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Parental Involvement in Minnesota Online Schools

by

William S. DeWitt

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Dissertation Committee:
John Eller, Chairperson
Janine Dahms-Walker
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Roger Worner

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the existence of parental involvement practices and successes or difficulties experienced with those practices—as reported by directors—in selected Minnesota online schools. The study was undertaken because, in a review of the research and related literature, it was clear that the resources and knowledge to implement quality parental involvement practices existed, but this may not have meant they were being implemented. Student achievement in Minnesota Online Schools appeared lower than traditional schools. However, no studies existed that documented the parental involvement practices that were in place or the successes and difficulties experienced with parental involvement in Minnesota’s Online Schools.

The study utilized Epstein’s (1995; Epstein et al., 2008) framework of six types of involvement to classify and examine collected data. The study was designed as a comparative case study, which examined a total of seven online school sites in Minnesota that served students in grades K-12. Data was collected through the use of case study and interview protocols, and included document collection and examination. The study was designed and conducted with a joint researcher to form a case study team.

Some of the study findings included; the prevalence of Communication and Learning at Home parental involvement types—taken from Epstein’s (1995; Epstein et al., 2008) framework, numerous newly documented practices and also common shared practices—such as required numbers of teacher-parent contacts and conferences, and reported successful involvement practices for online schools—such as in person meetings or orientation sessions, as well as reported difficulties. Notably, a major difficulty across the study’s school sites was revealed in the area of county truancy support. Recommendations for future research and current practice are made in the final chapter of the study.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank:

My wife, Sara, and daughters, Abigail and Elizabeth, for supporting me and understanding my investment of time into this work. This journey was started for them, and it would not and could not have been finished without them.

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My co-researcher, Bilal Dameh. His continued motivation, efforts, communication and insight propelled us to the finish line.

Thank you.

Disclosure

The methodology and instruments for data collection in this study were written and designed in conjunction with another researcher. Both researchers were examining components of parental involvement and online schools, and the participants to be interviewed—as well as documents to be collected for both researchers' studies—were located at the same online schools. Thus, both researchers partnered to form a case study team to interview the participants, collect data, and code participant responses. For further information about the co-researcher's study, please reference; Dameh, 2015.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Parental involvement has been linked to success in reading, mathematics, influencing continued achievement over time, behavior improvement, attendance, improved standardized achievement testing and overall student achievement in other areas (Barnard, 2004; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Reglin, Cameron, & Losike-Sedimo, 2012; Sénéchal & Lefevre, 2002; Sheldon, 2003; Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010; VanVoorhis, 2011). Various researchers over the past 6 decades have identified variables or aspects of parental involvement that contribute to these student successes, including helping at home, volunteering, communicating, and more (Epstein, 1987, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008; Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986). Joyce Epstein, one of the more prominent researchers—based on the number of studies published and the number of citations in other researchers’ studies—developed a widely used framework for parental involvement which identified many of the variables that contribute to the successes listed above. This framework included the following types of parental involvement: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with Community (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008).

Due to Epstein’s and others’ research, many administrators and educators now understand parental involvement is an important factor in increasing student achievement in many academic areas (Bloom, 1964; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Sheldon, 2003). Additionally, access to many examples of good parental involvement practices has also increased, such as those found in Epstein’s framework and recommendations (1995; Epstein et al., 2008), Henderson’s framework and research (2007) and others, including the U.S. Department of Education’s recent provisions on parental involvement found in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) from 2004, otherwise known as the ‘No Child Left Behind’ (NCLB) legislation (Department of Education, 2004).

The U.S. Department of Education’s provisions in this act outlined legislated requirements for involving parents in school, including such items as requiring schools to hold a written parent

involvement policy, to work with the community, and even requiring funding transportation to bring parents to school (Department of Education, 2004). However, no explicit enforcement provisions were included (Department of Education, 2004).

Although no enforcement provisions for implementing parental involvement practices exist from the NCLB act, many researchers also strongly encourage educators and administrators to start the process of increasing parental involvement in their schools (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008, Henderson, 2007; Henderson & Berla, 1994). As an example, Epstein recommended starting the process of parental involvement by developing ‘action teams’ comprised of administrative, parental, counselor and teacher members (Epstein, 1995). Epstein further recommended that those action teams identify (through tools such as surveys, questionnaires, panels, or other instruments) methods teachers and the school should employ to involve families and the community (Epstein, 1995). After action teams identified the current methods of parental involvement, Epstein then recommended creating plans to improve existing methods and to systematize other methods that would be implemented school wide— including determining those particular parental involvement practices that best meet school goals and increased student achievement (Epstein, 1995).

While encouraging all schools to increase parental involvement, Epstein also stated in regards her framework for parental involvement, “Although all schools may use the framework of six types [of parental involvement] as a guide, each school must chart its own course in choosing practices to meet the needs of its families and students” (Epstein, 1995, p. 8). This statement is due to the varied school needs, differences in families and programs that existed from school to school—each school would most likely have differing needs and focus areas. In this study’s timeframe (2014-2015), the parental involvement needs of different schools’ families and students also appeared to vary. In one example, since Epstein’s 1995 study, an entirely new type of schooling, in the form of online, virtual schools, had evolved (Molnar et al., 2013, 2014). These schools, as Epstein stated in regards to

traditional schools, may also be needing to ‘chart [their] own course’ in the parental involvement area due to their unique needs.

Despite the legislated provisions and recommendations from research, along with efforts made by some schools and school districts to involve parents, many schools still need to increase parental involvement, while others lack quality programs for this, often only contacting parents when students misbehave (Epstein, 2007). One reason this may occur is because determining those practices of a school’s involvement program that best meet the needs of their families and students, and increases student achievement, may be difficult even with the federal legislation and Epstein’s or other researchers’ recommendations. The difficulty of identifying the best practices may further increase in new forms of schooling, such as online schooling, for a variety of reasons.

One reason that finding a best practice in involvement is difficult is that many researchers differ in their understanding of the most ‘important’ types of involvement. For example, Becker, Epstein, and Dauber believed that ‘Learning Activities at Home’ was the most important type of parental involvement (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein & Dauber, 1991), while Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) stated that ‘Home Discussions’ was the most important, and Sheldon (2003) found that the amount of program outreach in any type of involvement was more important than the specific type. In addition to researchers differing on the most important type of parental involvement, it could be logically conjectured that educators and administrators might also have varied opinions about the most appropriate type of parental involvement for a given school and that school’s families.

To assist schools in finding starting points for parental involvement practices to improve, Epstein recommended that schools pose the following questions: “How might family and community connections assist the school in helping more students reach higher goals and achieve greater success? Which practices of school, family, and community partnerships would directly connect to particular goals?” (Epstein, 1995, p. 10).

When identifying school goals, since the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2004, otherwise known as ‘No Child Left Behind’, higher scores on standardized achievement tests may be considered and viewed not only as a goal but as a critical requirement in some schools. This is because the act required schools to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), expecting continual improvement over time on achievement measures on standardized tests (Department of Education, 2004). Parental involvement may be seen by many administrators and educators as one way to connect to this goal.

A category of schools that has demonstrated a failure in achievement measures on standardized tests, according to a 2013 and 2014 National Education Policy Center Report, are K-12 Online Schools, also known as virtual schools (Molnar et al., 2013, 2014). These schools deliver most of their teaching over the internet with students watching videos and interacting with teachers’ online (Molnar et al., 2013). According to these reports, in 2011-2012, most of the online schools that enrolled full-time students (71.9%) were rated academically unacceptable. Furthermore, progress in achieving AYP in online schools trailed performances in traditional schools by more than 20% in all years recorded (Molnar et al., 2013, 2014). Online schools lagged traditional schools by 28%, the greatest difference, in 2010-2011 (Molnar et al., 2013).

According to the Minnesota Department of Education, in December of 2014, there were seven public online schools that served elementary and secondary populations accredited to operate in Minnesota (Minnesota Department of Education, 2014). The seven schools had varying performances on Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA’s—standardized tests), with some schools results not reported at all, but the majority scored below the state average in both mathematics and reading according to the Minnesota Department of Education’s reported MCA testing data from 2009-2013 (see Appendix E). This aligned with the Molnar et al. (2013, 2014) report findings. According to a review of the schools’ websites, five of these schools have published parental involvement, or parental role policies, though the type and/or extent of parental involvement that actually occurs is not

currently known or available through a review of current research. This raised concerns as parental involvement appears to be connected to student achievement. Because of the link between parental involvement and student achievement; including standardized testing scores (Sheldon et al., 2010; VanVoorhis, 2011), and the research showing student achievement in Minnesota's online schools appeared lower than in traditional schools, the question then that seemed logical to pose was: what particular parent involvement practices were being implemented in Minnesota's Online Schools?

Statement of the Problem

In a review of the research, it is clear that the resources and knowledge to implement quality parental involvement practices exist, but this may not mean they are being implemented. Student achievement in Minnesota Online Schools appears lower than traditional schools. However, no studies exist that document the parental involvement practices that are in place or the successes and difficulties experienced with parental involvement in Minnesota's Online Schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the existence of parental involvement practices and successes or difficulties experienced with those practices—as reported by directors—in selected Minnesota online schools.

Research Questions

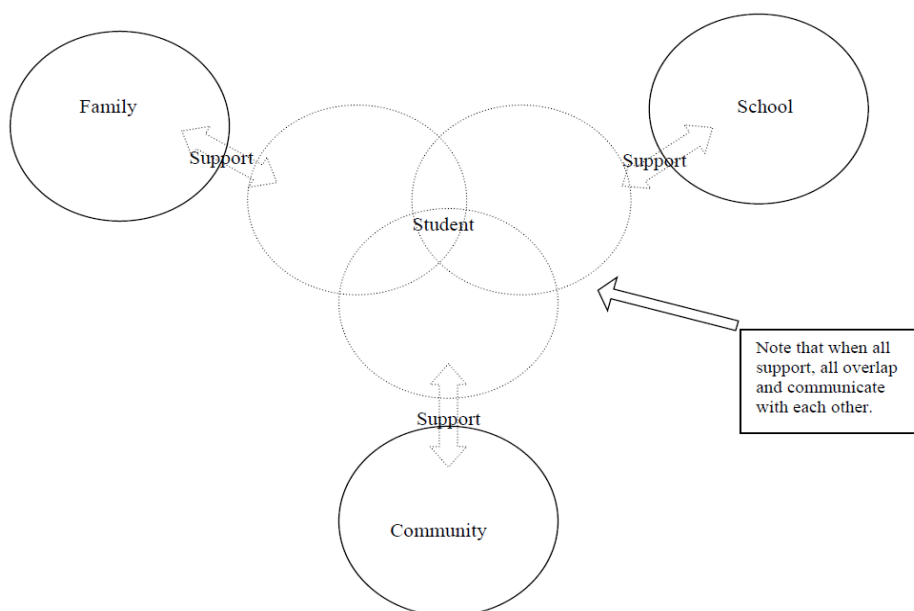
- 1) What types of parental involvement practices do select Minnesota online schools employ?
- 2) How are the parental involvement practices in select Minnesota online schools implemented?
- 3) What parental involvement practices do the directors of select Minnesota online schools report have been successful?
- 4) What parental involvement practices do the directors of select Minnesota online schools report have been difficult to implement, and what solutions do they offer to mitigate those difficulties?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was derived from Epstein's (1995) theory. Her Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory places the student at the center of three 'spheres'. These spheres include the Family, School and Community. The student is located at the center of these three spheres, since she or he is the most important contributor to his or her academic success. The spheres help influence and guide the student's success.

The theoretical framework is included, along with a conceptual framework, to assist the reader in understanding how involving the parents, school, and the community affect a student. The conceptual framework provides an aid for understanding the methods of the involvement that draws the school, parents and community together in their combined effort to support the student.

Epstein stated that the spheres can be moved closer together or further apart when supporting or not supporting the student, based on actions that occur (Epstein, 1995). For example, improving the communication between school, family, and community draws the spheres closer together in support of the student. Worsening communication among the three entities creates greater distance between the spheres. A rendering of this theory is included:



The conceptual framework for this study was also secured from Epstein's research (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008). While the theoretical framework provides the basis for understanding that involvement from all spheres supports the student and assists in helping the student experience academic success, the conceptual framework provides the basis for understanding the types of parental involvement practices schools can take that bring the three spheres closer together around the student. Epstein's six types of parental involvement framework will be used throughout the study to analyze and classify types of parental involvement practices.

The types of parental involvement are:

- 1- *Parenting*: Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.
- 2- *Communicating*: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.
- 3- *Volunteering*: Recruit and organize parent help and support.
- 4- *Learning at home*: Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.
- 5- *Decision Making*: Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders / representatives.
- 6- *Collaborating with Community*: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Further, Epstein stated, "Although all schools may use the framework of six types of parental involvement as a guide, each school must chart its own course in choosing practices to meet the needs of its families and students" (Epstein, 1995, p. 8). While employing Epstein's six types of parental involvement framework as the benchmark for this study, the importance of certain types of parental involvement related to the schools in question was not known. Also, the numerical order of the types of parental involvement cited above does not indicate the importance of, or illustrate where schools

should begin improvement programs. The methods used by Minnesota's Online Schools to implement these types of parental involvement may be very different from those used in traditional schools.

Significance of the Study

This study is intended to inform administrators and educators of the manner in which, and the specific components of the Conceptual Framework that are currently being used in select Minnesota Online schools. It is further intended to reveal particularly successful parental involvement practices and difficulties that have been experienced by these schools. Access to this information may provide administrators and educators with a basis for improving parental involvement practices in their online school. It is also intended to provide a basis for further research into effective practices of parental involvement in online schools.

This study may also enable administrators and educators in select Minnesota online schools to determine those practices which contribute to parental involvement and subsequently student success in their school. These findings may assist school leaders in determining which parental involvement practices to systematize, improve or (in the case of learning which practices are lacking) determining which practices to implement first. Also, new online organizations may find it beneficial to apply information acquired from this study in their school's design.

Delimitations

According to Roberts (2010), delimitations identify the planned limits of a study including factors the researcher is able to control and the manner in which the researcher focuses the study). The following delimitations were implemented:

- a) Online Schools included in the study were exclusively located in the state of Minnesota.
- b) Only online schools that served student populations from elementary school through grade twelve were included in the study.
- c) Only the perceptions of the director of each online school studied were included.
- d) The duration of the study was 2014-2015.

Assumptions

According to Roberts (2010), assumptions are what the researcher takes for granted in relation to the study. Four assumptions existed relative to this study. They were as follows: The participants were honest when being interviewed. Self-reported information, while typically honest to a certain degree, would usually attempt to portray the participant in a positive manner. Most of the parental involvement practices in selected Minnesota Online Schools would vary widely from one school to the next. Directors of selected Minnesota Online Schools would be hesitant to share information they believe could be damaging to their organizational marketing and recruitment (the online schools compete against each other in recruitment of students, and there have been two recorded lawsuits questioning the validity of online schools from Education Minnesota, the Minnesota Teacher's Union, and the Minnesota Department of Education in the past 11 years) (McClatchy-Tribune, 2011; Newswire, 2011a, b; Trotter, 2003).

Definition of Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): a federal legislative requirement that schools and school districts achieve continual academic improvement as measured on standardized testing results (goal of 100% proficient by 2014) (Department of Education, 2004)

Director(s): the administrator primarily responsible for administering and managing the day to day operations of an online school. Other titles for this position may include Principal, Administrator, Head, or others.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): a federal statute that was first enacted in 1965 and has been re-authorized through 2013 (present time of study inception) in amended forms. (Department of Education, 1995, 2004; Office of Education, 1969).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): a name of Public Law 94-142, which was first passed in 1975. This law benefited many students with disabilities. In this study, it is significant to parental involvement as it required that the Individualized Education Plans for students with

disabilities were required to be developed in consultation with the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the students (Congress of the U.S., Public Law 94-142, 1975).

LEA: Local Education Agency (School District or School) (Office of Education, 1969).

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs): standardized achievement tests administered by the state of Minnesota (Minnesota Department of Education, 2014a).

Minnesota Selected Online Schools: Those schools accredited by the Minnesota Department of Education to operate in the state of Minnesota that primarily deliver instruction through a virtual, internet methodology, serving students in elementary and secondary grades.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): a common name referring to the ESEA re-authorization in 2004 which first provided a federal definition for the term ‘parental involvement’, and which also provided increased mandates for student achievement in schools (Department of Education, 2004).

Parental Involvement: parents, children, and schools communicating with and working with each other to help their children succeed in school, including teamwork, community collaboration, fundraising, volunteering, homework monitoring, and expectations. (This definition is based on the researcher’s synthesis of the Department of Education’s, 2004, and Epstein’s, 1995, Epstein et al., 2008 definitions and frameworks).

U.S. DOE: United States Department of Education (Department of Education, 2004).

Organization of the Study

In Chapter 1, an overview of parental involvement was presented. Additionally, the lower student achievement records in online schools were discussed, along with the lack of research or further information about what types of parental involvement practices exist in Minnesota’s online schools. Other topics included the inter-related frameworks; the theoretical framework of overlapping spheres of influence and the conceptual framework of the six types of parental involvement that bring these spheres closer together. Also included were the research questions, study purpose, delimitations, assumptions and definitions of terms. The remainder of the study is organized into four additional

chapters. Chapter 2 presents a review of the related literature including the definition of parental involvement, general history of the research, success shown in specific academic areas in research, and current research related to online schooling. Chapter 3 contains a description of the qualitative, comparative case study methods used in conducting the study. Chapter 4 details the results of the study in relation to the four research questions and framework. Chapter 5 contains the conclusion and recommendations for online schools and future research.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Introduction

This review of literature presents four areas related to parental involvement and this study. The first area provides a definition of the term ‘parental involvement’, including conceptual frameworks of the term. The second area traces the general history of parental involvement in research. The third area examines existing connections and correlations confirmed through research between parental involvement and various aspects of student achievement. Finally, the fourth area provides a review of research related to online schooling. A summary of the literature reviewed concludes this chapter.

Parental Involvement

The term ‘parental involvement’ was given a statutory definition for the first time in 2004 in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Department of Education, 2004, p. 1). The term was defined as

...the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring that:

- parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning;
- parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school;
- parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and
- other activities are carried out, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA [parental involvement]. (Department of Education, 2004, p. 1)

The act (2004) also states, “Three decades of research provide convincing evidence that parents are an important influence in helping their children achieve high academic standards.” (p. 1). Research over the past 5 decades concurs with the above statement (Bloom 1964, Epstein, 1987, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008; Milner, 1951; Swanson & Henderson, 1976).

However, even with a federally enacted definition and guidelines to initiate higher parental involvement, researchers and educators continue to define and categorize ‘parental involvement’ into differing frameworks and theories. These differences occurred even prior to the federal act’s

implementation (Epstein 1995, 2001a, b; Epstein et al., 2008; Henderson 2007). In one example, Joyce Epstein, a published researcher for the past 4 decades, wrote a response in 2005 to the act in which she agreed with parts of the federal act definition and requirements, but recommended the addition of more emphasis on teamwork, more detail on parent-school compacts, the provision of more examples for middle and high school levels of involvement, (including community involvement which is one of Epstein's six areas of her parental involvement framework), clearer funding guidelines, providing parents in low performing schools more time for reporting and moving children, and better monitoring (Epstein, 2005).

In 1995, Epstein developed a parental involvement framework to include six types of involvement: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with Community (Epstein, 1995). In the same work, Epstein introduced the theory of overlapping spheres of influence. The premise was that a student functions at home (sphere 1), school (sphere 2), and in the community (sphere 3) (Epstein, 1995). Epstein believed that creating effective partnerships among all three would place the student at the center thus encouraging and supporting the student to experience successes (Epstein, 1995).

Adding to the definition of parental involvement, Ho discovered, while conducting a study in 2009, that there were no fixed meanings of parental involvement at three different school sites, and that, additionally, the meaning of parental involvement at each site changed over time (Ho, 2009).

Questioning the existing definitions, in reference to his prior studies in 2005, 2007 and 2010 on the topic, Jeynes states that, "Nevertheless, subsequent research has indicated that Epstein's rubric [framework] is probably too simplistic" (Jeynes, 2012, p. 1).

Other theoretical frameworks and models related to parental involvement have also been published; see Hornby and Lafaele (2011) as well as Henderson and Berla (1994) for two further examples. However, even with existing differences, this researcher's synthesis of the literature reveals that it may be generally understood for the purposes of this study, that parental involvement means;

parents, children, and schools communicating with and working with each other to help their children succeed in school, including teamwork, community collaboration, fundraising, volunteering, homework monitoring, and expectations. Items that may fall outside one particular definition or theory, as discovered during research, should be able to fit somewhere in the above synthesized definition.

History of Parental Involvement

This section traces the development of the research on the topic of parental involvement. Additional areas which are indirectly related to this study topic will be reviewed in subsequent sections (i.e., parental involvement correlated with reading achievement).

Published works were selected based on the perceived importance to parental involvement and this proposed study. The selection was based on:

- a) the number of additional studies cited in the work;
- b) the number of additional studies which appeared to rely on or base arguments and evidence on the preceding works;
- c) studies whose research had similar starting points, conclusions, or was specifically aligned with the main body of research.

The earliest study discovered, June, 1951, was conducted by Esther Milner. It was entitled 'A Study of the Relationship between Reading Readiness in Grade One School Children and Patterns of Parent-Child Interaction'. Milner administered a reading test to three elementary schools' first grade children to determine reading levels (Milner, 1951). After this, interviews were conducted with the children and the children's families to determine the types and levels of interaction (verbal, reading, social, etc.) at their homes (Milner, 1951). The study noted that students with higher reading scores had more experiences being read to by parents at home than the students with low reading scores. The students with higher reading scores engaged in conversations with their families at breakfast and at supper. It was found that they were also hugged, kissed or spoken to approvingly (Milner, 1951). The

students with the lower reading scores had no conversations and no experience being hugged, kissed or spoken to approvingly (Milner, 1951).

The study also made recommendations to educators on varying ways to assist the lower performing readers. These included: developing a plan to provide greater verbal, emotional and motivational experiences to these children; supporting publicly funded pre-school and kindergarten (including verbal, emotional and motivational experiences), or during the first 2 years of school, grouping these children in small classrooms in which the focus was on developing a bond with the teacher based on child-centered activities. Once the bond is developed the teacher could introduce the experiences needed to prepare the child for learning.

Bloom, in his book *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics*, seemed to agree in part with Milner, noting that consistent environments at home effected cognitive development more positively than inconsistent environments (Bloom, 1964). Bloom also discussed the relationship between home and school, stating that, “It is evident that when the school and home environments are mutually reinforcing, learning is likely to be greatest” (p. 128). Bloom recognized the influence the home and family had on educational achievement. He stated, “...the home environment is very significant not only because of the large amount of educational growth which has already taken place before the child enters the first grade, but also because of the influence of the home during the elementary school period” (p. 110). Bloom theorized that approximately 50% of a child’s achievement had been developed by age nine. As part of this, he stated “...17% of the growth takes place between the ages four and six, we would hypothesize that nursery school and kindergarten could have far reaching consequences...” (p. 110).

It should be noted that 1 year after Bloom’s recommendations, the United States Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act on April 11, 1965. This act provided funding to local education agencies (LEA) that were located in population areas with a majority of low-income residents to provide services to educationally deprived students (Office of Education, 1969). That

same year, the program 'Head Start' was also established providing pre-kindergarten educational services to many of the same populations.

Continuing the research showing the positive effects of parental involvement, McDill, Rigsby and Meyers (1969), conducted a study on Educational Climates of High Schools. The study identified 20 schools in eight states with similar demographic, socioeconomic and community characteristics, but were different in their achievement results. The researchers found that the degree of parental and community interest in quality education was "the critical factor in explaining the impact of the high school environment on the achievement and educational aspirations of students" (McDill et al., 1969, p. 584). Not only did parent involvement have a large effect on math, it also affected the academic achievement and goals of students when the researchers controlled for ability and family educational background (McDill et al., 1969).

In the same year, 1969, James Comer and the Center for School Improvement at Yale began a trial at two Schools in Newhaven, CT. These schools were the most underperforming schools in their district, educating a mainly minority population from low-income families. The trial established governance teams, mental health teams, parent involvement at all levels, and focused on psychological and social opportunities and development. The premise was that students had a 'psychological deficit' stemming from their lower exposures to opportunities and experiences (Comer, 1988). The researchers included parental involvement because they believed that to implement the changes necessary for their program, they would require positive relationships between the parents and staff. This may have been the first research that identified this relationship as affecting the levels of parental involvement, rather than simply implementing programs to counter the effects of no parental involvement (as suggested in Milner, 1951 or the 1965 ESEA Act). The schools in the study improved from being last in attendance and academics to being first and second in attendance and third and fourth in academics by the 1980s (Comer, 1988). Comer felt it was critical to have 'bonding' take place between the students and school, and positive, visible parent interactions with the school

and staff were critical (Comer, 1988). The process the schools went through was called the ‘Comer Process’ and is still used in many schools in current times (Yale School of Medicine, 2013).

Parental involvement influence was further reinforced in 1975, when the United States Congress passed Public Law 94-142. This was known as the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, currently entitled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). One provision of this act was that the Individualized Education Plan was required to be developed in consultation with the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the student (Congress of the U.S., Public Law 94-142, 1975).

Swanson published results of a study in 1976 theorizing a different reason for poor achievement in school which might appear to relate to school personnel influencing some aspects of parental involvement. She believed that instead of bad home environments, or ethnic group centered schools causing students to fail, that schools and families have different areas of which they care (Swanson & Henderson, 1976). She believed that if the school could find common ground and goals with the home and develop a plan with the family that parental involvement would occur.

Swanson identified a common goal of improving reading by involving Native American Papago Indian mothers with their child’s school. She studied a control group of 20 students and their mothers and an experimental group of the same number. The experimental group mothers were trained by aides from the reservation on strategies to promote interest in reading with their children. When the control and experimental groups were given a choice of activities, the children of the trained mothers more often chose to read. While these results may show that parental involvement was successful, it is debatable if the problem was due to different objectives...no attempts to increase involvement were made on objectives not wanted by the mothers. Either way, this is one of the earliest studies that showed parental involvement had an effect on student performance in school, and that the schools could affect the level of parental involvement.

In 1977, Wagenaar presented findings from a study of 135 elementary schools and their parent/ community involvement. This may have been the first study pointing to community

involvement, which is different from the school-family relationship. He found that, even when controlling for factors such as class size, socio-economic status and other factors, schools that were more open to parent and community involvement had higher levels of involvement. This finding was positively related with student achievement (Wagenaar, 1977). Of note, Wagenaar found no relationship between having parent participation in governance/decision making and student achievement. This contrasts with results and recommendations to be presented later in the review of literature.

Amendments to Title 1 in 1978 continued to establish stronger requirements for parental involvement. The amendments required that parents were to be kept informed of instructional goals, and they could recommend changes to instructional goals. It also required establishing Parent Advisory Councils, or 'PACS', and required that parents were to be kept involved in evaluating, planning and starting programs (Congress of the U.S., Public Law 95-561, Section 125, 1978). It should be noted that many of these requirements were removed when ESEA was replaced by the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act in 1981.

Though the research had begun to indicate many ways to involve parents and subsequent benefits of doing so, research also indicated that many schools and families remained quite separate. In her 1978 book 'World's Apart: Relationships between Families and Schools', Lightfoot discussed the many discontinuities that existed which kept schools and families apart (Lightfoot, 1978). One of the major themes of the book was the influence that individual teachers had on including or excluding families. She identified that teachers had a wide range of beliefs for including or excluding families from school. These beliefs ranged from being "...intent upon excluding families from school life..." to "...teachers whose view of children is totally shaped by their perceptions of parentage" (p. 9). She discussed the "middle range" of teachers by stating that there is a "...vast range of teachers who combine strategies for including and excluding families from school life" (p. 9). Lightfoot also discussed that many of the discontinuities between schools and families arise because of basic

differences in their purposes. She referred to schools and families as two “spheres of the child’s life.” (p. 21). There is similarity in terminology between Lightfoot’s spheres and Epstein’s (1995; Epstein et al., 2008) Overlapping Spheres of Influence theory. Because of the different purpose of the spheres and unclearly defined boundaries—Lightfoot refers to them as ‘overlapping worlds with fuzzy boundaries’ (p. 26)—families and schools struggle daily to determine who has control over certain areas. Lightfoot said that,

the only **sphere of influence** in which the teacher feels that her authority is ultimate and uncompromising seems to be with what happens inside the classroom. Behind the classroom door, teachers experience some measure of autonomy and relief from parental scrutiny, and parents often feel, with shocking recognition, the exclusion and separation from their child’s world. If teachers welcome the parents within their classrooms, they usually ask them to observe rather than participate and they view their presence as temporary and peripheral to the classroom experiences of children. (p. 26)

Continuing to show the importance of parental involvement throughout the literature, author Kevin Marjoribanks, in 1979, in a book entitled, “Families and their learning environments”, recognized, as did Bloom (1964), that “there exists a complex network of interrelated family environment variables that are associated with children’s cognitive and affective outcomes.” (Marjoribanks, 1979, p. 192). Marjoribanks also stated that “Environments for children’s learning will become more favorable when parents and teachers act as partners in the learning process” (p. 191). He continued to discuss the extreme difficulty of starting programs to do this though, only giving one example of an attempt in the mid 1970s in British Educational Priority Areas.

However, in 1982, Epstein and Becker surveyed 3,698 teachers across the state of Maryland regarding the teacher’s motivations to encourage parental involvement at home. One finding that emerged showed that some school districts had begun to implement formal involvement policies. They also found that, in general, there were not a large number of teachers who devoted time and effort to the practice in those school districts that did not have parental involvement policies. Those teachers who did devote time and effort seemed to be an anomaly in their individual schools. This was

not the case, however, in three districts in their study that did have high levels of parental involvement. These districts had formal involvement policies that Epstein suggested might be linked to their higher level of parental involvement. Other aspects besides formal involvement policies that increased parental involvement were: the students grade level (older grades had less involvement); racial composition (white students had more parents in the school); parental activity at the school (teachers worked more with parents who were at the school); teacher education level (higher educational levels had more involvement but experience was not a factor); and school district policies (Becker & Epstein, 1982).

In 1982, in a journal response to the study, Epstein and Becker suggested, “Of all types of parent involvement, supervision of learning activities at home may be the most educationally significant” (p. 10). They also suggested that this type of involvement can include the most number of parents, but the challenge is how all teachers can implement and follow up on learning activities in the home.

In an article published in 1984, Epstein related the results of a follow-up study. The goal of the follow-up study was to determine what teachers and schools should do to promote more involvement. A total of 82 teachers from the original 3,698 were selected. Parents of the children in these classrooms were surveyed. A total of 1,269 results were obtained at a 59% response rate. The study found that teachers and schools with more parents at the school were more likely to promote home involvement. Epstein stated,

When parents—even some parents—are involved at school, they convey a message to school administrators and teachers that parents are willing to work to improve the school and its programs. As a result, teachers may be more willing to ask these and other parents of children in their classrooms to conduct learning activities at home. (pp. 70-71)

The study also established that there were two things teachers did that positively influenced parents to become involved at home: getting ideas from teachers for home learning activities, and having the teacher frequently ask them for help (Epstein, 1984). As a result of these, parents knew more about

the school and also rated these teachers higher. The number of parents volunteering at the school did not affect these results. Epstein suggested that districts may be able to implement formal policies that encourage teachers to involve all families at home, and that involving parents in the school may help this occur (Epstein, 1984).

Parental involvement may be an equalizing factor between more and less educated families. Stevenson and Baker published the results of a study in 1987 to determine effects of mother's educational level on parental involvement, student age on parental involvement, and parental involvement effect on achievement. The researchers used data available from the TIME USE Longitudinal Panel Study. The information used was from an omnibus data set which gathered data on family use of time and schedule effect on their lives. From an original data set of 620 random households, their analysis included 179 children and teachers who were representative of the larger sample. While their measurement was based on parent involvement at the school (PTO and conferences) with no direct knowledge of home involvement, other researchers, including Stevenson and Baker seem to agree that when parents are involved at school it indicates the critical home involvement also takes place (Epstein, 1984; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). They discovered that higher educated mothers were involved more often in the school and that more involvement took place with younger students. They also discovered that more involved parents had higher achieving students. One aspect of the study that may be worth noting was the finding that when parents were involved, the educational level of the mother did not effect the student achievement. In other words, educated mothers generally are more involved, and have higher achieving students. However, if less educated mothers become as involved as the educated mothers, their students achieve at the same levels.

Stevenson and Baker had also conducted a study prior to this, published in 1986, concluding that higher educated mothers had more strategies to help their students in school, and that their students did better (Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Based on the 1987 study, they stated, "The current study extends this work by indicating that parental involvement mediates almost all of the influence of

the mother's education on the child's school performance." (Stevenson & Baker, 1987, p. 9). This appears significant in the fact that, if true, would indicate a critical area upon which to focus especially in undereducated communities. Parental involvement, even with undereducated parents, could increase student achievement.

Comer reported in 1987 on his school improvement process results and the importance of parent participation and involvement in the schools. He indicated that the key to his process is the School Advisory Council, or Steering Committee (Comer, 1988). One area the School Advisory Council focused on was school climate; parental involvement was critical in improving this area (Comer, 1988). All classrooms in his school hired a parent to participate 10 hours a week in the classroom, help plan a social calendar that involved all parents at the school in events, and offer workshops to show parents how to help their students (Comer, 1988). Students seemed to respond better when parents were visibly working with and supporting school staff and when they were helped at home. Achievement and attendance results improved greatly with this type of parental involvement.

Adding to the information on the importance of parental involvement in schools, Henderson and Berla analyzed and summarized a number of individual studies they believed showed evidence of the importance of parental involvement. Henderson and Berla wrote two books. The first published in 1981 (*The Evidence Grows*) and the second in 1987 (*The Evidence Continues to Grow*) (Henderson & Berla, 1994). The conclusions and evidence from these books, referencing the importance of parental involvement, is used by Henderson in continued writings about parental involvement into the 1990s and 2000s.

Continuing to encourage schools to increase parental involvement, Henderson et al. released the book, *'Beyond the Bake Sale: An Educators Guide to Working with Parents'* in 1986. These authors grouped parental involvement activities into five roles: 1) Partners (basic obligations); 2) Collaborators and Problem Solvers (reinforcing school efforts); 3) Audience (attending productions, etc); 4) Supporters (volunteering); and 5) Advisors and/ or Co-decision Makers (school

policy, governance). They acknowledged that, “Educators typically do not welcome parent involvement in advisory or governance roles...” (pp. 110-111). This book may have been the first attempt to provide educators and administrators with a guide on how to implement partnership programs, including: school based (site based) management; establishing a coordinator position; steps on recruiting; hints; exercises; and other suggestions. It also may have been the first attempt at defining or creating a framework to show exactly what is needed to enhance parental involvement.

In 1987, Epstein also published a framework of four types of parental involvement for school administrators to focus on. These types were: Basic Needs (which covered responsibilities such as feeding the student, sleep, and others); School to Home communication (including newsletters, phone calls, and others); Parent Involvement at the School (including volunteering, attending conferences, and others); and Parent Involvement in Learning Activities at Home (homework, reading, and others) (Epstein, 1987).

One year later, in 1988, Epstein published an updated framework of five types of school and family connections. These were: Basic Obligations of Parents (aligned with the original Basic Needs area); Basic Obligations of Schools (aligned with the School to Home communication); Parent Involvement at School (aligned with area of same title); Parent Involvement in Learning Activities at Home (same); and Parent Involvement in Governance and Advocacy (which included involvement in curriculum and staffing) (Epstein, 1988). The addition of this fifth type, which is very similar to Henderson’s Advisors and/or Co-decision makers from 2 years prior, may be important to note.

Also in 1989, the California State Board of Education (BOE) in their parent involvement initiative, related the importance of involving community and support services designed to assist schools, families and student learning (California BOE, 1994).

After the identification of the five types of involvement by Henderson and later Epstein, researchers continued to search for ways to increase parental involvement in schools. Epstein and Dauber, using Epstein’s framework, conducted a study involving 171 teachers at eight inner city

elementary and middle schools over the course of 3 years (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). The purpose was to examine programs, practices and attitudes toward parental involvement. They discovered there was a higher possibility of finding all five areas of parental involvement (Basic Obligations of Families, Basic Obligations of Schools, Involvement at School, Involvement in Learning Activities at Home, and Involvement in Governance and Advocacy) present in the school if involvement in learning activities at home existed (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). This finding appeared to mirror their assertion in the early 1980s that this was the most important type of involvement. In this (1991) study, Epstein and Dauber acknowledged the new suggestion of community involvement from the California BOE, and the possibility of it strengthening and supporting the school-family involvement relationship. However, they did not add it to the existing framework (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

Continuing to build support for parental involvement, in 1994 the reauthorization of ESEA included support for family, school and community involvement and partnerships (Stedman, Public Law 103-382-Oct 20, 1994). This legislation included a requirement for schools to establish parent-school compacts in order to receive Title 1 funds, and the adoption of a written involvement policy (Stedman, Public Law 103-382-Oct 20, 1994). These continued reauthorizations established a pattern of support from the federal government of policy implementation and legislation that sought to increase parental involvement.

Also in 1994, in their third book/study summary published, Henderson and Berla (1994) state, “The evidence is beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life.” Henderson and Berla emphasized that family support for their child’s learning, high expectations for their children’s achievement and future jobs, and involvement in their student’s learning at school and in the community are probably the largest predictors of success (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Using this book, the California Board of Education, in their 1994 involvement policy (revised from their 1989 involvement policy), references Henderson and Berla's work, and continued to include the new area of community involvement (California State Board of Education, 1994).

In the same work from 1994, Henderson and Berla determined six themes regarding parental involvement:

- 1) Family contributions are important.
 - 2) Parent involvement at the school helps student achievement.
 - 3) School improvement happens when parents are involved. (The work references Genethia Hayes of Project AHEAD in the Los Angeles School District, and says that she, along with other good administrators think when 1/3 of parents are involved at school, the student's achievement increases.)
 - 4) Parents should be: teachers, supporters, advocates, and decision-makers.
 - 5) Planning the parent school partnership thoroughly helps student achievement.
 - 6) Joining community, family and the school together is critical
- (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

One year later, in 1995, Epstein updated her framework to include six types of involvement: Parenting; Communicating; Volunteering; Learning at Home; Decision Making; and Collaborating with Community (Epstein, 1995). In the same document, Epstein introduced her theory of overlapping spheres of influence. The premise was that a student exists at home (sphere 1), school (sphere 2), and in the community (sphere 3). Epstein believed that creating effective partnerships among all three would place the student at the center, helping to encourage and support the student to experience successes (Epstein, 1995). This theory seems to draw from very similar language used in Lightfoot's 1978 book.

Acknowledging Epstein's theory and framework, but developing their own, Sui-Chu and Willms published a study of 24,599 eighth grade students and their parents and teachers. Their data

was gained from the National Educational Longitudinal Study in 1996 (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). In this study, the researchers classified their research of parental involvement into four areas: Home Discussion; Home Supervision; School Communication; and School Participation (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). These areas align closely with Epstein's framework, but do not address community involvement or governance and advocacy. Sui-Chu and Willms discovered the variable of 'Home Discussion' played the most significant role in achievement. They also discovered socio-economic status, minority or number of parents in household did not significantly affect the level of involvement (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). This appears to add to the literature presented from Stevenson and Baker (1987), showing that education level of parents did not matter when the parents were involved. Parental involvement begins to appear to be effective for student achievement in every type of family, regardless of income, education level or culture.

In 1998, Frome and Eccles published the results of a study which had discovered a new aspect of involvement not included in any definition, theory or framework to date. It was the relation between parents' perceptions of their child's ability and the child's perception of his/her own ability. They found that in both math and English, the child perceived their ability based on the parents' perceptions, thus influencing their perceptions even more than grades (Frome & Eccles, 1998). As an example, if the parents perceived their child to be good at math, and the child received poor grades, the child would still feel they were good at math. The researchers implied that even just the perceptions' had an impact on the child's effort and future success. This seems to lend weight to the importance of parental involvement, even from a perception level in schools. It also seems to show the importance of parental involvement at home, as theorized and then evidenced by Epstein and Becker (1982) and Epstein & Dauber (1991).

The groundwork for preparing educators to involve parents before they begin their teaching careers in the classroom may have begun in 2001 when Epstein published the book 'School, Family, Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools'. This book outlined her

parental involvement framework and provided examples aligned to her framework to implement parental involvement as soon as a teacher or pre-service teacher enters the classroom (Epstein, 2001b).

One of the most detailed and supportive of parental involvement pieces of legislation was the ESEA reauthorization in 2004. The legislation included the first statutory definition of parental involvement and parental involvement requirements. These requirements included parent-school compacts, communication support and requirements for schools, requirements to use designated percentages of funds for parental involvement activities, authorization to use funding for parental resource centers, and requirements for training parents (including helping parents themselves improve their academic skills) (Department of Education, 2004).

Besides influencing pre-service teachers, one of two books, 'Beyond the Bake Sale', that that may have influenced administrators on the topic of parental involvement was published by Henderson in 2007. This book provided information on initiating family, school, and community partnerships. It provided activities and checklists for the administrator and school to use to implement parental involvement practices. Henderson introduced the concepts of: partnership school; open-door school; come-if we call school; and fortress school. The names of these concepts were used as an example to help describe different levels and standards of partnerships (Henderson, 2007). Henderson focused on five areas to increase parental involvement different from the past: 1) building relationships, 2) linking to learning, 3) addressing differences, 4) supporting advocacy, and 5) sharing power. The book favored practitioner 'tips' and quotes and appeared to be written for administrators for immediate implementation.

The second book, which may also have influenced administrators, was published in 2009 by Epstein; 'School, Family, Community Partnerships: Your handbook for action'. The book detailed how to start a program for parent partnerships. The book introduced Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence theory, six types of involvement framework, and summarized general patterns of poor

involvement. These patterns of poor involvement included: less involvement in the upper grades, less affluent communities, single parents, and others (Epstein et al., 2008). Epstein believed these patterns can be negated with increased efforts to involve parents (Epstein et al., 2008). Epstein communicated that all families want to be involved, attempting to dispel the myth that a lot of families do not care. The need to form an ‘action team for partnership’ which included counselors, students, families and teachers, was detailed by Epstein. Epstein highlighted the principal’s important role in supporting and guiding the Action Team’s connections, finding funds to implement programs, identifying areas of weakness, checking progress and celebrating.

From 2001-2013, many new, specialized areas developed in the field of parental involvement research. Some of these areas included: motivational insights into parental involvement (Chuang & Pomerantz 2012), multiple cultural responses to parental involvement (Banerjee, Harrell, & Johnson, 2011; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Hyslop, 2000;), continued evidence of achievement in all areas (Jeynes 2012; Reglin et al., 2012; Sheldon et al., 2010; VanVoorhis, 2011), and technological advancements affecting parental involvement (Ho, Hung, & Chen, 2013).

In summary, the history of the research and publications to date seem to provide ample evidence showing that parental involvement generally benefits students. It also showed that schools can effect the levels of parental involvement by implementing a variety of parental involvement practices. The research to date provided several models of what successful programs might look like for teachers and administrators. This indicates that the main body of research is now in an ‘actionable’ state. Administrators and leaders have sufficient evidence and guidelines to begin to improve their involvement policies and practices.

Parent Involvement and Student Achievement

Parental involvement, while generally beneficial as shown through research, has also been shown to be beneficial in specific academic areas (Sheldon et al., 2010, Van Voorhis, 2011). A review of studies showing correlation between parental involvement and student achievement is discussed in

this section. Achievement areas include mathematics, reading, general achievement over time, attendance, behaviors, and standardized achievement testing. The effects, both negative and positive, of parental involvement is discussed with the studies.

Mathematics Achievement

Sheldon et al. (2010) surveyed 41 schools in the National Network of Partnership Schools over the course of 2 years regarding their parental involvement practices to increase math achievement, standardized testing scores, and strength of the parent partnership and perceptions from the parents on the parental involvement at the schools. They discovered that schools that had a strong partnership climate with families also showed an increase on mathematics achievement test scores by students (Sheldon et al., 2010).

Also showing benefits to mathematics achievement, Van Voorhis conducted a 2-year longitudinal study of the use of a family involved math homework program (Van Voorhis, 2011). He conducted the study with 153 families and students among four urban elementary schools that had a high level of cultural diversity and an over 70% free and reduced cost lunch program participation. He discovered that by implementing one 15-20 minute interactive, family involved math homework assignment per week (which was called a TIPS: Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork program), standardized math test scores were raised compared to those of a control group at the same schools. The interactive homework also resulted in increased family involvement and raised the confidence level in student's math skills (Van Voorhis, 2011).

Focusing on mathematics achievement and parental involvement from 1997-1999, Sheldon and Epstein (2002) surveyed 18 elementary and secondary schools across the United States. These schools reported on fourteen different mathematics related involvement activities and their administrator's perceptions of effectiveness. The researchers also collected mathematics standardized test results, and report card grades, to compare the reported involvement activities to achievement results. They discovered that two activities affected achievement:

Activities that supported mathematics learning included (a) homework assignments that required students and parents to interact and talk about mathematics and (b) mathematics materials and resources provided for families to use at home. The relationships between implementation of these activities and mathematics achievement were strong and positive, even after we accounted for the influential variables of schools' prior achievement or level of schooling. (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005, p. 204)

They had discovered that many of the schools maintained the same levels of achievement year to year, but some schools, particularly ones that implemented the two activities described above, increased achievement levels.

Reading Achievement

Implementing a Parent Support Reading Intervention which involved reading at home with children, completion of assignments at home and a 12-week parent workshop on reading strategies, increased reading scores in seventh graders who had failed a state test (Reglin et al., 2012). The researchers identified 30 students who failed the state reading test the year prior and compared them to a control group of 30 students who had also failed the year prior, but did not receive the parental support. The students receiving parental involvement support increased their test scores more than the students without the support.

Sénéchal and Lefevre conducted a 5-year longitudinal study to review the relationship among home literacy experiences, reading achievement, receptive language and emergent literacy skills (Sénéchal & Lefevre, 2002). The study was conducted with 168 students. The researchers administered parent questionnaires to determine levels and types of parental involvement, and conducted extensive pre-testing with multiple reading and reading preparedness tests some of which were the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and Stanford Early School Achievement Test. The researchers experienced some sample loss due to the length of time of the study, but stated it was not significant and was usual for the length of the study. The researchers found that exposure to books, and parental involvement in teaching children about reading and writing words, both led to success in reading in grade three (Sénéchal & Lefevre, 2002).

General Achievement over Time

Barnard (2004) analyzed data from the Chicago Longitudinal Study, a federally funded study from 1986-2000, to determine the relationship between parental involvement and high school success. Of the original 1539 children in the study, 1165 were still participating in the study at the endpoint (had not moved away or left school). The researcher acknowledged many studies link academic success in elementary school with success in high school, but no studies had compared parental involvement in elementary school to high school success. The researcher controlled for demographics, income rates and other risk factors. A statistically significant correlation existed in all measures of high school success when compared with teacher ratings of parent involvement. No significant correlations existed with parents' self reported involvement measures. The researcher speculated that many parents rate themselves high on parental involvement questions (Barnard, 2004). This could be an important implication for the future when designing research instruments to assess self-reported involvement practices.

Attendance Achievement

According to Epstein and Sheldon, "Attendance improves when schools take comprehensive approaches to family and community involvement" (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002, p. 10). They came to this conclusion after surveying 12 elementary schools for three consecutive years using a baseline, mid-year, and a final questionnaire. The schools were serving over 5,000 students from urban and rural settings. The schools were involved in implementing family and community involvement approaches to reduce absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). These approaches were successful increasing average attendance by over 1%. This level is high considering that many of the schools surveyed were already in the upper 90th percentile range. Communications, School Contacts and Parent Workshops were some of the helpful activities schools implemented during this time.

Continuing their research, in 2004, Sheldon and Epstein reported results of an expanded study. Surveying 39 schools both secondary and elementary, they discovered once again that schools

which had implemented parental involvement programs to reduce absenteeism had lower rates of chronic absenteeism. Programs that schools implemented to decrease absenteeism used four of Epstein's parental involvement framework areas: parenting, communicating, volunteering and community involvement (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).

Behavior Achievement

In a study conducted during the 1998-1999 school year, Epstein and Sheldon reported a link between parent involvement and behavior. They surveyed 47 schools in the National Network of partnership schools using a baseline and end of year survey. They analyzed prior year discipline incidence information, already implemented involvement programs, and end of the year discipline incidence information. They found that parental involvement helped decrease behavior problems in the school. They also discovered that parenting and volunteering (two of the six types of parent involvement from Epstein's 1995 framework) were found to be most predictive of better student behavior. When these areas of family and community involvement increased, discipline incidents decreased (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002).

Cheung and Pomerantz (2012) presented parental involvement as an influencing factor to increase intrinsic motivation in students. Parental involvement is directly related to increasing 'Parent-Oriented' Motivation according to the researchers. 'Parent-Oriented' refers to the student who is driven by a concern about meeting parents' expectations in the academic arena in order to gain parental approval (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). They found that when parental involvement took place, this led to Parent-Oriented Motivation, which led to Child Engagement, which led to Child Achievement. Another important finding was that Parent-Oriented Motivation had a direct relationship to children developing autonomous motivations (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). The researchers identified Parent-Oriented Motivation as the only type of extrinsic motivation that could increase intrinsic motivation (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012).

Negative Overall Effects

According to Pomerantz, Moorman and Litwack (2007), the amount of parental involvement may not be as important as the method, or ‘quality’ of it. They caution that parents who involve themselves in the wrong way could cause consequences both at school, and in students’ mental health areas. One example from their article refers to parents who may not involve themselves from an ‘autonomy’ standpoint, but rather from a ‘controlling’ standpoint. This would not be in the student’s best interest.

Also in the same article, reference is made to several studies that found negative correlations between involvement in homework help and school achievement: “Indeed, several concurrent investigations of families from diverse backgrounds have revealed that parents' assistance with homework is associated with poor performance in school among children (e.g., Chen & Stevenson, 1989; Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000; Georgiou, 1999) (Pomerantz et. al., 2007, p. 378). It is important to note though, that the authors assign doubt to these studies’ conclusions:

Although it is possible that this reflects the negative effects of parents' assistance with homework, research conducted by Pomerantz [same author] and Eaton (2001) suggests that this is unlikely. In this research with mainly middle-class European American families, children's poor performance in school predicted mothers' heightened assistance with homework 6 months later. Once children's initial achievement was taken into account, mothers' assistance predicted an increase in children's achievement over time. (Pomerantz, et al. 2007, p. 379)

In essence, the negative effect may be because low achievement triggered homework help.

Positive Overall Effects

In a meta-analysis of 51 studies, Jeynes determined that parental involvement programs result in greater educational outcomes (Jeynes, 2012). However, one article in the meta-analysis, along the same lines as Pomerantz’ work above, did caution against involvement being unconditionally beneficial if parents involve themselves negatively in their student’s life. This could have potential academic and mental health consequences. The quality seems to be important, not just the quantity.

Standardized Achievement Testing

To determine how parental involvement correlated to state standardized achievement tests, Sheldon surveyed 113 schools in an Urban School District in Maryland (Sheldon, 2003). The final sample size of schools that returned the survey was 82. These schools' student achievement test results were compared against the quality and progress of parent involvement programs as reported from the principal or from a few members of administration/action teams (Sheldon 2003). Even when controlling for the size of the school, the mobility of students and the number of students in free and reduced lunch programs, a statistically significant correlation between program outreach and standardized testing results was found. Sheldon acknowledged that program organization was very important in providing the ability to implement high-quality outreach to parents. Sheldon also states, "...the data suggest that, presently, schools' efforts to involve parents are more strongly related to student achievement in the lower elementary grades" (p. 161). As mentioned in reference to correlational studies in Chapter 1, Sheldon also says, "Although the present study establishes positive relationships between schools' programs to involve families and communities and the average level of students' performance on state-mandated achievement tests, a causal relationship between program outreach and student outcomes cannot be presumed" (p. 162). He continues, as part of many recommendations, to say, "Future studies should also use more specific measures of family and community involvement activities..." (p. 163). Sheldon communicates that having a larger group of involvement aspects to study may help researchers understand more in-depth effects on achievement (Sheldon, 2003).

Using more specific parental involvement factors as suggested above, in 2009 Brooks studied the correlation between standardized testing and parental involvement in one elementary school in Missouri. Brooks used factors such as volunteering, and providing time and place at home to study (Brooks, 2009). Brooks also used Epstein's framework of parental involvement, to demonstrate which programs the school was implementing, and how they corresponded to areas in the framework.

Brooks collected a 20-question parent questionnaire, student standardized testing data (from the Missouri Achievement Tests in third and fifth grade), and a needs assessment from the school principal.

It should be noted that the school located in an urban setting studied by Brooks had a 100% African American student population, and the two classes studied made up a total of just over 70 students. The response rate was under 50%. Because of the low response rate, no determinations could be made at the third grade level. Brooks did report a positive correlation for grade five achievement tests between parents' reported practices of involvement and standardized testing scores. Brooks showed that the elementary school's reported practices along Epstein's Framework areas positively influenced the involvement and, subsequently, the student achievement, but this did not seem to be verified by data or logic which is needed to determine causation (Slavin, 2007).

Online Schools

The history of online schools can be traced into the early 20th and late 19th centuries in America, beginning with correspondence courses (Lee, 2008). Correspondence courses, which traditionally involved sending course materials, notes, messages, examinations and written responses between the instructor and student through the mail, were at their greatest level between the late 1930s- 1950s (Lee, 2008).

Francis Lee used archived materials, along with notes from the International Conference for Correspondence Education (ICCE), during this time period to determine how the technology and educational thought processes of the time influenced the teaching methods used (Lee, 2008). Central to the development of correspondence courses during this time period was belief in the necessity of meeting the individual learner's needs (Lee, 2008). Correspondence courses relied heavily on assessments before, during, and after the course to allow the teacher to best select the next set of materials to send in order to tailor the learning to fit the learner (Lee, 2008). At the same time, mass produced assessments, records, model answers, and curriculum materials made adapting the

curriculum difficult (Lee, 2008). At times, teachers had to use a variety of materials when faced with unique learning situations (Lee, 2008). Another difficulty teachers faced was keeping the learner on track, on time and motivated (Lee, 2008). In one example, Lee references a company that sent mass produced motivational cards, birthday cards and reminders to students in the mail in order to keep materials flowing, on time, from the learner's home to the school and back (Lee, 2008).

Technology, in the form of audio recordings and video recordings, continued to add to the materials used in correspondence courses from these earlier times up through the early 1990s (Duncan, 2005). A prolific user of correspondence materials, the United States Army, used this method extensively for reasons similar to earlier in history such as individualized learning and cost savings in travel (Duncan, 2005). Just as the Army's use of related internet technology pre-dated the modern day internet (Perry & Pilati, 2011), the Army's use of distance learning through the internet pre-dated many of the companies that are now operating online schools throughout the United States (Duncan, 2005).

Steve Duncan produced a short publication on the Army's history of online distance education and its impact on online education (Duncan, 2005). During the initial stages of development in the early 1990s, concerns surfaced about the credibility of learning without the interaction gained from other learners and the teacher in the classroom (Duncan, 2005). Concerns about online education spread through all ranks; the highest ranking general of the US Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) refused to allow regular, active duty Army personnel to partake in online courses in 1992, only allowing reservists to take these offerings (Duncan, 2005). Funding was redirected completely in 1993, but re-emergence of the online courses began again in 1994 (Duncan, 2005). At that time, the United States Army addressed a number of issues such as teaching strategies and re-packaging curriculum (Duncan, 2005). There was realization that teaching strategies (or methods) were central to successful course delivery not just the technology utilized (Duncan, 2005). The United States Army also found that many online course providers would repackage old content

into new courses. A system called SCORM (Shareable Content Object Reference Module) was developed to enable instructors to develop their own teaching modules by getting content from previously developed courses, instead of paying a company to do it (Duncan, 2005). This was similar to Lee's report of early paper based correspondence teachers drawing from mass produced curriculum to cater to the learner (Lee, 2008). One other concern mentioned by Duncan was verification that the learner taking the course was really the one completing assignments (Duncan, 2008). By 2004, the Army had realized cost savings in online learning programs; Duncan reported online learning in the Army cost one-third less than traditional based instruction with similar post test results from the classes (Duncan, 2005). Duncan went on to state that, "The new challenge, now that we can bring knowledge to people, will be that of learning how to request the right information and sift and sort good information from bad." (Duncan, 2005, p. 8).

Perry and Pilati (2011), in a review of online distance learning, echoed concerns in the civilian sector that Duncan (2005) acknowledged in the defense sector. These included the need for designers and instructors to have a clear answer to the question, "How do you know who is taking your course?" (Perry & Pilati, 2011, p. 4). Perry and Pilati also commented that many of the same considerations in traditional classrooms, if incorporated into online learning, can help ensure success. Considerations included the development of plans for instructor responses and assuring the inclusion of all students in a learning community. Successes can be experienced, but online courses can fail if not planned well (Perry & Pilati, 2011).

While current cost savings figures and successes were not studied in Minnesota, the continued growth of online schooling has occurred, with 29 public, fully accredited online schools in operation by April, 2014. These schools had varying grade levels, with many only serving students in secondary grades. A total of just seven of these 29 online schools served students from the elementary grades through grade 12 (Minnesota Department of Education, 2014b).

Nationally, the trend is the same. The National Education Policy Center reports growth is increasing in the number of enrolled students, and number of opened fully and partially online schools in every year, through 2014 (NEPC Online Schooling Report, 2013 and 2014). There were over 310 online K-12 schools operating nationally, and in total, currently enroll over 200,000 students (NEPC Online Schooling Report, 2014).

The history of online schooling in Minnesota is difficult to trace due to little, if any, current studies. Throughout the recent history though, educators and several state government officials have raised questions about online schooling credibility (Newswire, 2011a, b; Office of the Legislative Auditor, 2011). In 2002 and 2003, Education Minnesota (the Minnesota Teachers' Union) combined forces with two other school districts and filed a lawsuit against the Minnesota Virtual Academy (MNVA) based out of Houston, MN (Trotter, 2003). While the lawsuit was unsuccessful, concerns were raised as to the teacher's ability to supervise instruction and meet other mandates in state law (Trotter, 2003).

The Minnesota Department of Education increased fiscal commitments to developing online education in 2008 to 38 million United States Dollars (USD), and in 2009, to 52 million USD, according to then Education Commissioner Alice Seagren (Minnesota builds online learning ..., 2008). Goals included increased access to technology in schools, as well as data sharing, online testing capabilities, online teacher professional development, and online coursework (Minnesota builds online learning ..., 2008).

One comparative case study of three online schools located in three different states in the nation did include an unidentified online school in Minnesota (Ahn, 2011). The school reported on was not fully online, but used a 'hybrid' model in which students came on campus for a portion of their week (Ahn, 2011). Teachers praised the school's ability to provide individualized learning plans, but also were concerned about the importance of student 'buy-in' and 'motivation' to complete work (Ahn, 2011). This motivation aspect of completing work is similar to that described by Lee (2008) in

early correspondence courses. The ability of a teacher to reach and teach a student requires creativity in communication and the design of online materials (Ahn, 2011). The study did note Minnesota's higher oversight of standards and teacher certifications in online schools compared to Nevada and Pennsylvania, but did not include information on parental involvement practices (Ahn, 2011).

Continuing the questions raised in Minnesota, in 2011, the Office of the Legislative Auditor issued a report detailing concerns regarding online schools (Office of the Legislative Auditor, 2011). The Legislative Auditor's office staff determined that Minnesota Online Schools had difficulty with student drop out and course completion rates. They also questioned why online schools continued to score inadequately on state standardized testing, and questioned credibility of reporting in their schools (Office of the Legislative Auditor, 2011).

Also, in 2011, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) attempted to shut down Blue Sky, an online High School, for failing to ensure students were taught every state standard. Some students were graduating with missing requirements (Newswire, 2011a, b). This resulted in a legal case, in which a judge did over-rule the Department's claim, based on the Department of Education's actions being uniquely formulated in this first instance experienced, with no prior implemented standards. The MDE seemed to combine different aspects of current standards to try to respond to the new situation encountered with no precedents or new standards developed for online schools (Newswire, 2011a, b).

Current achievement results in Minnesota's Online Schools mirror reported achievement results nation-wide. According to reported results from the Minnesota Department of Education's Data Center, the majority of the fully online K-12 Schools between 2009 and 2013 scored below state average on Reading tests, and Math tests (see Appendix E). Nationally, in both a 2013 and follow-up 2014 report on online schooling, the National Education Policy Center reported most of the online schools that enrolled students full-time (71.9%) were rated academically unacceptable. Furthermore, the difference between physical 'brick and mortar' schools and online schools' progress in making

AYP was over 20% lower in online schools in all years recorded, with 2010-2011 having the greatest difference of 28% (NEPC Online Schooling Report, 2013). The NEPC recommended that, “Researchers focus on collaborating with individual K-12 online learning programs to identify specific challenges that can be answered using a design-based research methodology” (NEPC, 2014, p. 4), and also recommending that, “State and federal policymakers examine the role of the parent/guardian in the instructional model of full-time online learning to determine the level of teaching support that is necessary for students to be successful” (NEPC, 2014, p. 4).

In examining these recommended areas of parental involvement and the role of the guardian, two studies were found involving online schools. One, conducted in Florida, validated an instrument to assess the parental involvement of an online school by surveying parents and children of the school (Liu, Black, Algina, Cavanaugh, & Dawson, 2010). The researchers concluded the efforts of the guardian in an online school closely resemble that of a teacher (Liu et al., 2010). The researchers noted that the implications for parent involvement may be very different from those in traditional schools.

The second study conducted in an online high school in Utah focused on the level of parent interactions and the motivation students drew from them (Borup, Graham, & Davies, 2013). The researchers selected two courses offered in the school and surveyed the parents and students. The response rate for the survey was 32.8% (Borup et al, 2013). The researchers found that an increase in involvement correlated highly with a decrease in achievement; however, this could be attributed to involvement increasing once parents were aware of struggles (Borup et al., 2013). The researchers also concluded that students found the parental interactions highly motivating (Borup et al., 2013). The researchers communicated that a theoretical framework for evaluating online programs would be helpful in future studies, as well as stating that gathering data from just the students and parents may inject a bias in the results and future studies should include other groups (Borup et al., 2013).

Summary

Based on a review of the many different definitions, theories and frameworks of parental involvement, parental involvement means: parents and schools communicating with and working with each other, and their children, to help their children succeed, in whatever form that takes. This includes: teamwork; community collaboration; fundraising; volunteering; homework monitoring; and setting expectations along with many other areas.

The past 6 decades of research has demonstrated that many students and schools do not have adequate levels of parental involvement. The research has also shown that schools do have both the ability to implement programs that make up for this lack of involvement, and the ability to increase the parental involvement levels through a variety of practices.

The United States Federal Government has continually implemented legislation over the years to help increase parental involvement in schools. Much information and research has been conducted that provides administrators and teachers strategies and examples to implement to increase parental involvement at their schools. Many materials on parental involvement has also been published, including handbooks and textbooks for use in training administrators and pre-service teachers. Research also demonstrates the positive correlation among involvement and success in reading, mathematics, achievement, student behavior, attendance, and connection to standardized achievement testing results.

In recent years, the advent of a new form of distance learning, online schooling, has grown exponentially. Research about parental involvement in this field is limited, especially in Minnesota. Online schools have incorporated many new technological innovations into teaching, and in many ways outperform traditional schools from a cost, individualization and course performance perspective, yet are outperformed by traditional schools from an enrollment, graduation completion rate, and standardized achievement testing scores perspective. Current research has identified the need to continue to research these new forms of schooling, with one focus area being the role of the parent

in interacting with the learner from home. The need to determine perspectives from online school leaders, and validation of an involvement framework also seem to be suggested (Borup et al., 2013).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 3 provides the methodology that was used in the conduct of the study. The study was designed as a qualitative research study, using a comparative case study methodology. The contents of this chapter include the study's purpose, research questions, participants, human subject approval, instruments for data collection and analysis, research design, procedures and timeline, and a summary of the methodology.

The methodology and instruments for data collection in this study were written and designed in conjunction with another researcher. Both researchers were examining components of parental involvement and online schools, and the participants to be interviewed—as well as documents to be collected for both researchers' studies—were located at the same online schools. Thus, both researchers partnered to form a case study team to interview the participants, collect data, and code participant responses. For further information about the co-researcher's study, please reference; Dameh, 2015.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to determine the existence of parental involvement practices and successes or difficulties experienced with those practices—as reported by directors—in selected Minnesota online schools.

Research Questions

- 1) What types of parental involvement practices do select Minnesota online schools employ?
- 2) How are the parental involvement practices in select Minnesota online schools implemented?
- 3) What parental involvement practices do the directors of select Minnesota online schools report have been successful?

- 4) What parental involvement practices do the directors of select Minnesota online schools report have been difficult to implement, and what solutions do they offer to mitigate those difficulties?

Participants

The researcher included seven select Minnesota online schools in the study. In each of the study's online schools, the director was interviewed. The directors were chosen to be interviewed since they provided unique insights on the parental involvement practices in online schools from a leadership perspective which had not been collected in previous studies. In the only two studies found on the topic of parental involvement in online schooling, data were not secured from any of the schools' administrators (Ahn, 2011; Liu et al., 2010).

Purposive sampling was used to determine the participants in this study. The seven study schools were selected from among an original set of 29 online schools in Minnesota (Minnesota Department of Education, 2014b). Only these seven schools met the following criteria for the study:

- a) The Minnesota online schools served students in elementary grades.
- b) The Minnesota online schools' directors were willing to participate in the study.
- c) The Minnesota online schools' had been accredited to operate by the Minnesota Department of Education.

The study population of online schools was selected from the state of Minnesota, due to the researcher's geographical location in Minnesota, familiarity with Minnesota's system of public education, and the intent to contribute knowledge to educational leaders in the state of Minnesota. Also, the selection of schools serving students at elementary grade levels was established as a criterion because of the fact that measurable parental involvement practices occur more frequently in elementary grades (Epstein & Becker, 1982; Sheldon, 2003).

Human Subject Approval–Institutional Review Board

Training for William S. DeWitt, the study researcher, was completed on December 7, 2013. Following approval from the researcher's doctoral committee, submission to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval of this study was completed in December of 2014, with final approval gained in January of 2015. Data collection measures, analysis and instruments included proper controls to ensure confidentiality for all participants and ensured that no damage will occur to the school or personnel involved in this study. The approval document from the board is included as Appendix G. Additionally included from the institutional review board is a copy of the informed consent form required to be signed by the participants based upon the board's review of the study. This is also included as Appendix H.

Instruments for Data Collection and Analysis

Two instruments were used in collecting the study's data. The first was a case study protocol (Appendix B) developed jointly by the two researchers—the case study team, as recommended by Yin (2009). This protocol provided guidance to the researchers on the frameworks and the objective of the study, the selected Minnesota online school locations and contact information, the preparation conducted by the case study team prior to each site visit, and sources and approaches for data collection at each site. It ensured reliability in the conduct of the study and internal study validity as suggested by Yin.

The second instrument used in this study was the interview protocol (Appendix C). The interview protocol was developed by the two researchers on the case study team. The interview protocol consisted of eight open-ended questions designed to allow the on-line directors to share their perspectives on each type of parental involvement. Additional follow up questions were used to clarify or draw out specific information from the on-line school directors related to procedures and reactions on success or difficulties.

The interview protocol was reviewed with and field tested by a group of 12 doctoral students in May, 2014 to ascertain instrument readability, clarity and focus of questions, and correlation between the interview questions and the case study's research questions—ensuring reliability in the study conduct and supporting the internal validity of the study. The protocol was field tested in the fall of 2014 to ascertain select factors about the administration of the instrument, including time required to complete administration of the instrument, clarity of the questions to the participants, and ease of conduct of the interview.

Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative research methodology. The study was designed as a comparative case study, employing a methodology in which multiple case studies were examined with comparisons drawn between the sites (Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management, 2010).

The case study design was used as a result of the small number of select Minnesota online schools that served students in elementary grades and the fact that little information (research) was available on these schools' parent involvement practices. According to Blatter (2008), "A case study is a research approach in which one or a few instances of a phenomenon are studied in depth" (p. 69). Blatter further stated that some researchers believe individual perceptions—a major focus area in this study—are important in social research, and the use of a case study is better than "large N-Surveys" for this purpose (Blatter, 2008, p. 70).

Yin (2009) also recommended that when determining a study's methodology, three areas should be examined: (a) the type of research question, (b) whether the researcher needs to control parts of the phenomenon or question to be studied, and (c) if the researcher is interested in a phenomenon that has occurred recently or in the past (Yin, 2009). The study was not dependent on controlling any of the events currently present in the programs under study. The types of research questions aligned readily to a case study, and the study was focused on events that were actually

occurring during the timeframe of 2014-2015 in Minnesota's online schools. All three of the recommendations offered by Yin (2009) for determining a study's methodology were met in selecting the case study as the most appropriate methodology for the study.

Further, the study searched for areas of difference and likeness in parental involvement practices between online schools by comparing the research results of the seven cases (select Minnesota online schools), hence the selection of a comparative case study design. Mills states, "The underlying goal of comparative research is to search for similarity and variation between the entities that are the object of comparison" (Mills, 2008, p. 101). Additionally, examining multiple cases—using the comparative case study design—allowed the researcher to apply common themes among the selected online schools. The comparative aspect lent weight to the external validity of the findings (Yin, 2009).

Yin stated that it is important to have at least two sources of evidence in case study research (Yin, 2009). This comparative case study's design adheres to Yin's recommendation, collecting data from two different sources at each case site (select Minnesota online schools), which is important to ensure validity. The first data source was inclusion of documents relating to practices of parental involvement at the select Minnesota online schools. These documents included parent and student handbooks, parent involvement or support policies, parent compacts, school website information related to parental involvement and other documents the online school directors provided. On the matter of documentation, Yin stated, "documents play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case studies. Systematic searches for relevant documents are important in any data collection plan" (Yin, 2009, p. 87). The second source of evidence in the case study's research is the conduct of interviews with the directors of the select on-line schools.

The design of the study relied on the use of a case study team. Yin states that,

...it often happens that a case study investigation must rely on a case study team... for any of three reasons: 1. a single case calls for intensive data collection at the same site, requiring a "team" of investigators... 2. a case study involves multiple cases, with different persons being

needed to cover each site or to rotate among the sites (Stake, 2006, p. 21); or 3. a combination of the first two conditions.

In this study, Yin's third condition was met. Multiple interviews at seven select Minnesota online schools were conducted; furthermore multiple sources of data had to be collected to secure answers to separate sets of research questions—one set for each researcher on the case study team. Due to these requirements and the high total number of schools—seven—a team approach between the two researchers was selected.

The validity and reliability of any case study, including the findings, are important in four areas according to Yin (2009). These areas include the internal, construct of the findings, external, and reliability of the study (Yin, 2009). The internal reliability and validity of the study are assured because of the collection of two types of data at each case site, and the use of interview and case study protocols.

The validation of the construct of the findings was accomplished by having all online school directors who responded to the interview questions review the draft of the transcripts as Yin (2009) suggests. Additions, clarifications and deletions to the transcripts were noted, and the report was then adjusted based on the directors' review.

The external validity of the study is assured through the study's use of multiple on-line school directors and school documents. Application of the results of each online schools director interview and document collections to the conceptual framework of the study, Epstein's six types of involvement, allowed for comparisons by replication logic (Yin, 2009) among the multiple on-line schools. Replication logic refers to drawing the conclusion that if a finding is replicated across multiple sites that were studied, it can be logically assumed it would continue to be replicated at other sites not studied. Yin suggests that if the generalizations found at each site continue to apply across multiple cases using this replication logic, then this lends weight to the findings and validity of the case study externally (Yin, 2009).

Finally, because of the creation and application of the case study protocol, reliability was further ensured. Thus, the study can be replicated again at any time using the same methodology. Also, placement of all data in the source of data chart will allow the researcher or future researchers to consistently replicate the study and achieve the same results. This proves the reliability of the case study (Yin, 2009).

While validity and reliability were assured, the following limitations were forecasted prior to the conduct of this study:

1. This study would be limited to select Minnesota online school directors' self-reported perceptions of their schools' parent involvement programs and methods.
2. Depending upon the results and the replication of results among the multiple case studies, the findings may not be generalizable to other online schools in Minnesota or in other states.
3. Because one of the major sources of data was secured through interviews, interviewer bias might occur. The chances of this occurring were reduced because of the protocols and validation measures established in the study.
4. During interviews, directors may forget to speak about a practice that is actually occurring, and the practice may not be located in the school's document data. These potential undiscovered practices may also be implemented solely by individual teachers, or small groups of teachers, which were not used as a source of data in the study.

Procedures and Timeline

Data collection for the study began in the fall of 2014. Each on-line school director was contacted by electronic mail (Appendix A) in order to describe the purpose of the study, the study's scope and information related to the scope, and to ask for their participation in the study. This email also included the assurance that the director's personal identification and the identification of their school in the study would be protected and not released, a protocol recommended by Roberts (2010).

Once all directors were contacted, the researcher(s) developed an interview and site visit schedule. Directors were provided the option of being interviewed—according to their preference—in person or by telephone, though it was the researcher’s preference to conduct the interviews in person and at the school sites.

After the schedule was developed, all documents were collected following the case study protocol. Interviews were also conducted in adherence with the case study protocol—by utilizing the interview protocol.

All data was collected and recorded in the ‘Source of Data Chart’ (Roberts, 2010, p. 158) in Appendix D. Data collection was completed by May of 2015.

The researcher conducted audio recordings of the interviews in those instances when directors agreed to this request. According to Yin, (2009), recording the interview is a personal decision, but it should not be used if it could cause the interviewee to feel uncomfortable. This case study relies on the use of a ‘case study team’ (Yin, 2009, p. 75). Because of the joint approach employed in the conduct of the study, detailed note taking without the use of recording devices was able to be readily accomplished.

Interview data were transcribed following the conduct of the interviews as suggested by Boyce and Neale (2006). The transcriptions were classified and placed in the Source of Data Chart. To further ensure validity in the transcriptions, each transcription was sent to the interviewees for review and additional comments or adjustments to the transcripts. In analyzing the transcripts of the interviews, the researchers independently established preliminary codes on the first reading of a jointly selected transcript (Saldana, 2012). During the second reading of this transcript, data were more firmly established—independently by each researcher—into final codes (Saldana, 2012). After this second reading, the researchers met to verify the alignment of their coded transcripts in order to ensure reliability. This was completed by comparing and matching the preliminary and final versions of coding appearing on the researchers’ transcripts.

According to Saldana, though it is difficult to achieve precise wording on the codes, researchers should generally agree on the coded areas more than 85-90% of the time (Saldana, 2012). When agreement was not reached at this percentage level, discussion and modification of the codes occurred until the percentage agreement recommended was achieved. In the initial coding of the first transcript, agreement was reached at 92.8%. After reliability was established on the initial coding, the remainder of the interview transcripts were coded jointly and agreement by ‘consensus’ determined the final codes. Saldana suggests that working together to complete the coding process may provide additional methods of interpreting and analyzing the data (Saldana, 2012).

Once the finalized coding was completed, application of these finalized codes from the transcripts into categories and themes, as Saldana recommended, occurred independently. This procedural step was conducted independently based on each researcher’s conceptual or theoretical framework and research questions. This allowed each researcher to answer the specific research questions related to the conceptual or theoretical frameworks of their study. All other data sources were subsequently reviewed independently because of the study-specific questions under investigation.

Patterns or themes that emerged between the interview source and other data sources in relation to the frameworks and research questions—along with comparisons across the case study school sites—are recorded in Chapter 4 of the study. After the recording of the findings, conclusions are drawn and recommendations for future study offered.

Summary

The study was a qualitative study, which employed a comparative case study methodology. Interview and case study protocols were reviewed, and field testing of the protocols were conducted prior to contacts of participants in the fall of spring of 2015. Interviews and collection of data took place through May of 2015. Multiple data collection procedures were used. These included interviews and document collections. Collection of these data were accomplished with the use of a case study

team. At all points of the study, validity and reliability were ensured through the establishment and adherence to case study and interview protocols, transcription from recording tools or through the use of two recorders, and a review of the findings with interviewees and the case study team. Data analysis occurred subsequent to December 2014, with the final results and conclusions presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This comparative case study examined the parental involvement practices that are in place, along with the successes and difficulties experienced with parental involvement, in Minnesota's Online Schools. The chapter is organized with a review of selected demographic information about the seven Minnesota online schools selected for inclusion in the study, followed by reports of the specific data pertaining to each research question. These include the types of parental involvement practices the online schools employed, how they were implemented, practices that have been reported as successful, and practices that have been reported as difficult to implement along with any proposed solutions. Data gleaned from interviews and documents collected at the case study sites are generally reported in a summarized format, based on the conceptual framework of Epstein's six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008). In some instances, however, a direct quote from an interview or a reference to a document source may be provided if clarity in answering the research question with the quote was achieved and anonymity of the case study site and director could be maintained.

Case Study School Selected Demographic Information

All of the study sample schools and their directors were assured anonymity in exchange for agreement to participate in the study. Thus, the study data have been reported in such a manner as to make the schools unidentifiable. Sample schools are listed and referred to in this study by a letter designator. Permissible demographic data on each school are listed below, which includes school location with a community descriptor and size, student population, student grade ranges, enrollment locations served, curriculum model, Title 1 funding status, and existence of general indicators of parental involvement practices in document form, such as parent involvement policies, parent-school involvement compacts, and parent-student handbooks.

Online School A: This school's offices were located in a primarily urban location (in this study defined as a large metropolitan area with a population of greater than 200,000). The school served a student population enrolled in grade levels from Kindergarten through grade 12. Total enrollment in the school was approximately 250 students. The school offered an online curriculum, as well as a blended environment (part online, part in school) to choose from. Student enrollment was state-wide. The school received Title 1 funds, had a published Title 1 parent involvement policy, a published parent-student handbook, as well as a signed compact for parental involvement between the school and the parent.

Online School B: This school's offices were located in a primarily rural area (in this study defined as a community population of less than 30,000 and with a surrounding area consisting largely of agricultural or forest land). The school served a student population of approximately 100, enrolled in grades Kindergarten through grade 12. Student enrollment was state-wide. The school offered an online curriculum, with optional blended time or learning support at the school offices where access is provided to computer laboratories. The school received Title 1 funds, had a published Title 1 parent involvement policy, a published parent-student handbook, and provided expectation letters for parental involvement rather than a signed compact between the school and the parent.

Online School C: This school's offices were located in a primarily urban location (large metropolitan area with a population of greater than 200,000). The school served a student population enrolled in grades kindergarten through grade 12. Total enrollment in the school was approximately 1,900 students. The school offered an online curriculum. Student enrollment was state-wide. The school does not receive Title 1 funds, or have a published Title 1 parent involvement policy. However, the school does publish a parent-student handbook, and required a signed compact for parental involvement between the school and the parent.

Online School D: This school's offices were located in a primarily suburban area (in this study defined as a mid-sized population between 30,000 and 200,000, or a smaller population base with a commute to a larger metropolitan area of less than 30 minutes). The school served a student population enrolled in grades kindergarten through grade 12. Total enrollment at the school was approximately 350 students. The school offered an online curriculum, with some shared athletic and other on-site activities for nearby students. Student enrollment was state-wide. The school received Title 1 funds and had a published Title 1 parent involvement policy. The school required a signed compact for parental involvement between the school and the parent. A student-parent handbook was not located.

Online School E: This school's offices were located in a primarily suburban area (mid-sized population between 30,000 and 200,000, or a smaller population base with a commute to a larger metropolitan area of less than 30 minutes). The school was accredited to serve a student population enrolled in grades Kindergarten through grade 12, though in practice the actual enrollment typically included grades 8-12. Total enrollment in the school was approximately 300 students. The school offered an online curriculum in which students enrolled part-time, while also maintaining part time enrollment in their home school districts. Thus, student enrollment was typically garnered from approximately twenty districts that had partnered with the online school to receive services. The school did not receive Title 1 funds or have a Title 1 parent involvement policy (though many of the enrolled students home districts do), but does have a signed parent school compact, and a student-parent handbook.

Online School F: This school's offices were located in a primarily suburban area (mid-sized population between 30,000 and 200,000, or a smaller population base with a commute to a larger metropolitan area of less than 30 minutes). The school served a student population enrolled in grades kindergarten through grade 12. Total enrollment in the school was approximately 40 students. The school offered an online curriculum with a part time option every other week for learning support at

the school's classrooms and computer labs. Student enrollment was state-wide. The school received Title 1 funds and had a published Title 1 parent involvement policy. The school required a signed compact for parent involvement between the school and the parent. A student-parent handbook was not located specifically for the school. However, the online school was operated by a public school district which had a district wide student-parent handbook.

Online School G: This school's offices were located in a primarily rural area (community population of less than 30,000 and a surrounding area consisting largely of agricultural or forest land). The school served a student population of approximately 500 enrolled in grades kindergarten through grade 12. Student enrollment was state-wide. The school offered an online curriculum. The school received Title 1 funds, had a published Title 1 parent involvement policy, and had a published parent-student handbook. The school required a signed compact for parent involvement between the school and the parent.

Results

Research Question #1

What types of parental involvement practices do select Minnesota online schools employ?

Question 1 findings are presented according to Epstein's framework of her six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008). Each of Tables 1-6 subsequently present each of Epstein's six types of parental involvement and the source of data confirming evidence of their employment at the seven case study sites. Table 7 provides a comparative illustration of the usage of all six types of parental involvement in the case study sites.

Table 1 examines interview and document results on Parenting. According to Epstein, parenting is focused on (schools) helping families establish home environments to support children as students. Table data revealed during interviews of school directors that 2 out of 7 directors, or 28.6% reported parenting involvement practices.

Some directors discussed the presence of standard school counselor positions and teachers providing tips to or having conversations with parents. These, while related anecdotally by the directors to helping families with parenting, were not deemed by the researcher to be an actual school practice that aligned with Epstein's (1995; Epstein et al., 2008) definition and examples. The two directors who reported parental involvement practices gave examples of working with county services to provide child care to parents who were themselves students of the online school which helped create a better environment for learning, implementing parent nights where parents come to the school to meet and share strategies, and using an online program to run a 'webinar', a seminar/ workshop held over the internet using video conferencing and instant messaging to communicate with participants on varying skills for parents.

An examination of sample school documents revealed that 5 out of 7, or 71.4% of all schools did provide evidence of helping parents establish a home environment suitable for learning, such as providing information about understanding and helping students with anxiety, modeling work habits with parent 'to do lists', providing a work location with good lighting, providing computers, or providing good wrist support [for typing and using the computer's mouse] at home. The discrepancy between reported and recorded practices that occur in the parenting area was the largest in any of the six types to be subsequently presented.

Table 1

Employment of the Parenting Type of Parental Involvement Practices

| Source | School | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Interview | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | Yes |
| Documents | Yes | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | -- | Yes |

Note. An entry of 'Yes' indicates evidence of one or more involvement practices in this area. An entry of '--' indicates no evidence of an involvement practice was discovered.

Table 2 details results from interview and documents related to Communicating. According to Epstein (1995; Epstein et al., 2008), communicating (for schools) concentrates on designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress. Table data showed during interviews of school directors that 7 out of 7, or 100% reported communicating involvement practices.

Examples of communicating practices included the following; many schools utilized internet based course and grade reporting systems that parents, students and school staff could access for progress reports, many schools provided monthly newsletters, and some had a required number of teacher-parent contacts over the phone or online.

Additionally, evidence in 100% of the online school's documents verified the existence of several communication strategies between the school and parents. Examples of these strategies were online message boards, weekly and monthly newsletters, signed requirements to update the school on phone, email and address changes and further strategies.

Table 2

Employment of the Communicating Type of Parental Involvement Practices

| Source | School | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Interview | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Documents | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Note. An entry of 'Yes' indicates evidence of one or more involvement practices in this area. An entry of '--' indicates no evidence of an involvement practice was discovered.

Table 3 shows results of data collection from interviews and document sources on Volunteering. Epstein (1995; Epstein et al., 2008) relates that Volunteering means (for schools) to recruit and organize parent help and support. Data collected during interviews of school directors showed that 6 out of 7, or 85.7% of directors reported volunteering practices. Parents chaperoning

field trips, chaperoning online class discussion rooms, as well as helping administer art and book fair evenings were some of the examples provided.

Evidence in each school's documents of volunteering practices was found in 4 out of 7, or 51.7% of schools. Some examples included requirements for committing a set number of volunteer hours in parent school compacts, written existence of opportunities to chaperone field trips, opportunities to administer student clubs, and opportunities to help parent groups in the school.

Table 3

Employment of the Volunteering Type of Parental Involvement Practices

| Source | School | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Interview | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | -- | Yes | Yes |
| Documents | Yes | -- | Yes | Yes | -- | -- | Yes |

Note. An entry of 'Yes' indicates evidence of one or more involvement practices in this area. An entry of '--' indicates no evidence of an involvement practice was discovered.

Table 4 presents interview and document results on Learning at Home. Epstein states that Learning at Home (for schools) means to provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning (Epstein 1995; Epstein et al., 2008). Data from the table revealed that 7 out of 7, or 100% of directors reported standard practices.

Directors discussed orientation sessions teaching parents how to help their child learn at home, contracts signed by parents agreeing to help and monitor their child's learning, and the school monitoring a student's online time and assignment completion rates to verify actions of learning at home. Directors also reported scheduling online webinars providing tips and instruction for parents in different subjects, providing tutoring assistance at the school's physical location as well as online over the internet, and employing specific staff members or requiring the teachers to contact parents to learn how to assist with difficult areas.

Every school's documents verified learning at home practices as well. A shared example from each school in the study occurred because each school possessed documentation either in contract form, or in a written directive form requiring parent(s) to agree to help and monitor their child's work completion and attendance. Schools also recorded webinar timelines on their websites, had links to video tutorials and help, had pre-recorded orientation sessions that parents could view and administered online blogs with parent tips for learning at home.

Table 4

Employment of the Learning at Home Type of Parental Involvement Practices

| Source | School | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Interview | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Documents | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Note. An entry of 'Yes' indicates evidence of one or more involvement practices in this area. An entry of '--' indicates no evidence of an involvement practice was discovered.

Table 5 examines interview and document results on Decision Making. According to Epstein (1995; Epstein et al., 2008), Decision Making is focused on (schools) including parents in school decisions, and developing parent leaders and representatives. Table data revealed during interviews of school directors that 7 out of 7, or 100% reported Decision Making involvement practices. Examples included school level, or district level, board and parent-teacher organization membership and leadership, as well as participation in class choices for their students.

Data also revealed that 6 out of 7, or 85.7% of schools had decision making practices documented for parents as well, such as decision making guides for the registration process for online learning, requirements for parents to participate in class placement and selection, the existence of boards and parent organizations to become involved in, and written statements in the schools' Title 1 parental involvement policies referencing the inclusion of parents in the development of parental involvement policy and practice.

These written policy statements that existed in the schools' Title 1 parental involvement policies were discovered to follow identical wording at each study site. As an example, identical wording was always found in section IV, relating to 'Development of School Policy'—which stated that the school will, "...involve parents in an organized, ongoing, and timely way, in the planning, review, and improvement of the parental involvement programs, including the school parental involvement policy..." (Excerpt from school F's parental involvement policy, p. 2). These written policies varied between schools as to the dates adopted or amended. The dates ranged from 2002–2014. Evidence of implementing and practicing these identical policies (as an example the parent review of parental involvement policy) could not be confirmed in all cases.

Table 5

Employment of the Decision Making Type of Parental Involvement Practices

| Source | School | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Interview | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Documents* | Yes | Yes | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Note. An entry of 'Yes' indicates evidence of one or more involvement practices in this area. An entry of '--' indicates no evidence of an involvement practice was discovered.

*No director or other documents verified the Title 1 policy statements were actually being employed, this is noted because all policies in all schools shared much of the same wording.

Table 6 displays the data collected from interviews and documents on the final type of parental involvement, Collaborating with Community. According to Epstein (1995, 2009), Collaborating with Community (for schools) means to identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. The data showed that 7 out of 7, or 100% of school directors reported practices of collaborating with community.

Directors reported examples including utilization of local community facilities for classes and testing, community service projects, and assistance from county truancy services statewide to help families and their children continue to attend the online school.

In examining the documents, 5 out of 7 schools, or 71.4% employed practices for collaborating with community such as partnering with hospitals and local business for course experiences, participating in community volunteering efforts where they (the students and parents) live, and using local facilities for classes such as libraries.

Table 6

Employment of the Collaborating with Community Type of Parental Involvement Practices

| Source | School | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Interview | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Documents | Yes | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | -- | Yes |

Note. An entry of ‘Yes’ indicates evidence of one or more involvement practices in this area. An entry of ‘--’ indicates no evidence of an involvement practice was discovered.

Table 7 presents a comparison of the data from question 1 across all case study sites, as well as all types of involvement practices. When comparing the evidence for the employment of all types of parental involvement across the case study sites the data suggests the greatest consistency of types of parental involvement being employed existed in two areas; Communicating and Learning at Home. This is followed in order from greatest to least amount of evidence for practices by; Decision Making, Collaborating with Community, Volunteering, and then Parenting. It may be important to note that this order may not reflect the actual effectiveness of the practices that are implemented in each of the six areas.

Table 7

Employment of Epstein's (1995; Epstein et al., 2008) Six Types of Parental Involvement

| School | Parenting | | Communicating | | Volunteering | | Learn at Home | | Decision Making | | Collaborating w/Community | |
|--------|-----------|------|---------------|------|--------------|------|---------------|------|-----------------|------|---------------------------|------|
| | Int. | Doc. | Int. | Doc. | Int. | Doc. | Int. | Doc. | Int. | Doc. | Int. | Doc. |
| A | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| B | -- | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | -- |
| C | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | -- | Yes | Yes |
| D | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| E | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | -- | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| F | Yes | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | -- |
| G | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Note. Evidence of a type of parental involvement at a case study site is indicated with a 'Yes'. If no evidence was discovered, this is indicated with a '--'. The abbreviation 'Int.' refers to evidence discovered during director interviews. The abbreviation 'Doc.' refers to evidence discovered during document collection and analysis.

Research Question #2

The second research question asked: *How are the parental involvement practices in select Minnesota online schools implemented?*

The data presented in reference to this question is organized according to the framework of Epstein's six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008), and then by school within each type of parental involvement. Tables 8-13 illustrate the implemented practices as compared across the school sites following each section.

1. *Parenting:* Help all families establish home environments to support children as students (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008).

School A helped families support their students' home environment by requiring them to provide a computer and internet access as part of the school-parent compact parents sign at

registration. The school also routinely sent parent letters to all families addressing topics to help support students, such as anxiety around standardized testing.

School B did not have any specific parental involvement practices in the area of parenting.

School C assisted families in establishing the supportive home environment by asking families, as verified in registration documents, to sign a contract during the registration process agreeing to such things as providing a computer and internet access to the student. The school placed this request on one of their main web pages as well, which may be read prior to a family registering or seeing the contract. The web page states, "...parents sign an agreement outlining their responsibilities as learning coaches and describing suggested steps for creating an optimal learning environment at home."

School D assisted families in establishing a supportive home environment by requiring families to sign a contract during the registration process agreeing to such things as providing a computer and internet access to the student according to registration documents. The school also provides online workshops (another name for the online seminars known as webinars) for parents covering topics such as "...time and home management, and behavior challenges..." according to information found on school D's website.

School E assisted families with a supportive home environment by providing documents during registration with tips to help students, such as modeling good habits by having a 'to do' list for yourself [the parents], and providing a study space free of distractions with good lighting, a computer, and support for the wrist.

School F's director, in helping parents establish the supportive home environment, would work with county services by filing reports and sourcing resources to provide child care to parents that were themselves students of the online school. This gave those student-parents time alone at home, and a better learning environment to complete their coursework. The director was also creating plans

and schedules for upcoming parent night implementation, a program where parents would be invited to the school to visit with each other on strategies to use with their kids at home.

School G helped families home environments by providing what the director called, “parent training programs”, which could be considered equivalent to seminars, 2-3 times per month. These were provided in a different way from traditional brick and mortar schools, where parents would typically receive an invitation and then physically come in to listen to a presentation. School G provided these in video format over the internet. Some sessions were reported as pre-recorded, with parents just watching online. Other sessions were reported as interactive, with a live video feed to the presenter, and parents able to ask questions online as the presentation progressed—similar to a webinar as discussed earlier. An example of a topic that would be presented was encouraging independent reading at home.

Table 8

Implemented Parenting Parental Involvement Practices

| Practice | School | | | | | | |
|--|--------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Compact requiring provision of computer and internet access. | Yes | -- | Yes | Yes | -- | -- | -- |
| Hosts online ‘webinars’ on parenting practices. | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | Yes |
| Provides documents with parenting tips. | Yes | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- |
| Parent Nights. | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- |
| Resource County Services for Child Care. | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- |

Note. An entry of ‘Yes’ indicates the school implemented the practice as described. An entry of ‘--’ indicates that no evidence of implementing that practice was discovered.

2. *Communicating*: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008).

School A communicated with parents in a variety of different ways. Some ways being used have already been documented in traditional schools (Epstein et al., 2008), such as sending out a weekly or monthly newsletter that informed parents about school events and announcements, holding parent-teacher conferences two to three times a year, and teachers, along with other staff, calling parents on the phone as needed about the student's progress. It should be noted though, that the school would use online tools such as email, vs. regular mail to implement these more traditional practices. Other ways of communicating in school A were not found as examples in current research. One of these examples included an online program that gave parents immediate access to view their student's progress, attendance, and grades at any time of day, and any day of the week. Also used for communication was online chat, which means using a headset and communicating similar to a phone using the internet to deliver the signal, and messaging, which means sending typed messages over the internet, through the school's online software system. Using chat and messaging systems allowed for direct contact between the student or parent, and the teacher. The school hosts an orientation session when parents register to help families understand how the school's programs work. The director also confirmed using a program called 'Skype' which combines a video and phone feed over the internet

School B communicated in traditional ways as well, such as phoning parents as needed about student progress. When school B made phone calls, one strategy they used was calling later in the evening to meet the parents' and student work schedules—to do this they employed a secretary that had later hours than other staff. Additionally, school B used interpreters on the phone, and a program called 'Language Line' that helped translate between staff and parents that spoke other languages. Staff at school B also used an email system to send messages to parents about student progress. School B had an online program that gave parents immediate access to attendance, student work

progress, grades, and additionally, the number of hours and times that students had logged on to the online school system to work on their classes.

School C used an email system to communicate as well, however their email system was an internal system that parents and students could also access and utilize from home. Because of the internal system, the school at times would, according to the director, "...mark it [the email message] as 'read required'..." This feature allowed the school to verify the parent or student had read the email, and told them what time of day they read it. According to the director, this gave the school knowledge into what time of day or night the parent and student typically worked on their school work. The school also communicated through what they called a 'Virtual Classroom' which was an online program that allowed for chat and messaging simultaneously over the internet—typically for use in whole group instruction or tutoring. This was useful, according to the director, especially in cases where parents or students could not be reached by phone. The director stated if the phone was shut off, or out of minutes, this was used more frequently, and was able to happen as the school provided the program, headset and microphone free of charge. School C also used two additional, traditional methods of communicating, which were sending out a school newsletter, and conferencing with parents on the phone. In regards the phone conferencing, school C required their teachers to conduct a minimum of two phone conferences with the student's parents each month.

School D held parent teacher conferences twice a year over the phone or online, and also sent out a newsletter once a month to parents. School D used an internal email system such as School C utilizes, and the director of school D stated it was used for the majority of communications. In initial registration documentation, parents were also required to sign a contract agreeing to immediately inform the school when phone numbers, mailing and email addresses changed. The school also provides an orientation to parents when they register. Finally, teachers were required to meet over the phone or online with parents of kindergarten–grade 5 students once each week to provide guidance on that week's instruction at home.

School E began their communication processes with the parent when first enrolling via written communication. The school and parent reviewed and signed a series of paper forms with various registration and enrollment information, ending with the parent verifying through a statement of understanding they understand the expectations for the online program. Then, once enrolled, a coordinator at the school contacts the parent and explains and helps them learn how to start the student's enrolled courses, and provides teacher contacts. This was followed by the actual teacher contacting the home in the first week by phone. This contact was to explain the course. After this point communication occurred between parents and teacher only as needed. Further examples are parent or staff initiated emails and phone calls, and progress reports emailed to parents, staff and students. The progress reports are based on the amount of class work completed. Parents receive this communication only if a student has not completed any work for 1 week, and again if no work is completed for 2 weeks.

School F required communication with student families from the teacher at least one time a week, but the director of school F indicated this number increases if the student needs help with course progress. Similar to school E, school F provided weekly progress reports to student families, and also had an online program that gave parents access to grades, progress, and other information on their student at any time of day, every day of the week. Similar to traditional school communication practices (Epstein et al., 2008), the director of school F stated that at the beginning of registration, and at least one time every year, they hold face to face meetings to develop a plan for, or review student progress. The director stated in regards to the importance of the face to face meetings, "We believe...there are really three important pieces...the school and teacher, the family/parent, and the student. When they are working together it works—if a link is a little weaker, that's when problems can happen, and where we try to help..." School F also used the phone to contact parents as concerns would arise during courses.

School G used four methods of communication with parents. These included the phone and email as many of the other schools listed above used. School G also communicated over an online program that allowed chat and messaging between students, teachers and parents. Finally, school G used the online program called ‘Skype’ to communicate with parents over the internet. This program allows users to talk as on a phone, but see a live video feed of the person they are speaking with on their computer screen. No specific triggers for communication or plans were given in school G, but the director stated that, “...teachers are in daily conversations with families...”

Table 9

Implemented Communicating Parental Involvement Practices

| Practice | School | | | | | | |
|--|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Phone calls as needed. | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Emails as needed. | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Online access to grades, course progress and attendance. | Yes | Yes | -- | -- | Yes | Yes | -- |
| Parent Teacher Conferences on the phone or through online program. | Yes | -- | Yes | Yes | -- | -- | -- |
| Mailed or Emailed Newsletters. | Yes | -- | Yes | Yes | -- | -- | -- |
| Online Chat. | Yes | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | Yes |
| Online Messaging. | Yes | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | Yes |
| Simultaneous Chat and Messaging Program. | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | Yes |
| Required phone or online meetings weekly with parents. | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | Yes | -- |
| Internet Video Phone Program ‘Skype’. | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes |
| Registration and Course Orientations. | Yes | -- | -- | Yes | Yes | -- | -- |
| Progress reports to parents | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | Yes | -- |
| Staff employed at later hours for phone calls. | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- |
| Interpreters or Translating Program. | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Read Required feature used on emails. | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Required Phone meetings to Parents Bi-Monthly from Teachers. | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Signed contract requiring parents to update school on contact changes. | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- |
| Required phone contact by teacher during the first week.. | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- |
| In person meetings for student progress planning. | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- |

Note. An entry of ‘Yes’ indicates the school implemented the practice as described. An entry of ‘--’ indicates that no evidence of implementing that practice was discovered.

3. *Volunteering*: Recruit and organize parent help and support (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008).

School A included the goal for each family to volunteer 20-40 hours of their time a year at the school, which was listed as part of the school's parent school compact that is signed at registration. In actuality the director found volunteer hours were not at that level. The director felt parents were already putting in a lot of time at home working with their students, which he felt was part of the reason why volunteering did not happen as much. The staff at the school, according to the director, recruited single, or small groups of volunteers for events during the school year. The director of school A gave examples of a parent running an advertising and information booth at a school choice fair for the school, a parent who volunteered to distribute the scholastic book forms each month, and small groups of parents who volunteer to help the school run a spaghetti dinner, a silent auction, and go on field trips when they are organized.

School B recruited small groups of volunteers for events during the school year. The director of school B gave examples of parents assisting during an Art work activity at the school building, and a physical education activity at the school building. The director also referenced a field trip to the Minnesota Science Museum that was to occur in which parents would volunteer to accompany their child to. The school did not specifically recruit volunteers for a home school parent group that exists in the school, but parents would volunteer to join the group and help each other with different aspects of attending an online school. Additionally, each year the school hosts an orientation at the school building, and though they do not recruit for it, many parents will volunteer to attend, talk and mentor the new families.

School C also recruited small groups of parents to volunteer on field trips with students, as well as working at, and organizing a book fair for the school. In addition to this, the school formed a volunteer club, in which parents volunteer to be on call to visit with prospective and current families to explain how the school works, help them with any questions or issues, and act as mentors. Finally,

the school recruited volunteers in individual classes to go online and monitor the student chat rooms on their online program. This occurs when the teacher breaks the online classes into smaller discussion groups located in separate chat rooms and cannot monitor every online chat room at once.

School D recruited small groups of parents when students would attend field trips. As an example, the director mentioned the Minnesota Science Museum.

School E did not have any volunteers or methods to recruit and organize them.

School F invited volunteers into the school building once every 2 weeks. This recruitment was done in advance through phone calls and emails, and when parents drop students off. Because the students spent 1 day every 2 weeks at the school building in class with the teacher, the volunteers were asked to come in each week—their tasks included reading with students, organizing activities, and other teacher directed tasks, such as would be seen in a traditional school (Epstein et al., 2008).

School G had a parent teacher organization that parents could volunteer to be a part of, and the director highlighted specific volunteer recruitment during state standardized testing times. At these times, the school would recruit parent volunteers to proctor and organize examinations for the children across the state.

Table 10

Implemented Volunteering Parental Involvement Practices

| Practice | School | | | | | | |
|--|--------|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Recruitment of single or small groups for field trips. | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | -- | -- | -- |
| Recruitment of single or small groups for annual events. | Yes | Yes | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Parent Groups. | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes |
| Mentoring new families. | -- | Yes | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Monitoring Students in Online Programs. | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Help the teacher in the building when students come to the school. | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- |
| Proctor and organize State testing. | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes |
| Required number of hours in parent school compact. | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |

Note. An entry of 'Yes' indicates the school implemented the practice as described. An entry of '--' indicates that no evidence of implementing that practice was discovered.

4. *Learning at home:* Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008).

School A placed responsibility on the parent to help teach the student at home. The director stated, "...it's really the parent's responsibility, particularly at the elementary level, to help the students through their assignments." In terms of specific ways to help the student at home, the school used their communication tool of parent teacher conferences, along with phone calls from staff when needed to help give advice to the parent at home. The director commented in reference to this, "...it's the parents there [at home] that are really elbow to elbow with their students, learning how they learn, and we find that is absolutely...critical for student teacher conferences...the communication can be that much richer about the student's learning style...what's working, what isn't...what might be an area for improvement." The school did not dictate how parents are to help their children exactly, but did provide one on one skype sessions to individual students as needed for academic help. Additionally, according to the school's handbook, the school made available a study center for students to use to receive additional help with schoolwork as needed during the days. The school also required that parents sign a compact with the school to monitor student log-ins, academic progress, to review class notes with the student, and supervise them directly during the day.

School B also placed responsibility on the parent to help teach the students at home. The director of school B said, "...K-5 they have to have a mentor or a coach." As a mechanism to monitor learning at home is occurring, the school monitored the log-in times of students, requiring them to be online one hour per day in each subject. In terms of assisting parents to help their students learn at home, the school provided a computer lab that was staffed by a licensed teacher from 7AM to 8PM at night that students or parents may come in to for extra help in their classes. The school also provided a letter to parents when they registered outlining the requirements for internet connection and

supporting the student with being organized, logging in, and contacting the teacher when the student showed a lack of understanding in a course.

School C met with the parents of each student when they registered to attend the school. At this meeting the school stated the requirement that at least one parent serve as a learning coach. The director stated that in regards the role the school requires the learning coach to fill, "...coach is there to give shoulder to shoulder guidance that they [students] need...for the elementary level, you can't expect them [students] to log in on their own and work independently." School C also provided access to the student's planner 24/7 through their online programs so the parent can monitor what lessons the student is working on.

School D also placed responsibility on the parent for learning at home. In reference to the role the school asks the parents to play in learning at home, the director stated, "They play a huge role, even more so than in a traditional setting..." According to the director, parents of students in grades 6-12 are required to be the learning coach. The school provided the parents with a log in for their online program which provides access to student classes, lessons, grades, etc. For parents in grades K-5, the school required the parents to teach the curriculum to the student. In order to support the parent in this, the school had the teacher assigned to the student meet with the parent once each week to provide teaching guidance. Actual curriculum was shipped through the mail to the parent. When parents registered their student, the school also provided documentation to the parent, and required a contract be signed stating the parent will provide transportation to state testing, will supervise students at home, and ensure the student's work is being completed and the student logs in to the school's online programs enough to maintain adequate attendance. Additionally, the school held an orientation session on how to use the curriculum and school's online programs to support their students.

School E placed responsibility on the parent to provide a supportive learning environment at home. The school did not expect any direct instruction to take place between the parent and student. This aligned with Epstein and Becker's finding that more involvement occurs in elementary schools

(Epstein & Becker, 1982). School E was accredited K-12, but historically the grade level of students that enrolled were 8-12. The school provided parents with a packet on how to support student success, as well as the parent student handbook. These documents provide information on how the parent can help support the student's learning at home, such as: having the student take responsibility to contact teachers, working with the student to develop a study schedule, and to check the student's progress on the online school's online program. The school also employed a learning coach at the school who phones parents and students when work is not being completed to learn if they are having technical difficulties, difficulty with internet support or other items the coach may be able to assist with.

School F placed responsibility for learning at home on the parents as well. The director stated, "They [the parents] are right alongside [the student]..." To assist with the parent's role, the school develops a plan for the parent to help the student learn at home during the first face to face meeting when registering. From that point, the school has a variety of programs they used to help support the parent in assisting the student to learn at home. Programs or methods used include phone calls and emails to the parent to try to engage them to assist the student in learning at home. If that does not work, sometimes the school will bring the student in to the school's computer lab for 2, or 4 hours a week—to provide more supervision and support of learning. Once successful, the school would then gradually give the student more time at home. Additionally, the school required their elementary and middle school students to come in to the school 1 day every 2 weeks for direct instruction from a teacher. Additional tools used to support parents at home included videos saved in the school's online programs explaining some of the lessons students are taught, and also providing a math and science teacher in the afternoons at the school that parents and students may contact for tutoring in these, according to the director, "more difficult areas" of school.

School G placed the responsibility for learning at home on the parents as well. The director of School G stated, "In an online world...because kids are young, an adult needs to be with [the] kids..." In school G, according to the director, the adult serves in a facilitation of learning role. The school

assists in learning at home by providing the following materials: books, lessons written by the teacher, and any materials needed with the lesson. Then the adult provides feedback on what the student understood, or troubles with understandings of what the student is to learn. The webinars this school provided, as discussed in response to the parenting aspect of this research question, also assisted the parents to involve themselves in learning at home, depending on the topic presented, such as how and why the school chooses particular methods of math instruction.

Table 11

Implemented Learning at Home Parental Involvement Practices

| Practice | School | | | | | | |
|---|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Signed compact requiring parents to supervise and assist students to support success. | Yes | Yes | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- |
| Orientation on curriculum use. | Yes | -- | -- | Yes | Yes | -- | -- |
| Assistance at school building. | Yes | Yes | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- |
| Advice from teacher on phone, conference, online. | Yes | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- |
| Provides separate access to student's lessons. | -- | -- | Yes | Yes | -- | -- | -- |
| Tutoring for student online. | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Monitors log-in times of students | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| In person meeting to explain requirements to supervise and assist students. | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Require parents to teach curriculum. | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- |
| Employ extra staff to contact parents to help with learning at home. | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- |
| Provide info on how to support student success | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- |
| In person meeting to develop plan for parent to assist | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- |
| Phone parent to encourage help. | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- |
| Online videos explaining lessons | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- |
| Online Seminars | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes |

Note. An entry of 'Yes' indicates the school implemented the practice as described. An entry of '--' indicates that no evidence of implementing that practice was discovered.

5. *Decision Making:* Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders / representatives (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008).

School A provided in its operating by-laws that three of the nine school board members must be parents. This board set school policy and gave guidance to the director in operating the school. Parents also gave feedback for grade and course placement for their child.

School B let parents be involved in decisions when registering their student for the school in terms of course amounts and initial placement.

School C had parents decide the amount of social interaction, according to the director, that their child will have in terms of field trips and events for their child. School C also let parents become involved in decisions in grade hold backs and grade advancements for students.

School D used parent input and feedback to make some of their decisions. According to the director, "...we always take input. Many parents will give input...we'll get input on our and their schedules and how we do things..." There was not a formal method for collecting the input, but the staff considered it when developing schedules.

School E required parents to be a part of the decision making process during registration, requiring them to ensure, and sign paperwork to make sure the classes their student registers for meet their graduation requirements. The involvement in decision making at the school was also formally sought after with an evaluative survey during the year, and also at the end of the year with parents, staff and students. The school also brought families in on a case by case basis to meet with the director, teacher, parents in cases when grades are questioned, or requests to drop classes occur.

School F's director believed that the use of the online schooling model inherently had parents acting as decision makers as they work along-side their student as a learning coach-adapting instruction, explaining things, giving feedback to the teacher. The director of school F stated, "In terms of decision making, really all day every day! They are in their students' lives as a primary resource, so always!" While not a specific method to involve parents as decision makers—it should be

noted this concept would most likely apply to all online schools that have parents serve in the learning coach or instructor role. The school also conducted end of year surveys to gauge effectiveness of programs and solicit parent feedback. Additionally, the school let the parents be involved in deciding the learning plan for their student during the initial registration meeting.

School G recognized also that just using their model of schooling required the parents to make decisions on instruction with feedback to the teacher daily. The director of school G commented, "...they are far more involved in the processing—they see when the child struggles...they see what is happening and can help make decisions on what they, the student, and we should be looking at for help." According to the school's parent-student handbook, the parent is given a unique login and is the individual that enters student progress, grades on assessments, and daily time and attendance for the student.

Table 12

Implemented Decision Making Parental Involvement Practices

| Practice | School | | | | | | |
|--|--------|------|------|------|------|-----|-----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Belief the Model of Online places the parent in curriculum and learning decisions daily. | Yes* | Yes* | Yes* | Yes* | Yes* | Yes | Yes |
| Policy Statement that parents would be involved in developing parent involvement programs.** | Yes | Yes | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Parent participates in grade and course placement decisions. | Yes | Yes | Yes | -- | Yes | Yes | -- |
| Parent Evaluative Feedback Sought for School Decisions. | -- | -- | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | -- |
| Grades and Course Drop Requests. | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- |
| Parent decides and enters grades, progress, time and attendance. | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes |
| Policy parents are board members of school. | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Parent decides social interaction amounts. | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- |

Note. An entry of 'Yes' indicates the school implemented the practice as described. An entry of '--' indicates that no evidence of implementing that practice was discovered.

*Director F and G's explanation of the decision making involved every day by parents in online learning makes it apparent this is occurring because of the model in each school.

**No director or other documents verified this occurred. All policies shared same wording.

5. *Collaborating with Community*: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008).

School A connected their parents, students and the school with all of the communities their families reside in state wide by requiring all students to complete a community and service fair project each year. According to the letter mailed to parents regarding the fair, the school also provided many examples of service areas from which to choose. The project required students to commit specific hours volunteering in the community—such as animal shelters, food shelves, and others—and then presenting their service projects at a fair that local community members near the school attend. Additionally, the director took regular walking tours through the neighborhood in which the school located to visit with members of the community. Finally, the school utilized county truancy services, statewide, to support the school’s efforts with student attendance. This was done through filing required paperwork with the applicable county to help keep students in school.

School B recognized a large majority of its students’ parents work at a local processing plant. The school had adapted its schedule to insure that staff are available by phone or email and computer labs are accessible at times when the parents are not working. The director referred to this accommodation as, “...fitting into their schedule...” The school also utilizes county truancy services statewide to support the school’s efforts with student attendance. The school does this by filing initial paperwork with their county, and having the county direct that paperwork to the county of the student’s residence.

School C connected their parents, students and the school with all of the communities in which their families resided by requiring participation in, “...a variety of school wide service days...” according to the school’s director. These service days occurred in 10 regional areas across the state so the students’ families can participate and connect with their communities. The activities varied, including cleaning up a state park, visiting a retirement home, cleaning up neighborhood yards, and

others. The school also utilized county truancy services, statewide, that will support the school's efforts with student attendance. The school does this by filing the initial paperwork with the applicable counties.

School D connected with some smaller public school districts across the state, usually located in rural settings, whose students don't have access to some programs. The online school partnered to offer programs in conjunction with those local districts. The school also utilized county truancy services, statewide, that would support the school's efforts with student attendance. The school does this by filing the initial paperwork with the applicable counties. According to the school's website, the school additionally recruits parents to fill the role of 'community coordinator' in order to coordinate activities in the local communities with other families attending the online school.

School E collaborated with over 20 public school districts in the state in order to offer supplemental online learning in conjunction with those local districts. Additionally, during the registration process, School E involved the local districts in making decisions on those courses which are appropriate for the student to enroll in and to insure the student is on the right track and supported. In specific programs, such as the school's health and science academy, documented in the school's regional policy guidelines—School E partnered with local organizations, such as the hospital, to provide real life work experiences for students in select courses and programs. As an example, a student may take classes in a nursing program, devoting a few hours each day at the local hospital observing the work. While not referring to school E, the director reported witnessing many schools that had discontinued collaboration efforts, saying that, "...in terms of trends I've seen from the state level...when it gets hard...schools turn to them [large online curriculum and school providers—such as 'K12'] to do it for them...these are large for profit companies, and they make profit...but you give up something when you do that."

School F worked with its local county's truancy officer to support the school's efforts with student attendance. The school does this by filing the applicable paperwork with the truancy officer,

and the officer then files the appropriate paperwork with other counties if the student resides outside of the local area.

School G also utilized county truancy services statewide that would support the school's efforts with student attendance by filing required paperwork with the applicable counties to help keep students in school. The school additionally had community service student clubs that promoted students working with their local communities to do service projects. The club participants met a few times a month virtually over the internet to share ideas and information on the contributions they made in their local communities.

Table 13

Implemented Collaborate with Community Parental Involvement Practices.

| Practice | School | | | | | | |
|--|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Utilization of Truancy Services | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Partnered with other school districts to provide programming. | -- | -- | -- | Yes | Yes | -- | -- |
| Required that students complete community service projects. | Yes | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Director visits to local community. | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Adapted staffing schedule according to local business hours for parents. | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Parent role of community coordinator | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- |
| Local business partnerships for classes. | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- |
| Sponsors Community Service Clubs | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes |

Note. An entry of 'Yes' indicates the school implemented the practice as described. An entry of '--' indicates that no evidence of implementing that practice was discovered.

Research Question #3

What parental involvement practices do the directors of select Minnesota online schools report have been successful?

The data pertinent to this research question are presented by school director and categorized by type according to the conceptual framework. Table 14 illustrates a comparative analysis of the successful practices in the sample online schools.

Director A found practices in the areas of learning at home, decision making and communicating to be successful. Citing the physical involvement model of online schooling, director A stated, "...our schedule is so unique...our parents are involved in their kids' education in a way that most schools can only dream of, because they are really working with the kids...here. We've got parents truly...working with their students." Because the student is living at home with the parent, an immediate increase and success in the learning at home type of involvement typically takes place as compared to traditional schooling models. School A also has parents of students who serve on their school board. Director A said, "We really don't have much trouble getting people to run..." This success keeps parents involved in the school's decisions. Communication during orientation was also attributed as a successful practice in providing parents with the tools to be involved in their students' education. The director also indicated that orientation—done on site at the school—has been successful when attended a second time by parents who were having difficulty understanding the school and maintaining their involvement.

Director B consistently referenced the communication type of parental involvement practices as successful. Immediacy of response, or 'getting back to them as soon as you can' as Director B stated, was very helpful. School B employs an online manager and a part time secretary to facilitate immediate responses to parents. Further strengthening communication lines, the director felt that setting up the school's email system to include the director, online manager and secretary on all emails helped in maintaining communication with parents. Finally, initiating face to face meetings with parents assisted in developing plans for student success, as in cases where students would log on and not work or miscommunicate progress to parents.

Director C reported successful practices in the areas of communication and volunteering. More frequent communication was reported as successful by implementing bi-monthly phone calls to conference with parents of school students.

Volunteering success was reported in three areas: facilitating once a month game nights where parents help supervise board games; helping in hosting and coordinating the high school prom and graduation ceremony; and small group online volunteering during which parent volunteers monitor separate virtual classroom 'chat rooms'. According to Director C, "...the teacher can't be in four at once." Such volunteering assists the teacher in keeping online students focused on their topics because parents are monitoring the students' discussions. In reference to parental involvement successes, Director C stated, "parents will frequently tell us that they get to know the teachers better! They will say, 'I had more personal calls and emails, vs a brick and mortar school.' And our teachers do this a lot. They make about five calls daily and find that it is so helpful to share strategies with parents." This increased communication was echoed through the school's bi-monthly calls and conferences.

Director D consistently referenced communication in all of the successful involvement practices. Sending an orientation video that included an overview of the school, along with responsibilities for parents and students, was regarded as helpful for both parents and students to be successful in the school. Additionally, having the video available as a reference was reported as valuable in reducing the number of parents who, in the past, had diminished their involvement in the school and had forgotten how to work effectively with the school. Also, communicating hints, information, and reminders through a weekly newsletter was reported as successful. Finally, communicating early to parents about state standardized testing by sending out information on the date, location and time of the testing, along with reminders through mail and email, assisted the school in achieving nearly 100% of its students tested. According to the director, "...it is a 98% requirement of numbers of enrolled students to test, and that's tough for us, we have to rely on parents

knowing what day it's on and driving to the testing site..." The school's early and consistent communication has greatly contributed to its increased success in having nearly all students tested.

Director E described two successful practices in the area of communication, one of which might result in greater learning at home parental involvement as well. This practice involved the creation of a new school position titled 'learning coach'. The position's duties involved communicating with parents to help them with technical difficulties, internet access and problems encountered with other aspects of online learning. The director stated the purpose of the position was to "unburden the instructor" and with the added communication vehicle assist in improving the amount of learning at home parental involvement that takes place for the student and parent.

Another successful communication practice in School E was the detailed design of the student parent handbook. This handbook was created in such a way that, as the director stated, "... is written as if you're going on a trip..." The handbook, as reported by the director, is often referenced by the Minnesota state department of education as an example of a good practice.

Director F reported successful practices in the area of communication. Persistence in communication was the first successful involvement practice stated. This helped 'reluctant parents', those parents who dread phone calls from a teacher or director related to student progress or their (the parents') involvement. Specifically mentioned was the practice of calling and leaving a message while not asking for parents to return the call. The message states that school representatives will call the parents again, and then to continue calling. This practice focuses on giving success to the students and parents and, as the director stated, to "never, never, give up." Also regarding communication, inviting parents to the school for additional face to face meetings to develop plans to foster student progress was reported as successful. This was reported as particularly the case (seeming to confirm Director B's comments) in instances when students would attempt to subvert the system by logging on and pretending to work for an hour, while in reality playing games or watching an online video service titled, "YouTube". Since School F tracks student progress rather than hours logged on by students,

school officials are able to identify this discrepancy and initiate face to face meetings to get students refocused on their school work. The director of School F felt a large part of the school's success in involving parents in their student's learning and enhancing student achievement in general is to host face to face meetings with the parents during the registration process. The purpose of these meetings is to develop a plan for the students that will be successful and to determine if the school is the right fit for the student's success.

Director G felt that the school's orientation program had been of particular success. The director noted it had taken about a decade to fully develop the program. This initial orientation is described as thorough, doing a much better job at orientating the parent and "...getting them comfortable with their role [parental involvement and learning at home as the coach] and learning the platform [how to navigate the online school's online system]."

Table 14

Successful Practices by Type of Parental Involvement

| Type | Successful Practice | School Director | | | | | | |
|------------------|--|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Communicating | Orientation, and/or repeat of Orientation | Yes | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | Yes |
| “ | Immediate responses to parents. | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| “ | Including all administration on emails. | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| “ | Holding face to face meetings. | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- |
| “ | Implementing bi-monthly teacher parent phone calls. | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| “ | Weekly Newsletter with hints and reminders. | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- |
| “ | Early communications for state testing. | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- |
| “ | Employing a school learning coach. | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- |
| “ | Design of Handbook. | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- |
| “ | Persistence in communication. | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- |
| Volunteering | Parent facilitated game nights. | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| “ | Parent help in planning and hosting graduation events. | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| “ | Parent monitored online small groups. | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Learning at Home | The online schooling model. | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| “ | Employing a school learning coach. | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- |
| Decision Making | Parents on the school’s board. | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |

Note. An entry of ‘Yes’ indicates the director related the practice as a ‘top three most successful practice’. An entry of ‘--’ indicates the director did not relate it as one of the most successful. Please note this does not mean the practice is non-existent in the school.

Research Question #4

What parental involvement practices do the directors of select Minnesota online schools report have been difficult to implement, and what solutions do they offer to mitigate those difficulties?

These data are presented by the online school directors and, then, categorized by type according to the conceptual framework. Table 15 illustrates a comparative analysis of the difficult practices.

Director A discussed the difficulty of identifying parents who would be consistent and reliable in their volunteer efforts. The director discussed the difficulty of helping some parents understand

how student online learning at home is supposed to work. According to director A, "...the parents don't quite get how those online days work..." In reference to this lack of understanding though, director A suggested that the school's orientation for parents assists greatly with this, and the school's strategy of bringing the parents in for a second orientation is valuable. Director A also found difficulty when a lack of student success was contributed to by parents not taking an active role with their students at home regardless of the orientation and communications provided by the school. According to the director, "...we try to be clear on what that role is...sometimes people don't hear us...", and "...some families just don't want to."

A final difficulty discussed by the director was related to needing to collaborate with different counties' truancy services. When a student in school A is found not to be completing work (school A tracks attendance based on work completion, not on log-in time), "...it's not enough to log in and then walk away from your computer for two hours...it's actually getting the work done..." according to director A, it provides a complex problem. Because enrollment in school A is statewide, the director must work with every county in the state for truancy support. In some counties, the truancy services were helpful, such as in Anoka County which helped enforce attendance based solely on the manner in which the school defined attendance. However, in other counties, truancy services are not helpful or non-existent. Director A stated, "...right now, for example, Dakota County, sent out a letter a year or two ago...that says, they will not file truancy based on lack of work completion." And, "...some counties have vastly different policies."

Director B discussed the difficulties of the timing of parental communications. The director stated, "...a kind of roadblock, or difficulty is that a lot of parents want to communicate in the evening...they think that you're there 24/7..." As a solution to this, the director has scheduled the school secretary to work a later shift and has used emails for some of the communications. Throughout the interview, Director B discussed parental misconceptions and errors in helping their students learn at home. As an example, Director B stated, "Some parents...go to work, and come

home and check on them. But, we just haven't had good luck that way." Further, the director gave examples of parents who believed their students were working hard on the computer all day, and the school would inform them their students had actually worked only 20 minutes and, then, these students had switched their computers screens to play video games and view other online programs. In these examples, Director B stated that getting the parent to "put in the time to work with their kids" was the difficulty. In some instances, the director also noted parents support at home would change when students spent time in other parent homes as in those cases where parents were divorced. In such circumstances, the director reported having personal conferences with the parents would help to increase the consistency between the two home environments.

Director B noted their local county was extremely helpful with truancy services, but did not think there were a lot of counties—across the state—as supportive as their own. Director B would file all truancy cases with the local county, including students residing throughout the state. In such cases, the local county would send truancy information on to the student's county of residence. The director noted that in these cases the student's county of residence would occasionally follow up, but the director's school had at least performed its duty correctly. Finally, the director noted incoming parents believed the online school could just provide credits to their student, with no work performed by the student, failing to understand the mission of the online school and its requirements and rigor. The director corrected this misunderstanding on the part of the parents during the registration process.

Director C spoke about the difficulties of working with different counties in which their students reside on truancy issues. The director stated, "...at times it can be terrible—we work with 57 counties, and all have different ways of handling it [truancy]." The director gave additional examples, including, "...in Blue Earth, they don't even recognize us as a school, and just throw it out..." The director went on to state that the school keeps making efforts to stay on top of the student's education. One of the biggest difficulties, according to the director, was that some families enroll their students and expect that as parents they can be "...hands off, but our model is truly a hands on one." The

director also spoke about difficulties when students would enroll with parents that were termed, "...hide out parents. This means parents whose students are already truant [at the school previously being attended]..." No solutions were provided for families whose students transfer in to online schools from brick and mortar schools, already holding a truant record, just to escape the truancy process (which may well be repeated online). However, when families attempted to transfer in from other online schools where they were truant, the director noted that even though online schools all compete for students with each other, they are very collaborative and keep each other informed, especially if a family is trying to 'hop' between them, in order to prevent families from hiding from truancy.

Director D stated the greatest challenge involving parents of students is reaching them. The director mentioned on many occasions that parents change phone numbers without informing the school. To counter this difficulty, the director uses multiple communication methods, including an internal email system, 'robo calls' (automated dialing services), and letters to the homes. Also, the director found that, "...communication back to us has been difficult—they [the parents and student] sometimes leave the school and go back to the home district, but don't let us know they switched..." The director stated this is a complex problem when the school enforces its truancy policies. As the director stated, it is difficult to contact parents in these instances and related that some of the difficulties experienced in this area was due to working with different counties across the state. The director devoted considerable time driving to different counties for meetings that traditional principals would not be required to do. Also, the director related the need to educate select counties on providing assistance to the online school, stating, "...once I deal with the county, they are very good to work with....they don't really understand why our own county doesn't deal with it...but really for a home visit or welfare check we can't get there all over the state." Finally, the director referenced state testing as a difficulty because of the school's reliance on the parents to transport their students to their testing sites. Because of this, the director initiated a procedure of sending a card to parents which

provided the location and time of testing, and beginning the communication on testing a few months in advance of the test date. This procedure has been consistently practiced at the school, resulting in securing around 97% of students actively participating in testing.

Director E found the greatest difficulty in communicating with parents, “Without question—the difficulty is reaching them...sometimes emails, phones are wrong...” Director E also found it difficult to achieve parent understanding of the student’s role and responsibilities for learning at home. Parents at times felt when students were not succeeding, that the problem lay with the teacher. Although student failures of courses were not reported to occur frequently, on those occasions when it did occur, the director found it difficult for parents to accept the failure and decide their next steps and classes for their students. An additional problem reported by Director E, involving collaborating with the community, occurs when a student does not attend their online school, as in a truancy case. According to the director, “...no one wants to do the reporting...it’s in our enrollment policy...15 days of not attending school we send them back to school[the student’s original school]....then they can file truancy. The counselor’s aren’t always happy (have to find a place)...” This withdrawal policy and re-entrance into the original school occurs because of the part time nature of school E’s program—the student is dually enrolled at the original school at the same time they are taking classes through School E.

Director F reported that some parents were not used to providing assistance with teaching to their students at home, and when they were not providing that teaching assistance, the students would struggle. On some instances when this occurred, the school would invite the student to complete their online classes in the school’s computer laboratory. The director noted that the amount of time they would invite students in for this help varied, with some students only needing the assistance for 2 hours a week, and others 4 hours a week. Once the students were caught up with their learning goals, they would transition to working again at home full time. The director found that, “...by far it [the

greatest difficulty] is the reluctant parent or the absent parent...” The director stated it was difficult to get this type of parent to be involved in their child’s education at home.

Director F noted the work involved in reaching out to county services to get daycare for a child, or securing and filing child neglect forms, etc. When initiating truancy services, the director worked with the local county’s truancy officer, even when students were not residents of the county. The local officer would send the report to the applicable county. The director found it was needed to follow up consistently with the resident county, saying, “...it’s a lot of work, but I call, email, and then continue to follow up...if you don’t follow up it can just get lost.” Director F also related a general solution when encountering any type of parental involvement or other educational difficulties. This solution was collaboration with other online programs. The director noted that, “...you can help each other...” in many areas.

Director G found the initial marketing and advertising to parents for the online school to cause difficulty for the school. The primary concern was related to the parent’s role—the director stated, “...we don’t do as good a job letting them know what their role will be...they think one thing, and then realize their commitment level is more than expected.” The realization by the parent, that, as the director said, “...for the parent to recognize that we fall under the same mandates...” was also difficult. Many parents think they could come to the online school to ‘escape’ the rules and regulations of a traditional school, and that the flexibility of the online school meant more than just choosing what time of day to ‘do school’. Finally, the director mentioned that some counties were difficult to work with in truancy support, saying, “...there are other counties that don’t understand the model and that gets harder...some counties that we report to don’t help for online school—the parent will say they are home schooling, or the county doesn’t recognize us...”. The director noted thought that this difficulty in working with the counties has become gradually better with time. The director said one solution that helped was assistance from an individual at the “state” who had worked with

many of the online schools about ten years ago providing tips and help with working with all of the counties, though the director was unsure of the individual's position or name.

Director G offered comments consistent with Director C and F that were about the collaborative nature of the online schools—how the schools were truly working together. The director noted about online schools as a group that, "...we fix issues..." which could be viewed as Director F and C did, a way to find solutions to some of the difficulties mentioned.

Table 15

Difficult Practices by Type of Parental Involvement with Offered Solutions

| Type | Difficult Practices | School Director | | | | | | | Offered Solutions |
|----------------------------|---|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---|
| | | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | |
| Communi- cating | Parent timing for communication | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Schedule staff later(Dir. B) |
| " | Parent belief that online schooling was easier. | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | Explain to parent during registration. (Dir. B) |
| " | Reaching the parents | -- | -- | -- | Yes | Yes | -- | -- | Use multiple means of communication. (Dir. D) |
| Volunteering | Finding Reliable Volunteers | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Learning at Home | Parent understanding of how learning at home is supposed to work. | Yes | Yes | -- | -- | Yes | Yes | Yes | Orientation Repeat. (Dir. A) Personal Conferences. (Dir. B) |
| " | Parent Decision not to participate | Yes | Yes | Yes | -- | -- | Yes | -- | Personal Conferences(Dir. B) |
| " | Parent support changes in split households | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | Personal Conferences(Dir. B) |
| " | Parents transferring between schools to avoid truancy. | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | -- | Collaborating with other Online Schools. (Dir. C) |
| " | Reliance on parents bringing students to state testing | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- | Communicate frequently and early. (Dir. D) |
| Decision Making | Parent decisions when a course failure occurs | -- | -- | -- | -- | Yes | -- | -- | -- |
| Collaborate with Community | County truancy services differ in recognition and help to online schools. | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Policy at the school transferring student back to original school(Dir. E) Send Truancy Case to local county to forward, then follow up (Dir. F) State Assistance (Dir. G) |

Note. An entry of 'Yes' indicates the director related the practice as a 'top three difficulty'. An entry of '--' indicates the director did not relate it as one of the most difficult.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of the comparative case study. In response to the first research question, the types of parental involvement practices that exist were shown, with all schools showing evidence of communicating and learning at home, followed by decision making, collaborating with community, volunteering and then parenting in order of evidence.

How each school implemented its own practices of parental involvement was subsequently discussed, with commonalities existing in the areas of: 1) Collaborating with community, as most schools used county truancy services across the state; 2) Decision making, with every school except one possessing a written parent involvement policy stating parents will help develop involvement practices; 3) Communicating, as every school used phone calls and emails, with a large number of schools providing access to their online programs to parents; and finally, 4) Learning at home and parenting areas, with a large number of schools utilizing compacts to require parents to assist the student and establish certain requirements in their homes.

Additionally, successes and difficulties were presented. In terms of successes, three directors acknowledged the benefits of orientation sessions, and even repeating the session for parents.

All schools related some type of difficulty in attendance enforcement, typically in the access and provision of county truancy services, with some counties across the state of Minnesota refusing to acknowledge online schools as an actual school to service, and some refusing to recognize the way online schools track attendance with the variance between using work completion, login time, parent reporting, or a combination of all.

The following chapter will present the conclusion of the study with discussion and recommendations from the researcher.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the existence of parental involvement practices and successes or difficulties experienced with those practices—as reported by directors—in selected Minnesota online schools.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 highlighted the underlying problem which resulted in initiating the study. That is, while knowledge and resources exist in the literature to implement quality parental involvement practices, that information may not result in such parental involvement practices being implemented. This may be the case in Minnesota Online Schools, as student achievement data appear lower than traditional schools.

The chapter introduced the research questions guiding the conduct of the study. They were as follows:

- 1) What types of parental involvement practices do select Minnesota online schools employ?
- 2) How are the parental involvement practices in select Minnesota online schools implemented?
- 3) What parental involvement practices do the directors of select Minnesota online schools report have been successful?
- 4) What parental involvement practices do the directors of select Minnesota online schools report have been difficult to implement, and what solutions do they offer to mitigate those difficulties?

In considering these questions, the study relied on both a theoretical framework and a conceptual framework. The theoretical framework is Epstein's (1995; Epstein et al., 2008) 'Three Spheres of Influences', which provides the premise that when the school, parents and community work together to influence the student, greater student achievement in every area is achieved. The

conceptual framework delineates the types of parental involvement practices schools, in particular, may implement to influence involvement, including Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with Community (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008).

Chapter 2 of the study presented a review of the related literature. An overview of the definitions of the term, ‘parental involvement’, was provided along with the study’s selected conceptual and theoretical framework developed by Epstein. The history of research of parent involvement was examined, including the identification of difficulties experienced by students in school without parent help at home, an emphasis on the close development of the spheres of influence theory from Lightfoot (1978) to Epstein (1995; Epstein et al., 2008); and the interrelated types of parental involvement identified between Henderson and Berla (1994) and Epstein (1995; Epstein et al., 2008) and other researchers. Numerous areas of success attributed to quality parental involvement were discussed, and, finally, a review of the evolution of online schooling from the early days of correspondence courses to the internet based curriculum delivery models of 2014 and 2015. In this review, concerns were discovered related to online schools’ achievement test scores and their requirements for the involvement of parents in their students’ learning at home. Literature also revealed a lack of studies on any online schools in Minnesota about the types of parent involvement practices that were taking place in those schools. Such findings provided the impetus for the study.

Chapter 3 discussed the methodology of the study. The methodology and instruments for data collection in the study were designed and prepared in conjunction with another doctoral researcher. Both researchers examined components of parental involvement and online schools. The participants to be interviewed—as well as documents to be collected for both researchers’ studies—were located at identical online schools. Thus, both researchers partnered to form a case study team to interview the participants, collect data, and code participant responses. For further information about the co-researcher’s study, please reference; Dameh, 2015.

The study was a qualitative study which employed a comparative case study methodology. Interview and case study protocols were reviewed, and field testing of the protocols were conducted prior to contacting study participants in the fall of 2014. Seven study schools were selected from among an original set of 29 Minnesota online schools as a result of having met the following criteria for the study:

- a) The Minnesota online schools served students in elementary grades.
- b) The Minnesota online schools' directors were willing to participate in the study.
- c) The Minnesota online schools' had been accredited to operate by the Minnesota Department of Education.

Interviews and collection of data occurred from Fall of 2014 through May of 2015. Multiple data collection procedures were used. These included interviews and document collections as recommended by Yin (2009). In each of the study's online schools, the director was interviewed, and a series of documents collected for analysis. Collection of these data was accomplished by the use of a case study team. At all points of the study, validity and reliability were ensured through the establishment and adherence to case study and interview protocols, transcription from recording tools or through the use of two recorders, a review of the transcripts with interviewees and coding review by the case study team.

Chapter 4 presented the study's results. The case study's seven schools displayed a number of types of parental involvement practices. Practices reported most frequently in director interviews and revealed in document research were the conceptual framework's types of communicating and learning at home (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008).

The manner in which the study schools implemented their parent involvement practices occurred in many unique forms; and also in many common forms. Commonalities among the case study sites included: 1) Collaborating with community, as each school used county truancy services throughout the state; 2) Decision making, with all but one school possessing a written parent

involvement policy requiring parents to assist in developing involvement practices; 3) Communicating, as every school was using phone calls and emails and a significant number of schools were providing access for parents to their online programs; and 4) Learning at home and parenting areas, with a large number of schools utilizing compacts with parents to require them to assist their students and establishing certain study and environmental requirements in their homes.

The directors of the study schools revealed that common successes were achieved with parents in conducting orientation sessions for parents and conducting face-to-face meetings with parents during student registration and when encountering issues.

The directors revealed common difficulties in three areas. First, all seven or 100% of the directors, related difficulties in attendance enforcement, typically when working with county truancy services in varying areas of Minnesota. Five of seven or 71.4% of directors related parent difficulties in understanding the amount of time and involvement their role required in online education, as well as the school's difficulty in working with parents who understood their requirements, but chose not to participate in or be involved with helping their children in learning at home.

Chapter 5 discusses the conclusions drawn from the study findings, limitations on the study, recommendations for current practices in online schools, recommendations for future research, and a final summary.

Discussion and Conclusions

Based on the related literature and results of the study, eight study conclusions were formulated. They are as follows:

- 1) More parental involvement occurs in the area of Learning at Home in the elementary grade levels than in the secondary grade levels of online schools.
- 2) Parental involvement practices center around the modalities that online schooling encompasses: the student's home and the communication systems connecting the school to the home.

- 3) Development of a new parental involvement conceptual framework for online schooling may be needed.
- 4) Online schools' practices, not policies, lead to parental involvement successes.
- 5) Online schools' person to person contacts with parents may increase success in parental involvement.
- 6) Online school directors in Minnesota are instituting practices to counter difficulties in parental involvement and helping students.
- 7) Different policies and practices in Minnesota's county governments negatively impact community collaboration with online schools.
- 8) Online schools' education and training of parents on their role in online learning is critical to successful parental involvement.

Conclusion #1: More parental involvement occurs in the area of Learning at Home in the elementary grade levels than in the secondary grade levels of online schools.

In traditional public schools, parental involvement with students enrolled in elementary school grade levels exceeds that with students enrolled in secondary schools. This has long been acknowledged among researchers and in practice, with Becker and Epstein (1982) first documenting the occurrence, and Sheldon (2003) recently confirming. However, in online schools, this expectation could not be found in research. The study originally sought to involve as participants schools that included only elementary grade levels, based on this assumption. However, during the course of interviewing 3 of 7 or 42.9% of online school directors, the directors related the increased role of parent involvement in learning at home with elementary students and a decreased involvement in their role as the students progressed to grades 7-12. These findings were consistent with Becker and Epstein's (1982) and Sheldon's (2003) findings. Because all of the study schools served grades K-12, these statements could be deemed valid. As an example of the difference in levels of parent involvement within one online school, school D required the parents of elementary aged students to

teach the curriculum at home with teacher guidance weekly, while the parents of grades 6-12 students were only to monitor student progress as a coach—a decrease in involvement at home.

Conclusion #2: Parental involvement practices center around the modalities that online schooling encompasses: the student's home and the communication systems connecting the school to the home.

As found in the literature, online schooling, by necessity, occurs in two locations—in the school which is defined through such electronic communications systems as the internet, telephone, and email, and the place of actual residence of the student. These areas—the home residence and communications were also found to be the two parts of the conceptual framework (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008) where most parental involvement practices occurred, as all seven or 100% of online school directors reported multiple practices in both Learning at Home and Communicating types of parental involvement. In traditional public schools, where students and parents physically travel to a building for such activities as volunteering, less reliance is dedicated to home and communication channels. Also lending weight to the conclusion that involvement practices center on communication and learning at home types, the study findings revealed the presence of additional types of involvement in these two categories beyond those typically found in traditional schools. One newly identified form of involvement was to secure parents as volunteers to monitor online chat rooms. The location of volunteering, how they volunteered, and the most likely method of recruitment of volunteers all occurred using communication channels. The volunteer most likely, in these instances, could have been sitting at home, supervising their own child's learning while providing this volunteer service to the school. Another example was found in the varying practices of running webinars on parenting skills that were provided over communication channels. This was a new method compared to traditional schools where parents are physically present at a parenting workshop or reading night.

Conclusion #3: Development of a new parental involvement conceptual framework for online schooling may be needed.

The study revealed new parental involvement practices that, while coded under Epstein's (1995; Epstein et al., 2008) six types framework, could have been classified under multiple types. It could therefore be difficult for practitioners or future researchers to evaluate online parental involvement programs using this model, and a new model may be needed. As an example of the difficulty in classification using Epstein's model, Learning at Home appeared to be more focused on having the parent engage with the student in completing homework, reading at home and assisting with other areas to supplement the curriculum taught at school, where the teacher maintained the primary instructional role. However, in online schools, the parent role becomes greater in some schooling models, such as school D's, in which the parent provides primary instruction and the teacher serves in an advisory capacity. Even in models with the child receiving instruction from a teacher over the internet, parents are involved in both homework completion type tasks and actual in-class assignments. Evaluating a program would then require focusing on how well the school provides tips specific to the curriculum, trains the parent to teach, and encourages or tracks the parents' supervision of the student's learning and teaching time. A category of 'Teaching at Home' may fit better—thus showing the possible need for a new model. This was consistent with findings discovered during the review of literature, such as the need for the development of a new model as previously suggested by Borup et al. (2013).

As a further example, the director of school F collaborated with local county services to provide child care for attending students. Is this a form of collaborating with community, parenting, or communicating? More likely it involves all three types of involvement. Perhaps this cross-framework example might be considered a new, possibly more effective practice entitled 'Multiple Type Involvement'. An involvement practice that could be categorized across the framework in multiple

types was also seen in school E's employment of a learning coach. This action increased levels of communication but also increased learning at home supports.

Conclusion #4: Online schools' practices, not policies, lead to parental involvement successes.

Directors, when speaking of their successes, most often referred to what and how they were doing things (practices)—rarely to documents (policies). In fact, 14 of the 17 or 82.4% of practices found to be successful were action oriented. Weekly newsletters, advanced mailings for testing times, and the design of the parent/student handbook were the only examples of documents. Conducting orientations, immediately responding to parent communications, and initiating bi-monthly phone conferences were some of many examples of successful involvement practices that were more 'action oriented'. These findings aligned with recommendations for 'practices' made by Epstein (1995; Epstein et al., 2008) as well as Sheldon's (2003) findings that the levels of program outreach (action be taken) were more important than the type of practices.

It is to be noted that, during the examination of select documents, there was evidence of policies which strongly suggested the existence of parental involvement practices. These practices, however, were not mentioned by directors. For example, director A noted that volunteering occurred at a low rate, yet in school A's parent school compact required parents to spend 40 hours each year in volunteering. As a further example, 6 of the 7 online school's possessed parental involvement policies which contained identical language relating to parents reviewing and planning involvement practices, yet no directors or other documentary evidence revealed this requirement occurred. It should be noted, however, that failing to follow these policies is not the issue. Rather, the issue is that policies do not necessarily translate to successful parental involvement practices. A school that simply institutes the practice of having its staff record observations and comments from parents during the year and, then, adjusts its programs may be more successful in having quality parental involvement compared to a

school that possesses a policy requiring the school to gather a group of parents together to evaluate the programs, which does not then occur.

Conclusion #5: Online schools' person to person contacts with parents may increase success in parental involvement.

In reviewing the findings of successful involvement practices, 11 of 17 or 64.7% of parental involvement practices involve person to person contacts. Select examples provided by directors include the school employing a staff member serving in the position of learning coach to contact parents, recommended face to face meetings, orientation sessions, calling parents bi-weekly, continuing to phone parents until they answer and others. Practices were identified which displayed the value directors gave to these person to person contacts. For example, in school's B and F, staff members were paid to work later hours in order to talk directly with parents on the phone after the parents completed their work day. While these examples were not cited by school directors as one of the main three successful involvement practices, they were mentioned in the communications' area, adding weight to the perceived importance directors held in person to person contacts. This importance is consistent with the literature on the development of early correspondence courses and their attempts at contacting students personally to encourage course completion (Lee, 2008).

Conclusion #6: Online school directors in Minnesota are instituting practices to counter difficulties in parental involvement and helping students.

Due to lower achievement results on standardized assessments in online schools—as found from the Minnesota comprehensive assessment scores (Minnesota Department of Education, 2014)—some researchers or administrators may have been concerned parental involvement practices in online schools might be largely ineffective or non-existent. This may also have been a concern nationally as reflected in the literature on online school standardized testing results (Molnar, 2013, 2014).

The study, however, demonstrated almost the opposite to be true, with many examples of success and many new parental involvement practices discovered in online schools. Even when

directors identified difficulties the schools experienced, the majority (81.8%) of directors had recommended solutions to those difficulties, often identified by more than one director. The newly discovered parental involvement practices also pointed to a focus on involving parents across all study schools. Examples included the employment of a secretary after school hours for communication with parents in school B; the employment of additional mathematics and science teachers during after school hours to assist parents and students struggling at home in those curriculum areas in school F; and others. Additionally, three directors mentioned the collaborative working relationships the online schools established with each other. As an example, director C referred to the schools helping each other avoid 'hide out' parents (those parents who continuously transfer schools to avoid truancy efforts) which immediately showed their effort in this area. This appeared to demonstrate that the concerns about and focuses on involving parents was at a sufficiently high level that it actually had overcome the competitive aspect of the online schools. This was inconsistent with assumptions the researcher had made in regards the competition present between the online schools (McClatchy-Tribune, 2011; Newswire, 2011a, b; Trotter, 2003).

Conclusion #7: Different policies and practices in Minnesota's county governments negatively impact community collaboration with online schools.

The evidence of differing policies and practices at the county level regarding lack of collaboration with online schools was significant. Though not found in literature, all of the directors referenced difficulties in dealing with the various counties on multiple issues. Most often mentioned was the lack of truancy support with various counties refusing to contact families and, in some instances, refusing to acknowledge the online school was even classified as a school. Other areas of negative impact were child protective services and child care. Specifically, the time, expense, and loss of education involved in addressing this issue for Minnesota students is troubling in these areas. Along with the lack of collaboration in some counties, difficulties at a policy level included requirements for meeting to secure these services. It can be difficult—both from a time and an

unfunded travel expense standpoint—for a director to attend a meeting in Lake County where the student resides, if the director and school is based in Washington County.

In relation to county support in truancy issues, an additional review of state statutes was conducted. It was discovered that four statutes influence attendance and truancy support in online schools at the state legislative level that may also contribute to differing policies and practices in the various 87 counties in Minnesota. These statutes were: Chapter 260C (Juvenile Safety and Placement), Chapter 260A (Truancy), Chapter 120A.22 (Attendance), and Chapter 124D.091 (Online Learning Option).

Minnesota's online learning law provided for funding to be sent to the online school instead of the home school district if a student chose to enroll in that school. This act demonstrated that online schools were subject to the same provisions as other publicly funded schools, including attendance and truancy requirements. It is important to note that the act listed no required methods for tracking attendance in the online schools and provided no guidance to online schools or counties in defining attendance (Minnesota Statute 124D.091, 2015). In the study findings, schools differed in their attendance requirements and tracking with some basing attendance on the amounts of work completed by students, some on the amounts of time students logged into the online programs, some on the parents' report of attendance, and some combining all or parts of all of these methods. It is also important to note that the statute provided for a state advisory board on online schooling which is specifically tasked, along with other responsibilities, to bring to the attention of the commissioner of education and the legislature issues related to student attendance (Minnesota Statute 124D.091, subd. 10 (b) 5).

The many methods of determining attendance in online schools were found to be misaligned with the public schools' statutes on attendance, requiring that students from age seven, or once enrolled, attend school every hour of every school day until the students turned 18 (or parents withdrew them at 16) (Minnesota Statute 122A.22). The misalignment occurred because online school

providers allowed students to conduct their schooling at times and locations of their own or their school's choosing instead of requiring all students to be physically present in one location for specified hours. As an example, one student may work for 2 hours on a class at nine in the morning each day of the week, and another student may work for 10 hours on the same class on Saturday. Both students complete the course work and meet the online school's requirements. Conversely, a student may log in an even greater time, perhaps for 8 hours a day, every day of the week and, yet, not complete any coursework. None the less, the student meets the log in requirements for attendance, but has not made any course progress. Thus, counties and schools may find it difficult to determine how to align online school attendance issues with the statutory requirement of attending school for every hour of every school day.

Further demonstrating misaligned requirements for online schools, schools are required to inform parents when they determine a child has been absent for 3 days and is classified as 'continuing truant' (Minnesota statute 260A.03). Along with the school advising the parent that they may refer the child to a truancy officer or board if truancy persists to 7 days, the schools must also tell the parents that they, the parents, are advised to attend class with their student for 1 day (Minnesota statute 260A.03). This requirement, intended for traditional schools to provide an impetus for the student to attend school and increase the involvement of the parent in supporting the requirement, is the parents' current responsibility with their student in an online school.

When referring habitually truant students to the county, many choices existed in state legislation for the counties. The counties could choose any number of methods to support attendance. These included filing for appearance in juvenile court, transporting the child to their home when discovered truant, transporting the child to the school when discovered truant, and others (Minnesota statute 260C.141). It may have seemed ineffective for counties—tasked with supporting online schools—to exercise some of their options, such as transporting the child to the school (as it is located online) or transporting the child to the home (the child is already there). Combined with the

misaligned requirements between traditional schools and online schools—including differing attendance definitions—may demonstrate some of the underlying causes of the reported difficulties that negatively impact online schools.

Conclusion #8: Online schools' education and training of parents on their role in online learning is critical to successful parental involvement.

The second most agreed upon difficulty with parent involvement focused on parents not understanding their role in online learning and not fulfilling that role once it was understood. This was a surprise to the researcher considering that online learning effectively positions the student in a setting to experience a high level of parental involvement. In fact, with the student at home with the parent and receiving instruction and partnership/support from the teacher and school, most online schools have created the format for learning Marjoribanks (1979) described as a total partnership that included parents and teachers. In this instance, the parent does not experience the “exclusion or separation” from their student that Lightfoot (1978) discussed in her research on the need for increased parental involvement. Yet, online school directors discussed the failure of parents to understand what they should do with their student or how they should be involved even when their child is in their home. While this surprised the researcher, it is consistent with research that reveals the need for educating and training parents on their role in traditional educational environments (Epstein et al., 2008).

Learning at home has been discussed as a critical type of involvement in online learning. Some of the successes discussed, including conducting a second orientation session for parents or providing focused, face-to-face training for parents may be helpful in combating parents' lack of understanding of their roles. Director phone calls to educate parents (director B), successful video orientation sessions, mentorship by other parents, and well-crafted handbooks all could play a part in aiding parents to understand their roles and better assist students in their online learning experiences.

Limitations

The following were limitations of this study.

- 1) During interviews directors of online schools may have failed to relate select parental involvement practices that were occurring in their schools. Also, select parental involvement practices may not have been documented and, thus, failed to have been included in the results of this study.
- 2) Biases of the interviewed directors, while planned for and controlled with additional document data and other methodological controls, may have still occurred, considering interviewed directors were self-reporting data on their own schools.
- 3) The conclusions and results of the study may not be applicable to those online schools which exclusively serve secondary school students and are not generalizable to schools operating outside the state of Minnesota.
- 4) Data gathered exclusively through an interview or exclusively from a document and not corroborated by both sources may be of questionable reliability in drawing conclusions. As an example, legally required documentation was discovered during the study that revealed that policies were in place to involve parents in the review of parental involvement practices. The existence of the policy may not have established as factual that the involvement occurred, since none of the directors mentioned such involvement practices during interviews.

Recommendations for Current Practice

- 1) School leaders are encouraged to initiate parental involvement practices in their schools. Documents and policies are valuable in guiding staff and encouraging appropriate actions from parents, but practices and actions by the parent and school—not policies—align more often with the success of the student.

- 2) Online schools are encouraged to initiate personal or immediate response type contacts with parents by telephone, skype, face to face, or other personal measures since these have proven to be more successful than contacts that require a voluntary response such as emails or voluntarily logging onto systems to watch videos, check grades, and others. Tools such as interactive webinars and chat systems are further examples of immediate response type contacts.
- 3) State legislative level policy changes should be considered to assist online schools in better performing their roles in supporting students. Providing statutes that link attendance, truancy, and online learning with common language and definitions could be effective in promoting greater assistance to online schools by counties. These changes should also encourage all counties to be more accommodating in providing truancy services that support online schools. These services should be provided to parents living in the county in instances where the school is located in the county or is not located in the county. The need for the suggested policy changes are a result of the reported lack of services discussed by various directors in the study. As an example, director A referenced Dakota County's letter refusing to enforce attendance requirements for online schools based on work completion. Supporting online schools by allowing telephone conference or web conference at required meetings with county representatives could also help reduce difficulties associated with travel and the incurred expenses.
- 4) Online schools may benefit by researching additional methods of working with county truancy services, as well as tracking and reporting attendance that may be more easily aligned to current state statutes. This may be beneficial because of the misalignment of the state statutes in regards to traditional and online school attendance requirements. As an example, subsequent to the discovery of the truancy support concerns raised in this study, two papers were located by the researcher which discussed methods to help

increase county support in this area. Both papers suggested ways to increase truancy support from county representatives; these included assigning a single truancy specialist at the school to enable the development of working relationships with county officials, networking prior to truancy filings with county representatives, and developing a way to translate the online school's attendance requirements into traditional schools attendance requirement. For example, if the online school required 20 assignments to be completed each week in order for the student to be in full attendance, providing a key to the county which displayed that the online school considered 20 assignments to equate to 5 days of schooling may have helped make the online school's attendance requirements easier to understand, thus increasing truancy support (Archambault, Bender, & Kennedy, 2013; Bender, n.d.).

- 5) Both online schools and traditional schools may benefit from reviewing and incorporating various parental involvement practices presented in this study. Incorporating those practices reported as successful, or practices suggested to overcome difficulties—if experienced by the reviewing school—may increase parental involvement and, subsequently, student achievement. In particular, difficulties in attendance and work completion, has been overcome in some instances through employing enhanced parental communications. This is supported by Epstein and Sheldon's research in 2002 and 2004, where they found increased communication, contacts, and parent workshops led to increased attendance. To illustrate this point, director F gave advice to “keep calling, and never give up.”

Recommendations for Future Research

When replicating a similar study in the future, four additional methodological procedures might be considered to potentially increase data collection results. They are:

- 1) It is believed that online directors could be invited to participate in a focus group following completion of their individual interviews. The focus group setting may provide opportunities for participating directors to recall information not provided in the initial interviews and increase the number of solutions identified for addressing concerns related to parental involvement. This may be particularly valuable in that three of the respondent directors commented favorably during their interviews about the collaborative relationship that online school directors do share with one another.
- 2) It is believed that adding the inclusion of observational data about the methods online schools employ in implementing parental involvement practices may increase the quantity of unreported parental involvement practices. In particular, observing the student–teacher–parent online systems in action.
- 3) It is believed that providing directors with the study’s interview questions in advance of interviews may enable them to provide additional details in responding to questions.
- 4) It is believed that including additional participants in director interviews may broaden both the quantity and quality of parental involvement practice data reported. Additional participants may include teachers, other staff members, parents, representatives of community organizations, and students.

Conducting research in two additional areas may also yield data that could expand the study’s findings or yield additional successful parental involvement practices for online schools. They are:

- 1) It may be of value to examine other online schools nationally to compare their parental involvement practices with those of Minnesota’s online schools. Determining whether or not the study’s findings in Minnesota are consistent with findings secured in other locations could lend weight in supporting the successes of select practices, such as orientation sessions for parents. Additionally, practices and techniques that involve

parents may be discovered elsewhere that could be applicable to Minnesota online schools.

- 2) It may be valuable to conduct research into parental involvement motivations and the reasons expressed by parents of children enrolled in online education for becoming involved or not involved in their children's education. This may prove useful in those instances where parents understand the online school's requirements for parental involvement but still choose not to become involved. If motivational or other reasons could be determined for parents remaining uninvolved in their children's education in online schools, more effective practices may then be discovered to address those issues.

Summary

This chapter presented a summary of the previous four chapters, and included the major findings of the study. Major findings of the study revealed that the conceptual framework's types of parental involvement that occurred most frequently were communicating and learning at home (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2008). Also discovered were many new practices of parental involvement, as well as practices that were found to be common among many of the study sites.

The directors of the online schools participating in the study revealed that common parental involvement successes were experienced in the areas of conducting orientation sessions for parents, as well as conducting in person meetings with parents during registration and when addressing issues. Common difficulties were identified by respondent school directors in working with county truancy services throughout the state; addressing the difficulty of parents not understanding the amount of time and actions their role required in online education; and the difficulties the schools encountered with parents who understood their responsibilities in online learning—but chose not to participate in or be involved with their children in helping at home.

Subsequent to these findings, the chapter discussed eight conclusions which were drawn in relation to the literature and findings of parental involvement in online schools in Minnesota. After the

eight conclusions were discussed, recommendations for future research, as well as recommendations for current practice were given. A number of newly discovered involvement practices and successes seemed to provide exciting opportunities for impact into the field of parental involvement, thereby benefiting many students in Minnesota.

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Appendix A: Email Invitation to Participants

Dear XXXXXXXX,

Thank you for your time and attention to this email. As an administrator at XXXXXX School, you have an important role in educating Minnesota's students in a new and innovative way, through your online programs.

We are studying the current practices of parent involvement in Minnesota online schools in both general and special education. We respectfully request the opportunity to interview you on how you involve the parents of your students.

If you are interested in receiving the results of our study, we will provide you a copy. It will include results from other online schools in Minnesota you may be interested in viewing.

All schools and administrators who participate can be assured of their privacy protection. All names of participants as well as schools will be reported anonymously (example: School A, or Administrator A). Additionally, any audio recordings made will be destroyed once confidentially transcribed. You may also request that we not use recording devices.

Thank you again for your consideration, we look forward to visiting with you soon.

Respectfully,

Bilal Dameh, Instructional Designer, E.d.D. Candidate, Saint Cloud State University

William DeWitt, M.S.E, E.d.D. Candidate, Saint Cloud State University

Appendix B: Case Study Protocol

Overview

1. Role of the Protocol:
 - a. This protocol is to be reviewed prior to commencement of contact with the site being researched. It is also to be reviewed prior to commencement of any data collection activities, to include interviews. This protocol provides guidance to the researcher, or the researcher's designated investigator, in order to ensure each case is approached consistently, and the study may be replicated at any point, with little to no variability.
2. Understanding of the Conceptual Framework:
 - a. The child can be supported with focus on six areas: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with community (Epstein, 1995).
3. Objective of the Case Study:
 - a. Determine the online school's reported practices of parental involvement that exist, along with difficulties or successes that are experienced with these practices.

Field Procedures

1. Sites to be visited: (include contact information)
 - a. XXXXX
 - b. XXXXX
 - c. XXXXX
 - d. XXXXX
 - e. XXXXX
 - f. XXXXX
 - g. XXXXX

2. Preparation prior to site visit:

- a. Email invitation to participate in the research study will be sent to all selected schools' general and special education directors. This email will explain purpose of study and give a background about the researchers.
- b. A reminder email will be sent two weeks after the original email to those directors who did not respond to the invitation request.
- c. A thank you email will be sent to those directors who respond to the invitation. Directors who accept the invitation will be asked to schedule a quick phone conversation to arrange for the interview date and provide more details about the study if needed.
- d. Phone conversation to schedule interview and discuss the follow email and option for recording the interview.
- e. A Follow up email reminder with the following preparatory questions:
 - i. How many students are enrolled in the school?
 - ii. How many students are receiving Special Education services? Please provide a general breakdown by type/area if available.
 - iii. Does your school have a formal 'Parent Involvement Policy' in place? If so, how is it typically communicated to parents?
 - iv. May we obtain a current copy of the parent/student handbook? (We can collect at the interview).
- f. Collect all available public documents and records without needing to contact staff at research site.

* Remember, to ensure consistency, no further contacts, except as directed in this protocol.

[Check for Parent/Student Handbook, parent involvement policy, volunteer opportunities/policies, communications policies, brochures for parent nights, parent contracts, etc]

- g. Review documents; incorporate any information into interview questions to enhance communication during interview.
 - h. Perform map reconnaissance of route to and on site for interview. Identify alternate route(s) and transportation.
 - i. Inspect on site supplies- pens, pencils, paper, recording device, charging status or additional batteries, 2 copies of interview protocol (separate locations), 2 copies of case study protocol (separate locations).
 - j. Identify back-up meeting location if difficulties encountered on site.
 - k. Review case study protocol and interview protocol for each interview.
3. Data Collection Plan:
- a. Perform searches of online school's website for document data prior to interview.
 - b. Upon arrival at site, interview director with strict adherence to interview protocol (Appendix C). If possible, record interview for transcript preparation.
 - c. Subsequent to interview, ask for documents related to parent policies and procedures (examples are student handbook, parent handbook, parent involvement plans, parent contracts, program plans for parents (reading classes, community activity brochures, etc)).
 - d. Interview Special Ed. Director using Interview Protocol.

Case Study guidelines

for both general and special education

1. Discover how the school interacts with parents.

- a. Find out: What formal policies exist, what actions are actually taken to interact with parents, which actions parents actually participate in/respond to, how do they implement the actions and policies (email, phone, online interface, etc).
 - b. Source(s): Documents involving parental policies, interviewee perceptions, direct observation of involvement practices.
 - c. Example(s): Formal parent involvement plan, Parent Teacher Organization procedures/bylaws, School Policy Documents relating to parents, Interviewee comments focused on involving parents, demonstrated use of online reporting system to parents.
2. Discover which of Epstein's types of involvement are being used.
- a. Find out: What the policies or parent involvement actions require from school staff, students, and/or parents. Also what the stated goals are.
 - b. Source(s): Documents involving parental policies, interviewee perceptions, direct observation of involvement practices.
 - c. Example(s): Teacher handbook outlining requirement to provide reports at certain times (communication). Parent contract outlining requirement for at home supervision. Interviewee comments focused on what they require, and how they execute it.
3. Discover which of Epstein's types of involvement are not being used.
- a. Find out: What area of involvement is not mentioned, avoided, deemed unfeasible, unnecessary or unknown.
 - b. Source(s): Documents involving parental policies, interviewee perceptions, direct observation of involvement practices.
 - c. Example(s): Lack of involvement guidelines or resources in various contracts or handbooks, interviewee comments about unnecessary, unfeasible practices, or failed practices. Interviewee experiencing difficulty answering involvement questions.

4. Discover the difficulties in parent involvement that have been encountered.
 - a. Find out: What their weakness is. What are they searching for a solution for, or have looked and could not find it. What is a complaint about involving parents during the interview?
 - b. Source(s): interviewee perceptions, direct observation of involvement practices.
 - c. Example(s): Policies that place 100% of responsibility on student or parent (could indicate an inability of the school to involve or influence area). Interviewee comments like 'hard', 'tough', 'impossible', 'difficult'.

5. Discover which parent involvement programs or practices that have been successful.
 - a. Find out: Which programs receive positive feedback from students, parents or staff. Which programs the site feels caused an increase in achievement. Which programs they feel were easy to implement.
 - b. Source(s): interviewee perceptions, direct observation of involvement practices, archival records.
 - c. Example(s): Questions the interviewee readily responds to about involvement. Examples of programs referred to multiple times. Programs or policies promoted in documents. Parent contacts that are directly observed in the online school program.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

*Ensure Initial steps in Appendix B (Case Study Protocol) have been followed prior to start of interview data collection.

Introduction

Say: “I would like to start by thanking you for your time and help in completing this interview. We have 11 questions to ask, with some follow up questions and we would appreciate your answers and feedback. This interview may take approximately 45 minutes to complete. The purpose of this interview is to collect information on parents’ involvement in online elementary schools.

Following the interview, as discussed prior, we would be very appreciative of collecting any documents you may have in the areas of parental involvement.

We would like to record the interview. Only the researchers will have access to the recording for the purpose of transcribing the interview. The recording will be locked in our offices until the transcription is complete, and then destroyed. You will be provided a copy of the transcription, to allow you to clarify, confirm or edit responses. During transcription, and when the results of the study are published, your name and your school’s name will be kept confidential. You may be referred to as Director ‘C’ or School ‘C’.

If you would like a copy of the study when completed, we will provide one to you.”

Wait for comments.

- 1) Please explain your strategies for communication with parents, and how often you communicate with parents.
- 2) Please discuss parents' role in learning, and how they help their children learn at home.
- 3) In what ways can, or do parents volunteer in this school? Also, in what ways can, or do parents participate in making decisions affecting this school or their children?
- 4) How does the school connect with communities in which your students live? Also, do you provide parenting or family support programs through your school?
- 5) When thinking of the success you have had involving parents, what are the top three successful involvement practices that come to mind?
- 6) Please consider difficulties your school has experienced when involving parents; what are the top three difficulties that come to mind?
- 7) If you could give advice to a new director of an online school in regards to parent involvement and the role the parents and school play in supporting the child, what would it be?
- 8) Do you have any other comments you feel would be pertinent in the area of parental involvement in online schools?

Interviewer follow ups on specific questions as needed:

Question 1) Any further information about communicating announcements, grades, IEP's...any satisfaction surveys?

Question 2) Are you able, or how do you confirm parents help at home? Do you have methods to encourage and motivate parents?

Question 6) Any ideas on fixing those difficulties?

Interviewer follow ups on all questions as needed:

Can you tell us more about _____?

Could you describe more about how _____ is done?

Do you feel _____ benefits students and why do you think it benefits them?

After the interview:

Thank you again for your time and help. We will provide the transcript of the interview to you soon, so you are able to verify the accuracy, and edit, or update any information in it.

Thank you as well for providing any items or documents you may have in the area of parental involvement. We would be interested in items like parent and student handbooks, parent involvement policies, communication policies, brochures for parents, and similar items.

Appendix D: Source of Data Chart

| School | Title 1 Family Involvement Policy | Parent School Compact | Handbook | Website captures | Other documents (brochures, program descriptions, etc) | Interview Recording/ Destroyed | Interview Transcribed |
|--------|-----------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|------------------|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| B | Found | Expectations And communication letters | Found – ALC is it – plus expectations | Yes | Program guide-learning coach role | Yes/ Yes | Yes |
| E | No title 1 - supplemental | Yes | Found | Yes | Yes - numerous | No/NA | Yes |
| F | Found | Registration Form and Refers to Individualized Learning Plan | Found (but district wide) | Yes | Registration Forms | Yes/ Yes | Yes |
| D | Found | Located in the Registration packet | Not found | Yes | Registration Packet | No/NA | Yes |
| C | Not Title 1 school | Yes | Found | Yes | Guide | No/NA | Yes |
| G | Found | Yes | Found | Yes | Parent Newsletter | No/ NA | Yes |
| A | Found | copy In handbook | Found | Yes | Brochure, Newsletter, and Parent letter on community involvement | Yes/ Yes | Yes |

Appendix E: Select Minnesota Online Schools Achievement Statistics Analysis (MCAs-2009-13)

| | Scores below state average | Scores equal to state average | Scores above state average |
|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Mathematics | 100% | - | - |
| Reading | 50% | 25% | 25% |

Source: Data Analysis conducting using data from the Minnesota Department of Education's Data Center via their website (Minnesota Department of Education, 2014).

*3 schools had no available data

Appendix F: Joint Interview Protocol to Research Question Alignment Chart

| Interview Question (w/follow up prompts[not shown]) | RQ1: Implemented | RQ2: 6 types | RQ3: Success | RQ4: Difficulty |
|--|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1. Please explain your strategies for communication with parents, and how often you communicate with parents. | X | X | X | |
| 2. Please discuss parents' role in learning, and how they help their children learn at home. | X | X | X | |
| 3. In what ways can, or do parents volunteer in this school? Also, in what ways can, or do parents participate in making decisions affecting this school or their children? | X | X | X | |
| 4. How does the school connect with communities in which your students live? Also, do you provide parenting or family support programs through your school? | X | X | X | |
| 5. When thinking of the success you have had involving parents, what are the top three successful involvement practices that come to mind? | X | X | X | |
| 6. Please consider difficulties your school has experienced when involving parents; what are the top three difficulties that come to mind? | X | X | | X |
| 7. If you could give advice to a new director of an online school in regards to parent involvement and the role the parents and school play in supporting the child, what would it be? | X | X | X | X |
| 8. Do you have any other comments you feel would be pertinent in the area of parental involvement in online schools? | X | X | X | X |

Appendix G: Institutional Review Board Approval



OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND
SPONSORED PROGRAMS
ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Administrative Services 210
Website: stcloudstate.edu/osp Email: osp@stcloudstate.edu
Phone: 320-308-4932

| | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Name: William DeWitt | IRB Application Determination |
| Address: 20554 Twilight Trail | |
| Rogers, MN 55374 | USA |
| Email: dewi1201@stcloudstate.edu | Exempt |
| Co-Investigators: Bilal Barneh | 1/2/2015 |
| Advisor: John Eller | |
| Project Title: Parental Involvement in Minnesota Online Schools | |

Comments:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application to conduct research involving human subjects. We are pleased to inform you that your project has been APPROVED in full accordance with federal regulations. Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

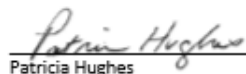
- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).
- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.
- Exempt reviews only require the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.
- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.
- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

Good luck on your research. If you require further assistance, please contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 320-308-4932 or email lidonnay@stcloudstate.edu. All correspondence should include your SCSU IRB number as indicated on this letter.

For the Institutional Review Board:


Linda Donnay
IRB Administrator
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

For St. Cloud State University:


Patricia Hughes
Interim Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies

SCSUIRB#: 1386 - 1691 Approval Date:

OFFICE USE ONLY
1/2/2015

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Continuing Review/Final Report



Name: William DeWitt

Co-Investigators: Bilal Bameh

Project Title: Parental Involvement in Minnesota Online Schools

1. Please indicate the status of your project:

This form serves as a Final Report

Project has been completed.

Data collection has been completed but data analysis continues.

Project has not and will not be conducted. Explain: _____

This form serves as a Continuing Review

Subject recruitment/enrollment continues; current consent/assent required. Please attach.

Data collection continues with enrolled subjects; no additional subjects will be recruited.

2. How many subjects have participated in your study? _____

3. Have any unexpected reactions, complications or problems occurred during this research?

No Yes, explain: _____

4. Have any subjects withdrawn from the research, either voluntarily or at the researcher's request?

No Yes, explain: _____

5. Have any subjects complained about the research?

No Yes, explain: _____

6. Has any new information been identified which may affect the willingness of current or future subjects to participate in this research?

No Yes, explain: _____

7. Have any changes been made to your research (including changes to informed consent documents, debriefing statements, recruitment materials, etc.) since it was approved by the IRB?

No Yes, explain and indicate whether changes were approved by the IRB:

Principal Investigator's Signature

Date

SCSUIRB#: 1386 - 1691

Appendix H: Adult Informed Consent

Adult Informed Consent Example

Title: Parental Involvement in Minnesota Online Schools
Primary Investigator: William S DeWitt
Research Assistant: Bilal A. Dameh
Telephone: 605-321-1122

St. Cloud State University
 Institutional Review Board

Approval date: 1/2/15

Expiration date: 1/1/16

Introduction

Parental involvement has been shown to be effective in supporting both general education and special education students in traditional schools. There is very little research into how online schools employ parental involvement practices.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate how what parental involvement practices online schools employ, and what successes or difficulties they encounter. Additionally, we are investigating any benefits that students derive from these practices.

Study Procedures

One 45 minute interview will be conducted with you relating to parental involvement practices in the online school. Additionally, we will request, if you are able to provide documents such as parent handbooks, or parent contracts, that may show us additional parental involvement information.

Risks and Discomforts

We do not foresee any risks or discomforts associated with this study. You may stop the study at any point if you do feel any risk or discomfort associated.

Benefits

Benefits from this study include learning about successful parental involvement practices and their benefits to students in online schools. You may also learn what other online schools in Minnesota are currently doing if you would like a copy of the study results.

Compensation

No compensation is being offered for completing this study.

Confidentiality

The confidentiality of the information gathered during your participation in this study will be maintained. Your personal identity will remain confidential. You will not be identified by your name in any published material. All data will be kept in our locked offices until study completion, and then destroyed.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time, for any reason, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University, or the researchers.

The study investigator may stop your participation at any time without your consent for the following reasons: if it appears to be medically harmful to you, if you fail to follow directions for participating in the study, if the study is canceled, or for reasons deemed appropriate by the research coordinator to maintain subject safety and the integrity of the study.

Acceptance to Participate in the online parental involvement study

You have read the information provided above, and you have consented to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty after signing this form.

Subject Name (Printed) _____

Subject Signature _____

Date _____