

SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS'  
ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS RELATIVE TO  
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

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1973

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE  
July, 1999

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my major advisor, Dr. Kouider Mokhtari for his guidance, encouragement and professional assistance throughout this study and my graduate program. I wish to also thank Dr. Kay Reinke and Dr. David Yellin for their interest and encouragement while serving as members of my committee.

A special thank you goes to the seventh grade principal that allowed me access to her building and gave so generously of her time. I believe her efforts to strive for excellence and to put children first is an inspiration to us all. I also wish to thank the parents for allowing their child to participate in this research study and the students who participated. For it is truly the parents who must acknowledge that education is important so that the child feels his/her time in the classroom is worthwhile. And it is the voice of the student who we must listen to in order to reach every child in the learning process.

I especially want to thank my family who continued to encourage me. My husband, Steve, and my two sons, Matt and Scott, who constantly showered me with their love, moral support and ideas while I completed this project.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“We need more teachers.” “Teachers do not have time to give each child the personal attention that he or she needs.” “There is too much paperwork and babysitting – we can’t do our best job of teaching.” “There is no more money. We can’t hire additional staff.” How many times have comments like these been voiced in Teachers’ Lounges, Superintendents’ Offices, PTA meetings, Educational Journals, and Boards-of-Education meetings? Part of the answer to this problem of limited resources would be greater daily involvement of parents (volunteers) in the classroom. This study looks at only a small piece of the overall picture, but this may give insight into the generalized situation.

My interest in parental involvement arises from my own experiences over the last 21 years, as my sons proceeded through the K-12 system. I have been an educator and a parent for some 25+ years. I have always been aware that parents are their children’s first teachers. Babies are born to learn and in their first few years, children learn more and at a much faster pace than at any other time in their lives. I was my sons’ first teacher. While some other parents were in a hurry to send their children off to pre-school, I had pre-school for my boys in my own home. Learning, reading and critical thinking were covered in our daily

“play”. So, when my sons were ready to enter school, I (along with a handful of other parents) was ready to volunteer in the school to help make their school years more productive. However, the principal and some of the teachers closed the doors. It was made very clear that parents were not welcome to participate and help within the school system, that the job of teaching was that of the teachers. Epstein (1995) characterizes this stance as viewing children as students rather than children. That is, students have two separate lives, the one they spend at school and the one they have at home with their families.

Because I was a teacher, this “closed-door policy” was not an acceptable answer to me. I “pushed” my way into this closed system but other parents did not feel as comfortable doing so. I became active in the PTA, became a school library helper, volunteered my services to the classroom teachers by tutoring in reading, math and spelling and became the school volunteer coordinator. Many teachers were happy to have the “extra” help in the classroom. My sons thought it was great and all the children became accustomed to seeing parent helpers in the building.

As my sons became older and entered seventh grade, leaving behind their local elementary school, I wondered how my helping and working would affect them and the other students in the building. Would volunteers be “accepted” at this school? Would the teachers welcome help in the classroom? Would older children want a parent in the building? Would my sons, who were working on their own independence, mind if I worked and volunteered in the middle school/junior high setting? By this time, the desire to expand parents’ role in



school management had inspired numerous "site-based management teams" and I am happy to say that the results were positive. The five years I spent working and volunteering in the middle school/junior high setting were very rewarding not only for me but for the students and teachers I helped.

Thank heavens that my first experience with the school system as a parent was some twenty years ago and times have changed, hopefully for the better. Today the important role that home plays in children's school learning has been recognized in numerous publications (Barber & Patin, 1997; Berger, 1991; Burns, 1993; Cavazos, 1989; D'Angelo & Adler, 1991; Epstein, 1995; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez and Bloom, 1993). It has been recognized that parents do play a critical role in providing their children with values, skills and attitudes that are essential for their success. Parental involvement starts in the home, promoting good behavior, excitement for learning and a strong work ethic so children come to school enthusiastic about learning. Parental involvement can and should continue into the classroom, helping with special activities or just the daily routine (Berger, 1991; Burns, 1993; Epstein, 1995).

Studies show that the benefits of parental involvement can be seen in both the school environment and the child's attitude (Amundson, 1988; Berger, 1991; Epstein, 1995). Parents do want to know what is going on in the school system and how they can help their child succeed at school. Parents do want what is best for their child, so teachers need to encourage parental involvement, if not at school, then in the home environment.

*"School can't educate alone. They used to be isolated, but now the problems are so magnified*

*that it takes the family; it takes the school and it takes the community all working together to make education possible."*

*Albert Holland, Principal  
(Amundson, 1988, p. 13)*

## Purpose

Research has emphasized the importance of parental involvement (Amundson, 1988; Barber & Patin, 1997; Berger, 1991; Burns, 1993; Cavazos, 1989; Epstein, 1995). Teachers tend to agree that parental involvement contributes to student success, effective teaching and a positive school climate. However, research has shown that school efforts to involve parents decrease as children become adolescents and enter middle school (Barber & Patin, 1997; Berger, 1991; Epstein, 1995; Vanden-Kiernan, 1996). Two explanations have been given for this decline. One possible reason for the decline in school practices to involve parents could be the teachers' beliefs about child development and their belief that older children do not want their parents to be involved (Barber & Patin, 1997; Vaden-Kiernan, 1996). The second possible reason for this decline is educational practices that make parents not feel welcome at school (Barber & Patin, 1997).

Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to explore both seventh grade students' and their teachers' attitudes and actions toward parental involvement in the learning process. Seventh grade was chosen for this study because it is the first grade in which these students leave their local elementary school and travel to a middle school environment for the community in which this

study was conducted. I felt it was important to listen to and try to understand the “student voices” and the “teachers voices” about parental involvement for older children.

### Definitions of Terms

Action is defined as a positive, neutral or negative deed that either promotes or discourages the task.

Adolescence is the span of years between childhood and adulthood that covers the ages from ten to early twenties. It is derived from a Latin word that means “to grow into maturity”. Because it is so prolonged, it is subdivided into three periods --early, middle and late adolescence (Gutheinz-Pierce & Whoolery, 1995; Hillman, 1991).

Attitude is defined as a positive, neutral or negative mental position.

Early Adolescence is the first stage of adolescence. This state includes children from ages 10-14 (Hillman, 1991).

Family is defined as a group of people related by blood or marriage living under the same roof.

Parent is defined as the adult that live under the same roof as the child and is in charge of the child’s up bringing.

Parental involvement is defined as active participation supporting positive education outcomes in their child’s development either in the school environment or in the home environment (Berger, 1991; Cavazos, 1989).

Seventh grade student is defined as a female or male currently enrolled in seventh grade middle school.

### Significance of the Study

The need for parental involvement in children's education is acknowledged and supported by extensive research (Barber & Patin, 1997; Berger, 1991; Epstein, 1995, Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993). Home and school are inseparable and both are concerned with the learning process of the child.

"We know that parents are the most consistent role model for their child and that parental attitudes and behaviors influence their child's academic achievement. We also know that parental involvement in the education of their child is further justified because parents have the primary responsibility for rearing the child in our society" (Brigham Young University, 1982, p. 8).

That is, parents are responsible for their child's attitudes, behavior and development.

This study will add to the existing body of knowledge about parental involvement. In particular, it will be of interest to seventh grade teachers and parents who are attempting to educate and support a seventh grade child. This information will look at giving "voice" to seventh grade students and seventh grade teachers to determine if and how the home and the school should continue to work together to enhance the learning achievement of older students.

### Limitations of the Study

All the participants in this study were seventh grade teachers and seventh grade students attending a local middle school. The public school system that was used for the study is found in a town in Oklahoma. All the participants came from the same area and attended or worked in the same school. This study was restricted to a sample of 155 students that returned their parental consent forms (from a student body of 469 seventh graders) and 30 seventh grade teachers who returned their survey forms (from a teaching staff of 38). The small size of the sample is acknowledged to be a limitation of the study and any generalization made from this study must be carefully evaluated with respect to the sample described. Also, the students that participated were students that had received good grades (ranging from A to C) the prior semester.

This study was done in a community that has an socio-economic status that would be described as middle class. This status is acknowledged to be a limitation.

These data were also assumed to be the honest and truthful response of those taking the survey. It was also assumed that both the students and the teachers had ample time to fill out the survey. All these factors significantly limit the generalizability of the results. However, the design of the study as a method of determining seventh grade students' and teachers' attitudes and actions toward parental involvement should add to the knowledge base of parental involvement.

## Organization of the Study

This report is organized into five chapters. Chapter I is the introductory chapter which explains the significance, need, limitations and organizations of this study. It also states the five research questions. Chapter II is devoted to a review of the literature and related research on parental involvement and the benefits of and barriers to parental involvement. Chapter III explains the methods and procedures of this study and discusses the selection of participants and the survey instruments used in the study. Chapter IV reports the results of the analyses of the data obtained from the surveys. Chapter V presents conclusions drawn from the study and recommendations for further research.

## Research Questions

1. Do seventh grade students have a positive attitude towards parental involvement?
2. Do seventh grade students actively seek parental involvement?
3. Do seventh grade females and seventh grade males differ in their attitudes and actions toward parental involvement?
4. Do seventh grade teachers have a positive attitude towards parental involvement?
5. Do seventh grade teachers actively seek parental involvement?

## CHAPTER II

# REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Introduction

In this chapter, a review of relevant literature and research will be discussed. Particular attention will be given to literature related to parental involvement, adolescent development and educational practices that act as barriers to parental involvement. Adolescent development and educational practices were chosen because these are the two explanations that have been given for the decline in efforts to involve parents at the middle school level (Barber & Patin, 1997; Vanden-Kiernan, 1996).

### Review

#### Parental Involvement

The family is critical to success in school. Indeed the "curriculum of the home" is twice as predictive of academic learning as family socio-economic status. . . . (and) parental influence is no less important in the high school years.

What Works: Research About  
Teaching and Learning  
U.S. Department of Education  
(Amundson, 1988, p. 3)

The importance of parental involvement in their child's achievement in school can neither be ignored nor overstated (Amundson, 1988). Extensive literature documents the relationship between parental involvement and children's learning and school performance. Parents make the difference between a student who excels and one who does not perform well in school (Amundson, 1988; Berger, 1991; Burns, 1993; Cavazos, 1989; Epstein, 1995; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993; Oakes & Lipton, 1990; Vaden-Kiernan, 1996). Parents are the most influential source that mold a child's development (Amundson, 1988).

Before a child even sets foot in a classroom, parents begin to lay the groundwork for learning by creating a warm, loving, nurturing environment in which the child can feel safe to explore his/her surroundings (Amundson, 1988). This family experience is important because it is the home that provides the most permanent environment and point of reference for the child (Kellaghan, et al, 1993). It is the parental attitudes and behaviors in the home environment that ease children's adjustment to school life. It is this parent-child interaction that influences children's school-related abilities and school success more than anything else (Cavazos, 1989; Oaks & Lipton, 1990).

Therefore, active parental involvement is critical. The basics of parenting is to provide love, good nutrition, enough sleep, clothing, shelter, health and safety for their child(ren) along with warmth and firm direction (Cavazos, 1989; Oakes & Lipton, 1990). These qualities are essential if children are to develop sound social and ethical values. However, these basics are not enough to



guarantee school success. Parents must set priorities, communicate values, consistently show interest and give words of praise and encouragement.

Parental involvement does positively affect the learning process (Amundson, 1988).

Oakes & Lipton (1990) describe five ways that parents actively support their children's school achievement: First, they take advantage of every possible opportunity to help their children develop language, play with words and explore ideas. Second, they provide their children with time out from structured activities and intensive interactions. Third, they allow them plenty of opportunities to play, explore, and discover. Fourth, they establish household routines that reinforce good learning habits and promote school success – they put learning and school first. They provide a space for learning and they help their children to develop a regular study time. And finally, they stay involved and enthusiastic about their children's learning, even as they get older. The actively involved parent also helps their children to feel in charge and they set high expectations for their children to meet as they are solving problems encountered in their daily lives.

No parents want to see their child fail. But according to Kellaghan, et al, (1993), schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context. Also, a study done by James Coleman (1991) conducted for the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare showed that there was a stronger correlation between student achievement and family involvement than there was between achievement and

"school quality". Therefore, interaction with children must include a home component to be effective.

Much of a child's development is cumulative. Amundson (1988) states that it starts at home where a child spends approximately 87% of his/her waking time under the control of their family and continues to the school environment where he/she spends the remaining 13% of his/her waking hours. Thus, success requires that parents participate actively and extensively in the child's development, starting from the earliest years, continuing up to the time when they are capable of self-reliance. Parents must guide, support, encourage, stimulate, motivate and keep their child on the right track for successful learning to take place. Hence, schools and families need to be united in their efforts to help each child achieve success (Kellaghan, et al, 1993).

When parents are involved in the process of education, their children will be encouraged to take responsibility for and to take a more active interest in their own learning, thus becoming successful learners (Kellaghan, et al, 1993). With this parental interest and support of the child, the child develops a higher interest in learning which promotes higher academic success (Burns, 1993). Therefore, it is important to recognize the interactive relationship between the home and the school in order to provide for success in school.

*"The American family is the rock on which a solid education can be built. I have seen examples all over this nation where two-parent families, single parents, stepparents, grandparents, aunts and uncles are providing strong family support for their children*

*to learn. If families teach the love of learning, it can make all the difference in the world to their children".*

*Richard W. Riley,  
US Secretary of Education  
(Coleman, 1991)*

### The Young Adolescent

Adolescence is a time of rapid change (Hillman, 1991; Irvin, 1998; Stevenson, 1998). The onset of adolescence brings with it physical, social, emotional and intellectual changes. Students during this time are attempting to adjust to profound physical and emotional changes brought on by puberty. Along with these physical changes and unpredictable emotions, changes in their relationships with parents and peers are occurring (Hillman, 1991; Stevenson, 1998). Peers and social relationships are of extreme importance at this age. Interactions with friends allow adolescents to compare families, contrast values, and take risks. Their reactions to one's dress, to one's jokes, to one's athletic ability and to one's appearance allow them to measure their ability in these areas (Irvin, 1998). Young adults need to see themselves as valued members of a group that offers mutual support and trusting relationships. These successful peer interactions, which begin at early adolescence, are critical for psychological growth, social maturity, emotional well-being and a sense of positive self-worth. This is how we learn the skills to cope with experiences in life (Hillman, 1991; Irvin, 1998).

Irvin (1998) suggests that peer groups usually have a positive effect. It is a place for trying out roles and ideas, plus it serves as a validation of a student's

value within a social unit beyond the family. Recent research shows that young adolescents do not routinely give into the negative aspects of peer pressure. Instead, they are more likely to follow adults' advice in matters that affect their long-term future and they actually rely on their own judgment more often than that of either their peers or their parents (Irvin, 1998). Peer groups usually reinforce rather than contradict the values of the parents because young adolescents tend to form friendships similar to the relationships they have had with their families (Irvin, 1998). The need for positive social interaction with peers and adults is important because the adolescents need overwhelming approval from friends, parents and other adults in their constructing their self-image. They need to know they can have a positive impact on the world around them which helps them to fulfil their need to succeed (Stevenson, 1998).

The onset of adolescence is a time for major realignments in relationships with adults. However, the new attachment that must occur with peers does not occur at the expense of, but rather in addition to, parental affection (Hillman, 1991; Irvin, 1998). Research findings suggest that authoritative parenting with its blend of non-suffocating affection and moderate control provides a secure familiar base for developing social interaction skills and a degree of independence (Hillman, 1991; Irvin, 1998; Stevenson, 1998). During this process of social and emotional development, the family remains important and the "cornerstone" for the young adolescent as he/she is trying to find his/her uniqueness and "place in the world" (Irvin, 1998).

### Educational Practices:

Many educational practices have discouraged parental involvement in the educational process. First, most schools say they want parental involvement but do not actively seek parent participation or only offer parents limited opportunities for involvement (Amundson, 1988; Berger, 1991). Second, many teachers overestimate their contacts with parents. As a result, they feel they are doing an effective job of promoting parental involvement, when parents' perceptions are the opposite (Amundson, 1988). Third, many teachers have received no training in working with parents. Because they are not comfortable, they may avoid any significant parent involvement at all (Amundson, 1988; Cavazos, 1989). Fourth, an increasing numbers of parents work and the schools do not provide opportunities for the working parents to be involved in the school (Amundson, 1988; Cavazos, 1989). Fifth, teachers, like parents, face continuous demands on their time. A need to involve parents may be seen by them as yet another demand for which to include in their already busy schedule (Cavazos, 1989; Berger, 1991). Sixth, parent roles are not clearly defined at the higher grades (Epstein, 1995). Seventh, the organizational structure of the middle school does not lend itself to parental involvement. Instead of one teacher, the child now has 6-10 teachers per day (Swap, 1993). Due to these educational practices, some parents do not feel welcome at school (Barber & Patin, 1997) and do not know what is expected of them or how they might help their child with their schooling (Swap, 1993).

Educators must understand that parental involvement is a process and not a product (Berger, 1991). There is no one best model for parental involvement (Amundson, 1988). It will take time, energy and commitment to make the process work for both the parents and the teachers and to help provide the greatest development for the children.

Research shows that it is each individual school's practices to involve parents that will determine how strong parental involvement is (Berger, 1991; Epstein, 1995). In addition, research has shown that parents who receive more requests from teachers to be involved in their child's education report higher levels of involvement both at home and in the school (Vaden-Kiernan, 1996).

The school and home are intertwined. It rests, therefore, on the shoulders of the schools to develop or to strengthen a positive relationship with parents in order to ensure the continuity and developmental environment that children need (Berger, 1991, p. vi). Parents and teachers need to work together so they can help each other fulfill their responsibilities, while bringing home and school together as partners in education.

### Summary

Parents play a crucial role in providing their children with the values and skills essential to success in school and in later life. When parents support learning at home, children are more likely to do well in school. But as we have seen, parents do not have to go to school to be involved, nor do they need a

college degree or have lots of free time. They just need to be enthusiastically involved with their children's learning by encouraging good study habits, monitoring homework, nurturing creativity, curiosity, and confidence and demanding the best possible schools for their children (Cavazos, 1989). They also need to provide for play, exploration of language and ideas and daily routines that support high expectations (Oakes & Lipton, 1990). To this end, parents must be involved in helping their children learn both at home and in the school, communicating to their children that school achievement is a top priority (Oakes & Lipton, 1990) and in selecting a quality education matched to their child's needs (Cavazos, 1989).

Yes, the nature of family has changed today. Yet young people still respect their parents, tend to agree with their parents' values and turn to parents for guidance (Irwin, 1998). There is a desire on the part of adolescents to begin to assert their need for independence. Although much of young adolescent behavior appears to be rejecting from an adults perspective, this is not the time for adults to alienate themselves (Irwin, 1998). Although peers become more influential during adolescence, in no way does peer influence out-weigh the influence of supportive parents (Hillman, 1991). Recent research indicates that early separation from family can have a negative effect on an adolescents' emotional well-being (Irwin, 1998).

Therefore, the school climate must actively demonstrate the spirit of teamwork among all members of the school community. Families and schools

must be allied through trust and respect if young adolescents are to succeed in school. Parents must be considered a very important educational resource. Schools today need to reach out to offer families meaningful roles in their children's education and lives in the school. It is important for the young adolescents to see their parents as effective people, as people who are concerned about them and who work and act on their behalf. And it is important that teachers understand their students' personal and family contexts so they can reach and enrich the students' learning and help them to take ownership of and responsibility for their own learning. So, our task as teachers is to be supportive and nonjudgmental and to do the very best we can with each situation as it is (Stevenson, 1998).

In conclusion, schools and families can no longer be "separate but equal" if they are to solve the complex problems facing the children of today. Schools must become family places where parents are encouraged to be actively involved in school life and where parents and teachers meet to guide and support each other. A positive relationship is the key to enhancing children's learning and to creating successful children (Burns, 1993). The following poem by an unknown author shows the importance of having a positive relationship between teachers and parents.

#### Unity

I dreamed I stood in a studio  
And watched two sculptors there,  
The clay they used was a young child's mind,  
And they fashioned it with care.



One was a teacher; the tools he used  
Were books and music and art;  
One a parent with a guiding hand,  
And a gentle, loving heart.

Day after day the teacher toiled  
With touch that was deft and sure,  
While the parent labored by his side  
And polished and smoothed it o'er.

And when at last their task was done,  
They were proud of what they had wrought,  
For the things they had molded into the child  
Could neither be sold nor bought.

And each agreed he would have failed  
If he had worked alone,  
For behind the parent stood the school,  
And behind the teacher, the home.

-Author unknown  
(Burns, 1993 p. 88)

### Predicted Results on the Research Questions

The primary purpose for gathering these data is to answer the five main research questions. In doing so, I will be able to determine if what the "experts" say in the literature review is really what is happening in the schools. Below I talk about the five questions and what I anticipate my study will show on the basis of the literature review.

**Research Question #1:** Do seventh grade students have a positive attitude toward parental involvement? The research on parental involvement states that those children with strong family involvement and support possess the positive attitudes and behaviors that increase success in school (Amundson,

1988; Berger, 1991; Epstein, 1995). The research on adolescents shows that they are striving for independence but that they also follow adults' advice in matters that affect their long-term future (Irwin, 1998). Because most children want to be successful, I do expect to find that these seventh grade students will have a positive attitude toward parental involvement.

**Research Question #2:** Do seventh grade students actively seek parental involvement? Children in the middle years are gradually detaching themselves from their parents but they still need and in most cases want adult attention, affection, guidance and direction. However, Irwin (1998) states that this period of development is characterized by a new sense of social awareness in which students move away from the security of the family to a more dominate peer dependence. Thus, I expect to find that these students will move away from actively seeking parental involvement unless they need help.

**Research Question #3:** Do seventh grade females and seventh grade males differ in their attitudes and actions toward parental involvement? Due to the fact that all students want to succeed, I feel they will do what is necessary for them to become successful learners. Therefore, I expect to find that there is no difference between these female and male adolescent students – both want to be successful.

**Research Question #4:** Do seventh grade teachers have a positive attitude toward parental involvement? After completing the review of current literature and finding overwhelming support for the importance of parental involvement (Amundson, 1988; Berger, 1991; Burns, 1993; Cavazos, 1989;

Vaden-Kiernan, 1996), I expect to find that these teachers will have positive attitudes toward parental involvement because they want their students to succeed.

**Research Question #5:** Do seventh grade teachers actively promote parental involvement? There was an abundant amount of material on the value of parental involvement and on the many and varied ways in which to involve parents. But because teachers also know that the adolescent wishes to become more independent and move away from parental support (Irvin, 1998), I expect to find that these teachers will encourage parental involvement but will not actively seek parental involvement.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain in detail the methods and procedures of this study. Included in this chapter are sections that state the purpose of this study and describe the subjects, the survey instruments, the data collection procedure, and the data analysis.

#### Purpose of the Study

This study was to examine the attitudes of seventh grade students and seventh grade teachers regarding parental involvement and to determine how these attitudes are expressed in the actions that both groups use with the children's parents. The five questions investigated in this study were:

1. Do seventh grade students have a positive attitude toward parental involvement?
2. Do seventh grade students actively seek parental involvement?
3. Do seventh grade females and seventh grade males differ in their attitudes and actions toward parental involvement?

4. Do seventh grade teachers have a positive attitude towards parental involvement?
5. Do seventh grade teachers actively promote parental involvement?

### Subjects

The subjects selected for this study involved two subject populations: seventh grade students and seventh grade teachers. Permission to do this study was obtained from the district superintendent and the building principal. The subjects were among 5,500 students and 391 teachers in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade in an Oklahoma school district. This district has a student ethnic composition of 14% American Indian, 1% Asian, 4% Black, 77% Caucasian and 4% Hispanic and a teacher ethnic composition of 1% American Indian, 1% Black and 98% Caucasian.

### Students

All subjects in this group that participated in this study were considered to be seventh grade students. All 513 students in the middle school building were given the survey (Appendix D) during their 30-minute homeroom time. Even though all 513 students had given their written permission agreeing to participate and to do their best while filling out the survey (Appendix C), only 155 parental written permission forms were received. Therefore, the 155 subjects used in this study were students who had agreed to participate, signed the student consent form (Appendix C) and whose parents had given permission for their participation (Appendix B).

The 155 seventh grade students that formally participated in this study consisted of 86 females and 69 males. For other general information regarding student gender, ethnicity and age see Table 3.1 below.

**Table 3.1 Descriptive Statistics for Students**

	Female	Male	Total
Subjects	86	69	155
Mean Age	12.8	12.8	12.8
Ethnicity:			
American Indian	11	2	13 ( 8%)
Black	1	2	3 ( 2%)
Caucasian	68	56	124 (80%)
Hispanic	4	3	7 ( 5%)
Other	4	4	8 ( 5%)

### Teachers

All the subjects in this group that participated in this study were seventh grade teachers. All 38 teachers in the middle school building were given the survey (Appendix E) during their regularly scheduled faculty meeting. They were given a week to fill out the survey during their free time. Even though all 38 teachers received a survey (Appendix E), only 30 were returned. Filling out the survey form and returning it constituted permission to use the results. Therefore, the 30 subjects used in this study were teachers who had agreed to participate by returning their surveys.

The 30 teachers that formally participated in this study consisted of 22 females and 8 males. For more information regarding the teacher gender,

ethnicity, age, degree held and years of teaching experience see Table 3.2 below.

**Table 3.2 Descriptive Statistics for Teachers**

	<u>Minimum</u>	<u>Maximum</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Age	23	60	44.67
Years of Teaching Experience	1	38	13.26
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Total</u>	
Gender			
Female	73.3	22	
Male	26.7	8	
Ethnicity			
American Indian	3.3	1	
Caucasian	96.7	29	
Degree Held			
Bachelor	66.7	20	
Master	33.3	10	

### Description of the Instruments

Two survey instruments were used in this study. These instruments included statements to determine both the subjects' attitudes and actions relative to parental involvement. Both the student survey (Appendix D) and the teacher survey (Appendix E) contained three parts.

Part I asked general information about the subjects such as age, gender, ethnicity, grades received (for students only) and years of teaching experience (for teachers only).

Part II contained twenty statements designed to solicit information about the teachers' and the students' attitudes and actions regarding parental involvement. The subjects were asked to read the ten statements pertaining to attitudes (Attitudinal Statements) and select an appropriate "answer choice"

using a Likert-scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). They were then asked to read the ten statements pertaining to actions taken (Actions Statements) and select an appropriate "answer choice" using a Likert Scale from 1 (Never or almost never) to 5 (Always or Almost Always).

Part III solicited additional qualitative data about parental involvement. These data consisted of three open-ended questions aimed at obtaining information about students' and teachers' perceptions concerning what parents do, what they wished parents would and would not do to promote educational success.

### Survey Development

In order to ensure that the statements in this survey were appropriate for determining students' and teachers' attitudes and actions regarding parental involvement, several steps were taken. First, this survey was composed of statements adapted from Berger (1991), who has written extensively about teachers' and students' attitudes towards parental involvement. Second, feedback was solicited from graduate students (from the College of Education on Oklahoma State University's campus), who were asked to critique the survey for content and overall readability. Third, a pilot study was conducted to further validate the statements in terms of content and comprehensibility. The pilot study consisted of a representative sample of teachers and students (approximately 10 teachers and 10 students) who were not otherwise affiliated with the study. The pilot groups were asked to complete their respective surveys and provide



feedback about completeness, readability and ease of completing the survey instruments in addition to validating the statements, as mentioned above.

Fourth, input was sought from the superintendent-of-schools, the principal of the school to be surveyed, and the teachers to be surveyed regarding the surveys' format and content. The principal, the teachers and the superintendent-of-schools reviewed drafts of the survey and authorized its administration, considering the study to be a benefit to the school district, the students, the teachers and the parents. These steps resulted in various refinements to the content and format of the final versions of the surveys.

### Procedure

Several steps were taken in preparation for the survey administration. The researcher visited the middle school during a regular faculty meeting. The researcher told the teachers about this study and asked for their help in three ways: one, the teachers were asked to fill out the teacher survey; two, the teachers were asked to talk with their homeroom students and to send home with these students a letter for the parents which explained the study and asked the parents to sign a consent form allowing their students' results to be used in the study; and third, the teachers were asked to administer the student survey.

### Student Survey

Each teacher was asked to talk with his or her homeroom students to explain the survey. They were also asked to explain that all the students would be filling out the survey the next week during one day's homeroom time and if the

students wanted their results to be included in the survey, their parents must also consent. Therefore, a letter (Appendix A) was taken home by the students explaining about the purpose of the study and asking that the parents sign a consent form (Appendix B) so their child's "voice" could be heard. The students had one week to bring back their signed parental consent forms so that their results could be used in this study. Several "blank" student surveys were left in the school office in case any parent wished to view the survey their child would be filling out.

The following week during homeroom time (i.e., the first thirty minutes of the day), the seventh grade teachers gave the survey (Appendix D) to their students. Before administering the survey, the teachers were asked to read to the students the directions as indicated in the Student Informed Consent Script (Appendix F) and to read and have all the students sign the Student Consent Form (Appendix C). This step was important as it reminded the students to do their best and to think seriously before answering each statement honestly. It also reminded the students that their grade would not be affected by anything that they wrote, as the survey was anonymous.

It was estimated that the survey would take about 30 minutes. Homeroom time was chosen in which to administer this survey for two reasons. One, it did not disrupt the students' classes and two, it was the first thirty-minutes of the day when the students would be the most rested and the least stressed. After the surveys were completed, the teachers were asked to return them to the teachers' lounge where the researcher was present to collect the surveys.

## Teacher Survey

At the faculty meeting that the researcher attended, each teacher was given a teacher survey (Appendix E). The researcher explained the purpose of this study and how the data would be used. It was made very clear by the researcher that the teachers' participation in this study was voluntary and anonymous, that there would be no penalty for not completing the survey, and that the information obtained would be kept confidential at all times (See attached Teacher Informed Consent Script, Appendix G). Teachers were asked to fill out the survey (Appendix E) during their free time and return the completed survey within a week. The teachers were allowed two options to turn in their completed surveys because not all the seventh grade teachers would be administering the student surveys. One, the teachers could return the completed survey to the office where there was a special "tamper proof" box; or, two, they could return their completed survey when they returned their student surveys to the researcher in the teachers' lounge.

The teachers were not asked to sign consent forms. The teachers were told that if they turned in their survey, it would be counted.

## Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 7.5 for Windows was used to record and analyze the data from the surveys. A t-test was used to determine whether significant differences existed between the female and male students with respect to their attitudes and actions toward

parental involvement. An alpha scale reliability analysis was performed to determine the reliability of the survey instruments. The qualitative statements of the surveys were examined for consistency with the quantitative results.

For the purposes of analysis and interpretation of the data obtained in this study, the subjects' mean responses from the Likert-scale 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) were categorized into three levels of performances (positive, neutral and negative) on each of the statements used. Thus, for attitudinal statements, a mean score of 3.50 or higher indicated that the subjects had a high or positive attitude toward parental involvement. Similarly, for actions towards parental involvement statements, a mean score 3.50 or higher indicated that the subject demonstrated active involvement in parental involvement. On the other hand, a score of 2.50 or below indicated that the subjects displayed a low or negative attitude and actions towards parental involvement. Finally, scores ranging from 2.50 and 3.49 indicated a neutral attitude and level of activity towards parental involvement.

An attempt was made to establish a clear difference between a high or positive and a low or negative mean rating of attitudes and actions toward parental involvement. A full point was left between the high or 3.5 and a low of 2.5 so that such a distinction could be established. Any mean rating which fell between 2.51 and 3.49 was considered "neutral" and because of this neutral range, the conclusions reached are more reliable and easier to support.

Next, the researcher examined each section (attitudes and actions) to determine which mean scores fell into what category (positive, negative or

neutral) in order to decide if the attitudes and actions of the subjects were positive, negative or neutral.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This chapter reports the results of analyzing the data obtained from the seventh grade students and teachers used in the study regarding their attitudes and actions towards parental Involvement. An additional question of interest sought to investigate whether there were any statistically significant differences between seventh grade males and females with respect to their attitudes and actions towards parental involvement.

All subjects in the study completed a parental involvement questionnaire using a standard Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Upon completion of the instrument, an internal consistency reliability analysis was conducted in an attempt to estimate the degree of consistency among the subjects with respect to their responses to the various items of the questionnaire. The results showed a reasonably high internal consistency coefficient for students ( $\text{Alpha} = .85$ ), and a modest internal consistency coefficient for teachers ( $\text{Alpha} = .51$ ). These data suggest that the subjects' responses across items were fairly consistent and reliable, although the teachers did show more variability within their group.

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to 5 (Strongly Agree) were categorized into three levels of performances (positive, neutral and negative) on each of the statements used. Thus, for attitudinal statements, a mean score of 3.50 or higher indicated that the subjects had a high or positive attitude toward parental involvement. Similarly, for actions towards parental involvement statements, a mean score 3.50 or higher indicated that the subject demonstrated active involvement in parental involvement. On the other hand, a score of 2.50 or below indicated that the subjects displayed a low or negative attitude and actions towards parental involvement. Finally, scores ranging from 2.50 and 3.49 indicated a neutral attitude and level of activity towards parental involvement.

An attempt was made to establish a clear difference between a high or positive and a low or negative mean rating of attitudes and actions toward parental involvement. A full point was left between the high or 3.5 and a low of 2.5 so that such a distinction could be established. Any mean rating which fell between 2.51 and 3.49 was considered "neutral" and because of this neutral range, the conclusions reached are more reliable and easier to support.

Next, the researcher examined each section (attitudes and actions) to determine which mean scores fell into what category (positive, negative or neutral) in order to decide if the attitudes and actions of the subjects were positive, negative or neutral.

**Research Question #1: Do seventh grade students have a positive attitude toward parental involvement?**

The results, presented in Table 4.1 below, show that, overall, the seventh grade students surveyed in this study displayed a positive attitude toward parental involvement.

**Table 4.1**  
**Students' Attitudes Toward Parental Involvement**  
**(in descending order)**

<u>Attitude Statements</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Statement #:		
8 I feel that my parents love me and want me to do well in school.	4.66	.94
10 I feel that my parents really want me to succeed.	4.63	.94
9 I feel my parents give me encouragement to do my best in everything I try.	4.34	1.07
6 I feel my parents should help me only when I ask for help with my homework.	4.10	1.23
5 I feel that I am old enough to be responsible for my own learning.	3.86	1.18
1 I feel it is important for my parents to be involved in my education.	3.84	1.08
7 I feel that it is important to share with my parents the good things and the bad things that happen in my day at school.	3.62	1.19
4 I feel glad to see my parent(s) at school.	2.60	1.37
3 I feel happy that my parent helps in the classroom.	2.55	1.35
2 I feel that my parents compare what I am doing to what my classmates are doing.	2.25	1.25



A closer look at the ten attitude statements in the above table show that the mean scores ranged from a high of 4.66 (Statement #8: "I feel that my parents love me and want me to do well in school") to a low of 2.25 (Statement #2: "I feel that my parents compare what I am doing to what my classmates are doing"). In general, as a group, these seventh grade students feel positive about their parents' involvement in their education although they are less positive about their parents' physical presence in the classroom. These results are certainly reassuring in light of research support for the role parents can play in their children's education.

#### **Research Question #2: Do seventh grade students actively seek parental involvement?**

Table 4.2, found on the next page, presents the data illustrating the students' actions towards parental involvement. These data show that the seventh graders surveyed have a neutral response toward engaging in activities that call for their parents' involvement. However, they support parental involvement with activities done in the home more than parental involvement in the school or classrooms. As a group, the mean score obtained ranged from a high of 4.18 (Statement #19: "I care what my parents think") to a low of 1.83 (Statement #14: "I invite my parents to come to school").

However, upon further investigation of both the quantitative and the qualitative results, the majority of these students already feel that their parents are helping them to become successful, so they do not perceive a need to actively promote parental involvement. Most of these students value parental

involvement in their schoolwork. Again, the results are encouraging when one considers the impact of parents in the child's education.

**Table 4.2**  
**Students' Actions Toward Parental Involvement**  
**(in descending order)**

<u>Action Statements</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Statement #:		
19 I care what my parents think.	4.18	1.07
16 I receive words of encouragement from home.	4.16	1.13
11 I ask my parents for help with homework I do not understand.	3.94	1.14
18 I want my parents to attend back-to-school night so they can see my classroom.	3.46	1.25
17 I want my parents to attend parent/teacher conferences to meet my teachers and see my work.	3.18	1.34
15 I share all my school papers with my parents.	3.06	1.34
20 I want my parents to talk with my teachers regularly so they know how I am doing and can help me with things I do not understand.	3.02	1.35
13 I want my parents to help at school.	2.50	1.22
12 I want my parents to visit my classrooms.	2.06	1.10
14 I invite my parents to come to school.	1.83	1.06

**Research Question #3: Do seventh grade male and female students differ with respect to their attitudes and actions toward parental involvement?**

A series of t-test analyses, presented in Table 4.3a and 4.3b found on the next two pages, revealed no statistically significant differences between female

and male students with respect to any of the attitudinal or action statements in the survey.

**Table 4.3a**  
**Student Attitudes Toward Parental Involvement by Gender**

Attitude Statements	Female		Male		t-Test	df	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD			
1. I feel it is important for my parents to be involved in my education.	3.87	1.0	3.81	1.12	.360	152	.719
2. I feel that my parents compare what I am doing to what my classmates are doing.	2.29	1.25	2.22	1.25	.327	151	.744
3. I feel happy that my parent helps in the classroom.	2.50	1.31	2.63	1.40	-.590	149	.556
4. I feel glad to see my parent(s) at school.	2.62	1.37	2.61	1.38	.019	151	.985
5. I feel that I am old enough to be responsible for my own learning.	3.79	1.22	3.96	1.13	-.854	151	.394
6. I feel my parents should help me only when I ask for help with my homework.	4.07	1.23	4.13	1.24	-.313	152	.755
7. I feel that it is important to share with my parents the good things and the bad things that happen in my day at school.	3.64	1.19	3.63	1.19	.015	151	.988
8. I feel that my parents love me and want me to do well in school.	4.73	.76	4.57	1.12	1.02	151	.310
9. I feel my parents give me encouragement to do my best in everything I try.	4.47	.91	4.16	1.24	1.78	151	.078
10. I feel that my parents really want me to succeed.	4.73	.81	4.50	1.07	1.51	151	.133

**Table 4.3b**  
**Student Actions Toward Parental Involvement by Gender**

Action Statements	Female		Male		t-Test	df	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD			
11. I ask my parents for help with homework I do not understand.	3.92	1.15	3.94	1.13	-.127	151	.899
12. I want my parents to visit my classrooms.	2.11	1.01	2.01	1.21	.504	150	.615
13. I want my parents to help at school.	2.51	1.21	2.51	1.25	-.008	150	.944
14. I invite my parents to come to school.	1.89	1.04	1.76	1.09	.764	150	.446
15. I share all my school papers with my parents.	3.07	1.45	3.04	1.19	.121	151	.904
16. I receive words of encouragement from home.	4.19	1.09	4.12	1.19	.383	151	.702
17. I want my parents to attend parent/teacher conferences to meet my teachers and see my work.	3.09	1.38	3.26	1.31	-.778	151	.438
18. I want my parents to attend back-to-school night so they can see my classroom.	3.35	1.23	3.63	1.23	-1.39	151	.165
19. I care what my parents thinks.	4.27	1.07	4.08	1.18	.999	151	.320
20. I want my parents to talk with my teachers regularly so they know how I am doing and can help me with things I do not understand.	2.94	1.36	3.12	1.34	-.803	151	.423

An examination of the mean scores obtained for female and male students indicated that these seventh graders' feelings and actions toward parental involvement are generally positive regardless of gender membership.

A closer look at these data show that the mean scores ranged from a high for females of 4.73 and males of 4.57 (Statement #8: "I feel that my parents love me and want what is best for me") to a low mean of 2.29 for females and 2.22 for males (Statement #2: "I feel that my parents compare what I am doing to what my classmates are doing").

However, it is important to note that while these students feel positively about their parental involvement at home (Statement #6 [Female: M=3.64, SD=1.19; Male: M=3.63, SD=1.19]: "I feel my parents should help me when I ask for help with my homework"), they are not as enthusiastic about their parents helping out in the classroom (Statement #3 [Female:M=2.62, SD=1.37; Male: M=2.61, SD=1.38]: "I feel happy that my parent helps in the classroom"). These results are consistent for female and male students throughout the survey.

#### **Research Question #4: Do seventh grade teachers have a positive attitude toward parental involvement?**

Table 4.4, on the following page, presents the results concerning teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement. These data show that there is some variability in the teachers' feelings towards parental involvement. The mean scores for teachers as a group ranged from a high of 4.73 (Statement #6: "I feel that parents' attitudes about school are important") to a low of 2.33 (Statement #1: "I feel that parents are more work than help"). A number of means fell in the neutral category, indicating that while teachers are not overly enthusiastic about parental involvement, they are not opposed to such involvement. This supports

Barber & Patin's (1997) and Vaden-Kiernan's (1996) findings that state the reason for decline in school practices to involve parents could be due to the teachers' beliefs about child development and their belief that older children do not want their parents to be involved. Also, it must be noted that statement #1, "I feel that parents are more work than help", because of the way it is stated, should be considered a positive statement even though it received a negative mean.

**Table 4.4**  
**Teachers' Attitudes Toward Parental Involvement**  
**(in descending order)**

<u>Attitude Statements</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Statement #:		
6 I feel that parents' attitudes about school are important.	4.73	.52
4 I feel that a seventh-grader needs to learn to do things on his/her own.	3.90	.76
3 I feel parents are interested in helping their child(ren).	3.53	.63
10 I feel that if I ask for help from the parents, I do get their support.	3.46	.97
2 I feel that I have the support of the parents.	3.37	.89
8 I feel that parents need to initiate communication with me about their child.	3.17	.87
7 I feel that every parent should "come to school" and follow their children for a day and attend class to help them understand what their child is experiencing while at school.	3.10	1.42
5 I feel it is my responsibility to get the parents involved with their child's learning.	2.90	1.29
9 I feel that older students want parental involvement.	2.63	1.27
1 I feel that parents are more work than help.	2.33	.88

Chapter 4  
The Role of the Teacher

**Research Question #5: Do seventh grade teachers actively seek parental involvement?**

Table 4.5 on the following page presents the results concerning teachers' actions toward parental involvement. The results show that there is some variability among teachers with regard to the 10 statements about actions that they take towards parental involvement. The mean scores obtained for the group ranged from a high of 4.63 (Statement # 17: "I consider an open door policy important to the school and to the classroom") to a low of 1.60 (Statement #18: "I use school-home activity packets to encourage family involvement"). A number of means fell in the negative category indicating that teachers are not overly enthusiastic about seeking parental involvement but they do think an open-door policy is important (M=4.63). Since these teachers do consider parents as partners in the educational process (M=4.53) they try to make parents feel comfortable when they come to school (M=4.57).

Upon closer examination, the responses also suggest that teachers are more enthusiastic about supporting parental involvement (e.g., Statements #15, 16, 17, 19, & 20) than they are about engaging in concrete activities aimed at promoting parental involvement such as sending newsletters home with students (Statement #12) or sending written handouts (Statement # 11).

In conclusion, these results have shown several interesting findings. First, these seventh grade students surveyed showed a positive attitude towards parental involvement. However, they wanted this involvement only when they needed help and only in the home environment. These results appeared to be consistent for all these students regardless of gender membership. Second, the

**Table 4.5**  
**Teachers' Actions Toward Parental Involvement**  
**(in descending order)**

<u>Action Statements</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Statement #:		
17 I consider an open-door policy important to the school and to the classroom.	4.63	.67
15 I make parents feel comfortable when they come to school and my classroom.	4.57	.57
16 I consider parents as partners in the educational process.	4.53	.73
20 I listen to parents to find out their perceptions about their child(ren).	4.23	.86
19 I communicate and share my plans and ideas for my students with their parents throughout the school year.	2.97	.99
13 I communicate with parents monthly about their child's achievement.	2.43	1.19
11 I send home written handouts that encourage parents to participate in the classroom.	2.33	.99
12 I send newsletters home with my students to keep parents informed about what is happening in the classroom.	2.10	1.27
14 I actively seek parent volunteers for my classroom.	2.07	1.11
18 I use school-home activity packets to encourage family involvement.	1.60	.89

results for seventh grade teachers showed that they support parental involvement and think it is very important, but they do little to encourage parental involvement through the actions that they take.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, an attempt was made to study the attitudes and actions towards parental involvement of 155 seventh grade students and 30 seventh grade teachers in an Oklahoma middle school. Also of interest was whether there were any statistically significant differences between seventh grade female and male students with respect to their attitudes and actions towards parental involvement. This topic was considered worthy of study given the recognized impact of parental involvement in a child's education.

Research indicates that students whose parents help with homework, attend school activities, promote good behavior and strong work ethic, show concern and give words of encouragement and praise have better attitudes toward learning. They also generally perform better academically and are less likely to drop out than those students whose parents are not as actively involved in their education (Amundson, 1988; Berger, 1991; Burns, 1993; Cavazos, 1989; Epstein, 1995; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993; Oakes & Lipton, 1990; Vaden-Kiernan, 1996).

However, while parental involvement is undoubtedly crucial in one's education, it is unclear how the students themselves—and their teachers feel

about such involvement. These questions formed the basis for the present study. Specifically, the research questions, which guided this study, were designed to find out how seventh grade students and teachers felt about parental involvement, whether they actively sought parental involvement, and whether female and male students differed regarding their attitudes and actions towards parental involvement. This chapter summarizes the main results obtained, discusses the findings in light of what research has to say about parental involvement and considers some conclusions and implications for research and instruction.

The results of this study have shown several interesting findings. First, the seventh grade students surveyed in the present study displayed a generally positive attitude towards parental involvement. However, they were not overly enthusiastic about actively seeking parental involvement in their schoolwork. These results appeared to be consistent for all students regardless of gender membership. The qualitative research data suggests that this could be due to the fact that these students felt that their parents were already doing a good job of helping them and did not need to seek this help as it was already being given. Second, the results showed that while seventh grade teachers indicate support for parental involvement in students' education, they, like their students, did not display a great deal of enthusiasm when it came to taking concrete actions to encourage parental involvement. This could be due to the fact that they are supporting their students' wishes about not wanting parental involvement at school, thus supporting the research by Barber & Patin (1997).

These results are interesting when one considers what is known about the role of parents in a child's education. However, it is unclear whether students, teachers and parents share the same understanding, attitudes and excitement about parental involvement. These findings have some important implications for parents, students, teachers and teacher educators.

### Parents

For the parents, they suggest that these seventh grade students feel that their parents are already doing an adequate job of helping them to become successful students. These students feel that their parents really want them to succeed (Statement #10, M=4.63). Their parents are helping them with homework, helping them study for tests, giving them words of encouragement and praise to do their best in everything they try (Statement #9, M=4.34) and being generally supportive in their educational efforts. These students also feel it is important for their parents to be involved in their education (Statement #1, M=3.84).

These students want their parents to know that they want parental involvement (Statement #1, M=3.84) but they also want to become more independent and they feel that they are old enough to be responsible for their own learning (Statement #5, M=3.86). Therefore, these students think their parents should help them with homework only when they are asked to do so (Statement # 6, M=4.10) because they do want to succeed and will seek help with homework when needed (Statement # 11, M=3.94).

These seventh grade students still care very much about what their parents think (Statement #19, M=4.18). From the open-ended qualitative questions, it was found that they very much want their parents approval, love, trust and respect but they also wish that their parents would recognize that they are growing up and need to start making some decisions for themselves. They expressed their desire to try and “stand on their own two feet” and learn from their own mistakes while someone is there to help them work through these mistakes. They asked that their parents be understanding and patient while they are learning to become independent, and that their parents allow them room to explore without being overly critical of their actions.

Therefore, recommendations to the parents for strengthening parental involvement at home would be to continue setting high expectations, giving words of praise, setting good examples, listening to what their children think, trusting them, being patient, showing them that decisions have consequences (good and bad) and being flexible. Give these children ‘room to grow and experiment with decision making’ but be ready to ‘catch them if they need your help or support’. Also, give them responsibility at home so they will become self-reliant and learn to plan ahead (Cavazos, 1989).

Recommendations to the parents for strengthening parental involvement at school would be to get to know each and every teacher your child has, volunteer in those classrooms during a time when your child is somewhere else, learn about your school’s expectations and volunteer to work in the school and/or classrooms on a regular basis.

## Students

For the students, it is recommended that the teachers actively promote parental involvement so that the students will be more willing to invite their parents to school activities and encourage their parents to volunteer in the building. It is also recommended that the seventh grade students in this study be helped by their parents, their peers and their teachers to develop positive attitudes toward learning through better communication. It is further recommended that these students be offered classes to build their self-esteem and to help them learn how to make the 'right' choices, while they still have adults and peers to help them understand all sides of the issues. Finally, it is recommended that these students should be offered classes that help them realize their long-term goals. Not only should students be given time to dream and plan for the future, but they should be encouraged to take service learning classes so they can use what they are learning in useful ways, become volunteers themselves and learn from other adults about career options. Volunteerism through service learning will help them in their strive for their own independence and individuality. It will also help them learn to fit in better with their peers.

## Teachers

For the teachers, the results suggest that they must use activities and promote strategies that actively encourage parents to be involved. These teachers felt very strongly that parents are partners in the educational process

(Statement #16, M=4.53) and consider an open-door policy important (Statement # 17, M=4.63) but they did not follow through with actions. Therefore, they did not get the 'extra' help they wished for in the classroom. And because 'the school' does not make volunteering a priority, children do not want just their parent to be singled out to help in the school. It appears to be okay if parents attend back-to-school night (Statement #18, M=3.46) or go to teacher/parent conferences (Statement # 17, M=3.18) because these are expected of all parents.

Also, these seventh grade teachers whole-heartedly agree that parents' attitudes about school are very important (Statement #6, M=4.73) and they do feel that parents are interested in helping their children (Statement #3, M=3.53). But, they also feel that seventh graders need to learn to do things on their own (Statement #4, M=3.90) and learn to accept the consequences of their own actions.

These seventh grade teachers appear to be fighting an 'inner battle'. On one hand the teachers fully understand that parental involvement is important (Statement # 16, M=4.53) but on the other the teachers believe they understand child development and feel that older students do not want too much parental involvement (Statement #4, M=3.90). This shows that the teachers have not resolved the issue of balancing these two conflicting issues and, since they have not determined what to do, they appear to do nothing regarding parental involvement. Therefore, the problem appears to be striking a balance that is

beneficial and promotes success for all students in the classroom. In order to solve this problem, communication appears to be a key issue.

Therefore, recommendations to the teachers for strengthening parental involvement would be not only need to 'know' that parental involvement is important but to act on this knowledge. Teachers must take the first steps and actively seek parental involvement to make schools 'user friendly' for all. It is also recommended that they make volunteering a priority so it becomes an expected thing to do in the building. It is further recommended that these teachers communicate more effectively with parents and students.

### Educators

For educators, the results are clear. Most parents are doing a good job at home and research has shown that this is of great benefit to the students in a variety of ways (Amundson, 1988; Cavazos, 1989). So, if schools want the parents to help in the classroom, then all the teachers and administrators must actively seek parental involvement and make it a school priority. This supports the research findings that state those schools that have active volunteer programs have active parental involvement (Amundson, 1988; Berger, 1991; Epstein, 1995). And because it is an expected happening in the school, students readily accept parental involvement because it is a part of 'the way things are done' in their school (Renihan & Renihan, 1995). Therefore, it is up to the teachers and schools to implement appropriate practices to encourage parental involvement in the schools (Berger, 1991; Epstein, 1995).

Also, it appears that much of the responsibility for creating a climate that welcomes and encourages parents to volunteer within the school sits on the principal's shoulders (Amundson, 1988; Giba, 1999). Giba (1999) states the manner in which a principal interacts with children ...can greatly affect teachers and parents perceptions. Strong parent-teacher relationships do not just happen, they require a lot of hard work and a willingness to spend time to get to know each other and to understand each other's expectations. Therefore, it is up to the school boards, administrators and principals working with teachers, parents and students to foster positive relationships and forge strong partnerships.

In conclusion, it is recommended that all school districts encourage parental involvement, training teachers, principals and administrators to effectively communicate with both parents and students in order to encourage parental involvement and to build trust between all parties. It is also recommended that each 'building' have a volunteer program so that both the teachers and the parents can work together to enhance the educational process of the students. Finally, it is recommended that teacher training programs make pre-service teachers more aware of the importance of parental involvement and share with these teachers-in-training different types of actions that can and should be taken by them in order to get the parents involved both in the classroom and at home.



## Future Research

Finally, further research in the area of parental involvement is needed. First, this study should be replicated in various seventh grade classrooms (rural to urban, and low socio-economic to high socio-economic) to verify the results obtained. Second, it is suggested that this study be conducted in schools where parent volunteer programs are already in place and in schools that have no parent volunteer programs in order to determine the effectiveness of parental involvement. Third, it is recommended that this study be conducted when students make the transition to middle school so that it can be determined if parental involvement has the same effect on students at different times during their schooling. Finally, it is recommended that the survey be modified so it can be determined more precisely why students and teachers feel the way they do toward parental involvement at home, at school in general and specifically in the classroom.

One must remember the limitations of this study when reading these results. This study was done with a 'select' group in Oklahoma and the sample size was restricted to 155 students and 30 teachers, most of whom would be described as middle class. The small size of the sample is acknowledged to be a limitation of the study and any generalization made from this study must be carefully evaluated with respect to the sample described. Also, the students that participated were students that had received good grades (ranging from A to C) the prior semester.

It is this researcher's belief that educators should initiate parental

involvement programs to develop the natural interest that parents have in their child's education. For varied reasons, parents tend to think schools unfriendly and intimidating places. Good communication seems to be the key to successful interaction and parental involvement. It is hoped that this study will contribute to this realization and generate further research on parental involvement. It is this researcher's belief that parents, students and teachers must work together as partners in education to achieve success for all those involved in the educational process.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
LETTER TO PARENTS

February 4, 1999

Dear Parents,

My name is Susan Szabo and I am a graduate student currently working on a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Reading at Oklahoma State University. During February 10, 1999, I will be conducting my thesis research. The purpose of this study is to determine the attitudes that seventh grade students and seventh grade teachers have toward parental involvement and to determine how these attitudes are expressed in the actions that both groups use to promote parental involvement.

The purpose of this letter is to ask your permission for your child to participate in this study to determine what they think about parental involvement. Participation will occur during regular school hours (during homeroom time) and will consist of each student answering a few questions. These answers will then be used to determine their attitudes and actions toward parental involvement.

Your child's name will NOT appear on the survey forms. Therefore, all responses to the survey will be kept confidential. Responses that are used in the study will be reported without reference to any individual child and individual names will not be used. The individual responses from your child will not be shared with your child's teacher or any other school faculty. The findings of this study will be reported for the group and not for the individual.

I appreciate your taking the time to complete the consent form allowing your child to participate in this research study. Your child's opinion is important to this study. Please sign the consent form and have your child return it to school. If you have any questions please feel free to call me at 762-7916, or my major advisor Dr. Kouider Mokhtari at (405) 744-8044, or the Principal at the Middle School. You may also contact Gay Clarkson, IRB Executive Secretary, Oklahoma State University, 305 Whitehurst, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078; (405) 744-5700.

**Thank you** for taking your time to read this and for agreeing to let your child help me with my research. Please give the signed consent form to your child to give to his or her homeroom teacher by the end of the week.

Sincerely,

Susan Szabo  
Graduate Student

APPENDIX B

PARENT CONSENT FORM



## Parent Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby authorize Susan Szabo,  
(print full name)

Oklahoma State University student, to include my child, \_\_\_\_\_  
in her research project. (Name of child)

I understand that the information gathered on my child about parental involvement will remain confidential and my child will not be personally identified by name in this study. I understand that the findings of this study will be reported only as a group and that my child's identity will not be revealed in any way.

I understand that the participation of my child is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate and my child's grade will not be affected in anyway.

I understand that my child will be asked to fill out a survey. The first part asks general information such as age, gender, ethnicity and academic achievement. The second part asks the student to read a few statements and select an appropriate "choice" using a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The third part asks the student to write brief comments about parents' involvement in their education. There is no "right" or "wrong" answer to these statements, so each student will be asked to think carefully about each question and answer honestly and to the best of their ability. This survey will take approximately 30 minutes and be given during homeroom time during school hours.

I understand that I may contact Susan Szabo for further information about this research project at (580) 762-7916. I may also contact Dr. Kouider Mokhtari, 248 Willard Hall, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078; (405) 744-8044 or Gay Clarkson, University Research Services, IRB Executive Secretary, Oklahoma State University, 305 Whitehurst, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078; (405) 744-5700.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. I understand that there will be copies of this survey in the middle school office that I may review if I so desire.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent's signature)

Student Consent Form

10/1

## APPENDIX C

### STUDENT CONSENT FORM

## Student Consent Form

\_\_\_\_\_, hereby authorize Mrs. Susan Szabo,  
(print full name)

Oklahoma State University student, to include myself in her research project on students' and teachers' attitudes and actions relative to parental involvement in the educational process of seventh graders.

I understand that by signing this consent form I am agreeing to think seriously about the questions and to answer each statement honestly. I realize that my grade will not be determined by anything I write on this survey.

I have read and fully understand the consent form and the Student Informed Consent Script.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D

STUDENT SURVEY

## Student Survey on Parental Involvement

**Directions:** The purpose of this study is to determine your attitudes and actions toward parental involvement. Please complete the statements as indicated. Your opinion does matter, so take your time and answer honestly and completely. There is no "right" or "wrong" answer. *Thank you* for filling out this survey.

---

### **Part One: General Information**

1. Gender:  female  male
  2. Age (years plus month): \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Ethnicity:  
 Anglo/White     Asian-America     Black/African American  
 Hispanic     American Indian     Other
  3. My grade for the first semester: (Circle one)  

in Math is . . . .	A	B	C	D	F
in Science is . . .	A	B	C	D	F
in English is . . .	A	B	C	D	F
in Social Studies is . . .	A	B	C	D	F
  5. I am happy with the grades I make. (Circle one.)    Yes    No
  6. My parents are happy with the grades I make. (Circle one.)    Yes    No
  7. I think my parents care how I do in school?  
(Circle one.)    Always    Sometimes    Never
  8. Do you want your parents to help you more than they do?  
(Circle one.)    Yes    No
- Explain why or why not.

## Part Two: Parental Involvement Survey

**Directions:** After reading each statement, circle the number (1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) that best answers the question. For question 1-10 please use the following scale:

- 1 means "I strongly disagree".
- 2 means "I agree occasionally".
- 3 means "sometimes agree."
- 4 means "I usually agree."
- 5 means "I strongly agree."

---

As a 7 <sup>th</sup> grade student, . . . . .	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree				
1. I feel it is important for my parents to be involved in my education.	1	2	3	4	5					
2. I feel that my parents compare what I am doing to what my classmates are doing.	1	2	3	4	5					
3. I feel happy that my parent helps in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5					
4. I feel glad to see my parent(s) at school.	1	2	3	4	5					
5. I feel that I am old enough to be responsible for my own learning.	1	2	3	4	5					
6. I feel my parents should help me only when I ask for help with my homework.	1	2	3	4	5					
7. I feel that it is important to share with my parents the good things and the bad things that happen in my day at school.	1	2	3	4	5					
8. I feel that my parents love me and want me to do well in school.	1	2	3	4	5					
9. I feel my parents give me encouragement to do my best in everything I try.	1	2	3	4	5					
10. I feel that my parents really want me to succeed.	1	2	3	4	5					

## **Part Two: Parental Involvement Survey (Continued)**

**Directions:** After reading each statement, circle the number (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) that best answers the question. For questions 10-20, please use the following scale:

1 means "I never or almost never do this".

2 means "I do this occasionally".

3 means "I sometimes do this."

4 means "I usually do this".

5 means "I always do this".

---

As a 7 <sup>th</sup> grade student, . . . . .	Never			Always
11. I ask my parents for help with homework I do not understand.	1	2	3	4 5
12. I want my parents to visit my classrooms.	1	2	3	4 5
13. I want my parents to help at school.	1	2	3	4 5
14. I invite my parents to come to school.	1	2	3	4 5
15. I share all my school papers with my parents.	1	2	3	4 5
16. I receive words of encouragement from home.	1	2	3	4 5
17. I want my parents to attend parent/teacher conferences to meet my teachers and see my work.	1	2	3	4 5
18. I want my parents to attend back-to-school night so they can see my classroom.	1	2	3	4 5
19. I care what my parents thinks.	1	2	3	4 5
20. I want my parents to talk with my teachers regularly so they know how I am doing and can help me with things I do not understand.	1	2	3	4 5

**Part Three: Open-Ended Questions**

(Please use the back of the paper if necessary.)

1. List up to 5 things your parents DO to help you become a successful student.

2. List up to 5 things you WISH your parents DID to help you become a successful student.

3. List up to 5 things your parents do you WISH they did NOT do so you could become a successful student.



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## APPENDIX E

### TEACHER SURVEY

## Teacher Survey on Parental Involvement

Directions: The purpose of this study is to determine your attitudes and actions toward parental involvement. Please complete the statements as indicated. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers. *Thank you* for taking the time to fill out this survey.

---

### Part One: General Information:

1. What type of Teaching Certificate do you hold?  
 Elementary (1-8)  
 Elementary with endorsements  
 Secondary (8-12)  
 Other
  
3. Which degree do you hold? (Mark only one.)  
 Bachelor  Master  Doctor
  
3. Your age: \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Number of years teaching experience: \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Gender:  Male  Female
  
6. Do you have any children?:  No  Yes How many? \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. Ethnicity:  
 Anglo/White  Asian-America  Black/African American  
 Hispanic  American Indian  Other
  
8. Indicate the amount of parental involvement you currently have in your classroom.  
 none  low  moderate  high  daily

## **Part Two: Parental Involvement Survey**

**Directions:** After reading each statement, circle a number 1-5 that best applies to you. For questions 1-10, please use the following scale:

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = agrees occasionally
- 3 = agrees sometimes
- 4 = usually agrees
- 5 = strongly agrees

---

As a teacher, . . . . .	Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree		
1. I feel that parents are more work than help.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel that I have the support of the parents.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I feel parents are interested in helping their child(ren).	1	2	3	4	5
4. I feel that a seventh-grader needs to learn to do things own his/her own.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel it is my responsibility to get the parents involved with their child's learning.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel that parents' attitudes about school are important.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel that every parent should "come to school" and follow their children for a day and attend class to help them understand what their child is experiencing while at school.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I feel that parents need to initiate communication with me about their child.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I feel that older students want parental involvement.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I feel that if I ask for help from the parents, I do get their support.	1	2	3	4	5

## **Part Two: Parental Involvement Survey (Continued)**

**Directions:** After reading each statement, circle a number 1-5. For questions 11-20, please use the following scale:

- 1 = never or almost never do
- 2 = do this occasionally
- 3 = sometimes do this
- 4 = usually do this
- 5 = always do this

---

As a teacher, . . . . .	Never					Always				
11. I send home written handouts that encourage parents to participate in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5					
12. I send newsletters home with my students to keep parents informed about what is happening in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5					
13. I communicate with parents monthly about their child's achievement.	1	2	3	4	5					
14. I actively seek parent volunteers for my classroom.	1	2	3	4	5					
15. I make parents feel comfortable when they come to school and my classroom.	1	2	3	4	5					
16. I consider parents as partners in the educational process.	1	2	3	4	5					
17. I consider an open-door policy important to the school and to the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5					
18. I use school-home activity packets to encourage family involvement.	1	2	3	4	5					
19. I communicate and share my plans and ideas for students with their parents throughout the school year.	1	2	3	4	5					
20. I listen to parents to find out their perceptions about their child(ren).	1	2	3	4	5					

**Part Three: Open-Ended Questions**

(Please use the back of the paper if necessary.)

1. Please list up to 5 things your students' parents DO to help you become a successful teacher.

2. List up to 5 things you WISH your students' parents DID to help you become a successful teacher.

3. List up to 5 things parents do you WISH they did NOT do so you could become a more successful teacher.

STUDENT INFORMED CONSENT SCRIPT

APPENDIX F.

STUDENT INFORMED CONSENT SCRIPT

## STUDENT INFORMED CONSENT SCRIPT

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To be read to the students by the teacher – on behalf of the researcher – prior to completing the survey instrument.

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"You are being asked to participate in a research study being conducted at our school. The purpose of this study is to obtain information about your attitudes and the actions you take toward your parental involvement.

You are being asked to complete a three-part survey. The first part asks you to provide information such as age, ethnicity, gender and academic achievement. The second part asks you to read some statements and circle a number that best applies to you. The third part asks you to write brief comments about your parents' involvement in your education. Please remember that there is no "right" or "wrong" answer to these statements.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide to stop at any time while completing the survey. There are no penalties for refusing to participate and your grade will not be affected in any way.

Your answers will be kept strictly confidential; so feel free to respond to all statements honestly and completely. Please do not put your name on your survey. Remember, think carefully about each question and answer them honestly and to the best of your ability.

Do you have any questions?

Please begin.

---

I handed out the survey to the students. I then read the Consent Form Script to the subjects and answered their questions. The survey was collected as subjects completed the survey.

---

Teacher's Signature

---

Date

EMERGENCY CONSENT SCRIPT

APPENDIX G

TEACHER INFORMED CONSENT SCRIPT



## TEACHER INFORMED CONSENT SCRIPT

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To be read to the teachers by the Principal Researcher  
prior to conducting the study.

---

You are being asked to participate in a research study being conducted at your school. The purpose of this study is to determine the attitudes that you have concerning parental involvement in children's education and to determine how these attitudes are expressed in the strategies that you use to promote parental involvement.

You are being asked to complete a three-part survey. The first part asks you to provide information about your age, ethnicity, gender and teaching experiences. The second part asks you to read some statements and circle an appropriate choice. The third part asks you to write brief comments about what you do to promote parental involvement. Please remember that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers to these statements.

You will be filling out this survey during your free time and returning the completed survey within one week. You have two options for turning in the completed survey. When you have completed the survey, you can put the completed survey into the "survey box" located in the School Office or you can turn it in to me at the same time you turn in your student surveys in the Teachers' Lounge.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. There are no penalties for refusing to participate and your job will not be affected in any way. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential; so feel free to respond to all the statements honestly and completely. Please do not put your names on your survey. The findings of this study will be reported only as a group and no one individual's identity will be revealed in any way. So, think carefully about each question and answer them honestly and to the best of your ability.

If you have any questions about this research project you may contact my major advisor, Dr. Kouider Mokhtari at (405) 744-8044 or Gay Clarkson, University Research Services, at (405) 744-5700.

Do you have any questions?"

---

Completion of the survey indicates consent of the participants to freely and willingly participate in the study.

---

Teacher's Signature

---

Date

APPENDIX H

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORM

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

**DATE: 01-13-99**

**IRB #: ED-99-069**

**Proposal Title: SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' ATTITUDES  
AND ACTIONS RELATIVE TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

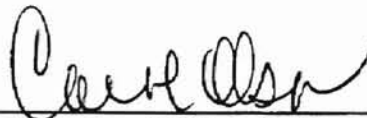
**Principal Investigator(s): Kouider Mokhtari, Susan Szabo**

**Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited with Special Population**

**Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved**

---

Signature:



Date: January 13, 1999

Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance  
cc: Susan Szabo

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modification to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

**DATE:** 01-13-99

**IRB #:** ED-99-069

**Proposal Title:** SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' ATTITUDES  
AND ACTIONS RELATIVE TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

**Principal Investigator(s):** Kouider Mokhtari, Susan Szabo

**Reviewed and Processed as:** Modification

**Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s):** Approved

---

Signature:



Date: February 1, 1999

---

Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance  
cc: Susan Szabo

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modification to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

## VITA

Susan Virginia Marschall Szabo

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND  
ACTIONS RELATIVE TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Miami, Arizona, the daughter of Don and Helen Marschall. Married to Stephen Szabo and have two sons, Matt and Scott.

Education: Graduated from Miami High School, Miami, Arizona in May 1969; attended Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona; transferred to Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan; received a Bachelor of Science degree in 1973 with minors in Elementary Education, History and Integrated Creative Arts. I currently hold an Elementary Teaching Certificate with Special Endorsement in Science and Social Studies. Completed the requirements for the Master of Science degree with a emphasis in Reading at Oklahoma State University in July, 1999.

Experience: Have 25+ years of experience in working with children and adults of all ages. Have taught in the classroom, home schooled, organized and developed summer classes for the PACE (Parents and Children For Excellence) Program, tutored elementary children in reading and math, developed and organized adult training sessions for both Boy Scouts and Sunday School/Bible School activities, volunteered in the classroom as a parent helper and tutor, been a substitute teacher in the school system, and am presently a Teaching Assistant at OSU.