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The Perceptions of Father Involvement in Elementary Schools

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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by

Myles Joseph Hebrard

August 2017

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Dr. William Flora, Chair

Dr. Cecil Blankenship

Dr. Bethany Flora

Dr. Virginia Foley

Keywords: Parent Involvement, Father Engagement, Elementary Schools

## ABSTRACT

### The Perceptions of Father Involvement in Elementary Schools

by

Myles J. Hebrard

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of father involvement in elementary schools. The focus of the study was to allow the researcher to develop a greater understanding of perceptions of father involvement, from both a father and teacher perspective. Data was collected from teachers and fathers through surveys and interviews. Specific content areas of the father survey included communication, activities fathers engaged in, training opportunities provided at the school, parent conferences, when events were offered, availability, and suggestions for school staff. Specific content areas of the teacher survey included communication, activities fathers engaged in, training opportunities provided at the school, use of data, parent conferences, when events were offered, invitations, and teacher wishes.

Information gathered through the administration of the father survey was utilized for supporting data for father interviews. The fathers in this study participated in interviews, answering open-ended questions about their perceptions of their level of involvement in the education of their child and the challenges they face that hinder them from being more involved. The in-depth interviews were conducted with 16 fathers of elementary aged schoolchildren. The interviews were utilized to identify themes and strategies fathers suggested teachers could use to engage fathers. Through the analysis of data, the researcher developed an understanding for the motivations, actions, and constraints fathers face when it comes to the education of their children. Findings and recommendations for practice and future research are included.

This study is dedicated to the men, women, and school personnel who intentionally choose to be the positive influence with our children, and work hard each day to leave a lasting impression to change lives. Although we all face our own challenges and moments of adversity, both personally and professionally, our children matter. When our children matter, the family matters. When the family matters, our communities matter. When our community matters, our nation matters. When we take pride in spending time and pouring into the lives of our children, our world becomes stronger and amazing things continue to happen. Thank you for being the parent and teacher our children need and deserve so very much. You are a difference maker!

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“Challenges are just part of the journey. There is no accomplishment without struggle. No triumph without tests and failures along the way.”

- Jon Gordon (The Carpenter)

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## CHAPTER 1

### OVERVIEW

#### *Introduction*

The importance of parent involvement has been acknowledged by researchers, policymakers, and educators alike. Research indicates that, when parents participate in the education of their children, the result is an improvement in student achievement and student attitude (Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, Whetsel, & Green, 2004). Increased attendance, fewer discipline problems, and higher aspirations have been correlated with parent involvement (Garcia, 2014; Henderson & Berla, 1997). When parents are involved in school, they gain a clearer understanding of what is expected of their children and how they can work with their children and teacher to enhance the educational experience (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Garcia, 2014). Further, when parents are involved in the school where their children attend, they send strong and consistent messages to them that education is valuable and important. Such messages positively impact learning and social development for children (Garcia, 2014; Scott-Jones, 1995).

Home and school constitute two proximal environmental contexts for the academic and social development of young children (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Downer & Myers, 2010). There is widespread consensus that parent involvement in the education of their children, both at home and at school, is an important factor contributing to the adaptive development of their children (Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker, & Ice, 2010; Reynolds & Shlafer, 2010; Tan & Goldberg, 2009; Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007). Thus, it is important to identify factors that enhance or inhibit parental involvement in education. It is known that involvement in the education of children depends on factors such as the education level of parents (Davis-Kean,

2005; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Hung, 2005; Manz, Fantuzzo, & Power, 2004), the age of the child (Epstein, 1995; Kikas, Peets, & Niilo, 2010; Manz et al., 2004), academic skills (Flouri et al., 2003), and school and teacher characteristics (e.g., teacher invitations). Less attention has been paid to examining how parental values and practices influence parent involvement in the educational process (Kikas, Tulviste, & Peets, 2014).

Educators and parents play vital roles in the educational success of children (NEA, 2008). Support and motivation are necessary to experience a successful opportunity, including learning experiences in school. Demands continue to increase for both families and teachers, but so has expectations for student performance both inside and outside of the classroom. Many times, getting the necessary support extends well before the school day begins and long after the building doors are locked. Many families are faced with overwhelming and unpredictable schedules and circumstances while juggling school, sports, family situations, family time, work schedules, and other responsibilities, allowing minimal time to provide support in any one given area (Swap, 1993). Parental involvement in the lives of children seldom involves that of a father figure (Johnson, 2013).

There is much evidence to support the idea that parent involvement in learning with their child (e.g., discussing schoolwork with them and attending parent-teacher conferences) facilitates learning and ultimately their achievement (Grolnick, Friendly, & Bellas, 2009; Pomerantz & Moorman, 2010). Academic achievement of students has been of great interest in America for many years and higher student achievement provides hope for a brighter future for American students (Epstein et al., 2009). Compared with the support children receive from teachers and peers, the role parents play in the learning of their children is often considered not only unique but also essential (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Grolnick & Ryan, 1992). Given the

importance of parent involvement in learning a major question is what underlies the beneficial effect on student achievement. Family involvement appears to be a better predictor of student achievement than any other factor (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Comer, 1986; Fan & Chen, 2001; Garcia, 2014; Henderson & Berla, 1997).

Parent involvement enhances student achievement through its influence on their motivation (Cabrera & Bradley; 2012; Catsambis, 2001; Gray & Anderson, 2010; Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Lamb, 2010; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004). The top five reasons school staff need to engage parents are:

1. Research shows that students with involved parents are more likely to:
  - a. Earn higher grades and test scores;
  - b. Attend school regularly;
  - c. Have better social skills;
  - d. Adapt well to school; and
  - e. Go on to postsecondary education (National Parent Teacher Association, 2009).
2. Parents express a genuine and deep-seated desire to help their children succeed academically, regardless of differences in socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and cultural background (Mapp, 2004).
3. Parents and teachers share an interest in and responsibility for children learning and development (Epstein, 2001).
4. Schools where they have engaged parents benefit from:
  - a. Improved teacher morale;
  - b. Increased support from families; and

- c. Improved collaboration across the school community (Henderson & Berla, 1994).
5. Positive student outcomes are evidenced in schools where educators communicate effectively and involve parents in activities focused on specific, targeted content such as behavior, attendance, math proficiency, homework, and/or reading (Epstein, 2005).

The National Parent Teacher Association (2009) charted six ways (see *Figure 1*) to involve parents that lead to and have positive results for the education of their child.

<b>Parenting</b>	<b>Learning at Home</b>
Assist families with: parenting and child-rearing skills; understanding child and adolescent development; and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level.	Support families by providing strategies for parents to lead their children in learning activities at home.
<b>Communicating</b>	<b>Decision-Making</b>
Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.	Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.
<b>Volunteering</b>	<b>Collaborating with the Community</b>
Improve recruitment and training opportunities that involve families as both volunteers and active participants that support students and school programs.	Engage families, students, and the school with local businesses, agencies, and other community groups.

*Figure 1.* Positive results with parent involvement. Reprinted from National Parent Teacher Association. (2009). *Family-school partnerships*. Reprinted with permission.

Mother participation has always been encouraged, although educational leaders began to consider a need to include fathers as well (Fagan, 1996; McBride & Rane, 1996). Within the elementary school context, school-based involvement is associated with student achievement, because such involvement is likely to include visits to the classroom and interactions with



teachers. Such interactions and exposure increase parent knowledge about the curriculum, enhance social capital, and increase the effectiveness of involvement at home (Comer, 1995; Epstein, 2001; Hill & Taylor, 2004). Further, interaction between parents and teachers may increase mutual respect and increase teacher perceptions about how much a parent values education (Comer, 1995; Epstein, 2001).

Identification and documentation exists on a range of factors that influence parent involvement, including socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, family structure, level of parent education, maternal employment, age of child, school characteristics and policies, and teacher practices (Feuerstein, 2000; Gray & Anderson, 2010; Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004). For example, families with high socioeconomic status are more likely to be involved with their children, their education, and influence their level of achievement. These families are more likely to contact schools, volunteer their time in the classroom, and attend Parent Teacher Organization meetings (Feuerstein, 2000).

School characteristics and policies have also proved to shape parent involvement. Issues associated with the type of school setting, the size, academic focus, climate, and sense of community affect the ways in which parents participate (Clawley & Goldman, 2004; Shouse, 1997). In addition, community conditions can impede parent involvement in school. Families, with children, living in low-income communities typically have less access to resources to support educational aspirations and are reluctant to form relationships to school. Individual family practices and cultural traditions influence the success of some children despite community conditions (Chrispeels, 1996, Gray & Anderson, 2010; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004). Equally significant is the confidence of a parent, that they are of assistance to their child, and the

belief that their child is capable of academic achievement (Clawley & Goldman, 2004; Eccles & Harold, 1996).

A variety of measures have been used to describe and discuss parent involvement, many focusing on attendance at school events and helping at home with reading and homework. However, it has been argued that the measure of parental involvement needs to include a broader and multidimensional perspective that addresses emotional and personal aspects in addition to school activities. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) defined parent involvement in three different ways: (1) behavioral, (2) cognitive-intellectual, and (3) personal. Behavioral involvement includes participation in school activities such as parent-teacher conferences and in home activities such as helping with homework. Cognitive-intellectual involvement includes connecting children to intellectually stimulating activities such as going to the library and discussing current events. Personal involvement entails staying informed of what is happening with the child in school.

Epstein (1996) supported the idea that parent involvement operates at many levels, and needs to be measured at the family, school, and community level in order to address effects on children's academic achievement. Epstein described parent involvement through six activities:

1. parenting (assist families with parenting skills)
2. communicating (communicate with families about school events)
3. volunteering (recruit family members as volunteers)
4. learning at home (involve families in academic activities in the home)
5. decision making (include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy)
6. collaborating with community (coordinate the work and resources of community agencies to strengthen school programs)

Discussing and examining parent involvement with expanded definitions has shown that parents who are involved in school are usually involved in a number of other ways (e.g., playing games and sports, working on projects, visiting the library and museums, attending community events, and talking about family history and current events) that promote their children's school success (Nord et al., 1997).

Social science scholars have continued to show great interest in the topic of fatherhood and the father's role (Bronstein & Cowan, 1988; Griswold, 1993; Lamb, 2010; Marsiglio, 1995; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Parke, 2002; Parke et al., 2005, Snarey, 1993). Fathers come in all shapes and colors, even married, divorced, widowed, married again, single, as a stepparent, or foster parent, a guardian, a grandpa, an uncle, married again for the third or fourth time, and incarcerated. Those serving in a father role have a powerful influence on children and young people (Clawley & Goldman, 2004). Research indicates that high quality father involvement, regardless of whether or not the father is living in the same home as the child, can alter emotional, behavioral, and educational trajectories for the better (Stahlschmidt et al., 2013).

Research exists on the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children, yet there is a paucity of research related to their involvement in schools (Abel, 2012; Martinez-Alba, 2013; McBride, Dyer, & Laxman, 2013; Terriquez, 2013). Extant research on parental involvement in education has been conducted largely without respect to which parent is involved. The implicit assumption is that family-school relationship frameworks function similarly for fathers and mothers (Kim & Hill, 2015). Regardless, educators and parents play important roles in the success of children when it comes to education, college, and career opportunities. It has long been believed that developing effective father-school relationships will not be easy, and will require hard work and persistence (Clawley & Goldman, 2004).

The association between father involvement and child development is well established. Positive fathering promotes improved social-emotional, cognitive, and linguistic outcomes in children (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012; Gray & Anderson, 2010; Lamb, 2010; McKeown, Ferguson, & Dermoot, 1998; Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, London, & Cabrera, 2002; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002; Tamis-LeMonda, Kahana-Kalman, & Yoshikawa, 2009). There is general consensus among developmental psychologists that the more extensive a father has an emotional investment, attachment, provision of resources, and involvement with his children, the better off children will be in terms of cognitive competence, school performance, empathy, self-esteem, well-being, life skills, and social competence. In addition, research indicates that the quality of male parenting is more important than legal, biological, or residential ties (Lamb, 2010; Palkovitz, 2002; Parke & Brott, 1999; Pleck, 1997; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002). These positive outcomes occur independent of the mother and her parenting skills (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012; Cabrera, Fagan, Wright, & Schadler, 2011).

In 2004, *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* defined parent involvement as a parental participation in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including ensuring:

- that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning;
- that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in the education of their children at school;
- that parents are full partners in the education of their children and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and
- that other activities are carried out, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA (Parental Involvement, Title I, Part A Non-Regulatory Guidance, United States Department of Education). [*Section 9101(32), ESEA.*]

Research shows that development of children are impacted by both fathers and mothers, sometimes in similar, and sometimes in quite different, ways. Taking action to include both parents in the life of the school and in the learning process can make a significant and positive difference to the achievements, motivation and self-esteem of their child. The family makes critical contributions to student achievement, from earliest childhood through high school. Efforts to improve outcomes for children are much more effective if they encompass their families. When teachers engage parents and students, there are significant effects. When parents are involved at school, not just at home, children do better in school and they stay in school longer (Henderson & Berla, 1997).

Educators must promote plans that involve parents, teachers, administrators, and community stakeholders to ensure all children receive a quality education. Involving fathers can also benefit the fathers themselves, and their families. Children who have engaged fathers in their education can make a significant difference to the lives of both child and father well beyond the years of school-based learning (Clawley & Goldman, 2004). A growing body of literature points to the importance of engaging fathers during the early periods of lives of children (Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz, 2010). The National Center for Fathering (2009) stated that 32% of fathers rarely visit the class and another 54% seldom volunteer at the school where their child attends.

Fathers today face challenges not experienced in previous generations. First, the number of children who grow up in single parent, typically mother-headed, households has surged in recent decades and is now estimated to be more than 35% (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011), making it difficult for many fathers to maintain consistent involvement with their children (Stahlschmidt et al., 2013). According to statistics, there are over 13 million single parents in the United States today, and the majority of them are single mothers rather than single fathers

(Heard, 2009). There is research to suggest the three most common forms of paternal absence- divorce, separation, and death- can have a detrimental impact on a child's emotional well-being (Beatty, 1995).

Second, the changing nature of the family, with more women working outside the home, has altered the traditional father role and how fatherhood has altered the traditional father role and how fatherhood is defined (Cornille, Barlow, & Cleveland, 2005). The definition of fatherhood has shifted from father as breadwinner to father as active parent and nurturer (Cornille et al., 2005; Lamb, 2000). This new conceptualization of fatherhood may cause role confusion for men whose own fathers did not model this behavior. Numerous scholars (e.g., Beatty, 1995; Bemporad, 1995; Diamond, 2007) have commented on the changing role of the father in the late twentieth and early 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

Finally, more children than ever live in poverty which puts them at risk for negative behavioral and educational outcomes (United States Census Bureau, 2011). Consequently, poverty and its associated risks to children poses additional parenting challenges to too many fathers (Stahlschmidt et al., 2013). Understanding parental involvement and how families living in poverty are involved in their children's education and how their perceptions compare to their level of participation is essential to developing a productive school climate with academic success for all children. Epstein and Salinas (2004) stated that families living in poverty need convincing reasons to become involved in the education of their children.

The partnership between parents and teachers must assure that a collective and collaborative effort is established to effectively educate children. Researchers, including Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan, and Evans (2006), have shown that fathers have great interest in their children, their education, the expectations for their achievement, and more

involvement in their education and school. Survey results indicate that 70% of two-parent family fathers and 81% of nonresident fathers wanted to be involved in the education of their children (Peters, Seeds, Goldstein, & Coleman, 2008). By creating a family-school partnership that works together, children will benefit by performing better in school, staying in school longer, and enjoying school more (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

### *Statement of Problem*

Students obtain better grades and test scores, have better school attendance, complete more homework, demonstrate more positive behaviors and attitudes toward school, and have higher aspirations when parents become aware of what is happening in school and encourage their children (Comer, 1995; Epstein, 1990; Henderson & Berla, 1997; Lontos, 1991). A primary goal of school boards must be to increase parent communication and collaboration. Parents are the initial educators of their children. Mothers have always been viewed as nurturers and as being involved in the education of their children, but involving fathers, according to McBride (2005), can turn out to be a contributing factor in the outcome too. The interest and involvement of a father in a child, let alone at school, when supported with that of the mother, packs a powerful punch in the education of a child (McBride, 2005).

Parents who spent time in the school developed relationships and were more comfortable addressing teachers when their children were experiencing difficulties (Barton et al., 2004). Amador, Falbo and Lein (2001) reported similar findings in their study of high schools and further elaborated by equating very involved parents with very successful students. One of the most important things that parents can do, according to Henderson and Berla (1997), is to support the goals and the process of education in school. It is important there is a real partnership between the schools and the families, and a commonality of interest developed. When parents

take interest with their child(ren) at home about what is important and energizing to their children at school, it reinforces the notion that school is a great place to be (p. 1)

Parental involvement in the education of children is very important in helping children succeed (Martinez-Alba, 2013). Researchers have found that family and community involvement in the educational process can significantly impact schools and student success (Comer, 1984; Davies, 1996; Epstein et al., 2009; Gordon & Louis, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jordan, Orozco & Averett, 2002; Shumow & Lomax, 2002). High-quality father-child relationships are known to produce positive outcomes for children (Stahlschmidt et al., 2013). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of father involvement in elementary schools.

#### *Research Questions*

To examine the perceptions of father involvement in elementary schools, the following research questions will be posed:

*Question 1:* How do fathers perceive their involvement in the education of their child?

*Question 2:* How do fathers perceive they communicate with teachers?

*Question 3:* How do fathers perceive teachers communicate with them?

*Question 4:* How are school activities designed to engage fathers in the educational experience of a child?

*Question 5:* What are teacher perceptions of what it means to be a father involved in the education of a child?

*Question 6:* How do teachers communicate with fathers?

#### *Significance of Study*

The importance of this study stems from the need to engage fathers in the education of their children and to have real intentionality when including them in communications about their



child. Two aspects are at play here, in this study, one being the perception of communication from home to school, as well as school to home, but also the perceptions (father and teacher) of what parent, more specifically the father, involvement looks like in the beholders eyes. Parent involvement and communication are two integral pieces to not only a child's success, but also the success of the school itself. Without either, breakdowns can occur, walls (unintentional or not) can be built, and in the end the child suffers the consequences. It is also important to examine how fathers perceive they are invited and included in opportunities and how school staff perceive they invite and include parents, more specifically fathers.

The results of this study may be utilized to provide insight and information for teachers and administrators to use when planning collaborative partnerships with fathers, especially when it pertains to the education of their children. Additionally, it will provide a perspective from fathers in relation to how they feel included or communicated with, but also how they receive the information about their child and what he or she is working on. Results from this study may influence teachers and administrators to find more effective ways to include fathers, communicate with fathers in both a one or two parent home, and encourage both fathers and the school to build a positive relationship that ultimately will affect the child and his or her success in school and beyond.

#### *Definition of Terms*

*Communication.* A process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a system of symbols, signs, or behavior; personal rapport; a technique for expressing ideas effectively (as in speech); the technology of the transmission of information (as by print or telecommunication); the development of affective communication from home-to-school and school-to-home can open the communication network (Epstein, 1996).

*Engagement.* To come together and interlock; form a partnership (Ferlazzo, 2011).

*Father.* A man in relation to his natural child or children, stepchildren, adopted child, or those residing with their partner's children (Livingston & Parker, 2011).

*Parent.* The term "parent" includes a legal guardian or other person standing in *loco parentis*, such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare (NCLB, 2004).

*Parent Communication.* The exchange of information with the intent of supporting relationships between parents and school staff; the exchange of information by families and school staff whom are engaged in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning (National PTA, Standard 2).

*Parent Involvement.* Parental involvement refers to parental participation in the educational development and experience of their children (Jeynes, 2007).

*Perception.* A result of perceiving; a mental image (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary).

*School Activities.* Something that someone takes part in or does at the school setting, or in which, involves school sponsorship.

*Teacher/Educator.* A person employed to guide and direct the learning experiences of students in an official educational setting (Houchard, 2005).

#### *Limitations and Delimitations of Study*

This study was limited to those fathers who took the time and responded to the survey. Follow-up interviews were made possible from those fathers who left contact information. This study was also limited to those teachers who took the time and responded to the survey. Other limitations included the reluctance to participate due to the researcher working in the participating school district, the possibility of lack of honesty on the survey (due to the belief of

retaliation or to not make oneself look worse off/ better off), and the way surveys were distributed to fathers (via child). All participants were reassured that participation was voluntary and every attempt was being made to keep data collected, associated by name, confidential. Participants were informed the data collected was only being used for the purpose of this study.

This study was delimited to fathers and teachers of four elementary schools in an East Tennessee city school system during the 2016-2017 academic year. The perceptions of fathers and teachers from the four schools could be viewed as a limitation or delimitation. Results of this study are only generalizable to the population used for this study and findings may or may not be applicable to other schools and school districts.

### *Overview of Study*

Chapter 1 includes an introduction, statement of problem, research questions, significance of the study, definitions of terms, delimitations and limitations in the study, and an overview of the study. Chapter 2 contains a review of available literature pertaining to parent involvement, as it relates to the importance of paternal involvement and the effects on children with and without a father present, historical and cultural perspectives of fathers, the development of children, factors associated with involvement in education and how communication from home to school and school to home impacts both the school and the father. Chapter 3 describes the methods and procedures used in this qualitative study including demographic information of participants, the research design, instruments used to collect the data, and how the data were analyzed. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research and the data analysis, including overarching themes from both teacher and father perspectives, as well as direct quotes from those who interviewed. Chapter 5 consists of a summary of the study, summary of the findings and conclusions, recommendations, and a conclusion.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Introduction*

Families are the first educators of their children and they continue to influence the learning and development of their children during school years and long afterwards (Jennings & Bosch, 2011). Parents engage in the education of their children in many ways in the home, the community and in schools. Good parenting in the home includes:

- Providing a secure environment
- Providing intellectual stimulation and conversation
- Modelling constructive social and educational values
- Shaping the child's self-concept as a learner by fostering literacy and problem solving
- Encouraging high aspirations, both personally and socially

Parents may be engaged in the education of their children in school contexts, both formally and informally.

According to Henderson and Berla (1997), the most accurate predictor of student achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which the family is able to:

- Create a home environment that encourages learning
- Express high, but not unrealistic, expectations for the achievement and future careers of the children
- Become involved in the education of the children at school and in the community (p. 160)

Evidence suggests parental involvement positively influences student achievement and overall well-being (Bauch, 1990; Epsetin et al., 2009; Flaxman & Inger, 1991; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Myers & Monson, 1992; Shumow & Lomax, 2002; Shumow & Miller, 2001). Epstein (1995) acknowledged that parent involvement is a complex and multidimensional concept

widely recognized to impact both the learning and development of a child. Levels and types of parent involvement vary for many reasons, including socioeconomic status, educational background, residential status, and sex of parent (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Fathers, in general, tend to be less involved than mothers.

Epstein (1995) describes six types of parental involvement in schools:

1. Parenting: The basic obligations of parents include housing, health, nutrition, and safety for their children. Parents also should provide home conditions for learning at all levels.
2. Communicating: The basic obligations of schools include school-to-home communication (such as memos, notices, newsletters, report cards, conferences, and phone calls) and information (on schools, courses, programs, and activities). Parents provide home-to-school communication, making a two-way channel for interaction and exchange.
3. Volunteering: Parents volunteer their time and talents at school activities and fundraising.
4. Learning at Home: Parents help their children with homework and with setting educational goals.
5. Decision Making: Parents participate in school councils, organizations and school decisions on policy, leadership, and advocacy.
6. Collaborating with the Community: Parents encourage partnerships with community resources and services (p. 704).

Henderson and Berla (1997) discuss the benefits of parent involvement for students and schools:

**Student Benefits:** Studies have documented these benefits for students:

- Higher grades and test scores.
- Better attendance and more homework done.
- Fewer placements in special education.
- More positive attitudes and behavior.
- Higher graduation rates.
- Greater enrollment in postsecondary education (p. 1).

**School Benefits:** Schools and communities also profit. Schools that work well with families have:

- Improved teacher morale.
- Higher ratings of teachers by parents.
- More support from families.
- Higher student achievement.
- Better reputations in the community (p. 1).

As parents become more involved with the school, they begin to develop more confidence in the school. Students whose parents participated had 24% fewer absences and were more likely to read at or above grade level (Levenson, 2016). The teachers they work with have higher opinions of them as well as higher expectations of their children. As a result, parents develop more confidence helping their children learn at home and develop a greater sense of confidence about themselves. When parents become involved in the education of their children, they often enroll in continuing education to advance their own schooling (p. 1).

Garcia (2014) stated that becoming active in a parent group at school is an important way to increase involvement. That involvement also encompasses:

- Setting goals with children and fostering achievement of those goals;
- Accessing and using academic scores to ensure children are on track;
- Frequently viewing the parent portal;
- Developing a working relationship with teachers and keeping in touch with them often; and
- Advocating for improvements in the school building with local school boards and state and federal governments to ensure schools have the resources they need to provide an excellent education to every student.

The most significant type of involvement is what parents do at home. By monitoring, supporting, and advocating, parents can be engaged in ways that ensure their children have every opportunity for success (Garcia, 2014).

Fathers, like mothers, do not start out with all the insights and skills needed to be an effective parent. Many begin with the first model they see, which is the behavior of their own parent. Using a father and their own personal experience when they were a child as a template can be growth enhancing or potentially destructive (Freiman et al., 2002). The education of parents is often argued to be the most important predictor of a child and his or her education (Amin, Lundborg, & Rooth, 2015; Havenman & Wolfe, 1995).

Children experience more positive outcomes and fewer negative outcomes when they experience positive father-child relationships, regardless of whether the father resides in the home (Harper & Fine, 2006). These children have fewer behavior problems, less psychological distress, and are less likely to engage in risky and antisocial behaviors compared to children who experience negative father-child relationships (Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999; Gray & Anderson, 2010; Harris, Furstenberg, & Marmer, 1998; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004). Father involvement and their role in rearing children has been highlighted in recent years, yet fathers are still less engaged in this process (Hoffert et al., 2002; Hung, 2005; Tam, 2009).

Martinez-Alba (2013) stated several interesting concepts including how fathers might be hesitant in school settings based on their own past negative experiences, or the high number of females working in schools, or the fact that they may have dropped out of school (p. 251). Teachers can maximize the participation of fathers in school experiences of young children by understanding how men learn, what it means to be a father, being sensitive to working fathers,

trying to involve absent fathers, and encouraging positive parenting skills (Frieman & Berkeley, 2002).

Parental involvement has been found to have a major impact on the educational accomplishments and well-being of a child (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010; Reynolds & Shlafer, 2010; Tan & Goldberg, 2009; Waanders et al., 2007). Building cooperation between teachers and parents is especially important when children start their school career as it helps to make the transition to school smoother and facilitate adaptation, which in turn has a positive impact on the future development of children (Kikas et al., 2014). Students made 40% to 50% greater gains in math and reading between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades when their teachers met with their parents face to face, gave the parents materials to use at home, and called them routinely (Levenson, 2016). The supportive role of both parents in developmental outcomes of children is acknowledged. It is important to find new ways to incorporate both mothers and fathers into educational activities for their children (Kikas et al., 2014).

#### *Parent Involvement versus Parent Engagement*

It is important to recognize that engagement is at the more active end of the participation continuum than involvement and may be qualitatively different. Pushor and Ruitenberg (2005) suggest the essential difference is that engagement implies:

“...enabling parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, teaching and learning, with teachers’ knowledge. With parent engagement, possibilities are created for the structure of schooling to be flattened, power and authority to be shared by educators and parents, and the agenda being served to be mutually determined and mutually beneficial” (p. 3).

Many schools focus on involving parents in various school-based or school-related activities, but emphasize that this constitutes parental involvement rather than parental



engagement (Harris & Goodall, 2007). Nonetheless, much of the research literature uses the two terms interchangeably. Most recently, a forum defined family engagement as follows:

“Family engagement is a shared responsibility of families, schools, and communities for student learning and achievement; it is continuous from birth to young adulthood; and it occurs across multiple settings where children learn” (Weiss et al., 2010, p. 6).

Defined in this way, and with a community engagement wrap around, family engagement represents “an innovative strategy in education reform” and “an effective strategy to promote student success” (Weiss et al., 2010, p. 9).

Parent or family engagement is not in itself a new idea. What is relatively new is the idea that it be formally enshrined in government policy and integrated systemically into school policies and practices. Family engagement must be a systemic, integrated and sustained approach, not an add-on or a random act (Weiss et al., 2010). Systemic here means family engagement that is purposefully designed as a core component of educational goals such as school readiness or student achievement. Integrated engagement will be embedded into structures and processes including training and professional development, teaching and learning, community collaboration, and the use of data for continuous improvement and accountability. Sustainable engagement will have adequate resources including public–private partnerships, to ensure effective strategies with the power to impact on student learning and achievement.

#### *A Look at Parent Involvement*

Parent engagement is evident in attitudes, behaviours, policies, programs, and strategies. Parents participate in the education of children that overlap spheres of home, school and community dimensions and shape the learning and development of children (Epstein, 2001). Epstein (2001) proposed six types of partnerships (see *Figure 2*) involving different levels of parent involvement, with related school strategies to facilitate these.

<b>Type of partnership</b>	<b>What it involves</b>	<b>Strategy</b>
<i>Basic obligations of families</i>	Providing children with basic needs such as health and safety.	Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.
<i>Basic obligations of schools</i>	Communication between school and family such as notes, phone calls, report cards and parent teacher meetings.	Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.
<b>Type of partnership</b>	<b>What it involves</b>	<b>Strategy</b>
<i>Involvement at school</i>	Volunteering at the school to assist teachers in the classroom or attending school events.	Recruit and organize parent help and support.
<i>Involvement in learning activities at home</i>	Helping children with homework, reading, transition and career decisions.	Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.
<i>Involvement in decision making, governance, and advocacy</i>	Serving in a parent-teacher association or committee, or being involved in other leadership positions.	Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.
<i>Collaboration and exchanges with community organisations</i>	Making connections with organisations that share responsibility for children's education, such as after-school programs, health services and other resources.	Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Figure 2. Six types of partnerships. Reprinted from *School, Family, and Community*

*Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools* (p. 73), by J.L. Epstein, 2001,

Boulder, CO: Westview. Reprinted with permission.

Epstein and Sheldon (2006) argue that effective programs of school, family and community partnerships will include a focus on increasing student learning and development that is explicitly linked to school goals for student success. They suggest that educators must “think new” about the communications, connections and coordinated actions they need to facilitate and achieve with families and community partners to help students succeed to their full potential (p. 117). Over the past 25 years or so, a range of initiatives and programs have been implemented to:

- develop family, school and community partnerships
- raise parent awareness about the benefits of becoming engaged in the education of their children
- provide parents with the relevant skills to become engaged in particular activities
- strengthen the capacity of the family to deal with the everyday demands of raising children (p. 124).

However, much of the focus has been on the primary years, and there has been little research and few programs about engagement in the middle and senior years.

One of the most important findings is that schools influence parental decisions about involvement. A number of studies indicate that most parents want to be more involved in the education of their children. However, a major study (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) found that decisions about parent involvement are influenced by a number of factors including:

- role construction (sense of personal or shared responsibility for the child’s educational outcomes and beliefs about being involved in child’s learning);
- sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school (belief that personal actions will help the child learn);
- perception of invitations to involvement (general and specific invitations from school, teacher, and student); and
- life-context variables (skills and knowledge, time and energy) and the school’s responsiveness to these.

The authors suggest a number of active steps that school staff can take to enhance the role construction and sense of efficacy of a parent for helping children learn. A range of invitations to events can be issued and involvement requests and suggestions can be adapted to the life contexts and circumstances of the parent. In these ways, actions by the school staff may enhance the motivation of parents to get involved. Conversely, inaction or negative action by school staff may diminish motivation for many parents.

### *Outcomes of Parent Involvement*

Becoming involved at school has important effects, not just for students, but for all members of the family. Parents develop more positive attitudes towards the school, become more active in community affairs, develop increased self-confidence, and enroll in other educational programs. This strengthens the family, not only as a learning environment, but as an economic unit (Henderson & Berla, 1997). No matter what economic, racial, or cultural group, whether it is rural or urban, the educational academic achievement scores for children do go up when there is parent involvement and good relationships between the home and school (Rural Audio Journal, 1995). Continued family involvement is key in creating sustainable change in behaviors (Linden, 2010).

Other positive outcomes from parent involvement include:

- Parent involvement leads to improved educational performance (Epstein et al., 2009; Fan & Chen, 2001; NMSA, 2003; Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Van Voorhis, 2003).
- Parent involvement fosters better student classroom behavior (Fan & Chen, 2001; NMSA, 2003).
- Parents who participate in decision making experience greater feelings of ownership and are more committed to supporting the mission of the school (Jackson & Davis, 2000).
- Parent involvement increases support of schools (NMSA, 2003).
- Parent involvement improves school attendance (Epstein et al., 2009).

- Parent involvement creates a better understanding of roles and relationships between and among the parent-student-school triad (Epstein et al., 2009).
- Parent involvement improves student emotional well-being (Epstein, 2005).
- Types of parent involvement and quality of parent involvement affect results for students, parents, and teachers (Epstein, 1995).

### *Parental Roles*

Women and men typically parent differently, too, with women providing more daily necessities (e.g., clothing, feeding, changing diapers) and men being more likely to engage children in play (Coltrane, 1996; Dufur et al., 2010; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004; Sayer, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001). It is less clear whether such parenting differences have long-term or detrimental effects on children (Adamsons & Buehler, 2007). Previous work on parenting indicated that mothers did the major portion of parenting work (Pleck et al., 2004), but research suggests a fathers contribution is growing (Dufur et al., 2010). Mothers often do the majority of day-to-day child-care tasks, but fathers are more likely to participate in recreational behaviors, including high intensity activities that require considerable commitments of time and interaction (Sayer et al., 2004; Yeung et al., 2001).

Mothering and fathering are two separate components of parenting (Coltrane, 1996; Lamb, 2000; Lewis & Lamb, 2003; Margsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Structuralist theories provided a potential explanation for why differences in mothering and fathering exist, focusing on ways hegemonic femininity and masculinity have been linked to specific parenting tasks. Research showing differences between typical mothering tasks (e.g., bathing, clothing children) and typical fathering tasks (e.g., bread-winning, recreational activities) linked different kinds of parenting to broader societal norms about appropriate behavior (Sayer et al., 2004; Yeung et al., 2001).

### *The Importance of Fathers*

Researchers have identified the significant contributions men can make to child development (Brazelton, 1992; Dudley & Stone, 2001; Furman, 1991; Lamb, 2010; Parke, 1996; Pruett, 1987; Townsend, 2002; Yogman, 1982). Fathers can have a significant impact on family life and in particular, on the lives of children. The fathers influence and reach can extend from the home to the classroom. Development, emotional growth, and cognitive functioning of children can be enhanced when fathers are involved in their lives (Levine, Murphy, & Wilson, 1998).

Involved fathers can be a positive and significant influence in the lives of children. Support from the father can begin before the birth of his child. A pregnant mother is more likely to receive prenatal care, enhancing the health of a newborn and herself when the father of the baby is involved. When fathers are actively involved with infants, the cognitive and motor development of the infant test scores are greater. When fathers are involved with their preschool children, these children can be more independent and self-directed. Elementary school children cope with stress more appropriately, develop stronger peer relationships, and achieve academically at a higher rate. When fathers are involved with their high school children, they have greater academic success (Levine & Pitt, 1998).

Before 1960, researchers attempted to understand the complex role of the father and his contributions to the well-being of a child from studies of father absence (Blankenhorn, 1996; Frieman, 2002; Popenoe, 1996). It has only been in the past four decades that researchers have changed their perspective as they began to observe, study, and understand the relationship between fathers and children when fathers are a presence in their lives (Levin & Pitt, 1998). By understanding the significant contributions fathers may make, and by aggressively getting fathers

involved in family life and in schools, the lives of children can be enhanced as fathers learn to nurture and children learn that men can be nurturing (Pruett, 1987). Many barriers exist which may make it difficult for some men to embrace fatherhood and become nurturing and effective fathers. According to Dudley and Stone (2001),

“many barriers - obvious and subtle, interpersonal and institutional – confront males as they contemplate their child-raising responsibilities. Societal values and biases are among the most formidable barriers. Boys and men receive numerous conflicting messages about who they are supposed to be. For example, are they to be independent or interdependent, emotional or in control of their emotions, active in child raising or successful in their outside careers? These conflicting messages are even more prevalent in the new millennium as equality between the sexes becomes an increasing reality. Men need help in understanding how these conflicting societal messages are woven into their lives. They also need help in affirming what they have to offer as fathers” (p. 22).

Children are placed at developmental, emotional, and physical risk when fathers are not involved in their lives. When fathers are involved, not only are the risks reduced, but the likelihood of positive outcomes are increased across the entire life cycle of a child (Levine & Pitt, 1998). It is easy to assume that men will not get involved with children because they are not interested or do not really care as much as women do. However, what shows as indifference is really a cover-up for deep-seated fears of various kinds (Levine, Murphy, & Wilson, 1998).

According to Blankenhorn (1996),

“the United States is becoming an increasing fatherless society. A generation ago, an American child could reasonably expect to grow up with his or her father. Today, an American child can reasonably expect not to. Fatherlessness is now approaching a rough parity with fatherhood as a defining feature of American childhood. Fatherlessness is the most harmful demographic trend of this generation. It is the leading cause of declining child well-being in our society” (p. 229).

In 2001, the United States Senate concerned about the risk children face when fathers are not present in their lives and acknowledging the contributions fathers make to children when they are involved in childcare introduced Senate Bill # S.653 entitled The Responsible Fatherhood Act of 2001. Within the framework of this Bill, the United States Congress

highlighted the effects of fatherlessness on children in the United States. Congress reported, “Nearly 25,000,000 children in the United States, or 36 percent of all such children, live apart from their biological father” (Responsible Fatherhood Act of 2001). Furthermore, the framers of this Senate Bill compared children who live without contact with their biological father to children who have contact with their biological father. The data suggests serious problems exist when fathers are not involved with their children. It is reported that children who do not have contact with their biological father are:

“five times more likely to live in poverty; more likely to bring weapons and drugs into the classroom; twice as likely to commit crime; twice as likely to drop out of school; twice as likely to be abused; more likely to commit suicide; more than twice as likely to abuse alcohol or drugs; and more likely to become pregnant as teenagers” (Responsible Fatherhood Act of 2001, H.R. 1300).

Father involvement protects children from engaging in delinquent behavior (Harris et al., 1998), and is associated with less substance abuse among adolescents (Coombs & Landsverk, 1998), less delinquency (Zimmerman et al., 1995), less drug use, truancy, and stealing (Barnes (1984), and less drinking (Harris et al., 1998). The relationship between drug use and adolescent marijuana use is attenuated by both closeness to father and the perception that parents would catch them for major rule violations (Dorius, Bahr, Hoffmann, & Harmon, 2004). Having a close, positive father child relationship predicts a reduced risk of engagement in multiple, first time risky behaviors. When fathers have a positive relationship with their child, the risk of engaging in delinquent activity and substance use is reduced (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, & Carrano, 2006).

Flouri and Buchanan (2003) found that father involvement at age seven protected against psychological maladjustments in adolescents from non-intact families, and father involvement at age 16 protected against adult psychological distress among adult daughters in women. Children



who had good relationships with their stepfathers showed a significantly lower risk of internalizing or externalizing problems (White & Gilbreth, 2001). Good relationships with both step and non-custodial fathers are also associated with better child outcomes (White & Gilbreth, 2001).

Positive involvement of a father is related to children having fewer behavioral problems (Amato & Rivera, 1999; Howard et al., 2006). Children who feel close to, and do things frequently with their fathers display less antisocial behavior and are less depressed and withdrawn (Peterson & Zill, 1986). Father involvement is also negatively associated with behavior problems, conduct disorder, and hyperactivity in children (Flouri, 2005). Flouri (2005) found that father involvement was not only negatively associated with bullying behavior, but also that it provided a buffering effect for children, in that, it protected them from extreme victimization. Aldous and Mulligan (2002) found that the greater the involvement of a father with a preschool child was related to the child having fewer reported behavior problems as a grade schooler. Their research further indicates that this benefit from early paternal attention was also evidenced for non-problematic young sons, but not daughters. Some research extends the benefits of father involvement for children in relationship to problem behaviors to fathers and mothers. Families with residential fathers reported fewer antisocial symptoms for fathers, mothers, and children (Piffner, McBurnett, & Rathouz, 2001). Kosterman, Haggerty, Spoth, and Redmond (2004) found that prosocial experiences with fathers may play a key role in dissuading daughters from antisocial behavior. Several risk factors to mental health problems of children in middle school that were associated with lower father involvement included having high stress reactivity (Boyce et al., 2006).

Traditionally, fathers have not taken a hands-on approach to childcare (Brazelton & Cramer, 1990; Lamb, 2010). It has been the responsibility of the mother to manage the household, raise the children, help the children with homework, and interact with the school. This is not to say that some men have not been involved as the primary parent in charge of childcare, or have taken an active role in raising children. However, when we acknowledge the contributions fathers can make to families, childcare, enhancing school success, and the risk children face when a father is absent, the question of how to get fathers more involved with their children in all aspects of their lives remains.

#### *A Cultural Perspective on Father Involvement*

From a cultural perspective, father involvement in the educational experience of a child varies around the globe. Ho and Hiatt-Michael (2013) concluded the following perspectives in their respective countries:

*North America:* In Canada, fathers were engrossed in playing, bedtime routines, and going to sporting events, whereas mothers were more involved in cooking, caring for sick children, and homework. African American fathers of sons reported the highest levels of engagement in caregiving and play (Leavell et al., 2012).

*South America:* In Argentina, the father used to have a dominant role in the family, but as time has passed, there has been more of a balance between men and women roles, including in the education of a child. Previous research showed Latino fathers were thought of as not participating in the lives of their children or as abusive and/or chauvinistic. More recent research has provided an optimistic light, where Latino fathers are providing financial support, as loving, and as caregivers. In addition, Latino fathers have shown to value their role as a teacher and believe they are accountable for the education of their children.

*Europe:* In Spain, the father is expected to help in raising children, including with school-related matters.

*Asia:* In Turkey, low father involvement was an issue that needs to be addressed through professional development. In South Korea, the role of the father varies with some seeing themselves solely as financial supporters and others who want to be an important part in the lives of their children.

*Africa:* An African father values education, knowing it can help make for a better life. However, many children across Africa do not have a father as a result of HIV, AIDS, famine, or war.

Ho and Hiatt-Michael (2013) concluded the study as a prediction to delinquency and academic outcomes for ethnic minority adolescents in the United States. The study described that when fathers are not present in the lives of their children, the chances of children living in poverty increase. Yet, if fathers spend quality time with their children, they can help prevent future criminal conduct in teenagers. Furthermore, positive relationships between fathers and their children had a positive influence on their scholastic results. Interestingly, too, themes emerged showing similarities across ethnic backgrounds and locales in the study. For example, fathers believed they needed to support their children financially. Fathers also set expectations for their children, such as the importance of school attendance, getting good grades, and preparing for future professions. Fathers were beginning to help more with homework and collaborating with teachers to share challenges they faced.

#### *Barriers to Father Involvement*

Although researchers have documented the positive role fathers play in the education of their children, fathers have been left out by school authorities. Historically, schools have not

encouraged a father to participate in the education of their children (McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Ho, 2005). There are several reasons for the lack of parental involvement, especially among fathers. Quinn (2006) acknowledged that society views the role of involved parent as being played by the mother, thus, allowing the decision to be optional for fathers. It is often the mothers and not fathers who have been responsible for the education of the children (Dudley-Marling, 2001).

Employment is considered a barrier for a father, given that they may not be available to transport their children to pediatric office visits (Ahmann, 2006) or to attend parent-teacher conferences and school settings (Frieman & Berkeley, 2002). The time fathers spend with their children can be limited due to the time fathers spend at work (Frieman & Berkeley, 2002). In some households, fathers make the demands of their career a priority over involvement in the education of their children.

According to Lamb (2010), there are no clear distinctive responsibilities made between maternal and paternal parents at the birth of their child limiting the lack of support given to the child. Fathers define the system of support as favoring the mother (Carpenter & Towers, 2008). Parents must be seen as equal partners and both must be included in decision making about the education of their children and provide sufficient time to understand the process (Esquivel, Ryan, & Bonner, 2008).

#### *Father Involvement and Child Development*

School aged children of involved fathers are also better academic achievers. They are more likely to get A's (Garcia, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 1997; Nord & West, 2001), have better quantitative and verbal skills (Bing, 1963; Goldstein, 1982; Radin, 1982), have higher grade point averages, get better achievement scores, receive superior grades,

perform a year above their expected age level on academic tests, obtain higher scores on reading achievement, or learn more and perform better in school (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Blanchard & Biller, 1971; Cooksey & Fondell, 1996; Feldman & Wentzel, 1990; Gadsen & Ray, 2003; Garcia, 2014; Goldstein, 1982; Gottfried, Gottfried, & Bathurst, 1988; Howard, Lefever, Borkowski, & Whitman, 2006; McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Ho, 2005; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997; Shinn, 1978; Snarey, 1993; Wentzel & Feldman, 1993). Children of involved fathers are also more likely to live in cognitively stimulating homes (William, 1997). The academic support of a father was positively related to the academic motivation of an adolescent boy to try hard in school, feel their grades were important, and to place a high value on education (Alfaro, Umana-Taylor, & Bamaca, 2006). Father contact was also associated with better socioemotional and academic functioning in school related areas for children with single or married adolescent mothers (Howard et al., 2006).

Children of involved fathers are more likely to demonstrate more cognitive competence on standardized intellectual assessments (Lamb, 1987; Radin, 1994) and have higher IQ's (Gottfried et al., 1988; Honzik, 1967; Radin, 1972; Shinn, 1978). Children of involved fathers are more likely to enjoy school (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997), have positive attitudes toward school (Flouri, Buchanan, & Bream, 2002; Flouri, 2005), participate in extracurricular activities, and graduate. They are also less likely to fail a grade, have poor attendance, be suspended or expelled, or have behavior problems at school (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Brown & Rife, 1991; Mosley & Thompson, 1995; National Center for Education Statistics, 1997; Nord & West, 2001; William, 1997). In addition, Zimmerman, Slaem, and Notaro (2000) found that positive paternal engagement in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade predicted fewer problem behaviors in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

Children of involved fathers are more likely to have higher levels of economic and educational achievement, career success, occupational competency, better educational outcomes, higher educational expectations, higher educational attainment, and psychological well-being (Amato, 1994; Barber & Thomas, 1986; Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992; Bell, 1969; Flouri, 2005; Furstenberg & Harris, 1993; Harris, Furstenberg, & Marmer, 1998; Lozoff, 1974; National Center for Education Statistics, 1997; Snarey, 1993). More recently, Flouri and Buchanan (2004) found that father and mother involvement at age 7 independently predicted educational attainment by age 20 for both sons and daughters indicating that early father involvement can be another protective factor in counteracting risk conditions that might lead to later low attainment levels.

Overall life satisfaction of children is positively correlated with father involvement and their experience of less depression (Dubowitz et al., 2001; Field, Lang, Yando, & Bendell, 1995; Formoso, Gonzalez, Barrera, & Dumka, 2007; Furstenberg & Harris, 1993; Zimmerman, Salem, & Maton, 1995), less emotional distress (Harris et al., 1998), less expressions of negative emotionality such as fear and guilt (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1990), less conduct problems (Formoso et al., 2007), less psychological distress (Flour, 2005), greater sense of social competence (Dubowitz et al., 2001), higher level of self-reported happiness (Flouri, 2005), fewer anxiety symptoms, and lower neuroticism (Jorm, Dear, Rogers, & Christensen, 2003). In adoptive families, ratings for a young adult of paternal nurturance and involvement were strongly and positively correlated with their reports of current psychosocial functioning (Schwartz & Finley, 2006). Likewise, paternal acceptance is significantly and positively related to self-reported psychological adjustment for youth (Veneziano, 2000).

Father involvement contributes significantly and independently to adolescent happiness (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). Harper and Fine (2006) found a positive relationship between paternal warmth and child well-being for non-residential father families. A close, non-conflictual stepfather-stepchild relationship improves adolescent well-being (Yuan & Hamilton, 2006) and close relationships with both stepfathers and non-resident fathers is associated with better adolescent outcomes in regards to grades, self-efficacy, internalizing and externalizing behaviors, and acting out in school (King, 2006).

High father involvement was also associated with an increased feeling of paternal acceptance, a factor that plays a role in the development of self-concept and esteem in children (Culp, Schadle, Robinson, & Culp, 2000). Consequently, children of involved fathers had higher self-esteem (Deutsch, Servis, & Payne, 2001; Ross & Broh, 2000). Overall, father love appears to be as heavily implicated as mother love in the psychological well-being and health of offspring, as well as in an array of psychological and behavioral problems (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001).

Father involvement, in relation to children, is positively correlated with overall social competence, social initiative, social maturity, and capacity for relatedness with others (Amato, 1987; Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993; Gottfried et al., 1988; Krampe & Fairweather, 1993; Mischel et al., 1988; Parke, 1996; Snarey, 1993; Stolz, Barber, & Olsen, 2005). The impact begins early in child development. Kato, Ishii-Kuntz, Makino, and Tsuchiya (2002) found a direct influence of male participation in childcare for the social development among three year olds.

Adolescents who are securely attached to their fathers report less conflict in their interactions with peers (Ducharme, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 2002). Furthermore, the levels of

direct involvement by a father are positively related to an adolescent and his or her friendship and peer experiences (Updegraff, McHale, Crouter, & Kupanoff, 2001). Conversely, negative paternal affect such as high levels of hostility, had significant direct and indirect effects on adolescent negative social behavior, which in turn predicted decreased peer acceptance (Paley, Conger, & Harold, 2000).

### *Effects of Father Absence on Child Development Outcomes*

Children who live without their fathers are more likely to have problems in school performance (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Horn & Sylvester, 2002; Kelly, 2000). They are more likely to have lower scores on achievement tests (McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994; Painter & Levine, 2000; Pong & Ju, 2000; Snarey, 1993; US Department of Health and Human Services, 1995), lower scores on intellectual ability and intelligence tests (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Luster & McAdoo, 1994), have lower grade point averages (McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994), be academic underachievers working below grade level (Blanchard & Biller, 1971), have lower academic performance (Kelly, 2000), have trouble solving complex mathematical and puzzle tasks (Biller, 1981), or spend an average of 3.5 hours less per week studying (Zick & Allen, 1996).

Children who live without their fathers are more likely to experience behavior problems at school (Gray & Anderson, 2010; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Horn & Sylvester, 2002; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004) such as having difficulty paying attention, disobedience (Mott, Kowaleski-Jones, & Mehaghan, 1997), being expelled, suspended (Dawson, 1991), or have poor school attendance. They are more likely to drop out of school (Gray & Anderson, 2010; McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994; Painter & Levine, 2000; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004), twice as likely to repeat a grade (Nord & West, 2001), less likely to graduate



from high school, more likely to complete fewer years of schooling, less likely to enroll in college (Gray & Anderson, 2010; Krien & Beller, 1988; McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994; Painter & Levine, 2000; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan; 2004), and more likely to be out of school and work (Gray & Anderson, 2010; McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004).

Boys who live without their fathers consistently score lower on a variety of moral indexes such as measures of internal moral judgement, guilt following transgressions, acceptance of blame, moral values and rule conformity (Hoffman, 1971). Girls who live without their fathers are more likely to cheat, lie, and not feel sorry after misbehaving (Parke, 1996; Mott et al., 1997). Both boys and girls are less likely to be able to delay gratification, have poor impulse control over anger and sexual gratification, and have a weaker sense of right and wrong (Hetherington & Martin, 1979).

Children in father absent homes are more likely to have problems in emotional and psychosocial adjustment and exhibit a variety of internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Horn & Sylvester, 2002; Kelly, 2000; Painter & Levine, 2000). Not living with both biological parents quadruples the risk of having an affective disorder (Cuffe, McKeown, Addy, & Garrison, 2005). Family structure affects conduct disorders and childhood aggression directly, but the magnitude of the effect declines when tested with family processes and individual characteristics (Brannigan, Gremmel, Pevalin, & Wade, 2002). However, the heightened antisocial behavior in children associated with absent biological fathers was not mitigated by presence of stepfathers and what not accounted for by lower SES (Pfiffner, McBurnett, & Rathouz, 2001).

In father absent home, boys are more likely to be more unhappy, sad, depressed, dependent, and hyperactive (Mott et al., 1997). Girls who grow up in father absent homes are more likely to become overly dependent (Mott et al., 1997) and have internalizing problems such as anxiety and depression (Kandel, Rosenbaum, Chen, 1994). In addition, a combination of low father contact and high levels of either anger or trust in the daughter-father relationship was related to particularly deleterious psychosocial outcomes for adolescent girls (Coley, 2003). Both boys and girls are more likely to develop disruptive or anxiety disorders (Kasen, Cohen, Brook, & Hartmark, 1996), have conduct problems (Kandel et al., 1994), suffer from psychological disorders, or commit suicide (Brent, Perper, Moritz, & Liotus, 1995). Adolescents whose mothers divorced and remained single, those born outside marriage and their mother remained unmarried had the greatest behavioral problems when compared with their counterparts with married biological parents (Carlson, 2006).

Children who live without their fathers are more likely to choose deviant peers, have trouble getting along with other children, be at higher risk for peer problems (Mott et al., 1997), and be more aggressive (Horn & Sylvester, 2002). Children who live without their fathers are at greater risk of being physically abused, of being harmed by physical neglect, or of suffering from emotional neglect (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996).

Adolescents in single-mother or single-father families are significantly more delinquent than their counterparts residing with two biological, married parents, although these differences are reduced once various family processes such as supervision, monitoring, involvement and closeness are accounted for (Demuth & Brown, 2004). Nonetheless, children who live without their fathers are more likely to engage in criminal behavior (Horn & Sylvester, 2002), or commit a school crime- possessing, using, or distributing alcohol or drugs, possessing a weapon, or

assaulting a teacher, administrator, or another student (Jenkins, 1995), are at higher risk of status, property, and personal delinquencies (Anderson, 2002; Bush, Mullis, & Mullis, 2000), or score higher on delinquency and aggression tests (Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Diaz, & Miller, 2000). Mackey and Immerson (2004) found that father absence, rather than poverty, was the stronger predictor violent behavior in young men. Adolescents in father absent homes face elevated incarceration risks (Harper & McLanahan, 2004). Absence of paternal influence was a particularly important risk factor for criminality of daughters, although mothers and fathers appeared to play a similar role in controlling the antisocial behavior of their sons (Kemppainen, Jokelainen, Isohanni, Jaervelin, & Raesaemem, 2002).

Children who live with a single parent or in step-families are more likely to use and abuse illegal drugs, alcohol, or tobacco compared to children who live with either biological or adoptive parents (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, Capps, & Zaff, 2006; Johnson, Haffman, & Gerstein, 1996; Kelly, 2000; Painter & Levine, 2000) and report higher rates of drinking and smoking (Griffin et al., 2000). Mandara and Murray (2006) found that father absent boys were much more likely than father present boys or either group of girls to use drugs. Father closeness was negatively correlated with the number of a children who smoke, drink, and smoke marijuana (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2004). Father closeness was also correlated with the use of alcohol, cigarettes, and hard drugs by children and was connected to family structure with intact families ranking higher on father closeness than single-parent families (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2004).

Adolescents who live without their fathers are more likely to engage in greater and earlier sexual activity, are more likely to become pregnant as a teenager (Ellis et al., 2003; Gray & Anderson, 2010; McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994; Miller & Moore, 1990; Metzler, Noell, Biglan,

& Ary, 1994; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004; US Department of Health and Human Services, 1988), or have a child outside of marriage (Painter & Levine, 2000). This elevated risk was not explained by familial, ecological, or personal disadvantages associated with father absence and there was stronger and more consistent evidence of the effects of father absence on early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy than on other behavioral or mental health problems or academic achievement (Ellis et al., 2003). More specifically, women whose parents separated between birth and six years old experienced twice the risk of early menstruation, more than four times the risk of early sexual intercourse, and two and a half times higher risk of early pregnancy when compared to women in intact families (Quinlan, 2003). Teens without fathers were twice as likely to be involved in early sexual activity and seven times more likely to get pregnant as an adolescent (Ellis et al., 2003).

Early fatherhood is much more likely to occur if young men did not grow up living with their own fathers. Young fathers were also less likely to be living with their children if their own fathers had not lived in residence with them throughout childhood (Furstenberg & Weiss, 2001). Overall, research indicates that being raised by a single mother raises the risk of teen pregnancy, marrying with less than a high school degree, and forming a marriage where both partners have less than a high school degree (Teachman, 2004).

Children who live without their fathers are, on average, more likely to be poor (Gray & Anderson, 2010; Horn & Sylvester, 2002; Sigle-Anderson & McLanahan, 2004) with the US Bureau of the Census (2003) reporting that children in father absent homes are five times more likely to be poor. Overall, father absence has deleterious effects on a wide range of child development outcomes including healthier, social and emotional, and cognitive outcomes (Wertheimer, Croan, Moore, & Hair, 2003).

Obese children are more likely to live in father absent homes than are non-obese children (Gray & Anderson, 2010; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004; Strauss & Knight, 1999). The obesity of the father is associated with a four-fold increase in the risk of obesity of sons and daughters at age 18 (Burke, Beilin, & Dunbar, 2001). In addition, the BMI (Body Mass Index) of the father is the best predictor for his children, independent alcohol intake, smoking, physical fitness, and education (Burke et al., 2001). Furthermore, it is the total percentage of body fat of the father, not the mother, which represented as the best predictor of changes in daughters total percentage of body fat (Figueroa-Colon, Arani, Goran, & Weinsier, 2000) as well as the diet and enjoyment of physical activity by the father. As his BMI rose, so did his daughters (Davison & Birch, 2001). Active toddlers were more likely to have a father with a lower BMI than less active children (Finn, Johannsen, & Specker, 2002). This finding echoes other research that found a correlation showing strong predictors of inactivity in children and their father, with similar affects (Trost, Kerr, Ward, & Pate, 2001; Fogelholm et al., 1999). Overall, children who live without their fathers are more likely to experience health related problems (Gray & Anderson, 2010; Horn & Sylvester, 2002; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004).

### *Work and Fathering*

The traditional role of the father is that of the provider of the family. Fathers thought of their role as working hard to provide their children with financial means to buy the necessities of life (LaRossa, 1997). Many men grew up with fathers who made sure that work obligations were satisfied, often at the expense of child obligations (McKenry, Price, Gordon, & Rudd, 1986). Men of the twenty-first century who want to place their children first and their work second are facing the reality that working women have had to deal with for decades. It is not easy, and often people have had to make hard choices between their children and their careers (Frieman &

Berkeley, 2002). Some men and women have no choice but to show up to work or face fewer options at home including things like food, clothes, or other necessities. Those working hourly jobs, or lower on the organizational chart, are sometimes faced with the ultimatum of “show up for work or lose your job.”

Economic support of the family is an indirect, but an important way, a father can contribute to the development of his children. Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001) argue that economic provision for child and family needs is the foundation on which many fathers build their involvement in the family life and that it is integrated and connected with many other forms of father involvement. Fathers who do not provide economically for their families are more likely to disengage from involvement and many other aspects in the lives of their children than fathers who do provide economically (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001).

Snarey (1993) found that when compared with men who are not fathers, fathers exhibit a greater attachment to the labor force and career out of a sense of responsibility to provide for their children. Fatherhood encourages men to be more serious about their work productivity but not to “over commit” to their jobs and careers (Coltrane, 1995; Eggebean & Knoester, 2001; Gutmann, 1994).

### *The Single Parent*

Slightly more than one-half of all marriages in the United States end in divorce, and millions of children every year enter a new category of family structure: the single parent family. In 1970, 12% of all children in the U.S. lived in single-parent homes; by the year 2000, that number rose to just over 30% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Such a shift in family demographics has a direct influence on the life of children. One important area in the life of a child that is impacted by family structure is education. Studies on children reared in single-parent families

consistently indicate negative effects with school achievement, completion, behavior, and social development (Amato & Keith, 1991; Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Downey, 1994; Featherstone & Cudnick, 1992; Lee, Kushner, & Cho, 2007; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Pong, 1998; Pong & Ju, 2000).

Divorced fathers have to maintain a business-like co-parenting relationship with their former wives, even if pride gets in the way when dealing with the “other” parent (Frieman & Berkeley, 2002). Frieman (1998) noted that teachers must work to protect the pride of fathers by giving divorced fathers the chance to deal with the school independently of their former wives. By understanding that pride might get in the way of involvement, teachers need to treat divorced fathers as if they were single parents, providing them with all information about their child independent of that given to mothers. This does not mean a teacher gets in the middle of parents; rather, the teacher offers information to each parent just to be sure everyone is appropriately informed.

### *Absent Fathers*

To address these many questions in regard to the role of the father in the family and the father-son relationship, we must first define what an “absent” father is. The most obvious form of absence is physical absence. It might be that the father died at an early age, or abandoned the family via something like divorce. Moreover, the biological father might never have been known to the child, or the father could have never been a part of the nuclear family to begin with. The idea of the absent father implies that he is not a daily presence in the life of his son or daughter, and it is assumed that he will not return to the family system (Gleitsmann, 2015). Approximately 44% of mothers who are the custodial parent of their child are divorced or separated, and 33% report that they have never been married (Heard, 2009). While it is impossible to know the exact

extent of the physically absent father in the family system, one can assume that the impact of physical absence would be felt by the child and affect his or her psychological development.

There could be an emotional or psychological absence of the father. The father might be physically present in the life of a child, but have little to do with him or her on a day-to-day basis. He could be detached, thus not emotionally attuned to his child (Gleitsmann, 2015). Other men choose to be both physically and emotionally absent from their children, have children, and then take no interest in fathering. Often, these are the men who have children, but do not intend to live with the mother of the child as a family. They might occasionally visit their children or provide them with money, but they do not take part in the process of fathering. They are fathers in title only (Frieman, 2000).

Teachers can help children with absent fathers by involving males to serve as role models in the classroom, arranging for services for physically absent or noncustodial fathers, and altering the curriculum to make it male friendly (Frieman, 2000). Female teachers, aware that children need males in their lives, can involve surrogate “fathers” in the classroom lives of father-absent children. Volunteers can come from the ranks of retired community members or volunteers from civic organizations. Male volunteers, similar to classroom helpers, will first have to be trained in how to relate appropriately to young children (Frieman & Berkeley, 2002).

#### *Importance of Communication*

Effective parent communication supports relationships between parents and school and, as a result, student achievement is encouraged (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011; United States Department of Education, 2010; Weiss, Lopez & Rosenberg, 2010; Wanat, 2010). With current accountability standards, public schools are required to communicate with families in order to involve families in the educational experiences of their children. Bagwell (2011) found that



parental involvement and student progress are enhanced through communications and partnerships.

Routine phone calls reporting positive behaviors of their children, newsletters mailed home, and report cards mailed home are other ways to ensure that noncustodial fathers are involved in the school process. Books and stories used in the classroom can also help to present fathering in a positive light to children who have no active fathers. Many books present positive images of men and confront issues involving absent fathers. This literature represents the great diversity found in schools today (Frieman et al., 2002).

Current educational reform efforts mandate that schools involve parents in the educational process. According to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), schools are required to provide opportunities for involvement and improved communications for families (United States Department of Education, 2010). In support of these mandates, research studies have found that partnerships between school and parents may improve outcomes for children (Walker, Wilkins, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Wanat, 2010). The communication process in educational communities is critical for building and maintaining relationships, especially the relationship between school and home (Schumacher, 2008). Building meaningful relationships requires shared understandings of the same goals such as student achievement or specific pathways toward graduation. If people or groups are to work together, they need to develop common, yet effective, methods of communication.

Previous studies have shown that communication leads to parents being involved and engaged in the education of their child that in turn increases things like student academic and social progress (Epstein et al., 2011; Bagwell, 2011; Murphy, 2009; Struck, 2004). The 2010 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reflects the importance of strengthening and

supporting family engagement through specific programs such as family reading night at the school, designed to involve families. ESEA ensures that schools provide families with the information they need about their schools and fosters getting families involved in the decision-making processes (United States Department of Education, 2010). States are also required to provide parents with clear-cut reports that communicate key information about schools including student achievement, graduation rates, school climate, and school funding.

Sharing information among stakeholders is one reason that communication is essential between home and school, school and home, or school and community. Current trends in communication exchanges between school and home are based on the need to share meaningful information related to student learning and to make parents feel more welcome as a contributor to the school experience for their child. According to Hafizi and Papa (2012), parents are an integral part of education and should be informed on a regular basis about the progress of their children.

A second aspect of school to home communications, the interpersonal, is necessary for effective communication as it forms positive relationships with parents (Schumacher, 2008). Hafizi and Papa (2012) noted that when schools create positive relationships through the use of reciprocal conversation, schools proactively ward off conflicts with parents regarding supporting student learning and social or behavioral issues.

A third facet of school to home communication is the mode. Schools rely on several modes of communication to share important information and the relevance is often based on the frequency and satisfaction of the perceived messages. Different modes may overcome barriers that impede home and school communication. These barriers, if not overcome, can negate possible benefits to student learning. Such barriers can emanate from the school, parents, and

even from the students. Unfortunately, several researchers suggest that the breakdown of the communication process can harmfully influence parental involvement and in turn, negatively affect student learning (Epstein, 2001; Graham & Clay, 2005; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Keen, 2007; United States Department of Education, 2010).

Teachers communicate with parents about the educational process and how opportunities for parental involvement are important to improving student learning (Epstein, 2001). School to home communication formats may vary but have traditionally included things such as daily notes, weekly newsletters, signatures on tests or assignments a student performed poorly on, monthly calendars, behavior charts, progress reports, and report cards. Yet, both teachers and parents face ever-increasing demands on their time. It is important to seek out effective means of school to home communication to keep parents informed about the education of each child (Murphy, 2008).

#### *Father Participation in School Experiences*

Teachers should be able to make provisions for fathers who cannot take time off from work to be involved in the school experience of their child. One way to do this is to have flexible times for fathers to visit the school. A pot of coffee brewing early in the morning can lure a father to drop his child off at school a few minutes early and discuss progress and development on his child (Frieman et al., 2002). Other possibilities include making sure fathers know that they are important by providing time to speak, either in person or communicating via email or telephone. Teachers and administrators can also make time to communicate, via conversation or newsletter, to fathers making them feel welcome to the school and all the activities, not just relegated only to special projects involving manual labor.

Working fathers would also benefit from early morning or late afternoon conference hours so they could stay connected with their children and the academic progress. Fathers with flexible schedules could be invited to school to have lunch with their child or to share some time reading to a classroom, or tutor children in a class. Frieman and Berkeley (2002) also believe teachers could provide fathers with a list of low-cost weekend educational activities. Lists of suggested field trips, such as an excursion to the library, along with a list of possible books to read together, are particularly appreciated by fathers who see their children only during scheduled visitations. Suggested lists of good educational toys could be given to fathers to aid in birthday and holiday gift giving.

There are several strategies to reduce obstacles to the involvement of a father in education. Convincing a father that there is significance, no matter how small or simple the action might be can mean a great deal to their child. It is important to remember that both sensitivity and self-confidence are greater than any specific skills in paternal behavior and influence. Sensitivity is critical to both involvement and closeness. The closeness of the father-child relationship is the crucial determinant of the impact a father has on the development and adjustment of a child. Developing sensitivity enables a father to evaluate the signals or needs of his child, and respond to them appropriately (Lamb, 2010).

#### *Focusing on the Involvement of a Father in Early Childhood Programs*

Father involvement in early childhood programs (ECPs) has increased over the past 10-15 years (Palm & Fagan, 2008). Given the large numbers of families utilizing the early childhood programs, there are considerable benefits for getting fathers involved. Parent involvement patterns in learning begin well before children start elementary school. Head Start has always stated that parents are the first teachers of a child. It is more advantageous to support

the involvement of a father prior to children starting school as a primary prevention (Fagan & Palm, 2004).

Another reason for focusing on fathers is that parenting experiences increase fathers understanding about the way they grow and develop (Snarey, 1993). When fathers spend time with their children fathers grow in personal responsibility, maturity, and social skills (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997). Mutually beneficial father-child relationships in turn noticeably affect mothers, families, communities, and society (Williams, 2013). When fathers are not given opportunities to be involved in early childhood programs, they miss learning from and with their children (Palm, 1992).

#### *Father Engagement and Parenting Programs*

Another strategy to enhance father-child relationships is through father participation in parenting programs. They have been shown to increase the accessibility of a father to their children, including direct involvement and support to learning, while also decreasing parent reports of problem behaviors for their children (Fagan & Iglesias, 1999). Although parenting programs benefit fathers and their children, recruitment of fathers to such programs remains a challenge for fatherhood program providers (Bayley, Wallace, & Choudhry, 2009). Furthermore, there is insufficient published research to guide recruitment efforts.

Extensive evidence shows that parenting interventions based on social learning principles are an effective treatment for behavior problems in children (Dretzke et al., 2009; Eyberg et al., 2008). However, the majority of parents who have concerns about their children and their behavior do not receive services, highlighting the need for a public health approach to the provision of evidence-based parenting intervention strategies (Sanders, 2012). To reach as many people as possible, a public health approach has a focus on ensuring that parenting intervention

strategies are widely available in easily accessible formats and delivery mechanisms (Metzler et al., 2012). This approach contrasts with the traditional clinical treatment model of parenting interventions based on highly intensive practitioner-delivered interventions to targeted individuals.

Fathers are one group of parents who have been identified by researchers and clinicians as experiencing barriers to participation in parenting interventions (Fabiano, 2007). There are several key reasons why increased father involvement in parenting interventions is needed. First, a large body of research indicates that children with behavior problems early in life are at risk for a range of long-term negative outcomes (Knoster, 2003). Poor father child relationships have been found to precipitate delinquent behaviors in adolescents (Atwood, Gold, & Taylor, 1989) and low levels of father involvement have been found to effect school achievement and aggression, and heighten the likelihood of engagement in risky behaviors in children (McLanahan & Teitler, 1999). Second, behavior problems in young children are more likely to persist in the context of difficult parent-child relationships, highlighting the need for early parenting interventions, especially with fathers (Cowan & Cowan, 2002). Third, current research on the unique contributions of a father to the behavioral development of children suggests the possibility that increased father involvement in parenting programs is likely to be highly beneficial for young children with disruptive behavior problems (Bogels & Phares, 2008; Fabiano, 2007; Tiano & McNeil, 2005). Finally, a growing body of research shows that when fathers are involved in parenting interventions outcomes are improved for children, mothers and fathers (Bagner & Eyberg, 2003; Sanders et al., 2013; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1997).

Despite the many potential benefits of father involvement in parenting programs, issues of low participation rates and program adherence is often problematic (Tiano & McNeil, 2005).

A variety of reasons have been suggested for low father participation, including the way programs are advertised and promoted to families, and aspects of program content and delivery (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Fabiano, 2007). For example, parent training that is promoted in a way that could be interpreted as parents lacking a skill may deter fathers, as it has been suggested that men are unlikely to seek help if doing so means admitting there is a problem (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Fabiano, 2007). In addition, most programs do not differentiate between the treatment role of mothers and fathers (Lee & Hunsley, 2006) when the parenting tasks of each parent may differ greatly, and as a result the content of parenting programs may be viewed by fathers as being less relevant to their needs compared to mothers (Fabiano, 2007). If fathers are not engaged or do not find the program content relevant they are less likely to implement the techniques, leading to decreased program effectiveness (Fabiano, 2007). Other key barriers that have been identified to fathers accessing parenting programs and family services include a lack of information about the services available, fear of not knowing what the program will involve, and how fathers will be perceived by other men if they seek help (Anderson et al., 2002; Berlyn et al., 2008; Fabiano, 2007).

Co-parenting counseling is another strategy being used to keep fathers involved and engaged, as early as birth. The rate of childbirth for unmarried couples has risen dramatically over the past several decades, and many young parents are co-parenting outside the context of marriage, often struggling to coordinate parenting activities between households, without the security of a committed romantic relationship (Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010). Until recently, young fathers in these “fragile families” were considered irrelevant to maternal-child health because they were often peripherally involved in prenatal care and early child rearing. However, there is evidence that many young men want to remain positively involved as co-

parents, but lack the necessary skills and support (Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008). The prevalent failure of young fathers to stay engaged with the partner only underscores the importance of including them in public health efforts to support the well-being of the child (Alio et al., 2010). The role of the co-parenting relationship as a predictor of parent functioning and child health suggests that supporting these fragile relationships could help improve the social context and health outcomes of children (Carlson & McLanahan, 2006; Feinberg, Jones, Kan, & Goslin, 2010).

### *The Influence Fathers Have on Young Children*

A substantial body of research literature documents the significance a father has on the development of their child. A father contributes to his children within three domains, including financial contributions, presence or care giving, and human capital (Fagan & Palm, 2004). Studies on the well-being of fathers and children showed significant associations between positive father involvement and the well-being of offspring and how fathers significantly affect the development of sex roles, cognitive abilities, and achievement motivation (Amato & Rivera, 1999). An investigation of over 100 studies on parent-child relationships found by having a caring father was as vital for the happiness and scholastic achievement of a child as having a loving and nurturing mother (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). In some studies, the love of a father was identified as a stronger contributor than the love of a mother on some important positive child well-being outcomes, such as language development, literacy, mathematics, science, and social emotional development (Williams, 2013).

Lamb (1997) suggests that preschool children had higher cognitive competencies on standardized intellectual assessments because of more involved fathers. Infants who have fathers involved in their lives, during the first 18 to 24 months, are more secure and more likely to



explore the world around them with increased enthusiasm and interest than children who did not have fathers involved in their lives (Williams, 2013). In his 2008 dissertation, Hufnagel found there were positive correlations when studying factors that contribute to the involvement of non-residential fathers and their children, with a higher engagement factor from the father when they were a major part of the pregnancy and birthing experience. The analysis by Hufnagel suggests that adolescent fathers who are active in the decision making and activities leading up to the pregnancy, are present at the delivery, and immediately hold their child are significantly more likely to be involved, and continue their involvement with their child. The way fathers interact with their children in challenging situations helps children to develop problem-solving abilities and independence (Pruett, 2000).

Research suggests when it comes to making life choices, children who have a secure relationship with their fathers are twice as likely to enter college, 75% less likely to become pregnant, 80% less likely to become involved with law enforcement and the juvenile justice system, and half as likely to show various signs of mental health issues (Wade & Sylvester, 2002). “A white teenage girl from an advantaged background is five times more likely to become a teen mother if she grows up in a single-mother household than if she grows up in a household with both biological parents” (Whitehead, 1995, p. 21). If a young male is reared without a father the chances of him engaging in criminal activity doubles and it triples if the area in which he resides has a high percentage of fatherless families (Hill & O’Neil, 1993). “The research is absolutely clear...the one human being most capable of curbing the antisocial aggression of a boy is his biological father” (Wade & Sylvester, 2002, p. 106). In terms of developing empathy, a long study started in the 1950s found that the strongest indicator for children being empathetic later in adulthood was warm father involvement in the early years of their life (Sears, 1957).

Researchers found the number one factor in developing empathy in children, based on a 26-year study, was father involvement (Koestner, 1990). “The closer the connection between father and child, the better off both are now and in the future” (Pruett, 2000, p. 41).

### *The Benefits of Teaching Positive Parenting Skills*

Since the 1970s, the push for defining co-parenting roles, irrespective of marital status, and shared responsibilities, has dominated the discussion (Lamb, 2010). Frieman and Berkeley (2002) state teachers can play an important role in teaching positive parenting skills to all fathers. Some important issues that fathers need to learn are how to praise their children, how to put the needs of their children first, and how to deal with mistakes.

*Praising Children.* Fathers need to learn how to give their children praise for accomplishments. It is easy to be supportive of a child when he or she does something so spectacular that others acknowledge the accomplishments of their child. However, it is just as important for a father to praise his children when they do ordinary things. The key is to let the child own the accomplishment and all of the resulting praise.

Learning how to praise their children might not be a natural thing to do for all fathers. Teachers can help fathers learn the appropriate responses to the victories or other actions needed when speaking with their children. Teachers can model by praising daily “victories” when speaking to the father of a child. An occasional phone call home or email to the father to report that the student performed well, or worked especially hard during the day, can be helpful. In this way, fathers can see an example that praises desirable behaviors.

*Putting the Needs of the Children First.* Many things that men need to learn in order to become more effective fathers run counter to the way men are normally socialized, especially being taught to think that fathers are the most important members of the household. Particularly

when a father has younger children and has to make a choice between his needs the needs of the child; he needs to learn to value the needs of the child above his own.

Schools can highlight fathers in weekly newsletters or events, in addition to providing the information about important events to children. After events, fathers could issue special badges, which recognizes their contributions, attendance, and compassion to placing the needs of their child before their own. Local newspapers also love stories about contributions made by fathers to the classroom.

*Making Mistakes.* Many men have a hard time accepting the fact that they can make mistakes in their parenting. Fathers may feel their authority compromised if they back down from a decision. This is not true. Children respect a father who makes mistakes and corrects them, and they have greater respect for fathers who are this honest and sensitive with them. Most caring men have done their share of insensitive things as fathers. It is easy to berate oneself for making a mistake, but it serves no purpose. As fathers, we try to learn from our mistakes. A parent is continually learning. The fact that fathering is a developmental process has allowed us to be even more excited about our children, about fathering, and about our growth as individuals.

### *Summary*

The NCLB was developed to improve the academic achievement of all students and cultures in the United States (NCES, 2003). Congress amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was a federal effort to support elementary and secondary education. The act built on four ideas: (a) accountability and results, (b) practices based on scientific research, (c) parental options, and (d) local control flexibility (NCES, 2003). Lee and Bowen (2006) stated that parental involvement varies in the education of a child and includes Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and volunteering. Home activities,

such as discussing homework with their child or assisting with homework, are also contributing factors to parental involvement. According to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (2004), when parents are involved in education, the child has a more positive attitude and behaviour, which means that school are more effective.

Changes in the American family, as well as in work and family patterns have influenced research on actual father involvement in child rearing, on predictors of involvement, and on barriers to increased involvement by fathers (McBride & Rane, 1997). If teachers, especially female teachers, understand the uniqueness of fathers, they will be better able to increase father involvement in the educational experience of children (Frieman et al., 2002). By understanding the unique paths to fatherhood that many men take, teachers will be better able to engage fathers as allies in the educational experiences of their children. The benefits of such understanding will accrue to fathers, their children, their teachers, and the school community in which all participate.

Parents should have many ways they can be involved with their children, both inside and outside of the school, and encouraged to do so. Community partners and organizations must understand the needs of the school and the parents. Federal and state mandates can be implemented to assist in providing greater opportunities to educate children (Kim, 2008). In addition, a number of studies have confirmed that fathers see themselves as more capable at caring for children, which leads to greater levels of involvement (Jacobs & Kelley, 2006; Sanderson & Thompson, 2002). Effective partnerships between schools and families are based on understanding the cultures, socioeconomic status, and interests of children (Epstein, 2006).

Activities that present a wide selection of opportunities for participation enhance the chances of involving different parent skills and accommodating parent schedules. Researchers

emphasized that the care and planning of parental involvement are even more significant than the specific type of involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Henderson & Berla, 1997). The children benefit from the well-planned programs designed to involve a variety of parents. The activities and programs must be receptive to the various factors that persuade parental decisions to become involved in the education of their children.

CHAPTER 3  
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*Introduction*

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of father involvement in elementary schools. If we do not bridge the connection between what is happening in the classroom and what is happening at home, we are missing something really vital (Levenson, 2016). Through a renewed understanding of the benefits to students through positive relationships between teachers and parents, stronger relationships can be formed to more positively impact student achievement. Reciprocity amongst schools, parents, and community has been pursued by researchers, educators, and parents alike, but differences in parent involvement perceptions can make the desired reciprocity hard to achieve (Knopf & Swick, 2007).

Defining parental involvement has varied among researchers. Traditional definitions of parental involvement require investments of time and money from parents, and those who may not be able to provide these resources are deemed uninvolved. Bower and Griffin (2011) implied that underlying assumptions in traditional definitions of parental involvement make demands of parents to help facilitate the success of the school. Roles offered to parents should include contributing to decisions about school policy and involvement in home learning activities (Epstein et al., 2011).

According to Tonn and Wallheiser (2005), educational leaders continue to meet challenges with a lack of parental involvement. These challenges, in spite of the NCLB mandate, are primarily due to the lack of adequate school-parent partnerships (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

The role of parents in education is changing considerably (Richman & Kopel, 1996; Shepard & Rose, 1995).

Key factors associated with fathers being omitted or not invited to school functions include the failure to include fathers, specifically, in school functions and events and staff anxiety in inviting fathers (Burgess, 2009). Fathers who are involved in the education of their children are likely to have lived in cognitively stimulating home environments (Williams & Sternberg, 2002). There is a consensus among educators, parents, and researchers that parental involvement is an important factor in the academic success of children (Szente, 2006; Wright & Willis, 2004). Trotman (2001) reported that factors affecting parental involvement include socioeconomic status, education level, and family structure. Wright and Willis (2004) stated that the inconsistency in parental involvement warrants investigation.

#### *Research Questions*

The following research questions were utilized for this study:

*Question 1:* How do fathers perceive their involvement in the education of their child?

*Question 2:* How do fathers perceive they communicate with teachers?

*Question 3:* How do fathers perceive teachers communicate with them?

*Question 4:* How are school activities designed to engage fathers in the educational experience of a child?

*Question 5:* What are teacher perceptions of what it means to be a father involved in the education of a child?

*Question 6:* How do teachers communicate with fathers?

#### *Qualitative Design*

Qualitative research methodology was utilized in this study. Qualitative studies are used to understand and describe the world of human experience (Moore, 2002). Qualitative research is

designed to study and bring perspective and understanding to social phenomena of participants in the study (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2013). The role of the qualitative researcher is to decipher contributing factors. Ary et al. (2013) wrote, “The goal is to provide a holistic picture with a depth of understanding, rather than a numerical analysis of data” (p. 25).

Choosing a phenomenological research design allowed for an understanding and conceptualization of the perceptions of father involvement in elementary schools. Interview data was utilized to develop insight into school attributes and events that fathers either engaged in or did not as related to the education of their children. There remains a phenomenon associated with why fathers choose whether or not to get involved and how teachers invite fathers to participate in the educational experiences of their child.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) described qualitative researchers as those who “espouse some common considerations and procedures for its conduct and certain habits of mind and heart. They are intrigued by the complexity of social interactions expressed in daily life and by the meanings that the participants themselves attribute to these interactions” (p. 2). A qualitative researcher has an interest to “foster pragmatism in using multiple methods for exploring a topic. Thus, qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 2). Strauss and Corbin (1998) maintained, “Qualitative research and the researcher are so intertwined that it becomes difficult to separate one from the other” (p. 4).

This research study allowed the researcher to utilize data from interviews to develop insight into the perspective of fathers on issues regarding:

- how they were involved or not
- how and when they got involved



- how they communicated with the school
- what parts of education they were most interested in or engaged in, and
- how they felt their involvement impacted or did not impact the education of their child

The interviews provided rich data through honest and personal dialogue. The interviews also allowed fathers time to be metacognitive in their reflections on the role of a father in the education of their children.

A survey instrument was utilized to prescreen fathers. Results from this survey were utilized in determining the sample for this study. Information from the survey was utilized to support themes rising from the interviews but the survey information was not central to data collection. Teacher perspectives on communication with fathers were collected through the use of a survey instrument. Additional data collected from the teacher survey was how teachers invited and engaged fathers and what they perceived to be an involved father.

### *Constructivism and Phenomenology*

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena: appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meaning things have in our experience (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). The central structure of an experience is its intentionality. The experience is directed toward something because it is an experience of or about some object. An experience is directed toward an object by virtue of its content or meaning (which represents the object) together with appropriate enabling conditions (Barua, 2009). This study, therefore, focuses on the phenomenon on the engagement of fathers in elementary schools.

### *Permissions*

Permission was requested from the Superintendent of the school system to conduct the research. The study proposal was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at East

Tennessee State University (ETSU). Meetings with the four elementary school principals were scheduled to discuss the research project. Items discussed included communication to staff, the best location for the drop box for surveys, and survey distribution. The researcher drafted an email that was sent to each teacher informing him or her of the survey. Teachers were briefed on the purpose of the study, why the researcher was conducting the research, and was told to contact the researcher for any questions or concerns.

#### *Peer Review*

Prior to the beginning of this study, survey and interview questions were piloted and reviewed by men who are fathers, but not participants in this study. Survey questions for the teachers were piloted and reviewed by experts in the teaching field who were not participants in this study. All questions were reviewed to assure that the questions would allow for the collection of rich and deep data during the interview process with the intent that data saturation would occur.

#### *Survey Instruments*

The researcher delivered the father survey (Appendix A) to each school. Surveys were placed in the mailbox of every homeroom teacher by the researcher. Surveys were sent home, with the students, to the attention of the father. The survey included a consent letter (Appendix E) explaining the purpose of the study and why the information was being sought. Consent was implied once the father completed and returned the survey to the school. Spanish versions of the father survey (Appendix D) were available in each school.

The researcher delivered the teacher surveys (Appendix B) to each school. Surveys were placed in the mailbox of each certified teacher by the researcher. The survey included a consent

letter (Appendix F) explaining the purpose of the study and why the information was being sought. Consent was implied once the teacher completed and returned the survey to the school.

### *Interviews*

Data sources included interviews from the father or the care-taking male in the household. The researcher utilized the Interview Protocol (Appendix C) for this study. Interview questions were not follow-up questions to what the father had indicated on their survey. Interviews were used to solicit more in-depth information and to gain a better understanding of their involvement. Speaking to the men in person identified the perceptions and conceptualizations of roles and responsibilities a father play in the education of their children. The fathers in this study participated in interviews, answering open-ended questions about their perceptions of their level of involvement in the education of their child and the challenges they face that hinder them from being more involved. Interview questions should be open ended and non-threatening to respondents (Creswell, 2011).

Interviewing as a conversation is an opportunity for respondents to reflect on their experiences (Gerson, 2009). The interview also offered an opportunity for fathers to identify how “we”, as educators, could assist in supporting their involvement. The interviews were utilized to identify themes and strategies fathers suggested teachers could use to engage fathers. As outlined by Creswell (2011), for standard open-ended models, each interview was face-to-face with the researcher, if possible, and the interview was recorded using an audio recording device. If a face-to-face interview was not possible, a telephone interview was conducted. In addition to audiotaping, observational notes were taken during each interview in order to capture the nonverbal aspect of the interviews. In-depth interviews present a way to discover details about individual lives and the context in which they make decisions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

### *Data Collection*

Surveys were utilized for sample selection of father participants and to collect supporting data for father interviews. Surveys were the only source of data collection for teacher participants in this study. A collection box was placed at the entrance of each of the four schools for the population of fathers and teachers to submit their completed surveys. Fathers and teachers were given two (2) weeks to return their surveys. The researcher collected the boxes and completed surveys from each school and secured them offsite.

The researcher conducted one-to-one interviews with fathers who volunteered to be interviewed for further questions and analysis for the purposes of this study. Interview transcripts were reviewed and analyzed for recurring themes. The utilization of in-depth interviews allowed data saturation, which provided the researcher rich data to develop themes relating to fathers point of view regarding their responsibility in the involvement of their child's education. Names of the interview participants are confidential and all identifying information was addressed by the researcher. For the purpose of this study, interview participants and their children were provided with pseudonyms. Children were not part of the interview process, but fathers utilized the name of their child in the interview process. The researcher conducted the interview at a designated time and location convenient to the father. Results were analyzed for themes and reported in the findings of this study.

### *Trustworthiness*

Determining the validity of a qualitative study involves checking for accuracy of the results. Creswell and Miller (2000) suggested that trustworthiness is affected by the role of a researcher and his or her insight to the validity in the study and a personal choice of paradigm assumption. Identifying one or more strategies is useful when checking for accuracy of results.

Multiple strategies should increase the ability of the researcher to verify the accuracy of the results and convince the reader of the authenticity. Peer review and member checking will be utilized by the researcher to validate the study (Creswell, 2013).

#### *Statement of Researcher Bias*

The researcher has been in education since 2002 as a teacher, principal, and district administrator. The researcher also has served as a father since 2010. The closeness to the study topic has the potential of creating both positive and negative research bias. Putting aside personal bias and subjectively increased the trustworthiness of the study. The strength of validity in qualitative research is based on whether the results are accurate from the point of view of the researcher and participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Terms, such as authentic, trustworthy, and credible are associated with qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000) and are topics that are discussed often (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

#### *Credibility*

The interview questions offered fathers the opportunity to express themselves in a way ordinary life rarely affords them, with someone who was interested in what they had to say while attempting to keep their identity anonymous. The questions were specific and not complex (Creswell, 2013). Interviews took place in a public place. Participants were asked the same interview questions and in the same order. The interview questions asked of all respondents were asked in the same order to reduce potential bias and increase the comparability of responses (Cohen et al., 2011). Maintaining a consistent pattern during the interviews allowed for reliable reporting of the results. Joppe (2000) defined the term reliability as

“The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable” (p. 1).

Handwritten notes taken during interviews help to correctly interpret audio-recorded interview transcripts, ensuring there are no mistakes while reporting the results and that there is no misunderstanding with terms and the meanings used during the interviews (Gibbs, 2012). A comparison was established using the documented notes and recorded participant information obtained during the interview process, being certain not to confuse or take the meaning of words out of context, reporting only what was said (Creswell, 2013). The handwritten notes also served as a means to provide security to all fathers in the event of a mechanical failure with the audio recording device. The audio recordings were transcribed immediately following the interview process. Respondents were assured that their words would be treated responsibly as a result of the recordings and that they had the right to refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any point.

Member checking, as requested, was used in the final report whereby the report was examined by the participants to determine if the notes and responses reported were accurate (Creswell, 2017). This allowed the researcher to establish an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and express details that lent to the credibility of the procedures used during the interview process.

### *Ethical Considerations*

The researcher provided a code of ethics to the participants that included the purpose of the study and a confidentiality clause. Patton (2014) asserted that it is essential for researchers to address ethical issues in qualitative research because of the naturalistic inquiries from the real world. Participants were assured confidentiality and anonymity for their responses to questions in the interview or on the survey. The participants were informed their participation was voluntary and that they may quit at any time, whether in completing the survey or during the

interview. The completed surveys returned by fathers served as evidence of informed consent (Fink, 2003). Creswell (2011) stated that all participants and the domains of the research sites must be respected because ethical issues arise in the process of collecting data. All information and data obtained from the surveys and interviews will be securely locked in a file cabinet for a period of seven years, at which time all collections will be destroyed.

### *Population*

Fathers and teachers of four public elementary schools was the population for this study. The study was conducted in East Tennessee during the 2016-2017 academic school year. The schools represented in this data consisted of 1644 students and 127 teachers, in grades K through 4<sup>th</sup>. From the population, a sample of fathers and teachers was selected.

### *Sample*

Based on the father survey instrument, sixteen fathers were selected to participate in the interview process. A father was selected based on the voluntarily placement of their name and phone number at the bottom of the completed survey. Four fathers were selected from each of the four elementary schools in this study.

### *Sampling Strategy*

The sampling method was maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation sampling supports examples of race, class, gender, and individual variations; however, this researcher exercised the theoretical freedom to elect samples that represent phenomenal variation. Coyne (1997) details phenomenal variation as variation of the target phenomenon under study. Using the four quadrants (see *Figure 3*), four fathers from each quadrant were interviewed for data saturation. Maximum variation sampling supports examples of race, class, gender, and individual variations.

		Low	High
Student Achievement	Low	≤ 40%	≤ 50%
	High	≥ 60%	≥ 70%

PTO/PTA Membership

Figure 3. Student achievement and PTO/PTA membership data for 2014-2015.

The Tennessee State Report Card was used to determine the proficiency status on the Math and Reading Language Arts (RLA) Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) test. Proficiency included those students who scored either proficient or advanced on one or both of the TCAP tests. TCAP data was used from the 2014-2015 school year because this was the last information available by the State of Tennessee, as of November 30, 2016, and due to the fact the 2015-2016 TNReady student assessment was abandoned by the State mid-year for excessive complications. PTO/PTA membership was determined on the following criteria: less than 11 active members resulted in a low status, whereas, more than 11 active members resulted in a high status.

The low-low (LL) group had less than 11 active members in their PTO/PTA and less than 40% students experiencing proficiency on either the Math or RLA TCAP test. The low-high (LH) group had more than 11 active members in their PTO/PTA and less than 50% students experiencing proficiency on either the Math or RLA TCAP test. The high-low (HL) group had less than 11 active members in their PTO/PTA and more than 60% students experiencing proficiency on either the Math or RLA TCAP test. The high-high (HH) had more than 11



members in their PTO/PTA and more than 70% students experiencing proficiency on either the Math or RLA TCAP test.

Father participants were selected based on their willingness to participate in the survey and interview. Teacher participants were those who submitted completed surveys. Identifying factors such as academic history, employment, race, or other unique individual characteristics were not used to select either a staff member or a father. Staff members included both men and women, currently employed by the school district. Fathers included those men who identified themselves as a care-taking male in one of the four schools surveyed. The researcher sampled both staff and fathers from low achieving to high achieving schools, and from low participation in PTO activities to high participation.

### *Setting*

The physical setting for this study was suburban community in East Tennessee. The surveys were distributed and collected in February 2017 and the interviews took place in March 2017.

School A represents the LL group, where less than 11 members were actively involved in the PTO/PTA and less than 40% of students experienced proficiency on either the Math or RLA TCAP test. According to the 2014-2015 Tennessee State Report Card, School A had 45.2% of their students' proficient or advanced on the Math TCAP test and 29.4% on the RLA TCAP test. School A had 399 students enrolled with a 98.7% free and reduced population. Thirty-two teachers were employed at School A in the 14-15 school year. Six (6) to seven (7) members were actively involved in the school's PTO/PTA in the 2016-2017 school year.

School B represents the LH group, where more than 11 members were actively involved in the PTO/PTA and less than 50% of students experienced proficiency on either the Math or

RLA TCAP test. According to the 2014-2015 Tennessee State Report Card, School B had 63.1% of their students' proficient or advanced on the Math TCAP test and 47% on the RLA TCAP test. School B had 378 students enrolled with a 62.7% free and reduced population. Twenty-nine teachers were employed at School B in the 14-15 school year. Twelve (12) to sixteen (16) members were actively involved in the school's PTO/PTA in the 2016-2017 school year.

School C represents the HL group, where less than 11 members were actively involved in the PTO/PTA and more than 60% of students experienced proficiency on either the Math or RLA TCAP test. According to the 2014-2015 Tennessee State Report Card, School C had 63.6% of their students' proficient or advanced on the Math TCAP test and 51.8% on the RLA TCAP test. School C had 446 students enrolled with a 51.3% free and reduced population. Thirty-four teachers were employed at School C in the 14-15 school year. Ten (10) members were actively involved in the school's PTO/PTA in the 2016-2017 school year.

School D represents the HH group, where more than 11 members were actively involved in the PTO/PTA and more than 70% of students experienced proficiency on either the Math or RLA TCAP test. According to the 2014-2015 Tennessee State Report Card, School C had 72.7% of their students' proficient or advanced on the Math TCAP test and 58.5% on the RLA TCAP test. School D had 421 students enrolled with a 44.7% free and reduced population. Thirty-two teachers were employed at School D in the 14-15 school year. Twelve (12) to fifteen (15) members were actively involved in the school's PTO/PTA in the 2016-2017 school year.

#### *Data Management*

Survey instruments were filed by school, separated by father and teacher. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the fathers. The audio files were transcribed. Audio files were destroyed upon completion of transcription of each interview. Participant names for this

study were coded with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Transcriptions were coded with the appropriate matching participant pseudonym. Interview material was transcribed from its original recorded form into a readable format ready for analysis (Ary et al., 2013) and placed separately in marked folders for each of the respondents. All instruments and data collected will be stored by the researcher for seven years.

Since research is always obtrusive, the researcher needs to ensure that the rights, needs, privacy and consideration for the participants are addressed (Creswell, 2003). In consideration of participants, interview participants who requested, received a copy of the interview transcription via electronic mail to review and insure that the transcript accurately reflected the appropriate dialogue and meaning (Creswell, 2003).

#### *Data Analysis*

Survey information was reviewed and analyzed for recurring themes, from both father and teacher perspectives. Thematic analysis was conducted on surveys, identifying the barriers, opportunities, and challenges perceived for both the father and teacher. Father surveys were utilized to form lists, explanations, and descriptions using open-ended questions. The father surveys were used as supporting evidence to the interviews and research questions 1, 2, 3, and 4. Teacher surveys were utilized to collect data for the support of research questions 4, 5, and 6.

Through the analysis of data, the researcher developed an understanding for the motivations, actions, and constraints fathers face when it comes to the education of their children. Transcriptions from the father interviews were conducted, line-by-line, for some of the questions, while others were analyzed on an axial basis. According to Creswell (2011), the process of coding involves categorizing and organizing qualitative data. The coding process involved categorizing data, such as phrases, words, recurring themes, sequence of events, or

transformation from one status to another (Ary et al., 2013; Creswell, 2011). The way respondents explain and describe their actions will be captured and then represented in the study by use of direct quotations, paraphrasing, and thick description (Creswell, 2013).

### *Summary*

This chapter contained the methodology, data collection, and analysis used to support the research questions guiding this study. Phenomenological study methodology was utilized to understand the perceptions of two populations: fathers and teachers. Information from surveys was utilized to identify volunteers, perceptions, and supporting data related to the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of father involvement in elementary schools. The focus of the study was to allow the researcher to develop a greater understanding of perceptions of father involvement, from both a father and teacher perspective. On average, American fathers spend less than 15 minutes daily interacting with their children (Barnes, Bryson, & Smith, 2006). Children whose fathers were involved in their education showed higher educational achievement and occupational mobility relative to their parents (Sarkadi et al., 2008).

Data was collected from teachers and fathers through surveys and interviews. Information gathered through the administration of the father survey was utilized for supporting data for father interviews. Specific content areas of the survey included communication, activities fathers engaged in, training opportunities provided at the school, parent conferences, when events were offered, availability, and suggestions for school staff. Interviews were used to solicit more in-depth information from fathers and to develop an understanding of their involvement. The in-depth interviews were conducted with 16 fathers of elementary aged schoolchildren.

Pseudonyms were given to protect the confidentiality of the 16 fathers and their children.

The study was utilized to collect data that was used by the researcher to explore teacher perceptions of an involved father and how teachers communicated with fathers. Specific content areas of the survey included communication, activities fathers engaged in, training opportunities provided at the school, use of data, parent conferences, when events were offered, invitations, and teachers wishes. Six research questions guided this study:

- R<sub>1</sub>. How do fathers perceive their involvement in the education of their child?
- R<sub>2</sub>. How do fathers perceive they communicate with teachers?
- R<sub>3</sub>. How do fathers perceive teachers communicate with them?
- R<sub>4</sub>. How are school activities designed to engage fathers in the educational experience of a child?
- R<sub>5</sub>. What are teacher perceptions of what it means to be a father involved in the education of a child?
- R<sub>6</sub>. How do teachers communicate with fathers?

This chapter provides descriptive data, data analysis, and results of this study.

### *Descriptive Data*

This qualitative study utilized data from four elementary schools in an East Tennessee school district. Data was used to describe the perceptions of father involvement in elementary schools. Elementary schools in this particular district served students in grades kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

### *Participants*

This study collected information with surveys, from fathers and teachers, and interviews of fathers only. A total number of 52 teacher surveys were returned for descriptive data, data analysis, and used in the results for this study. A total number of 174 father surveys were returned for descriptive data, data analysis, and used in the results for this study.

A total of 42 fathers were identified as potential candidates for the interview portion of this research study. Sixteen agreed to a one-to-one interview. The sixteen participants who were interviewed had a total of 34 children, of which 21 were in elementary schools within this school district. The other 13 were not elementary school aged. The ages of the fathers ranged from 24 to 68 years old. Demographic data (see Table 1) include pseudonyms, age, number of children and

how many were in elementary school, educational rights, and highest level of education attained by each father.

Table 1

*Demographic Data of the Participants*

Pseudonym	Age	# of children (ages)	Elementary School Aged		Custodial Status	Highest level of education
			#	Grade		
Robert	68	4 (46, 39, 10, & 5)	1	4 <sup>th</sup>	Custodial	B.A.
Chip	33	3 (6, 3, & 1)	1	K	Custodial	A.S.
Steve	37	2 (6 & 18)	1	1 <sup>st</sup>	Custodial	A.S.
Richard	36	3 (6, 3, & 1)	1	1 <sup>st</sup>	Custodial	A.S.
Jimmy	40	2 (12 & 9)	1	4 <sup>th</sup>	Custodial	B.S.
Michael	41	2 (4 & 6)	1	K	Custodial	Ed.S.
Darryl	35	2 (8 & 10)	1	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Custodial	H.S.
D.J.	43	2 (8 & 10)	2	2 <sup>nd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup>	Custodial	H.S.
Drake	38	2 (8 & 11)	1	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Custodial	B.S.
Joe	40	2 (7 & 7)	2	1 <sup>st</sup> & 1 <sup>st</sup>	Custodial	B.S.
Chet	43	1 (8)	1	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Custodial	B.S.
Ron	37	2 (5 & 7)	2	K & 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Custodial	B.S.
Ben	28	2 (8 & 9)	2	3 <sup>rd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup>	Custodial	B.S.
Max	39	2 (7 & 9)	2	2 <sup>nd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup>	Custodial	M.S.
Sam	37	2 (7 & 10)	1	2 <sup>nd</sup> & 5 <sup>th</sup>	Custodial	Ed.S.
Walter	24	1 (6)	1	1 <sup>st</sup>	Custodial	GED

**Robert**

Robert was 68 years old, college educated, and was “both a father and grandfather.” His two older children were “grown and moved out.” He was legally the father of the 5 and 10 year old residing with him and his wife. Robert and his wife were both retired leaving their schedules “more flexible.” He explained that he “was not as involved with my first children” and “age and situation have a lot to do with it.” He loved to “review the folder” each day, asking “how their day was, and listening to them discuss and fuss about the day.” He said “my child needs to decompress when they get home from working all day in school.” Each year, the family tried to

take a trip to “explore different parts of America” and hoped the learning “sticks” as they visited different places.

Robert explained that his involvement included “walking the kids into the school, going to book fairs, and attending parent conferences.” He did not attend PTO meetings because he does “not care for it.” He said, “If the teacher needs something, we will be glad to help.” Pressed on what it was about PTO, he explained it was “too much organization and fundraisers.” He truly wants “what is best for my children” and feels like electronic communication is great between home and school. If something is going on at school, “my wife goes to more than I because she operates better in that venue.” Robert wanted educators to consider “how to make the uneducated fathers and those working two jobs in today’s society feel welcome.” He said “they also need to be included in communications somehow.” He believed that his children are attending a “great school system,” have “phenomenal teachers” and that is why the “children will do just fine.”

Robert only remembered his father attending football games when he was older. His father worked a “swing shift” in the factory, and only “took off for the ball game.” He even recalled, “I do not even remember him looking at my report card.” His mother was able to stay at home and was “always at the school” volunteering. He feels supported by feedback from the teacher when his child is having difficulty on something, but is “challenged with the advancing stages” of technology, only learning now “what I need to know.” He loved “to learn” and had almost acquired a second degree, but “never completed the thesis to acquire my Master’s degree.” Robert said his responsibilities as a father included “providing stability to the household and providing an environment to learn.”



## **Chip**

Chip was 33 years old and held an associate's degree for his current position with a civil engineering firm. He and his wife had relocated to the area, from Ohio, with their three young children, ages one, three, and six. He loved to ask his child "about their day" and made them "expand upon answers when they do not say much." Chip said "I try to talk to my children as much as possible," despite his work schedule and "maintaining my expectations" at the local gym. Upon returning home from the gym, he said he would have his child "re-read the book to me that (child) read to mom." On weekends and breaks, the family liked "to do short trips to the park, take hikes, play outdoors, go to museums, and have fun at Dollywood."

Chip explained that his involvement included "picking up the kids and practicing sight words at home" when he could. He said "I have attended the book fair and one PTO meeting." Due to "my work schedule," and working "50-60 hours" a week, he is "not available to do more and mom takes on the main duties of homework, packing lunches, and baths." When mom works her part-time job at night, it becomes a challenge "juggling 3 kids" and doing "all those duties" he is accustomed to her doing. Chip said he and his wife "feel confident in the school system" and moved here because it was a "great school system" and had "phenomenal teachers."

Chip's father was a truck driver and was never involved in the home. To this day, Chip said "my father will tell people he never even changed a diaper." Chip remembered going to "my grandparents' house after school," each day, to do homework and "working with my grandfather around the farm." Most of "my fondest memories with a male role model are with my grandfather." He said his grandfather was the one who "taught me how to build and take care of things." Chip's mother worked at a local bank, and was "unavailable to attend functions" during the day. He feels supported by feedback from the teacher when his child needed "more practice"

at home, especially on “sight words.” He was “challenged with my work schedule” when it came to supporting the educational pursuits of his children. Chip said his responsibilities included “giving stability to the household, showing what an honest work ethic means, and providing for the family.”

### **Steve**

Steve was 37 years old, former military, and married to a woman with a child from a previous relationship. He was the father of the 6 year old, residing with the mother of both children living in one house. Steve enjoyed “asking my child how their day was,” prodding when they would answer “nothing”, and “encouraging them” to try and “find the positives when they did not like something that was due for homework.” Steve’s availability was “limited” due to working two jobs and even stated “it will become a shortfall.” He said “I know the weekend needs to be a break,” but it was the only time Steve had to “do homework” with his child.

Steve explained that his involvement at the school was “limited based on my work schedule, but if I were off I would volunteer.” He had “always kept jobs to keep me close to home” and “wanted to be different than how I was raised.” Steve said his father was a “traveling electrician” and “never attended anything” school related when he was growing up. His responsibilities as a father included “showing the importance of school, discipline, and structure” because, as he stated his “wife does not like to lay down rules and stick to them.” Steve wanted “more notice for parent-teacher conferences” and to “have them in the evenings instead of the day.” He also said schools should consider “holding more events just for dads” or something like “what Home Depot does” on the first Saturday of each month, where the parent and child completed a project together.

Steve “appreciated when the teacher sent notes home” telling the parents “what flash cards to review or gives instructions on how to complete unfinished work.” His frustration was he often “sees it too late.” He and his wife relied “on the school to provide support to the child” and their needs. He said his challenges included overcoming the fact that “my wife does not value education.” Other challenges Steve faced in supporting his child included “patience, work schedule, and trying to keep up with it all.” He received “50-100 emails per day” and stated “everybody needs something.” Top that with “so much more is expected outside of school pertaining to education and finding the time” he found it difficult “prioritizing” things. Steve was frustrated that one day his oldest and his biological child “will realize I did not finish my nursing degree.” He hoped that his children “will do as I say, and not as I did” when following their dreams and not “dropout because they want to earn money and have a girlfriend too.”

### **Richard**

Richard was 36 years old, worked at a manufacturing plant, and drove “30 minutes each way” to work. His schedule included working “6 days a week.” He often missed seeing his children as he was “up and out the door before the kids were awake,” and home about 6pm each evening. He and his wife resided with their 3 children (6, 3, & 1.5 years old). He said he “tries to pick my child up at school,” which “was rare” if he ever got off early. Most evenings he came home to ask, “How was your day?” He did try to “read with my child” and do any homework, if any, but surrendered that “mom stays home and all the heavy lifting is done before I get home.” Richard loves “that my child wants to learn about everything” and attributed that to the teacher. He said “the teacher connects so well” with the students, “my child does not need me” when it came to education.

Richard explained that his involvement in the school primarily was through email. If behavior issues arose, “I contact either the teacher or vice-principal through email.” He said “this year we had not needed to like last year,” but he knew he could if necessary. He did attend the “Open House” at the beginning of the year, but did not “participate in anything else.” Asked how teachers and administrators could support his involvement, he stated, “It’s my responsibility to find the time to do things with my (child).” Because his child attended a “great school” and has had “great teachers,” Richard said he did not “need to be the provider to education.” He believed it was “the intangibles that make or break a childhood” and “my child’s school is the right fit.”

Richard’s father was a pilot who was “never around and called occasionally.” His mom and dad divorced when he was three. After the divorce, “it became physically impossible to see each other” because he and his dad “lived on opposite sides of the U.S.” He felt supported by the feedback from the teacher and vice-principal when “my child was having some behavioral difficulties.” He never “felt attacked” and actually “appreciated how they approached” the situation with “here is what we can do” and “here is how you can support from home.” Richard is “challenged by my work schedule” and knowing “my child has to approach other adults” for help or support. However, he was emphatic that “I will not dumb it down” because he does not “speak to my (child) as a child.” Richard said his other responsibilities included three things: “how to stay safe, how to stay healthy and teaching my child right from wrong.”

### **Jimmy**

Jimmy was 40 years old, a working professional, with a bachelor’s degree. He resided with his wife and two children, ages 9 and 12. He did not “have time to discuss school” with his child and said the reason he got married, was “for my wife to take care of the kids.” He said if “my (child) has an issue at school, the school can deal with it” because his children did not have

issues at home. He did say his child was “a good kid.” His availability consisted of him attending “Open House and Christmas” programs. He said when it came to his children,

“I provide the resources for them to be safe, comfortable, and fed each day. They are fortunate they do not have to ride the bus as their mom can take them and pick them up each day. In the evening, we sit down for dinner and then I will either go work on stuff or go watch tv.”

Jimmy explained that his involvement in the school included “pay the fees they require” and “going over if I have an issue.” He “leaves school to my wife” as he said, “she takes care of that scene.” He had “no desire to get involved” and did not know of any support they offered in regards to teaching, learning, techniques, or family assistance. He said, “The school does their thing.” Jimmy wanted educators to consider “being more selective in who attends school, make father’s be more responsible for their children, and have them get jobs to teach their children about responsibility.”

Jimmy’s father never participated or attended any of his school functions as a child, but did make time when “I showed animals” at the fair. He said, “It is a social scene and status thing for families to win best of class divisions.” His mother “worked at the church” so she would volunteer when events took place. He felt supported that the school will “prevail with their education,” but challenged in “talking to them about kids who are different from us and who act out in class.” He did not believe they “had enough” money, but knew his kids will be “fine” because they were “abled body enough to work when they get older.” Jimmy said his responsibility as a father was to “provide the basics.” “That is what a father is supposed to do.”

## **Michael**

Michael was 41 years old, served as an educator, and had an advanced degree. He and his wife had two children, ages 4 and 6. He loved to “discuss school daily” with his two children by “encouraging them to try their best and that it was ok to miss problems as long as they tried.” He

spent time talking to his children about being “nice to others, eating all of their lunch, being respectful to adults, and asking each what was the best part of their days.” On weekends and breaks, Michael would “take my kids to Home Depot” project days, have them assist with “little chores around the house, go to yard sales,” go to different events and functions, and “explore” other cultural opportunities. Each year, the family took “a trip to the beach” where the kids could “explore the wonders of the ocean.”

Michael explained that his involvement included “lunch with of my child at least once a week,” volunteering in the classroom as needed, “going to the book fairs, and attending the parent conferences.” He did not attend PTO meetings because he was “involved in my own heavily.” He knew his children “will do well and have an awesome opportunity” in the school system because of “the great teachers.” He did share a frustration and “the teacher always texting my wife for everything.” “When the classroom needs something, when my child is not feeling well, or if there seems to be cute picture taken” the teacher did not seem to ever “include me, and I am right here supporting her.” Michael wanted educators to consider “making contact, communicating, and making men feel welcome” when a father actually tried. “If I feel this way, with how much I try to participate, I could not imagine what it would be like for those who choose to do nothing.”

Michael was a military brat and had a father who was deployed often, and did not remember his father attending many school functions. His mom and dad divorced and he and his father became “separated by distance” and location. As a result of the divorce, his mother had to “support the family” and became less involved in Michael’s education. He felt supported by the feedback he “gets from walking my child in or picking them up from school,” each day, but was challenged with things like “finding time to do more and spend more time with them,”

“reviewing daily materials and reading each night,” and “balancing the work load and demands of home ownership and church.” Michael said his responsibilities as a father included “teaching his children respect, courtesy, manners, sportsmanship, and discipline” He also said he was responsible for “providing for my family, teach his kids to give back, and to show value in learning.”

### **Darryl**

Darryl was 35 years old, former military, and was only “home on the weekends” because he drove a semi-truck in the regional area. Darryl’s daily encounters with his 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders was mostly “through Face Time,” especially “on the road.” He enjoyed “asking questions about their Math,” although he explained it was “challenging to me” because “it does not look the same when I was in school.” When Darryl was home on the weekends “I enjoy spending time with my children,” especially taking them “camping and fishing.”

Darryl explained that his involvement at the school was “non-existent due to my work schedule.” He did “try to make it to the holiday programs,” when there was one, and “wished” there were weekend programs. He stopped short of “asking teachers to do more” because he said “some of those teachers do an awesome job at doing so much for our children now.” He explained it was “just the one’s running out the door before the kids’ leave I would like to get a word with.” Darryl’s father worked in the “Pennsylvania steel mills” and was “never” home. “Mom was able to stay at home and went to everything we did or asked her to attend. She played both mom and dad at school and home for us.”

Darryl said his responsibilities as a father included “supplying kids with the tools to learn, making sure they learned, and making money.” He worked in the oil fields after leaving the Army and “drives long hours today” to make enough money to “sacrifice my home time for

her (wife) to stay home.” Darryl wanted the teachers to consider how to “connect with kids who live in homes where one parent is gone for long periods of time, how to encourage fathers to get involved in their child’s life, and how to communicate with the growing number of grandparents who are taking care of kids these days.” Challenges that Darryl was faced with in supporting his children included the “amount of time away from home, the amount of responsibility and pressure placed upon my wife each day, and the lack of communication with the school.”

### **D.J.**

D.J. was 43 years old, a sales representative, and lived with his wife and two children. He and his wife waited “later in life to have children.” D.J. enjoyed having a “flexible schedule” where he could ask his children “about school every day.” He prided himself in “discussing school every day when they come home” and would work to “learn anything I can.” He would “prompt them when they get stuck, but set high expectations too” for them “to come home with straight A’s.” His role as a sales representative allowed D.J. to be available most anytime, and he attended “almost all activities” his children were involved in.

D.J. explained that his involvement at the school was “very important to me and my children.” He said that “at plays, I see mostly both parents,” yet at safety patrol meetings, “a bunch of mothers.” He believed “men need to change their mind about the roles we play today,” in terms of “involvement and responsibilities” when it came to children and education. D.J. said his father “was not involved” because his mom and dad got a divorce when he was young. “Dad lived far away and mom had to work. I just made a choice to be different for my kids.”

D.J.’s responsibilities as a father included “the basics” such as making sure his children were “clothed, fed, bathed, loved, and taken care of.” He also said it was his responsibility to make sure they “do well in school.” D.J. did not really have anything for the teachers to consider,



just added that “fathers are not typically involved anyway, it is a problem in society in general.” D.J. did not know of any support or training offered by the school to help parents, but had not needed any himself. As for challenges, he said “everything was good” in terms of supporting the educational pursuits of his children.

### **Drake**

Drake was a “highly motivated” 38 year old father, who owned his business, and lived with his wife and two children, ages 8 and 11. Drake enjoyed “to discuss school” with his children “not just for the academic side” of things, but also for things such as their “daily interactions with other children, their personal performance for certain teachers or with particular subjects, and to see what they were looking forward to.” Drake described his availability as “always” and said because of his role in the business, he was able to attend most events. He said “during school hours, it is always women and me at the events. After school, a few more dads will come and support their children.”

Drake raved about his involvement at the school and loved “reading to the classroom every week.” He “loved connecting” with other children and felt “by being an involved parent I am showing how important and valued my children are.” Drake came from a family who had “very involved” parents. Both his mother and father “were actively engaged in my upbringing” at home and in his educational experiences, which “I believe established the foundation for the father I am today.” He felt supported from the school and attributed that to “my active involvement and communication.”

Drake’s responsibilities included “modeling appropriate behavior, helping my children become good productive adults, and setting high expectations.” Drake completed his bachelor’s degree and moved from Southern California, with his family, and shared about being an “active

member of WATCH DOGS (Dads of Great Students).” This program “sought out fathers who would volunteer one day per year to actively be on the campus of their child.” The thought was “having a man walking around campus had an influence of taking care of students.”

## **Joe**

Joe was a “blessed” 40 year old father, who resided with his wife and two children, while working for a financial institution. Joe enjoyed having “routines each night” with his family, especially having “dinner at the table” where he could “talk to my children about their day, who they sat with at lunch, what they talked about on the playground, what they learned new.” He enjoyed “looking over their work” and tried to learn the new concepts as “education had changed” since he was in school. Joe said his availability was “flexible if I have enough notice,” and always attended “the important ones” at the school. He took advantage of not having to work on the weekends and “usually plan something fun with the family.”

Joe explained that his father was “only involved in coaching type” roles, as him and his brother both played 3 sports and kept good grades. He said:

“My dad was an electrician and maintained a farm. He did not have to motivate us for school. We had the desire to learn more. He wanted to push us harder on the playing field and would be there for practices and games. He never missed those. I do not remember him at anything else though.”

Joe shared that he “made a pact with myself to be different” when he had children, to be different from his father, and “to be more involved and active” in the lives of his children.

Joe said his responsibilities included “taking my children to church, teaching my children right from wrong, and helping them in any way I can.” He did not know of any specific trainings that the school offered to help support him with his children, but he was “very thankful for the services” they provided in helping one of his children to “overcome a speech impediment.” He

did not have any challenges at this time in supporting the educational pursuits of his children, but wished he knew “what I could do to get more fathers involved in their kids’ lives.”

### **Chet**

Chet was 43 years old, self-employed, and a “simple” father who enjoyed “doing everything” with his 8 year old child. Chet enjoyed “discussing homework, reading together, and working on multiplication facts.” He described his household routines as “the same.” He said “dinner is together every night and before bed, we have a fun read.” Chet served “both the mom and dad” roles, while his wife and mother of their child, worked for a government agency that kept her “away from home.” He created a “spot within my office for (child) to go to work with me in the event something came up or was unable to go to school.” Chet described his availability as “plentiful.” “If there was a scale of 100, I would be a 110”, he said. He prided himself on “being able to walk my child to school every day.”

Chet explained that his involvement in the school included going “to all the programs.” Since he owned his business, his schedule was “flexible” to attend “all school functions.” He also took his child to “violin lessons and (omitted) Scouts” each week. Chet said he did not do PTO because there were “not enough hours in the day.” Chet said his father ran a business, much like his, but that he was “never involved” in his schooling or education. “Dad was always working” was the excuse he got growing up and it resonated inside him. Chet said he “made a choice to trade time with my child for money,” especially in the situation “where my wife” was currently. He did say “my priorities might change” when his child gets older.

Chet felt supported by the school, especially at “the early ages when they send home the extra practice material and laminated sheets.” He felt this “partnership was more successful” because he “forged a positive relationship with the teacher” and asked, “What can I do at home?”

He did not share any challenges, but said “that will change once his child gets older.” He wishes “more fathers” would get involved in the lives of their children and thought “if teachers and schools will give more advanced notice, maybe they will come.” Chet described his responsibilities as “keeping routines, teaching hygiene, the protector, and being the role model.”

## **Ron**

Ron was 37 years old, former military, and a college graduate who was working for a security firm. He and his wife resided with their two children, ages 5 and 7. Ron enjoyed “talking to my children as much as possible” about things they had “done in class, what they talked about in class or on the playground.” Ron’s availability was “challenging” because “I am often called away from home to secure buildings and areas.” He was frustrated that there was “not enough time in the day to balance work, play, and family.” When he was able to take time off, he enjoyed “taking my family hiking and camping.”

Ron explained that his involvement at the school was “limited due to my role at work”, but that he was “thankful I can make enough money to allow my wife to stay at home to do all the big and little things for our children.” Ron’s father was a contractor and was “never involved” in the school or athletic parts of his life. He commented that “my dad had routines and still to this day will not change his schedule for his kids or grandkids.”

Ron said his responsibilities included “protecting my family, providing for my family, and making sure my kids know right from wrong.” He did not know of any training opportunities offered at the school to assist him in helping his child with their schoolwork, but conceded he did not know “if I would have the time to attend anyway.” Ron wanted educators to consider “helping fathers to find balance and ways to engage their kids and providing outside the box type

activities on weekends, breaks, or over the summer that purposefully partner fathers with their child in meaningful activities.”

## **Ben**

Ben was a 28-year-old engineer, a college graduate, and married with two children, ages 8 and 9. When discussing school, Ben enjoyed asking his children “if they tried their hardest each day, trying to figure out what they did or did not understand.” He said he was more concerned with “comprehension than grades.” His children seemed “to do fine” on their work, something he said “both me and my wife felt a sense of accomplishment” as they grew up too. Ben described himself as “very available” to his children, although he never attended any school functions. He made himself available to his children “via phone when on a road trip” to “check-in” and to see how his kids were doing.

Ben offered no explanation to why he was not involved in the school, just said that “work keeps me so busy.” His role was “very important” and he felt it would “provide for a nice future for me and my family.” Ben’s biological dad lived in another state, which eliminated any opportunity of seeing him. His mom had re-married several times, after the divorce to Ben’s father when he was a baby. Even today, “I do not have a relationship or communicate with my father.” Ben said his responsibilities as a father were “to provide a house over their head, food to eat, and to teach my kids to be more successful than myself.”

Ben’s challenges in supporting the educational pursuits of his children included “my personal choices of career over assisting them with their homework” or being available to “teach them responsibility.” He loved the school his children attended and felt supported, but knew of no training opportunities. Ben admitted he “would not have time” anyway, but does “wish teachers could find ways to get parents engaged in their child’s education.” He offered several

suggestions for educators to consider when soliciting father involvement, which included asking a father “Do you love your kid?” He also said “show ways they can support their child, and track data points with who actually shows up for parent conferences.”

## **Max**

Max was 39 years old, a college graduate, and served as an educator. He and his wife resided with their two children, ages 7 and 9. He loved “talking about school” daily with his children, and having “them come to my school to participate in the fun things going on there” too. He strived “to make it home early enough” each night, to “assist with homework and play” with the kids, although certain times of the year proved to be more of a challenge due to his role in education. Max loved to take his children on weekends and breaks to “pancake breakfasts, museums, parks, and camping.” His children “love to get out and explore.” He said it was “something I learned from my dad” when he was a young boy.

Max explained that his involvement at the school of his children included attending “mostly the evening functions, although sometimes I can arrange my schedule to have lunch” because they were at the same school. He said “my children are doing well in school” and he had no concerns with “where they are at academically.” Max, being an educator, knew that “good communication with the teacher and administrator were essential to having a successful relationship and helping to strengthen that foundation for my children.” Growing up, Max remembered doing things with his father. Still to this day, “we are very close and often get together to work on projects, take random trips to a movie, or attend a sporting event.” Max attributed that to “my involvement and engagement” to his own children today.

Max said his responsibilities included “providing for my family, making sure my kids know right from wrong, and giving them every opportunity to explore cultures in a world outside

of their own.” He did not know of any specific training opportunities offered at the school, but knew that “if any father needed help all they have to do is ask.” He added:

“If parents would build a positive relationship with the teacher instead of being in attack mode all the time we can move mountains together. I wish parents could see the tone or the way they write letters sometimes. It is not always positive.”

Max wanted educators, including himself, to “target fathers with the use of food” and children, and “encourage their attendance.” He believed “children are starving for the attention” and it was “up to us to find a way to get them involved.”

### **Sam**

Sam was 37 years old, served as an educator, and had an advanced degree. He and his wife had two children, ages 7 and 10. He loved having “nightly discussions” with his children and “checking their work, looking through their folders, encouraging them to try their best, finding out about what they talked about, who they liked, and what the latest gossip in the hallway was.” On weekends and breaks, Sam would take the “family to the beach” or on short trips, trying to “free my mind” from his role in the field. He enjoyed taking his children to their evening activities and weekend programming, as well as “sporting events, hunting, fishing,” and his own school functions. In the summer, the family “takes one big vacation and sometimes pairs that with extended family.”

Sam explained that his involvement at his children’s school included the “activities in the evening.” He said “I am thankful that most are at night.” He was “unable to arrange my schedule to attend things like field days or lunch” because he would have to be willing to take an entire day off of work. He reserved those when one of the children were actually sick, or he was ill. Sam said “my children are doing well in school” and he had “no concerns” with where they were academically. Sam said he had a “great relationship” with the teachers and it “is instrumental in

their success and development in school.” Sam recalled his father always “pushing me on the athletic field, but made sure I knew playing time would not happen unless the grades were there.”

Sam said his responsibilities included “protecting my family, providing for my kids well-being, teaching them how to respect others, and giving them an opportunity to excel in a world that owes nobody.” He had not participated in any training opportunities offered at the school, but conceded he did not “know that I would have the time to attend anyway.” Sam wanted to “find ways we could incorporate hunting, fishing, and sports to get fathers to participate with children, whether their own or not, and to encourage the men to become more involved and an influence instead of a problem.”

### **Walter**

Walter was 24 years old, a high school drop-out, but had successfully completed his GED. He and his wife were resided in a “new house” with their 6-year-old child. Walter loved “playing with my baby,” spending what time “I can with my child,” and trying “to assist with schoolwork” when he could. Walter wished he “spent more time with my child and help” with schoolwork, but admitted that “school was not easy for me.” “It became difficult” that Walter ended up getting into some trouble, “found myself on the wrong path, and wound up dropping out.” He said:

“I see myself as lucky. I get to re-write my story. I hope to discourage my child from making the same mistakes I did.”

Walter explained that his involvement at the school was “limited due to needing to work two jobs to help cover the insurance, rent, bills, food, and everything else.” He really wanted to save up to “take my family on a nice trip one day.” Walter “only” attended the Open House this year, and nothing else. He did not “find school a welcoming place.” He said it was “not because



of anyone there, just from past experiences.” Walters’s story got more complicated because his parents “abandoned” him at a young age and “I became a product of the State system.” He only remembered “passing from house to house and family to family, especially when I got in so much trouble or just decided to shut down.” He did not have “contact with my biological parents even today.”

Walter said his responsibilities as a father included “taking care of my family and all their needs, making sure my child had a home where they knew they were loved and supported, and encouraging my child to do it better than me, each and every day.” He did not know of any training opportunities offered at the school, but said he “may not know the material anyway.” Walter was interested in “helping around the school to do landscaping or physical labor” to contribute, but did not feel comfortable “doing anything with academics.” Walter continued, “I would eat cheap” if that was an option, because “I want to continue to give back to a community we want our child to grow up in.”

### *Data Analysis*

The surveys were analyzed for recurring themes among fathers and teachers. In addition, interview transcripts were coded and analyzed for recurring themes among the fathers. Interviews were transcribed from the original recorded form into a readable format ready for analysis (Ary et al., 2013) and placed in separately marked folders for each of the respondents. Coding methods were used to organize the interview data. According to Creswell (2009), the process of coding involves categorizing and organizing qualitative data. The coding process involves categorizing data, such as phrases, words, recurring themes, or sequence of events (Ary et al., 2013; Creswell, 2009). Interview and survey data was organized into tables in response to the six research questions in this study to display the recurring themes.

## Results

This section is a summary of the data collected through surveys and in-depth interviews. Data was analyzed for recurring themes. Results were organized by the research questions that guided this study.

### *Research Question 1*

*How do fathers perceive their involvement in the education of their child?*

The recurring themes associated with Research Question 1 were that fathers perceive themselves to be involved in the education of their child: minimal or limited related to work, outside the school, and through the importance of daily interactions. The results (see Table 2) were based on 16 father interviews. Results based on the father survey were utilized for additional support.

Table 2

#### *Father Involvement in Education*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Minimal or limited; work related</b>	<b>Outside the school</b>	<b>Importance of daily interactions</b>
Robert		√	√
Chip	√	√	√
Steve	√		√
Richard	√		√
Jimmy	√		
Michael		√	√
Darryl	√	√	√
D.J.			√
Drake		√	√
Joe		√	√
Chet			√
Ron	√		√
Ben	√		√
Max		√	√
Sam		√	√
Walter	√		√

*Minimal or limited related to work.* Eight of the sixteen fathers (50%) perceived their involvement in the education of their child as minimal or limited due to work, as compared to the other eight fathers. During the interview, the following responses were recorded:

Chip stated:

I am honestly not available to be involved much because of my work schedule. I usually work 50-60 hours a week at my engineering firm. I have attended a book fair if that counts for anything, but mom takes on the main duties of homework, packing lunches, baths, and attending everything. I feel confident in this school system. It has phenomenal teachers and I know they will have a tremendous impact on my children. If I can provide for my family and maintain, the rest will work itself out.

Steve added:

I always kept jobs to keep me close to home. I wish I could do more at the school and am limited based on my work schedule, but if I were off, I would volunteer.

Richard stated:

I am up and out the door before (child) is awake and home around 6pm. I get to see my kids about an hour a day before they go to bed. I do not just need to be the provider to education.

Jimmy added:

My wife takes care of that scene. I am going over there only if I have an issue, but other than that I pay the fees they require. By the way, those fees are too much. I work too hard for all this money to go to supplies, clothes, shoes, and feeding this crew. My family is lucky I choose to work as much as I do.

Darryl stated:

I have tried to make it to holiday events when I am in town. I really wish the school had fun stuff I could do with my kids on the weekend, but it is not fair to ask a teacher to do more than they already are doing. Listen, I am non-existent in my children's education due to my work schedule.

Ron added:

I am able to attend special programs around the holidays, if I can get away from work. It is not any more than 1 or 2 things a year I can attend. I am very limited due to my role at work with what I can participate in. When we are shorthanded I have to go. It is good money, too. I did attend the last parent conference and we talked about progress and behavior. My wife has to keep me informed of everything. There just is not enough time in the day to balance work, play, and family.

Ben stated:

I have to be on the road for my job a lot. My kids do great in school. I never had any issues learning and they should not either. I expect they will go to college and get great jobs. That is an expectation in our house.

Walter added:

School was never a place of success for me. I did not do well with relationships or learning in school. I do not go to too much there because it is not a fun memory for me. I want my (child) to have everyone to help and not have me in the way. It is better if I just work and make money anyway. We need money to have stuff, but we also have to live. And pay these bills and things. I attended the school's Open House because I wanted to

see the inside of the school. I had never been in there. My wife does all of that stuff usually. It is easier for her and she is smarter anyway.

Based on the 174 completed father surveys, 56% of fathers perceived their involvement as limited. One father commented, "I do not get involved due to my work schedule." Another father stated, "I have time to listen to him read on the phone while I am away on business." A third father added, "Just parent conferences and help with homework sometimes. I work many hours."

*Outside the school.* Eight of the sixteen fathers (50%) perceived their involvement in the education of their child as opportunities provided outside of the school. During the interview, the following responses were recorded:

Robert stated:

My wife and I have always loved to travel. We traveled with our oldest children, and when we took legal guardianship of these two we wanted that to continue. Every year we take a trip to explore different parts of America. Honestly, we hope that the kids will learn new things and that it sticks. I know one day they will cover it in class and I want them to be able to say they have been there.

Chip added:

We have to plan our weekends with three kids. It is usually short trips to the park or playing outdoors, but sometimes we will go on hikes. My oldest has to complete assignments that allow us to go to the local museums. We always make it to Dollywood several times a year too.

Michael stated:

My boys think they are masters of thrift and junk. They will wake up every Saturday morning ready to go to yard sales. I love to take my kids to Home Depot to build the

projects too. One likes to build, the other likes the cookies, but it is up to me to train them. We get out to different activities around town, especially if they are kid friendly and free. This area and region has a lot to offer in terms of exploring and learning. We also have a strong commitment to the church on Sunday mornings.

Darryl added:

We go camping and fishing when the weather is right. I wish it could be more often, but it is fun to see their eyes light up around the campfire. There is so much to be learned outside.

Drake stated:

We enjoy taking trips as a family. Moving here from California has given us an opportunity to explore the East Coast. My kids are well traveled. It is the little things that travel teaches children that schools cannot like patience, choices, and getting along in very close quarters. I enjoy visiting historical places with my kids and educating them about events that occurred there.

Joe added:

My kids like going to the park and playing with the other kids. We usually have a house full it seems at least once a month. We like to host and have everyone here. The kids can play games and watch movies. On breaks, we like to get a cabin and get away. We go hiking and fishing. We also go into town to the aquarium and do the other attractions.

Max stated:

I believe there is a pancake breakfast in town about every week. My kids like to go because we know many of the families. I also like to take them to the State Parks to hike and to go camping. I love to get out and explore, and I am hoping they will too if I keep

the electronics out of their hands. It is fun keeping them active in the community. We go to the science museum a lot. The kids enjoy all the different activities it has to offer and my wife and I like it too.

Sam added:

My kids are always if they can go hunting and fishing with me. I took them at an early age and they continue to go with me. I love that they have a heart for the outdoors. It gives me an opportunity to spend a little more time with them, but to also make sure I teach them things like safety. When we take the family to the beach, it is always a big thing. Sometimes we pair that with our extended family and make it a big thing. The kids all love getting together and being together.

Additional support was collected from the completed father surveys. One father commented, “We go to the public library to research online about stuff. We also like going out into the woods on hikes and geocache adventures.” Another father stated, “We hike, camp, canoe, see animals in the environment, and program computer games.” A third father added, “When we are driving or walking around I teach him new things like types of communication, power lines, driving on right side of the road, speed limits, mile markers, states, capitals, expansion joints on sidewalks, signs, and buildings. I enjoy teaching hands-on, real-life, and applicable things.”

*Importance of daily interactions.* Fifteen of the sixteen fathers (94%) perceived their involvement in the education of their child through the importance of daily interactions. During the interview, the following responses were recorded:

Robert added:

When the children get home, we review the folder to see what needs to be completed. It is important to get the work done before we play. I enjoy asking them how their day was

and listening to them discuss and fuss about the day. It is funny to hear what the burning issues are with their friends. I love walking the kids into the school each day because it allows me to set the tone for the day.

Chip added:

My child does not like to say much. I always make them expand upon answers when they do not give me what I want to hear. I enjoy hearing about their day when I get home. I do not have much time before they need to be in bed, but it is important. I do try to have my child re-read the book to me that (child) read to mom.

Steve added:

I am always encouraging them to try harder even when they do not like something. I tell them life is not easy and they must always try to find the positives. It can be friends, teacher, smell, weather, homework. I make them find the positives when they do not like something that was due for homework. I have to set that expectation now. I enjoy asking my child how their day was and seeing what they did in class.

Richard added:

I am not available much, but I do enjoy getting to read with my child. They always say to read for at least 15 minutes a night with your child. I can see a difference.

Michael added:

With my two, I am always encouraging them to try their best. They are complete opposites. I have one who is competitive and one who is a perfectionist. I have to remind one that it is ok to miss problems as long as they tried. It is a hard concept to get through to a 6 year old. We do discuss school daily, though. I have to constantly remind them to be nice to others and about being respectful to adults. They are at school, but it is



important for me to remind them. The best part of my day is asking each what was the best part of their days is. Sometimes it is me picking them up. They know how to get a treat or a reward I think.

Darryl added:

I am not around much, but I am able to connect with my children through Face Time. Since I am on the road each week, I have to do fathering and school on the phone. Even though school is challenging to me, I do enjoy asking questions about their Math.

D.J. added:

We are discussing school every day when they come home. We have set high expectations in our house, but it is clear education is very important to me and my children.

Drake added:

I enjoy getting to discuss school on a daily basis with my children. And it is honestly not just for the academic side of everything. My wife and I are very much interested in their daily interactions with other children too. You can never be too safe anymore. It is also important for us to check on their personal performance for certain teachers or with particular subjects because we know they struggle at times. We all do. But keep in mind, we all want to see what they were looking forward to.

Joe added:

We are the family that still enjoys dinner at the table each night. I hear about their day and learn what is going on at the school. I am able to talk to my children about their day to see who they sat with at lunch or what they talked about on the playground. It is always interesting. Sometimes you wish you did not ask. I am also interested what they

learned new by looking over their work. Since education has changed so much, I feel like I am learning myself.

Chet added:

The things I help with the most are discussing homework, reading together, and working on multiplication facts. Our routines are the same each night. Before bed, we have a fun read just to get those last moments in before we do it all again tomorrow.

Ron added:

I know my schedule sounds challenging but I do love talking to my children as much as possible. I try to keep up with what the teacher is doing in class or what they talk about. It is important for me to try to understand what they talk about in class or on the playground.

Ben added:

I am able to check-in via phone when on a road trip, so being out of town so much does not prevent me from talking to my children. It is important for me to see if they tried their hardest each day because once you lose your motivation it is a downhill spiral from there. We are constantly trying to figure out what they did or did not understand. For me, I am more concerned with comprehension than grades.

Max added:

We are always talking about school. They cannot get away from it. I hope they do not want to be educators when they grow up, but I of course will support them with whatever they choose to do. We have our nightly discussions, which can range just about any topic you can think of.

Sam added:

Our nightly discussions can get lively. It is quite interesting what the latest gossip in the hallway is. As a father, though, I am always encouraging them to try their best.

Walter added:

I just enjoy what time I can with my child and playing with my baby. I try hard to assist with schoolwork, but school was not easy for me.

Completed father surveys provided additional support. One father commented, "I am not near as involved as my wife is with school and education. I love teaching him about life though. It is a team effort and both of us are involved in different capacities." Another father stated, "Listening to him talk, watching him play video games, and asking if he has any homework. Since he never has any, I just watch him play videos." A third father added, "Asking my son daily if he has homework how was school, and checking his work to make sure it is correct." A fourth offered, "At home, we do homework, math problems, and read together often."

### *Research Question 2*

*How do fathers perceive they communicate with teachers?*

The recurring themes associated with Research Question 2 were that fathers perceive they communicate with the teacher in three ways: as needed, positively, or through their wife. The results were based on 16 father interviews. Results from the father survey were utilized for additional support.

*As needed.* Seven of the sixteen fathers (44%) perceived they communicate with teachers as needed. During the interview, the following responses were recorded:

Steve stated:

It is hard with my work schedule and trying to keep up with it all. My life is just busy. It always seems everybody needs something, and I am sure teachers feel the same way.

When I am getting 50 to 100 emails per day, I could not imagine everything they have to weed through. I try to only get in touch with the teacher if I need to. I am thankful they communicate home. It is frustrating when I see it too late, but at least they try. Since my wife does not value education, I have to be able to use them as a resource too.

Jimmy added:

I really have no desire to get involved with the school. I wish I could afford to send them to private school, but that is not some kind of magical kingdom in and of itself either.

Schools are crazy wanting me to pay the fees they require to attend. What happened to free and public? But listen, I am going over to that school if I have an issue. I do not have time to discuss school with the teacher, but I will if there is a problem.

Richard stated:

I contact either the teacher or vice-principal through email if I need to. Fortunately, this year we have not needed to like last year, but my child had some behavior challenges last year. They handled the situation great. I never felt attacked at all as a parent. I appreciated how they approached the matter and we came up better supports for my child to be more successful in school. I feel like I can go back to them if I ever needed to again.

Michael added:

I do not send any extra messages to the teacher. She has enough on her as it is. The last thing she would need is an email or text everyday asking a question. I know if I need

something, I can get a hold of her. Even though the teacher is always texting my wife for everything, I would not add more to her plate.

Joe stated:

We are the family that still enjoys dinner at the table each night. I hear about their day and learn what is going on at the school. I do not try to and reach out to the teacher any more than what I feel is necessary. If I have a concern, sure I can contact her. Other than that, I wait for the teacher to send stuff home or contact me.

Max added:

My wife and I do not have any concerns where they are at academically. I know I can email or call the teacher if I need to. I will not bother her with unnecessary amounts of notes or emails though. I want to contact her only if I really have a concern or need.

Sam stated:

I have no concerns. My children are doing well in school. The teacher and I communicate once a week so I can follow their progress. I know I can just send an email or call if I need something.

Additional support was collected from the completed father surveys. One father commented, “I have not needed to contact the teacher, but I know if I needed them they are available by phone, email, or at their desks.” Another father stated, “I prefer to communicate through my child. It is just easier until I need to talk to someone over there.” A third father added, “I have not had an occasion, but I know I can when I need something.”

*Positively.* Eight of the sixteen fathers (50%) perceived they communicate with teachers positively. During the interview, the following responses were recorded:

Robert stated:

The kids attend a great school system. This system has so many phenomenal teachers too. I bet you have people lining up to move into this system. I just want what is best for my children. We are able to email back and forth with the teacher. The teacher is excellent at keeping us informed. We try to encourage her when we see her too. If the teacher needs something, she knows we will be glad to help.

Michael added:

I really tried to set the tone from the first day my child met his teacher. I wanted her to know that we would support her in any way we could. Since I am able to have lunch with my child at least once a week, I get to see the teacher often. She is super sweet and I do not feel like she thinks I would take up her time or anything. I even try to stop and get her a biscuit when I take my (child) something. I think it adds to our relationship and she knows I am supportive of what she is doing for my child.

D.J. stated:

We have high expectations for our kids. They know to come home with straight A's. I do not have to force anything with my children or ask the teacher for extra grade opportunities. I just communicate in a positive manner that I feel is in the best interest of everyone. It is not that complicated. We all have those difficult people to deal with. I am not going to be one of those, unless I really need to. But the school and my involvement is very important to me and my children.

Drake added:

The teacher and I have a great relationship. I am reading with her classroom every week. I love being able to sit with my child's classmates and sharing experiences. I know that

by being an involved parent I am showing how important and valued my children are too. The teacher is great. I feel very welcome in her room and she has a great learning environment set up.

Joe stated:

I choose to be more involved and active with my children. It had to be that way because I made a pact with myself to be different from my father. The last thing teachers and administrators need is another parent who complains about everything. Listen, I am very thankful for the services they gave my child. That experience was very trying for our family. When it is your child and you just want them to be perfect, like you and me, you do not want to have to sit in a meeting to hear about your child's deficits. They have done an amazing job to help (child) overcome a speech impediment. Anytime I am able, I thank them. I am lucky to have great people with my children.

Chet added:

I love being able to walk my child into school every day. The interactions with other parents and teachers are genuine and positive. The principal is always visible which makes me feel like my child is safe. I do not ever need anything, but it is nice just to be able to wave or say good morning. Education is like a partnership. At least that is how I see it. For the partnership to be more successful I must do my part just as much as the school is doing theirs. I know my child is doing well because I forged a positive relationship early on with the teacher. I am not afraid to walk into the school and say hello. It is great for everyone involved.

Max stated:

I know that good communication with the teacher and administrator are essential to having a successful relationship and helping to strengthen that foundation for my children. If I do not send a positive message via me, through my children, or in support of the school, then we are moving backwards. Yes, I do not always agree with everything the school or one of their teachers does. It does not mean that I should speak badly of them or trash the teacher on social media or something. I get that already. When Twitter or Facebook begins to fix problems then maybe I will go that route. Until then, I want to support my child's teachers. I know by doing so, they will take care of my kids.

Sam added:

I love where my children go to school. The teachers are awesome. The culture is welcoming. My children are doing well in school too. They have so many opportunities even at this level. I hope I can maintain great relationships with the teachers throughout their school careers. I know I will hit some bumps probably, but I will always try to remain positive. I have to for my kids. I know the way I present myself is instrumental in their success and development in school.

Completed father surveys provided additional support. One father commented, "We work closely with teacher on goals. It is important to be supportive of the teacher." Another father stated, "We work very hard to be involved and very positive in all aspects about the school. But not helicopter over the child's education. We trust our child's teacher and the district." A third father added, "Encouraging (child) to take pride and ownership in his homework. Encouraging and praising the process and effort to my child's teacher as much as possible."



*Through their wife.* Five of the sixteen fathers (31%) perceived they communicate with teachers through their wife. During the interview, the following responses were recorded:

Chip stated:

My work schedule is crazy. I usually work 50-60 hours on a weekly basis and then hit the gym before I come home. It is the only time I can squeeze it in. I am just not available to do more. Their mom takes on the main duties of homework, packing lunches, and baths, but she is also the one who takes care of the bills, the paperwork for the school, and talks to the teachers on a regular basis.

Jimmy added:

My wife takes care of that scene. I contribute in ways to my family that I feel are beneficial. I do not have time to discuss school, nor attend to anything there much. She (wife) completes all the paperwork and communicates with the school, whatever it is they do over there. I really do not get involved with talking to them. I do not know of any issues my kids are having or cause, but if my (child) has an issue at school the school can deal with it.

Darryl stated:

I am not involved in the kids' education at all. I feel like I am truly non-existent due to my work schedule, but I am able to make a nice income for my family. I do not have anything against the school. I want to be able to communicate more. Right now, I talk to my children more through Face Time than in real time. I am able to provide in other ways, though, and I will sacrifice my home time for her (wife) to stay home. She does a great job with the school.

Ron added:

You know I do not think I have ever signed anything for the school before. We went down there for registration, but my wife knows how to fill all that stuff out better than I do. She is the detail woman. I often am called away from home to secure buildings and areas. I guard people and property. My focus is just different. I have to be able to move quickly if a call comes in. With this job, I am thankful I can make enough money to allow my wife to stay at home to do all the big and little things for our children.

Walter stated:

My wife has to take on the school part for our child because I do not find school a welcoming place. My story is not pretty. I can tell you bad things I used to do. It is just easier for my wife anyway. She likes to be involved and know what is going on. I would love to be able to walk in and be more involved, maybe even volunteer over at the school. I am just not doing anything with academics. And it is not because of anyone over there at the school. It just from all my past experiences.

Based on the results of completed surveys, 22% of fathers indicated they do not communicate with the teacher at the school. One father commented, "Communication is mostly between my wife and their teachers. She corresponds via email, text message, and notes back and forth in homework folder." Another father stated, "I do not contact the teacher because my wife does that." A third father added, "My job keeps me away from home a lot. My wife handles all the communication and forms with the school." Additional results (see Table 3) and methods a father used to communicate with a teacher were aggregated by school.

Table 3

*Communication from Father to Teacher*

	<b>Phone</b>	<b>Print</b>	<b>Face-to-Face</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>School A</b>	22 (73%)	11 (37%)	8 (27%)	4 (13%)
<b>School B</b>	26 (48%)	34 (63%)	26 (48%)	8 (15%)
<b>School C</b>	26 (51%)	13 (28%)	12 (26%)	8 (17%)
<b>School D</b>	20 (45%)	14 (32%)	24 (55%)	18 (14%)
<b>Total</b>	94 (54%)	72 (41%)	70 (40%)	38 (22%)

*Research Question 3*

*How do fathers perceive teachers communicate with them?*

The recurring themes associated with Research Question 3 were that fathers perceive teachers communicate with them in three ways: minimal, very supportive, and by print. The results were based on 16 father interviews. Results from the father survey were utilized for additional support.

*Minimal.* Five of the sixteen fathers (31%) perceived the teacher communicated with them on a minimal level. During the interview, the following responses were recorded:

Steve stated:

I am fortunate to not have to bother them for everything. I will be honest, my child has the teacher who connects so well with her students that my child does not need me when it comes to her education. The teacher does not contact me specifically unless there is something we need to address.

Michael stated:

My child does well in school so he does not receive the attention he needs to excel while at school. The teachers have to focus on students that require more assistance.

Darryl added:

My challenge is the lack of communication from the school. I wish teachers could find ways to connect with kids who live in homes where one parent is gone for long periods of time. I know it is a challenge with as many as they have.

Ron stated:

I would not say the teacher never tries to contact me, but it is not like she is making an effort to encourage me to do more either. I know my availability is challenging, but I do not know what to do if the teacher will not involve me. I wish teachers could find ways in helping fathers to find balance and ways to engage their kids.

Walter added:

If the teacher ever did try to contact me, I may not know the material anyway. It is just better for her to work through my wife.

Additional support was collected from the completed father surveys. One father commented, “Inconsistencies in behavior monitoring with certain teachers who will not communicate. In both cases, a meeting with the principal and staff resulted in a quick and successful resolution.”

Another father stated, “Everything seems to be discussed during the PTO/PTA meetings and shared during those interactions. I am not available to attend.” A third father added, “I realize that teachers and staff are very busy so I expand on any subjects or homework they send. I just need to know more information on what he is studying at the time.” A fourth father offered, “Primarily by sending a typed memo or handwritten note when necessary.”

*Very supportive.* Seven of the sixteen fathers (44%) perceived the teacher communicated with them in a very supportive manner. During the interview, the following responses were recorded:

Robert stated:

The teacher is great at giving us feedback when our child is having difficulty. She is very eager to send a note in the daily folder if we need to provide some extra practice at home.

Chip added:

My (child) loves to work on her sight words every night. The teacher is great to keep those coming home so we can add support for her too. Her daily notes are always positive when they come home.

Steve stated:

I appreciate when the teacher will send a note home telling me what flash cards to review. It is also very helpful when she gives instructions on how to complete unfinished work. Sometimes I do not think I would want to rely on my (child) for that information. So much more is expected outside of school pertaining to education that I need all the help I can get.

Richard added:

Fortunately, this year we had not needed to like last year, but my child had some behavior challenges last year. They handled the situation great. I never felt attacked at all as a parent. I appreciated how they approached the matter and we came up with better supports for my child to be more successful in school. I feel like I can go back to them if I ever needed to again.

Drake stated:

The teacher and I have a great relationship. I am reading with her classroom every week. I know that by being an involved parent I am showing how important and valued my children are too. The teacher is great. I feel very welcome in her room. She is so

encouraging to all of her students and supportive of those parents who want to get involved. I do not know why some never attend anything.

Chet added:

I can remember when my child was at the early ages. They would send home the extra practice material and laminated sheets. Those laminated sheets were so helpful and provided us with the extra support our child needed to be successful in the classroom.

Max stated:

We are in this together. Reaching out to each other is not hard, and we know it is necessary for the success of the child and the school. Having good communication with the teacher and administrator are essential to having a successful relationship and helping to strengthen that foundation for my children. We are very big supporters of each other.

Completed father surveys provided additional support. One father commented, "Staff at (School B) are awesome! I am amazed by the help they offer." Another father stated, "I have seen notes on homework that helps us understand where she needs help." A third father added, "The teacher uses class dojo to share information and send encouraging messages, especially around testing time. It has opened a good line of communication with all school staff."

*By print.* Five of the sixteen fathers (31%) perceived the teacher communicated with them by print more than any other mode of communication.

Steve stated:

I appreciate when the teacher will send a note home telling me what flash cards to review. It is also very helpful when she gives instructions on how to complete unfinished work. The teacher is great about sending home the different activities going on.

Michael added:

I know there is a lot of information to push out from the school, but sometimes it can get lost with the amount of papers that come home. I wish there was a way to separate out the important items from the sales stuff. Do you ever think they will go to a digital format or are we still too far away from that? The teacher just puts it all in the folder. She told us at the beginning of the year to check it nightly.

D.J. stated:

The teacher is great at communicating with notes and newsletters. The newsletters are a way for me to see what is going on and so I can schedule around appointments.

Joe added:

We get our annual notice about our IEP meeting. The speech person does an excellent job at providing us with progress reports. The teacher will send home the daily folder. Everyone has a behavior log and calendar. It is just highlighted with green, yellow, or red marks.

Sam stated:

Thank goodness the teacher puts a calendar of events in the folder each month. I like to mark off my calendar when I am able so I can attend. Since I am able to attend mostly the activities in the evening, it is important for me to see what the teacher has planned.

Based on the results of completed surveys, 63% of fathers identified print as the most utilized method of communication by teachers. One father commented, "Written notes to us via her take home folder." Another father stated, "Weekly paper newsletter. Notes in the folder." A third father added, "Information sheets sent home with my child. Tips in the newsletter." Additional

results (see Table 4) and methods a teacher used to communicate with a father were aggregated by school.

Table 4

*Communication from Teacher to Father*

	<b>Phone</b>	<b>Print</b>	<b>Face-to-Face</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>School A</b>	22 (73%)	12 (40%)	4 (13%)	4 (13%)
<b>School B</b>	18 (33%)	46 (85%)	20 (37%)	6 (11%)
<b>School C</b>	28 (61%)	24 (52%)	10 (22%)	5 (11%)
<b>School D</b>	26 (59%)	28 (64%)	8 (18%)	11 (25%)
<b>Total</b>	94 (54%)	110 (63%)	42 (24%)	26 (15%)

*Research Question 4*

*How are school activities designed to engage fathers in the educational experience of a child?*

The recurring themes associated with Research Question 4 were that school activities were designed to engage fathers in the educational experience of their child three ways: through conversations at conferences, open to more improvement, and unknown. The results (see Table 5) were based on 16 father interviews. Results from the father and teacher survey were utilized for additional support.

Table 5

*Activities Designed for Father Engagement*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Through conversations at conferences</b>	<b>Open to more involvement</b>	<b>Unknown</b>
Robert		√	
Chip			√
Steve		√	
Richard	√		√
Jimmy		√	
Michael	√		
Darryl			√
D.J.		√	√
Drake	√	√	
Joe	√		



Chet		√	
Ron	√		√
Ben			√
Max	√	√	
Sam	√		
Walter		√	

*Through conversations at conferences.* Seven of the sixteen fathers (44%) perceived the conversations at conferences engaged them in the educational experience of their child. During the interview, the following responses were recorded:

Richard stated:

My child had some behavior challenges last year. They handled the situation great. I never felt attacked at all as a parent. I appreciated how they approached the matter and we came up better supports for my child to be more successful in school. I feel like I can go back to them if I ever needed to again.

Michael added:

Attending parent conferences has been beneficial for me and my wife this year. Since our (child) is in Kindergarten, it was important to get a feel for what we were in for. The teacher shared some great strategies we could do at home and all the things they were doing in class. It also helped her to know we were eager to volunteer in the classroom when she needed us for different activities or parties.

Drake stated:

The teacher and I have a great relationship. I know that by being an involved parent I am showing how important and valued my children are too. The teacher is great. I feel very welcome in her room. She is so encouraging to all of her students and supportive of those parents who want to get involved.

Joe added:

I choose to be more involved and active with my children. Listen, I am very thankful for the services they gave my child. That experience was very trying for our family. When it is your child and you just want them to be perfect, like you and me, you do not want to have to sit in a meeting to hear about your child's deficits.

Ron stated:

I did attend the last parent conference and we talked about progress and behavior.

Max stated:

We are in this together. Reaching out to each other is not hard, and we know it is necessary for the success of the child and the school. Having good communication with the teacher and administrator are essential to having a successful relationship and helping to strengthen that foundation for my children. We are very big supporters of each other.

Sam added:

I love where my children go to school. The teachers are awesome. Our parent conferences are productive and meaningful. We talk more about progress than anything. Grades are important, but not the only thing in our house.

Additional support was collected from the completed father surveys. One father commented, "We talk about how he is in the classroom. What comes naturally to him and what does not. How he learns." Another father stated, "My son's academic levels, goals, and behavior." A third father added, "We hear positive feedback and praise when we attend parent conferences."

In addition, support was collected from the completed teacher surveys. One teacher commented, "The same as with mother- grades, behavior, how the child is doing." Another teacher stated, "We discuss all areas of education in parent conferences: areas of strength, areas

to strengthen, and any concerns they may have.” A third teacher added, “Academic growth and academic needs for future growth, behavioral struggles and successes are the items we discuss the most.” A fourth teacher offered, “Assessment results; what they mean and how they can help. Are they behaving?”

*Open to more improvement.* Eight of the sixteen fathers (50%) were open to more improvement to engage them in the educational experience of their child. During the interview, the following responses were recorded:

Robert stated:

I want what is best for my children. The teacher emails us when there is a concern and we are able to communicate that way. It is working effectively. I am about attending parent conferences to see how they are doing on their academics. Other than that, my wife goes to more than I because she operates better in that venue. I do like going to the book fairs and getting the kids a little something. But I do not do PTO. I do not care for it. It is way too much organization and fundraisers anyway. Everything seems to be about money in schools. If the teacher needs something, we will be glad to help. If I could offer a suggestion to a teacher it would be to see how to make the un-educated fathers and those working two jobs in today’s society feel welcome.

Steve added:

If the school could give more notice for parent-teacher conferences, I would try to arrange my schedule to attend. They would also need to have them in the evenings instead of the day. They really limit who can attend when they are during school hours. School hours are working hours. I wish they would consider holding events just for dads.

If they sent me a special invite or had something like what Home Depot does on the first Saturday of each month I would probably participate more.

Jimmy stated:

I really have no desire to get involved with the school. Really, I have no time either. I did attend the Open House this year just to meet the teacher. She seemed nice. I will go to the Christmas programs when they have one. It is not every year they do one.

D.J. added:

I think men need to change their mind about the roles we play today. It is amazing how at plays, I see mostly both parents in attendance and supporting their child. But go to a safety patrol meeting it is a different story. It is a convention of a bunch of mothers.

Drake stated:

When I lived in California, I used to be an active member of a group called WATCH DOGS. The group stood for "Dads of Great Students." It is a program that sought out fathers who would volunteer one day per year to actively be on the campus of their child. It really was a great program for the students and the staff. The thought behind it was by having a man walking around campus had an influence of taking care of students. It is something you should consider bringing to this school system.

Chet added:

I do not know what to suggest to how to get more fathers involved. I wish they would. Maybe if teachers and schools will give more advanced notice, maybe they will come.

Max stated:

If parents would build a positive relationship with the teacher instead of being in attack mode all the time we can move mountains together. I wish parents could see the tone or

the way they write letters sometimes. It is not always positive. Sure, we can work to target more fathers with the use of food, or using their cute children in a program to encourage their attendance. Children are starving for the attention from their fathers and it really is up to us to find a way to get them involved. If any father needed help all they have to do is ask.

Walter added:

If the teacher ever did try to contact me, I may not know the material anyway. It is just better for her to work through my wife. I would very much be interested in helping around the school to do landscaping or some type of physical labor. Let me paint or build something when school is closed. I am just not doing anything with academics.

Additional support was collected from the completed father surveys. One father commented, “The teacher sends home tips on how to help my son with his vocabulary words and the math games on the computer help him with math and technology skills. I can only do what they send me.” Another father stated, “The school offers programs however, we have not utilized them because my wife is a teacher. We let the other people attend those.” A third father added, “There were several trainings offered by my child’s school through seminars and the classroom, but I failed to attend any of those.”

In addition, support was collected from the completed teacher surveys. One teacher commented, “Conferences showing online applications- nothing formal. We really need more offerings.” Another teacher stated, “Parenting workshops of various topics, communication folders, etc. that are introduced and trained by staff at the beginning of the school year. I just wish more parents would show up, especially fathers.” A third teacher added, “A reminder goes home in the child’s folder, on our newsletter, and it is posted on our school marquee.” A fourth

offered, “There are flyers, emails, robo-phone calls, etc. to advertise the various events. Kids are also encouraged by teachers and admin to talk to grown-ups about upcoming events.”

*Unknown.* Six of the sixteen fathers (38%) were not aware how activities were designed to engage them in the educational experience of their child. During the interview, the following responses were recorded:

Chip stated:

There is not a lot of training needed at their grade level. I do not know of any trainings offered by the school to support me or help me to teach my child. Any issues are always explained well with my wife.

Richard added:

I do not just need to be the provider to education. I love that my child wants to learn about everything. My child does not need me to learn. They go to a great school with great teachers. Just because I do not have time to go to events and functions at the school, or even know when they are, does not mean I do not care.

Darryl stated:

With the amount of time I am away from home, I do not know when the school hosts most events.

D.J. added:

I do not know of any support or training offered by the school to help parents, but I would not have needed any of it for myself anyway.

Ron stated:

We went down there for registration, but my wife knows how to fill all that stuff out better than I do. She is the detail woman. My focus is just different. I have to be able to

move quickly if a call comes in. With this job, I am thankful I can make enough money to allow my wife to stay at home to do all the big and little things for our children. I do not know of anything offered by the school to assist me in helping my child with their schoolwork, but I do not know if I would have the time to attend anyway.

Ben added:

Work keeps me so busy. My kids go to a wonderful school and I am sure they offer great programs. I would not have the time to get involved even if I knew when they were.

Based on the results of completed father surveys, 70% of fathers indicated an unawareness of how school activities were designed to engage them in the educational experience of their child. One father commented, "I am not aware of any such training opportunities. They might exist, I just do not know." Another father stated, "None that I know of. I have not seen anything offered." A third father added, "Really just assignments or homework with directions on how to complete it. Most times my child has to guess because I do not know how to help him."

Based on the results of completed teacher surveys, 50% of teachers indicated an unawareness of how school activities were designed to engage fathers in the educational experience of their child. One teacher commented, "I am not aware that they are specifically asked." Another teacher stated, "I don't know." A third teacher added, "Unknown, not sure we specify fathers. Mostly focus on parents who are available." A fourth teacher offered, "None specifically for fathers. I have no idea how we could fit more into our year than we do now."

#### *Research Question 5*

*What are teacher perceptions of what it means to be a father involved in the education of a child?*

The recurring themes associated with Research Question 5 were that teachers perceived fathers should be involved in the education of their child in three ways: present in the school, support at home, and somewhere other than sports. Results (see Table 6) were based on the 52 completed teacher surveys.

Table 6

*Teacher Meaning of Father Involvement*

<b>Present in School</b>	<b>Support at home</b>	<b>Somewhere other than sports</b>
36 (69%)	29 (56%)	11 (21%)

*Present in school.* Thirty-six of the fifty-two teachers (69%) perceived father involvement, in the education of their child, included the presence of the father in the school. From the teacher surveys, an involved father included their presence at celebrations, conferences, or in a performance where their child was playing a role. Teacher surveys indicated they perceived father involvement to include asking for feedback of student work, volunteering for classroom parties or service projects, and having lunch with their child. One teacher commented, “Volunteering in the class and around the school.” Another teacher stated, “Classroom volunteers for activities or parties, lunch with students, and lunch room duties during TCAP week.” A third teacher added, “Any and all, especially celebrations, appealing to teachers for feedback and not being aloof.”

*Support at home.* Twenty-nine or the fifty-two teachers (56%) perceived father involvement included having support from the father at home. From the teacher surveys, support at home included checking the daily work and signing the folder of their child, reading 15 minutes nightly with their child, having a good attitude towards the school, encouraging chores and self-responsibility at home, and having a consistent behavior or discipline plan. One teacher commented, “Listening to and reading with kids at night.” Another teacher stated, “Encouraging



chores, self-responsibilities, and perseverance when things get rough- how to work through it, not tantrum. Things at home that carry over to the classroom daily life of the child’s character.”

A third teacher added, “Daily homework, reading, and signing the child’s folder.”

*Somewhere other than sports.* Eleven of the fifty-two teachers (21%) perceived father involvement somewhere other than on a sports field. From the teacher surveys, somewhere other than sports included community events, attending church, outdoor recreational activities, family reunions, volunteer projects, and shopping. One teacher commented, “Make note of the small steps forward. Things other than sports.” Another teacher stated, “Encouraging fathers to take their children out into the community to experience more. Our students only know what is on social media.” A third teacher added, “How about church? Sometimes a small community can rally together and become change agents too.”

### *Research Question 6*

*How do teachers communicate with fathers?*

The recurring themes associated with Research Question 6 were that teachers communicate in at least one of three ways: phone, print, or face-to-face. Results (see Table 7) were based on the 52 completed teacher surveys and aggregated by school.

Table 7

#### *Communication from Teacher to Father*

	<b>Phone</b>	<b>Print</b>	<b>Face-to-Face</b>
<b>School A</b>	10 (100%)	10 (100%)	0 (0%)
<b>School B</b>	12 (100%)	12 (100%)	6 (50%)
<b>School C</b>	16 (89%)	18 (100%)	4 (22%)
<b>School D</b>	12 (100%)	12 (100%)	6 (50%)
<b>Total</b>	50 (96%)	52 (100%)	16 (31%)

*Phone:* The use of the phone was the 2<sup>nd</sup> most used mode of communication when discussing educational matters with the father of a child. From the completed surveys, 96% of teachers indicated they communicated with the father of a child with either a phone call, text message, or an app available on their mobile device.

*Print:* The use of print was the mode of communication utilized the most when teachers discussed education matters with the father of a child. From the completed surveys, 100% of teachers indicated they communicated via email, a note, and through the daily folder of the student. School B and C were two schools who indicated the highest use of behavior charts within their student folders.

*Face-to-Face:* Talking in-person was the least used mode of communication when teachers discussed education matters with the father of a child. From the completed surveys, 31% of teachers indicated using face-to-face communication to share about student progress, achievement, behavior, or other educational matters. Teachers who indicated they used face-to-face as a mode of communication, 98% identified it was during a parent conference or other meeting. The remaining 2% indicated they had regular interactions with fathers who walked their child to class or were present at school programs.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of father involvement in elementary schools. Parent involvement has a positive effect on the social, emotional, and academic growth of students (Van Voorhis, 2003). By examining the perceptions of fathers and teachers regarding communication, barriers to active involvement, and how school staff are providing opportunities to engage fathers in the educational experience, recommendations for alternative ways of enhancing communications to fathers will be identified by the researcher. Improving home to school communications and involving fathers in the education of their children will improve the educational experience of students (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1997). A summary of the findings and conclusions, recommendations for future research, recommendations for practice, and conclusions are detailed in the following sections.

#### *Summary of Findings and Conclusions*

Analysis of data resulted in the emergence of themes related to the six research questions. A summary of themes and findings related to the six research questions is presented in the following section.

#### *Research Question 1*

How do fathers perceive their involvement in the education of their child?

There are many factors which effect the success of a student in school, including things parents have no control over. However, fathers are in control of one major component of the success of their child, and that is their involvement. Fathers indicated work was the main reason

limiting their involvement in the school or with their child. Results from the father survey indicated 56% of the fathers had limited involvement due to work schedules. The father interviews identified eight of the 16 fathers with minimal involvement because of their roles in their jobs or the number of hours worked. Many families are faced with overwhelming and unpredictable schedules and circumstances while juggling school, sports, family situations, family time, work schedules, and other responsibilities, allowing minimal time to provide support in any one given area (Swap, 1993).

Fathers in this study perceive they were involved in the education of their child outside of school. Activities that fathers were most likely to participate in with their children included camping, fishing, hiking, going to the park, traveling, and visiting local attractions. Although some fathers did not find themselves very active within the school or having strong communication with the teacher, they were interested in engaging with their child in other ways. The identification of this theme correlates with a perception of teachers in Research Question 5, somewhere other than sports. Parent participation in the home, school and community shape the learning and development of children (Epstein, 2001).

When parents demonstrated consistent interest and involvement, the children were more successful in their education because parent involvement improves attendance, motivation and self-esteem, test scores, grades, and graduation (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Fathers indicated their involvement with their children through the importance of daily interactions. This theme crossed all levels of involvement, including those fathers who would be considered very active, somewhat active, and limited in their involvement in the education of their child. From the interviews, almost all the fathers expressed the importance to their daily interactions with their

child regardless if they were traveling for work or not. Almost 70% of fathers want to be more involved in the education of their children (Peters et al., 2008).

### *Research Question 2*

How do fathers perceive they communicate with teachers?

Useful and clear two-way communication encourages cooperation between the home and school and reveals to students that contact is being made between the home and school in an effort to monitor student success (Epstein et al., 2009). Fathers in this study perceived they communicate with teachers in three ways: as needed, positively, or through their wife. Survey results indicate that fathers contact the teacher in the following ways: face-to-face, print, and phone. Survey data further supports that 22% of fathers indicate their main communication with school staff is to address a concern or problem that their child had in school. Parents can benefit from effective communication with the school by having increased knowledge of policies, procedures, and programs within the school, allowing the parents to provide additional support in the educational experience (Epstein, 2001).

Fathers in this study perceive they communicate positively to the teacher. Fathers involved in the interviews indicated strong belief that their children attended a great school system with phenomenal teachers. Moreover, interviewees indicated a perception that the education of their child was a partnership or shared experience with school staff. As parents communicate with the school, they typically become more comfortable and satisfied with the school and the teachers (Epstein et al., 2009).

Parents may be intimidated by the language, the curriculum, and the staff, consequently, they avoid communication with the school (Flynn, 2007). The most challenging theme emerging from this study were those fathers indicating communication was through their wife. Based on

the completed father surveys, 22% of fathers indicated they do not talk to the teacher because communication was done through their wife. School staff must find ways to encourage and invite father participation for the benefit of their child. As a result of effective and positive communication with staff, parents are able to encourage a successful educational experience for their children and may become more actively involved (Epstein, 2001).

### *Research Question 3*

How do fathers perceive teachers communicate with them?

Challenges are likely anytime communication is involved. Communication must be clear and useful and staff need to be considerate of factors such as language barriers and literacy of families that could affect the understanding of the information being shared (Epstein, 2001). Fathers in this study perceive that teachers communicate in three ways: minimal, very supportive, and by print. Fathers in this study perceive that teachers have minimal communication with them when it comes to the education of their child. Results indicated the teacher communicated through the wife, as needed, or in a way that did not relate to the father. 15% of fathers, responding to the survey, indicated the teacher communicated with their wife on educational matters. It is critical that administrators and teachers encourage respectful two-way communication between the school and home (Wherry, 2009).

In an effort to overcome barriers preventing parent involvement, research indicates schools are more successful when the school staff are respectful and responsive to parents (Wherry, 2009). Fathers indicated that teachers communicate with them in a very supportive manner. Fathers involved in interviews responded that they felt supported when their child was having difficulty with academics or behavior issues. The challenge is ensuring that all fathers feel the same level of support no matter their situation. Actions by teachers may enhance the

motivation of parents to get involved. Continued parent involvement is key to creating sustainable change in behaviors (Linden, 2010).

Fathers indicated that teachers utilize print as the primary mode of communication. Based on the completed father surveys, 63% of fathers indicated teachers use print as their primary communication tool when sharing dates of interest, school news, or behavior concerns. Fathers identified printed materials used by a teacher as: notes, newsletters, behavior charts, assignments, and advertisements. Most print materials were distributed through the daily folder of the child. Based on completed surveys, 78% of fathers indicated they had received a written note attached to an assignment or test that the child did poorly on. 82% of fathers, responding to the survey, indicated the teacher utilized written communication about the behavior of their child on a daily basis, through the daily folder.

#### *Research Question 4*

How are school activities designed to engage fathers in the educational experience of a child?

Three themes emerged using information from surveys and interviews on how school activities are designed to engage fathers in the educational experience of their child. Based on responses from the father and teacher in this study, they included: through conversations at conferences, open to more improvement, and unknown as to how. Parent-teacher conferences are an essential component to communication of student achievement, progress, and behavior (Bagwell, 2011). Teacher surveys identified conversations at conferences were a meeting attended by the father such as parent teacher conference, IEP meeting, or discipline meeting with principal. It is important to note what information is discussed in parent teacher conferences when the father is present. From the surveys, teachers indicated the importance of discussing the

behavior of the child first, while the father indicated their interest to discuss the performance of the child first.

According to the National PTA (2009), weekend or evening classes held at the local school are an effective way to engage fathers in the education of their child. Teachers and fathers in this study indicated that school activities to engage fathers were open to more improvement. Parent involvement should not be confined to active participation during school hours in the building. Schools are attempting to overcome the obstacles and building bridges for effective partnerships (Flynn, 2007). While it may be impossible to require parental involvement, it is important to provide multiple opportunities for fathers to be involved in the educational process. There is an increased appreciation for the teaching profession and the role of the teacher when parents are involved in school activities (Epstein et al., 2009). With time being an issue in many families, schools need to create flexible schedules to provide trainings (Epstein et al., 2009) or other meetings relevant to fathers.

Parents become and remain an overlooked entity in the education of their children (Greene & Tichenor, 2003). Teachers and fathers in this study indicated that it was unknown how school activities engaged fathers in the educational experience of their child. Based on the results of completed father surveys, 70% of fathers indicated an unawareness of how school activities were designed to engage them in the educational experience of their child. 97%, of fathers, indicated they had no knowledge of any training opportunities provided at the school. Limited professional development at the school or district levels and the lack of pre-service training (Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005) contribute to the deficit of parents actively engaged in the learning. Interestingly, 94% of returned teacher surveys had no knowledge of training offered by the school. 50%, of teachers, indicated an unawareness of how school activities were designed to



engage fathers in the educational experience of their child. This result presents a challenge for the schools to identify, communicate, and forge partnerships to increase parent involvement. Schools and school districts struggle to effectively engage parents in the educational process of their children (Keller, 2006).

#### *Research Question 5*

What are teacher perceptions of what it means to be a father involved in the education of a child?

Parental involvement is recognized by researchers, educational leaders, teachers, and parents as significantly important to the educational achievement of children (Flynn, 2007). Teachers in this study perceive fathers should be involved in the education of their child in three ways: present in school, support at home, and somewhere other than sports. As one teacher stated, “Quit being absent.” Teachers indicated actions for a father to be present in a school included walking the child into the school, picking their child up, being present at celebrations, conferences, or programs, volunteering for classroom parties or service projects, or having lunch with their child. Teachers indicated a strong interest in offering suggestions to fathers and how to become present when responding to this survey. According to Research Questions 2,3, and 6, face-to-face contact with each other is the least utilized between fathers and teachers though. As parents become more involved, educators and parents may become more confident and comfortable with each other (Epstein et al., 2009).

The National PTA (2009) suggested that activities should be sponsored by schools that teach fathers how to help their children to learn. Teachers in this study perceive that father involvement included the support at home. 79% of teachers, responding to the survey, indicated support at home included responsibilities such as checking daily work, signing the folder, reading nightly, having a good attitude towards school, encouraging chores and self-

responsibility, and building a consistent behavior or discipline plan that would carry over into the school. Parent involvement begins at home by providing a safe and healthy environment, appropriate learning experiences, support, and a positive attitude about school (NEA, 2008). Studies indicate increased academic achievement with students having involved parents at home (Epstein et al., 2009; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Swap, 1993; Whitaker & Fiore, 2001).

Students gain self-confidence and ownership of the community in which they live from collaborating in activities within the community (Epstein et al., 2009). Teachers in this study perceive that father involvement included anywhere other than on a sports field. Teachers, responding to this survey, indicated that father involvement with the child could include participation in community events, volunteer projects, or other outdoor recreational activities, attending church or family reunions, visiting museums, or going shopping. Families may benefit from schools collaborating with the community by experiencing increased knowledge and gaining the use of resources within the community to develop skills and obtain services for their family (Epstein, 2001). Community collaboration allows families to work together to strengthen their relations and build a sense of ownership within the community (Epstein et al., 2009).

It is important to recognize that fathering through sports is a manifestation for bias and judgement on many fronts, and not just from teachers. Research indicates that participation in youth sports is central to parenting in three ways for men (Coakley, 2006; Harrington, 2006; Kay, 2009). First, sports participation is often motivated by a desire to spend time with their children and is seen as one of the main venues for fathers to get involved (Doucet and Merla, 2007; Harrington, 2006). Youth sports are often viewed as a fatherly “duty” that at times is prioritized above work (Kay, 2007). Second, youth sports are central to fatherhood as a means

for men to develop close relationships with their children (Harrington, 2006; Jenkins, 2009; Kay, 2007). Sports offer fathers and children a common interest to talk about and do together (Harrington, 2006). Third, fathering through sports offers men opportunities to teach their children skills and values. This is closely connected to the notion that sports participation contributes positively to the physical, cognitive, and moral development of children (Eccles et al., 2003).

#### *Research Question 6*

How do teachers communicate with fathers?

Survey results indicate that teachers contact fathers in the following ways: face-to-face, print, and phone. Results from teacher surveys, indicate 100% communicate with fathers by print. The use of print by the teacher corroborated the perceptions of fathers for Research Question 3. Although this result (100%) was high, it is small relative to the fact there were 127 elementary teachers (or 42%) in the school system. Administrators and teachers may not fully understand the importance of parental involvement and the effects on student achievement (Flynn, 2007) if communication is inconsistent. The correlation should be noted on the heavy utilization of print by teachers, yet the father responses to not receiving the message or knowing about an event at the school. If teachers do not personally invite fathers, they do not feel valued or welcome. Parents are more likely to become actively involved in the education of their child if they are invited (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Invitations are powerful motivators and relay a message to parents that they are valued and important (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Teachers in this study indicated they communicate with fathers by phone and face-to-face as their second and third, respectively. Data from the teacher survey correlated with the perceptions of fathers for Research Question 3. Based on survey results, the use of the phone did

not constitute a conversation with the father. When teachers do not feel parental support, they often believe it is a waste of their time to contact parents (Flynn, 2007). Analyzing the father surveys submitted, the use of a free texting app or class dojo app were two apps that fathers indicated teachers set up at the beginning of the year using their mobile phone. Fathers indicated these two apps were the easiest to use and to have knowledge of when events were occurring. 98% of teachers, responding to the survey, indicated face-to-face communication was during a parent conference or another type of parent meeting. The remaining 2% indicated they had regular interactions with fathers who walked their child to class or were present at school programs.

Teachers can gain from clear and effective communication with parents. Students made 40% to 50% greater gains in math and reading between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades when their teachers met with their parents face to face, gave the parents materials to use at home, and called them routinely (Levenson, 2016). Communication, whether written or oral, allows for additional support of the school by giving parents a better understanding of policies, procedures, and programs within the school (Epstein, 2001). Feeling welcome and respected by educators is an important link with parents and their willingness to become involved (Henderson et al., 2007). Clear communication between families and schools encourages the use of parent networks to communicate with all families within the community (Epstein et al., 2009).

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

Four recommendations for future research are proposed based on the findings of this particular study:

- It is recommended that this study be replicated in urban and suburban areas to determine if father perceptions of school communications are similar.

- A second recommendation would be to replicate this study utilizing single fathers, with custodial rights of children, to determine if father perceptions of school communications are similar.
- A third recommendation is to conduct research to develop social and psychological barriers to teacher efforts in communicating with fathers.
- Another recommendation is to conduct research to determine effective strategies for engaging fathers in school activities.

### *Recommendations for Practice*

Four recommendations for practice are made based on the findings of this particular study:

- Develop activities and events that require parental involvement.
- Use professional development hours to explore how teachers welcome parent participation in their classroom.
- Create professional development opportunities to examine the unspoken phenomenon *Sisters before Misters*.
- Develop workshop opportunities for teachers to receive further education on the power of their involvement in community activities.

### *Conclusion*

Parent involvement is an integral component of student achievement and school reform. Research indicates that when parents are meaningfully involved, students achieve more despite their socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or education level. Schools who welcome parent involvement will outperform schools who shut parents out. Having the opportunity to bridge the gap between the culture at home and the learning institution leads to collaboration,

increased teacher morale, and gains in the classroom by the student. Parents need to be treated as partners and given relevant information by people with whom they are comfortable. Finding ways to make them feel welcome or to participate may be the initial challenges.

The work will never end for a parent or a teacher when a child is involved. We all must do better if we are to provide an opportunity for every child, not just the ones who have both a mom and dad involved. Nothing is ever guaranteed, and even in a two-parent household, the connections are not always as strong as one might think. A good education is now more important than ever in creating the pathway to opportunity. We must work collaboratively for the betterment of our children. We must work together to build strong families. We must work together to encourage lifelong learning and value education. We must work together to make an inviting culture inside our schools where everyone feels welcome and accepted. We must work together to create strong communities that support each other and expect excellence. We must do it for our children.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### **Survey Questions for Fathers**

1. List the forms of communication you use to contact your child's teacher(s).
2. List the forms of communication your child's teacher(s) uses to contact you.
3. Describe the activities you like to engage in the most when it comes to your child's education.
4. Describe the activities you least like to engage in when it comes to your child's education.
5. Describe the training opportunities offered to you, by your child's school staff, to assist in working with your child at home or in school.
6. What items are most discussed when you attend a parent conference at the school?
7. List the time(s) and day(s) of the week that work best with your schedule for attending events at your child's school.
8. Describe when most events are offered by your child's school.
9. Describe how you have been involved in your child's education.
10. What ideas, suggestions, and/or concerns have you brought to the attention of school staff?

## Appendix B

### Survey Questions for Teachers

1. List the forms of communication you use to contact a child's father.
  
2. List forms of communication a child's father uses to contact you.
  
3. Describe activities fathers engage in the most when it comes to their child's education.
  
4. Describe activities fathers are least likely to engage in when it comes to their child's education.
  
5. Describe the training opportunities offered to fathers, by school staff, to assist in working with a child both at home and in school.
  
6. How is data used to engage fathers in a child's education?
  
7. When a father attends a parent conference, what items are most discussed?
  
8. Describe when most events are offered by your school.
  
9. How are fathers asked, encouraged, or invited to participate in special events, educational activities, advisory boards or special committees, or maintain the facilities?
  
10. What activities do you wish fathers would be more involved in when it comes to their child's education.

## Appendix C

### **Interview Protocol**

1. How would you describe your availability to your child?
2. How often do you discuss school with your child?
3. Describe your communication with your child's teacher.
4. What responsibilities do you have as a father?
5. Describe your involvement in your child's school.
6. How many school functions do you attend monthly? Annually?
7. How have you been supported by the school to help your child? Discuss training opportunities the school offers to assist you in helping your child with their school work.
8. What are the challenges you face in supporting your child's educational pursuits?
9. Is there anything else you think "we" as educators could do to help or support a father's involvement in their child's education?

## Appendix D

### **Preguntas de la Encuesta para Padres**

1. Enlista las formas o medios que utilizas para poder comunicarte con los maestros de tu hijo(a).
2. Enlista las formas de comunicación que el maestro de su hijo(a) utiliza para ponerse en contacto con usted.
3. Describe las actividades en las cuales te gusta involucrarte más, en lo que la educación de tus hijos(as) respecta.
4. Describe las actividades en las cuales te gusta involucrarte menos, en lo que a la educación de tus hijos(as) respecta.
5. Describe el tipo de entrenamiento que se te ha ofrecido por el personal de la escuela de tu hijo(a), para asistirte en cómo trabajar con tu hijo(a) en la casa o en la escuela.
6. ¿Cuáles son los temas que son más hablados cuando asistes a una conferencia de padres de familia en la escuela de tu hijo(a)?
7. Enlista las horas y días de la semana en los cuales estas más disponible para asistir a conferencias de padres de familia en la escuela.
8. Describe cuándo la mayoría de los eventos son ofrecidos por la escuela de su hijo.
9. Describe cómo has estado involucrado en la educación de tu hijo(a).
10. ¿Qué ideas, sugerencias, y/o preocupaciones ha expresado al personal de la escuela?



## Appendix E

### Father Consent Letter

February 15, 2017

Dear Father:

My name is Myles Hebrard, and I am a graduate student at East Tennessee State University. I am working on my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. In order to finish my studies, I need to complete a research project. The name of my research study is The Importance of Father Involvement and their Child's Education.

The purpose of this study is to understand how the involvement of fathers in schools impacts educational experiences of their child. I would like to give a brief survey questionnaire to all fathers at your child's elementary school. It should only take about 10-15 minutes to complete. You will be asked questions about communication, participation, and training opportunities. This study may provide benefit by offering more information about identifying effective strategies to communicate, active engagement in school events, and better support from home to school and school to home.

Every attempt will be made to see that your survey results are kept confidential. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the ETSU IRB and I, Myles Hebrard, have access to the study records.

If you do not want to fill out the survey, it will not affect you in any way. Participation in this research study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time.

If you have any research-related questions or problems, you may contact me at (865) 425-9025. I am working on this project together under the supervision of my ETSU Advisor, Dr. William Flora. You may reach him at (423) 439-7617. Also, the chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at East Tennessee State University is available at (423) 439-6054 if you have questions about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at (423) 439-6055 or (423)439-6002.

Sincerely,



Myles Hebrard

Version 01.31.17

## Appendix F

### Teacher Consent Letter

February 15, 2017

Dear Teachers:

My name is Myles Hebrard, and I am a graduate student at East Tennessee State University. I am working on my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. In order to finish my studies, I need to complete a research project. The name of my research study is The Importance of Father Involvement and their Child's Education.

The purpose of this study is to understand how the involvement of fathers in schools impacts educational experiences of their child. I would like to give a brief survey questionnaire to all certified teachers at your elementary school. It should only take about 10-15 minutes to complete. You will be asked questions about communication, participation, and training opportunities. This study may provide benefit by offering more information about identifying effective strategies to communicate, active engagement in school events, and better support from home to school and school to home.

Every attempt will be made to see that your survey results are kept confidential. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the ETSU IRB and I, Myles Hebrard, have access to the study records.

If you do not want to fill out the survey, it will not affect you in any way. Participation in this research study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time.

If you have any research-related questions or problems, you may contact me at (865) 425-9025. I am working on this project together under the supervision of my ETSU Advisor, Dr. William Flora. You may reach him at (423) 439-7617. Also, the chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at East Tennessee State University is available at (423) 439-6054 if you have questions about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at (423) 439-6055 or (423)439-6002.

Sincerely,



Myles Hebrard

Version 01.31.17

## VITA

### MYLES J. HEBRARD

Education: Marysville High School, Marysville, Ohio

University of Charleston, Charleston, West Virginia  
B.S. Business Administration, 1998

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee  
M.S. Special Education, 2002  
Ed.S. Special Education, 2003  
Administrative Licensure Educational Leadership and Supervision, 2008

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN  
Ed.D. Educational Leadership, 2017

Professional Experience: Anderson County Schools, Clinton, Tennessee  
Teacher, Clinton Middle School; 2003 – 2008  
Principal, Claxton Elementary School; 2008 – 2015

Oak Ridge Schools, Oak Ridge, Tennessee  
Supervisor of Special Education, 2015 – present

Honors and Awards: Clinton Middle School Teacher of the Year, 2005  
Anderson County Teacher of the Year, 2005  
Governor’s Volunteer Award of Excellence, 2005  
Tennessee Lottery Educator of the Week, 2006  
TN School Board Association Award of Excellence, 2006  
ING Unsung Heroes Award, 2004 & 2006 (National Winner)  
Japan Fulbright Memorial Fund Recipient, 2006  
Optimist Member of the Year, 2010  
Argentina Fulbright Administrator Exchange Program, 2013 & 2015