subsequent area of Parent Involvement. (Or until the yarn runs out.)
Then change colors of yarn and complete the same process for the second question.

Slide 64



Allow a 15 minute break.

Slide 65



What now...

- Let's meet to HONESTLY evaluate how our goals are being met this school year.
 - Real talk
 - What is working?
 - How do we keep it working?
 - What is NOT working?
 - What are our barriers?

Facilitate discussion to talk as a group and seriously evaluate the goals set for the year.
Say: **EVERYONE MUST PROMISE TO BE HONEST.**
This conversation should take at least an hour to be productive.

Slide 66



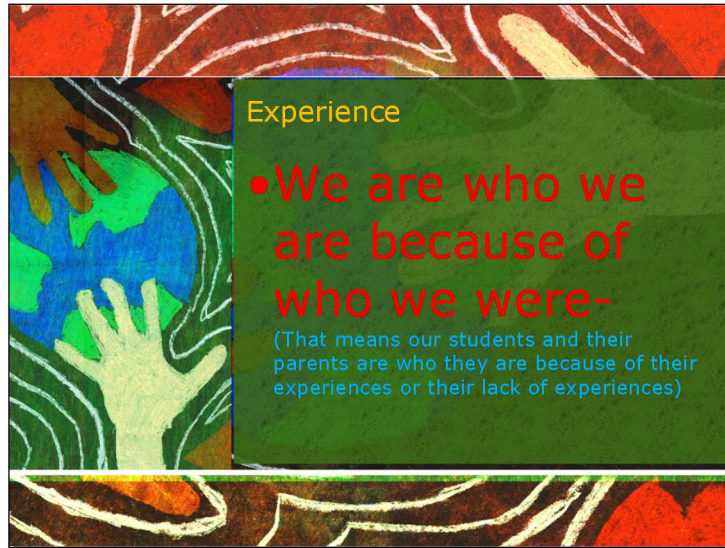
Facilitate discussions about each of the six parent involvement areas.

Slide 67



Provide instructions for where participants are to go to get lunch and where they will eat.

Slide 68



Facilitate discussion regarding: Something to think about - We must plan for all types of experiences in each of these areas of Parent Involvement.

Slide 69



Organize participants back into groups for the day.
Distribute Actions step form from previous sessions to each group.
Each group will be assigned 3 of the Parent Involvement areas.
Re-evaluate the action steps for long term effects for each area of Parent Involvement.

Slide 70



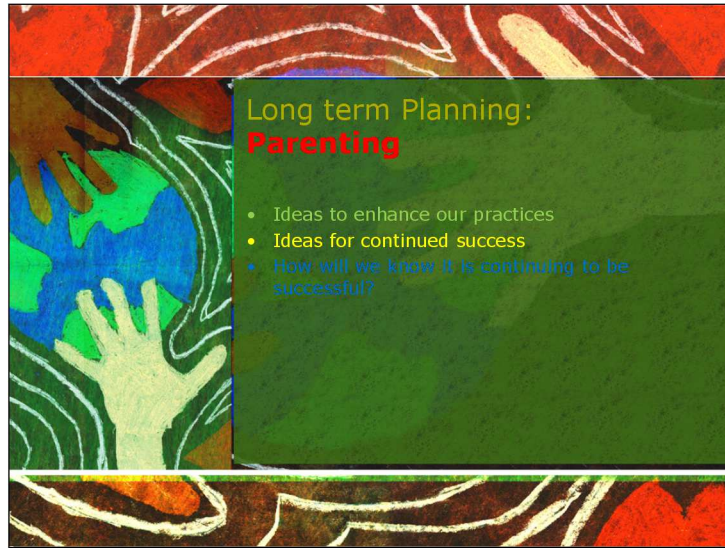
Facilitate discussion of long term action goals for each of the six parent involvement areas and discuss successes and areas to grow.

Slide 71



Allow a 15 minute break.

Slide 72

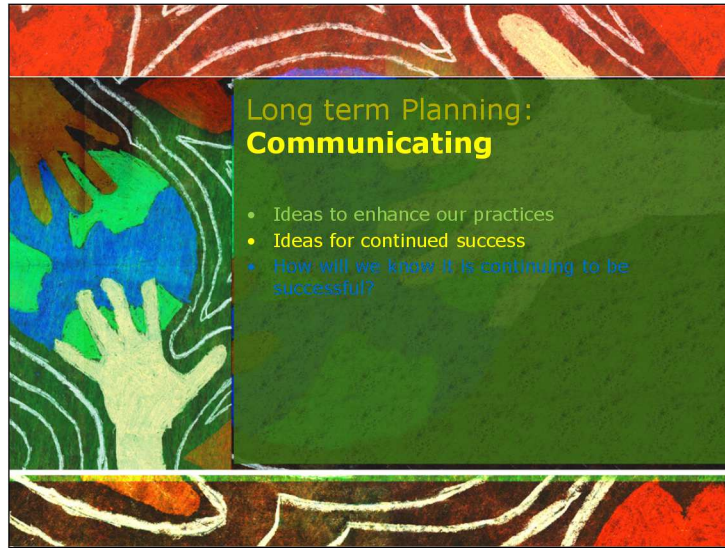


Facilitate discussion:

Each group shares their Action Steps for Long term planning and the whole group provides input in each area.

Modify steps of action plans as needed to encourage and ensure long term success.

Slide 73



Long term Planning:
Communicating

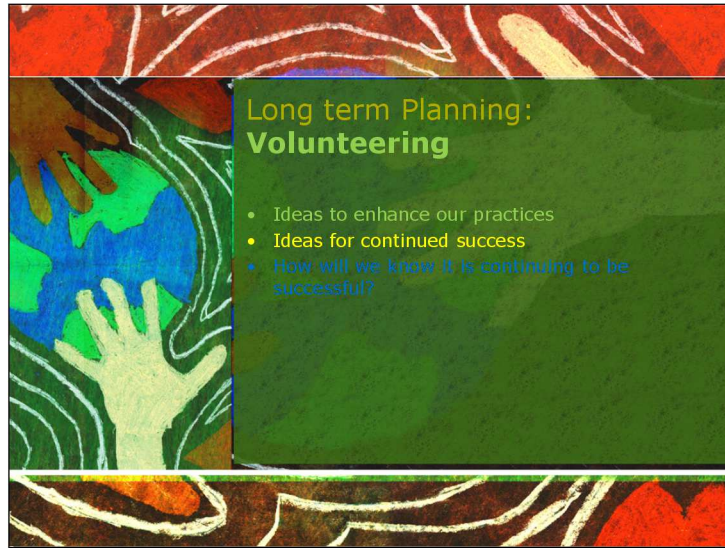
- Ideas to enhance our practices
- Ideas for continued success
- How will we know it is continuing to be successful?

Facilitate discussion:

Each group shares their Action Steps for Long term planning and the whole group provides input in each area.

Modify steps of action plans as needed to encourage and ensure long term success.

Slide 74



**Long term Planning:
Volunteering**

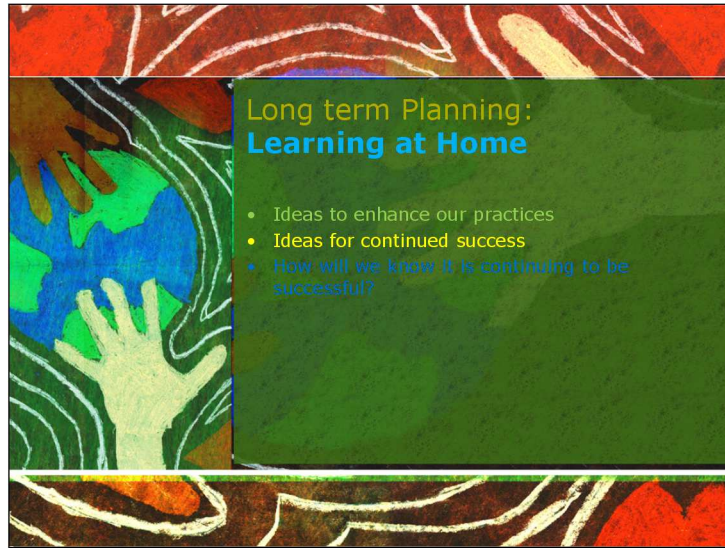
- Ideas to enhance our practices
- Ideas for continued success
- How will we know it is continuing to be successful?

Facilitate discussion:

Each group shares their Action Steps for Long term planning and the whole group provides input in each area.

Modify steps of action plans as needed to encourage and ensure long term success.

Slide 75

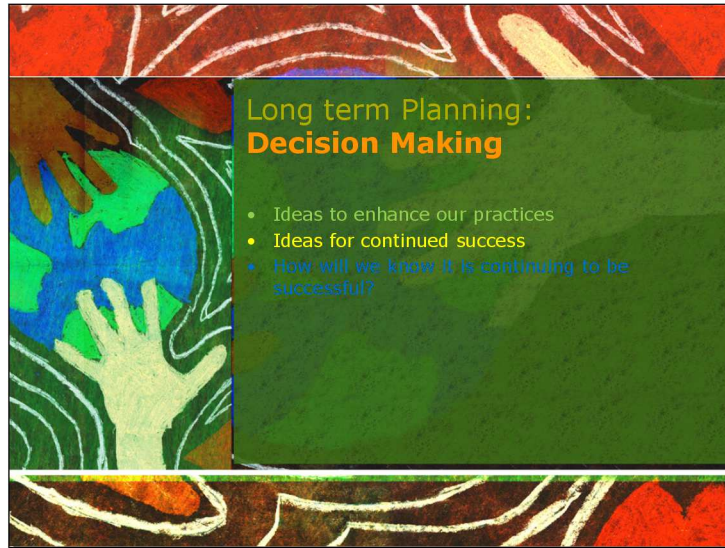


Facilitate discussion:

Each group shares their Action Steps for Long term planning and the whole group provides input in each area.

Modify steps of action plans as needed to encourage and ensure long term success.

Slide 76



Long term Planning:
Decision Making

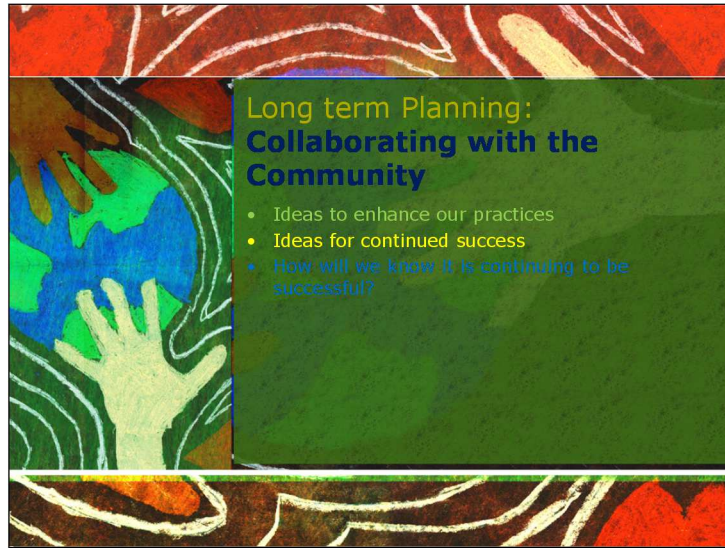
- Ideas to enhance our practices
- Ideas for continued success
- How will we know it is continuing to be successful?

Facilitate discussion:

Each group shares their Action Steps for Long term planning and the whole group provides input in each area.

Modify steps of action plans as needed to encourage and ensure long term success.

Slide 77

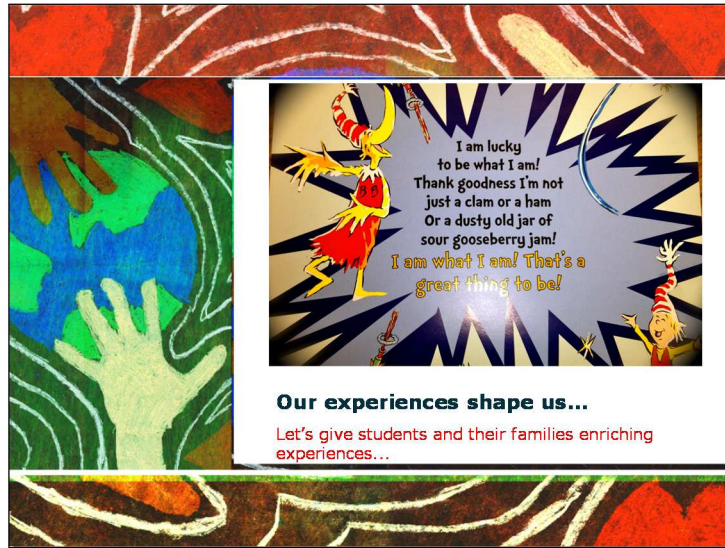


Facilitate discussion:

Each group shares their Action Steps for Long term planning and the whole group provides input in each area.

Modify steps of action plans as needed to encourage and ensure long term success.

Slide 78



Say: I leave you with these words - from the great Dr. Seuss.
Our students and families deserve enriching experiences.
This has been an enriching experience for ALL of us. Explain that I will distribute the Final Action Plan to all participants by email and that I will be available to consult as needed in future meetings and events.

Slide 79



Evaluation

- Let me know your thoughts!
 - Be honest
- What went well today?
- What should we do differently next time?
- Please complete the session evaluation and turn it in before you leave.
- Suggestions?

Distribute session evaluation to all participants. Allow time for reflection and completion of the session evaluation forms. Participants will need privacy to complete evaluation forms. Provide a place to submit evaluations that will protect their anonymity.

Slide 80



References:

- Epstein, J.L. (1998). *Toward an Integrated Theory of school and family connections*. Report No. 11. Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools.
- Epstein, J. L., & Dauber, S. L. (1991). School programs and teacher practices of parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, 289-305.
- Epstein, J.L., et al. (2009). School, family and community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. In *School, family and Community Partnerships: Your handbook for action*, 3rd ed. (Larson, L. & Bartlett, D.A., Eds.). California: Corwin Press. pp. 9-30.

Appendix B: Epstein Survey Parent Letter

DATE

**PARENT SURVEY
OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
IN THE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE GRADES**

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Our school is working to improve the ways that educators and families help each other to support children's learning and success in school. Your ideas will be used to help improve our programs and practices.

I am asking the parent who is most involved with the school in your child's education to answer the questions in this survey. If you have more than one child at this school, answer the following questions about the child in the highest grade level. Please note that this survey:

- Is voluntary. It is hoped that you answer every question, but you may skip any questions you feel are too personal.
- Is confidential. Please do not write your name anywhere on the survey.
- Has no right or wrong answers.
- Is not part of your child's schoolwork.
- Will not influence your child's learning or grades in any way.

Thank you very much for your participation!


Sincerely,

_____ Amanda N. Compton _____

Researcher

Appendix C: Permission to Use Survey

Walden University Mail - RE: Survey Use https://mail.google.com/mail/?ui=2&ik=0662cdb104&view=p...

 Amanda Compton <amanda.compton@waldenu.edu>

RE: Survey Use
3 messages

Joyce Epstein <jepstein@jhu.edu> Wed, May 22, 2013 at 3:08 PM
 Reply-To: Joyca Epstein <jepstein@jhu.edu>
 To: "amanda.compton@waldenu.edu" <amanda.compton@waldenu.edu>

5-22-13

To: Mandy Compton

From: Joyce Epstein

RE: Requested information

Sorry for my delay in responding to your e-mail. We have been addressing deadlines here for a couple of months and e-mail has suffered.

Thank you for your note and kind words about our *Handbook for Action*. I am glad to know of your interest in research on school, family, and community partnerships. It is certainly a good idea to tie your studies to the real-life challenges that you are addressing at your school and that are present in many schools in TN and across the country.

You do not have to be a member of NNPS to use our surveys (through we hope your school will join when you are ready).

You certainly have permission to use or adapt the surveys to match your research questions.

- If you ordered and obtained the surveys, a permission to use/adapt comes with the packet.
- If you still need to order the packet, go to our website. <http://www.partnershipschools.org> , and click on Publications and Products. Scroll to surveys to select and order the packet for the

1 of 21 4/1/14 6:18 PM

Walden University Mail - RE: Survey Use

<https://mail.google.com/mail/?ui=2&ik=0662c0bf104&view=sp...>

Elementary/Middle Grades. A general permission to use/adapt comes with the surveys. Or you can use this e-mail to note permission.

All that we require is that you include full reference to the original survey in your reports.

Per your other question: We only have school, district, state, and organization members of NNPS – not individuals, as the point is to build capacity at all policy levels to organize and implement goal-linked partnership programs.

Best of luck with your project.

[see email signature
logo](#)

Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D.
Director, Center on School, Family, and
Community Partnerships and
National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)
Research Professor of Sociology and Education
2701 North Charles Street, Suite 300
Baltimore, MD 21218

Phone: (410) 516-8807

Fax: (410) 516-8890

Email: jepstein@jhu.edu

Web: <http://www.partnershipschools.org>

From: nnps

Appendix D: Voluntary Interview Sheet

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Completing the parent survey is only one portion of this research. I also plan to conduct individual interviews to discuss this survey in more detail. If you are interested in helping with this part of the research and you would be willing to allow me to speak with you further, please complete the information below and return it with your completed survey.

Student: _____ Grade: _____ Teacher: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Contact information:

Phone Number: _____ Alternate Phone: _____

Your help with the interviews would be greatly appreciated. Like the surveys, these interviews are:

- Voluntary- You may opt out of any questions that you feel are too personal
- Confidential-No identifying information will be included in this research.

In addition, these individual interviews will not impact your child's school-work and will not influence any grades your child receives in any way. You may also opt out of the interview at any time.

Please consider allowing me to talk with you further about your involvement in your child's education. If you are selected to participate in the interview process, I will contact you to explain the process in more detail. An additional consent form will be provided to you prior to the interview.

If you need further information regarding resources available to you as a parent or ways that you can become involved in your child's education please contact XXXX, Principal of XXXX Elementary School.

Sincerely,

Amanda N. Compton, Researcher

Appendix E: Parent Interview

Effective Strategies for Engaging Parents Qualitative Measure Parent Interviews

A. The school's contact with you

1. Tell me some ways that you are involved with your child's school or class.
2. Describe ways the school make you feel welcome?
3. What does your child's teacher do to keep you informed of your child's progress?

B. Your involvement

1. Tell me about ways you help your child at home?
2. Describe a typical school day evening in your home.

C. Your ideas

1. Tell me what you do you let your child's teacher know if he/she is having problems academically?
2. Describe what you would do you let the school know if you disagree with something at school?

3. What things do you do to motivate your child when he/she doesn't want to work?

D. Connections with other parents

1. Tell me ways that you communicate or interact with other parents?
2. What can the school do to help you network with other parents?

E. Your family

1. Tell me about your family, specifically, who lives in your home and what is their relationship with your child?
2. Is there anything that you would like to share that we have not discussed?

Adapted from

Sheldon, S. B. & Epstein, J. L. (2007). Parent survey of family and community involvement in the elementary and middle grades. Johns Hopkins University: Center School, Family and Community partnerships.

Appendix F: Action Plan Worksheet

School: _____ Area of Parent Involvement: _____

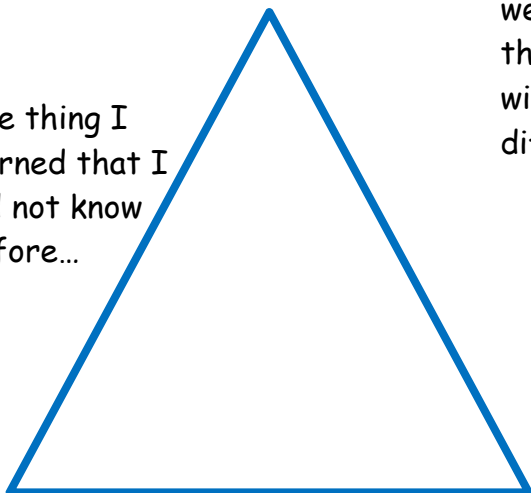
Item needing Action	Action to be Taken	Priority or ease of change	Materials Needed	Target date of completion	How will we know it is achieved or successful?

Appendix G: Session Evaluation

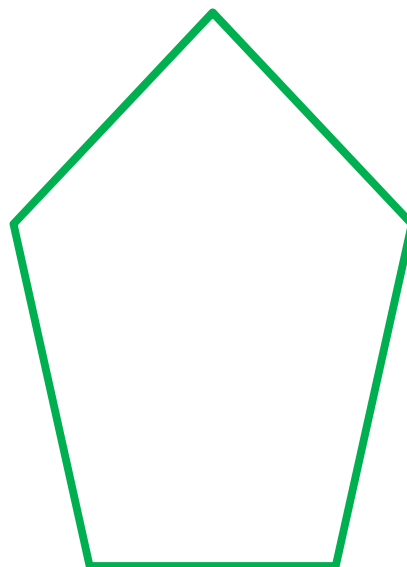
Session Evaluation

Session #: _____

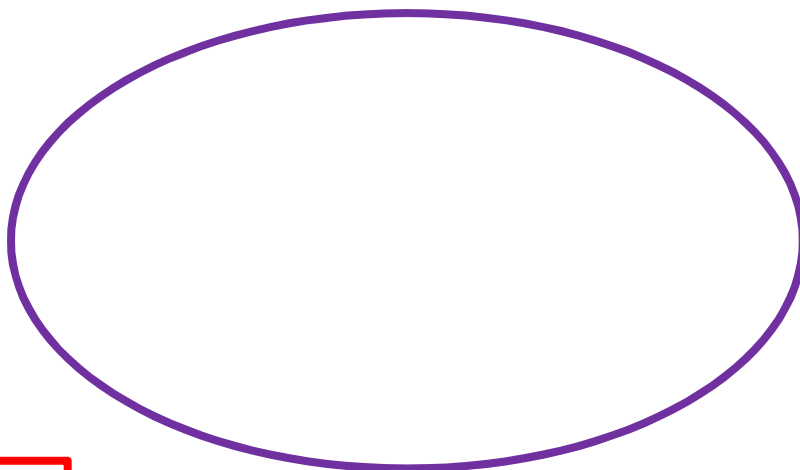
One thing I learned that I did not know before...



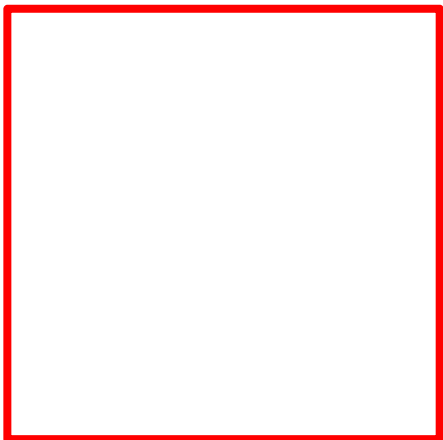
One strategy we discussed that I think will make a difference is...



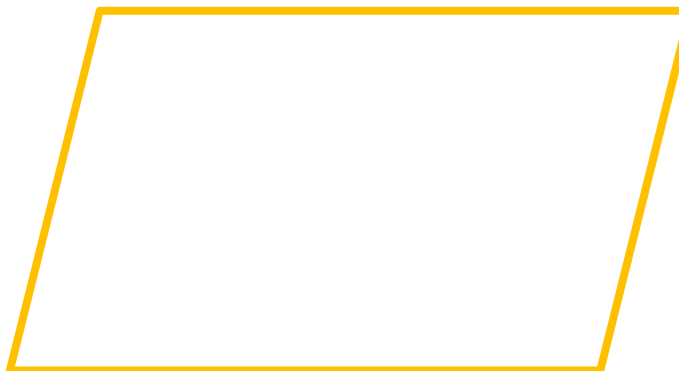
I am most excited about...



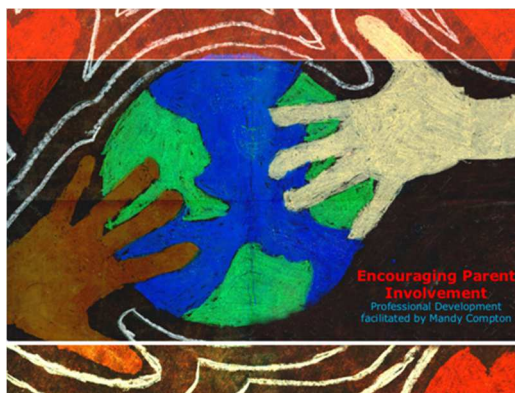
I did not like...



I want my facilitator to know...



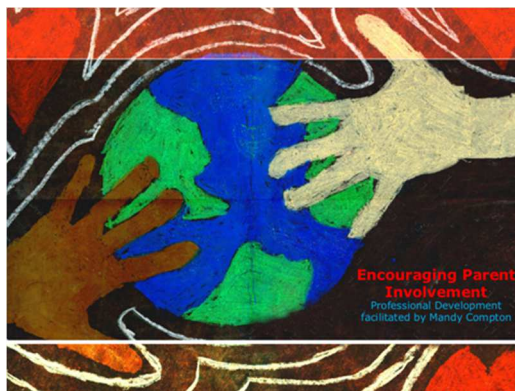
Appendix H: Session Agendas



Encouraging Parent Involvement Agenda - Session 1

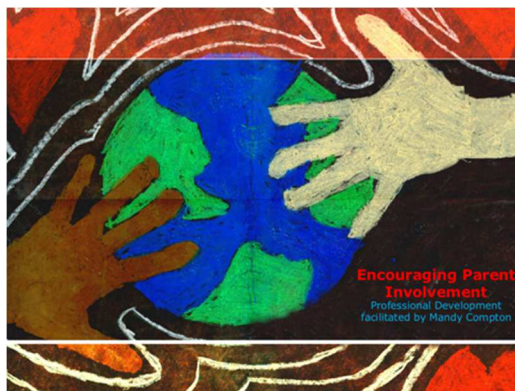
(Insert Date prior to session)

8:00-8:30	Sign in - Welcome - Introductions
8:30-8:45	Fun Stuff - Getting to know team
8:45-9:00	Rules & Norms
9:00-9:30	Team building
9:30-10:00	Understanding Framework & Research (Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, & Collaborating with the Community)
10:00-10:15	Break
10:15-11:30	Discussion - What does Parent Involvement mean to me?" Analysis of Survey Results
11:30-12:30	Lunch (on site)
12:30-1:45	Developing Action Steps
1:45-2:00	Break
2:00-3:00	Discussion of Action Plan
3:00-3:45	Assigning of duties to implement Action Plan
3:45-4:00	Wrap-up & Evaluation



Encouraging Parent Involvement Agenda - Session 2 (Insert Date prior to session)

8:00-8:30	Sign in - Welcome - Catch up
8:30-8:45	Choose groups for the day
8:45-9:15	Fun stuff - Team building
9:15-9:45	Team Activity - What do we remember?
9:45-10:00	Break
10:00-11:30	Review progress on Action Plan from Session 1 (Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, & Collaborating with the Community)
11:30-12:30	Lunch (on site)
12:30-1:00	Discussion "How are we really doing?"
1:00-1:45	Ideas to Enhance our Practices
1:45-2:00	Break
2:00-3:00	Ideas to Enhance our Practices - (continued)
3:00-3:45	Assigning of duties to implement revised Action Plan
3:45-4:00	Wrap-up & Evaluation



Encouraging Parent Involvement Agenda - Session 3 (Insert Date prior to session)

8:00-8:30	Sign in - Welcome - Catch up
8:30-8:45	Choose groups for the day
8:45-9:45	Team reflection
9:45-10:15	Fun Stuff -Team Activity
	"What have we accomplished?"
	What still needs to be done?"
	(Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, & Collaborating with the Community)
10:15-10:30	Break
10:30-11:30	What now? Real talk (progress on Action Plan)
	(Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home,
	Decision Making, & Collaborating with the Community)
11:30-12:30	Lunch (on site)
12:30-1:00	Plan for experiences
1:00-1:45	Planning for long term
	(Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering)
1:45-2:00	Break
2:00-3:00	Planning for long term - (continued)
	(Learning at Home Decision Making, & Collaborating with Community)
3:00-3:45	Assigning of duties to implement long term Action Plan
3:45-4:00	Wrap-up & Evaluation