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Parental Involvement in Middle School: The Parent's Perspective

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOL: THE PARENT'S
PERSPECTIVE

By
Brittany D. Orange

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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This dissertation was submitted by Brittany D. Orange under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31

Thank you Lord for giving me the strength to endure. At times I got weary, but I did not faint!

To my mom, thank you for the push, daily reminders, prayers, wisdom, and unconditional love. At times, I wanted to cry and give up, but you reminded me it is only a test. To my brother Dr. Christopher McNeil, I cannot say thank you enough. While you were writing your own dissertation, you took time to assist me. Shawnice, thank you for being the best sister, cheerleader and friend.

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Last, but definitely not least, to my wonderful daughter Bethany, I hope you are proud. I love you beyond words! You have been my biggest supporter. Thank you for giving your mommy the time and space to complete this task.

Abstract

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOL: THE PARENT'S
PERSPECTIVE. Orange, Brittany, 2020: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.
Over the years, parental involvement has been studied from the perspectives of
administrators and teachers. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to expound
upon parental involvement from the parent's perspective. The researcher's goal is to
understand the reasons why parents choose to get involved and the strategies they
consider beneficial and a hindrance in facilitating their involvement. Parental
involvement declines as students move through the K-12 system (Benner, Boyle &
Sadler, 2016). As students move to middle school, the educational structure changes.
Students go from having one teacher to multiple teachers, which presents a challenge to
parents, as they are in the habit of building a relationship with just one teacher (Ducreux,
2012) The researcher collected qualitative data in the forms of a survey, focus groups and
individual interviews to find thematic connections in participants' lived experiences.
Overriding themes that emerged from the data collection were (a) diversity, (b) resources,
and (c) communication. Parents identified school climate as a factor the positively
affected their involvement. Parents perceived lack of cultural diversity, the lack of
resources and the lack of timely communications as barriers when attempting to be
involved in their students' education. The information gathered from this study
addressed opportunities for school to overcome these barriers. The setting of this research
is two middle schools located in the piedmont region of North Carolina.

    Keywords: involvement, parent, family-school partnership, middle school, parent
perception

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

Parental involvement has been characterized in numerous ways. Parental involvement can be portrayed as establishing regular communication between school officials and parents regarding school related activities and student academic success. When parents and educators work together, children complete homework, perform better academically, have a positive attitude toward school, have better social skills, and desire to continue their education beyond high school (Lloyd, 2011). According to Tekin (2011), the key concept of parental involvement is that parents know what they want for their children and should be involved in their educational experience. Improved relationships between school and parents build parental comfort levels when interacting with school personnel. Parents who feel comfortable with school personnel will be more open to assist with developing school policies and increasing their involvement in their child's educational experience.

The idea of parental involvement in schools is not a new theory. The involvement of parents and families in education is recognized as a significant factor for children's well-being and academic success (Pepe & Addimando, 2014). Educators have theorized involved parents as those who regularly attend school events and assist with homework (Jeynes, 2011). Studies have shown a connection with parental involvement and lower dropout and truancy rates (Paylor, 2011). Additional benefits of parental involvement are improved student outlook towards school, increased self-confidence, and academic achievement

With all the benefits of parental involvement, there is a population that, as a

whole, struggles with how to be involved. Research suggest that parents of adolescent children have a tendency to be involved less in their child's education (Costa & Faria, 2017). This subgroup of parents has the same high expectations of their students; but they may lack the time, resources, or confidence in their ability to be fully involved in their student's education (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2013). Despite these barriers, Williams and Sánchez's (2013) study revealed that over half of the parent participants in their study wanted to be more involved in their child's education, but barriers prevented them from being involved in the way and at the level they preferred (Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Barriers to parental involvement have been extensively researched; however, there needs to be more research about these barriers during adolescent years and how they affect parental involvement (Griffin & Galassi, 2010). Educators must be able to recognize the barriers to parental involvement and the effort families put forth to be involved despite those barriers. Schools are warned against specifying actions as parental involvement because the school's definition often results in families feeling excluded and their efforts being unrecognized if their attempts do not meet school expectations (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Parental involvement declines as students move through the K-12 system (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016). Gender, socioeconomic status, and parent's educational attainment are a few of the factors that influence the levels of parental involvement. Work schedules, lack of transportation, and lack of childcare are all barriers that hinder families from attendingt school events or volunteering in the school (Bower & Griffin, 2011). As students move to middle school, the educational structure changes. Students

go from having one teacher to multiple teachers, which presents a challenge to parents as they are in the habit of building a relationship with just one teacher (Ducreux, 2012). As students transition from elementary to middle school, some forms of parental involvement have a neutral effect or a negative effect on student achievement (Froiland & Davison, 2014). Middle school students face increased social pressure, greater academic expectations, and a desire for independence that make the middle school years a challenging time for parents who are trying to be involved and students who desire greater autonomy (Ducreux, 2012).

A major challenge has been how parental involvement is defined and measured (Brock & Edmunds, 2010). Educators and parents have conceptualized involved parents as those who frequently attend school functions and help their children with homework (Jeynes, 2011). School officials must listen to parents and come to consensus on how parental involvement is defined, measured, and effectively communicated so the needs of all families can be addressed. Schools must acknowledge and develop avenues for parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds to engage in their child's education.

Legislation Regarding Parental involvement

One of the most significant components of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 is Title I. Title I gives school districts federal funds to spend on low-income students under the premise that these students require more resources to achieve the same educational outcomes as their more affluent counterparts to counteract the negative effects of economic deprivation (Liebman & Mbikiwa, 2017). Under Title I, parents have rights that are aimed to increase parent knowledge and participation in their child's education. Under Title I policy, schools are required to build

capacity for involvement and to improve academic achievement ("Title I – Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged," 2018).

Under the 2015 reauthorization of ESEA, which was reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the term parental involvement was replaced with parent and family engagement to foster a collaborative relationship between schools and the community as a whole (Ujifusa & Tully, 2016). The term parent and family engagement is used to cover a variety of in- and out-of-school activities that can benefit students (Cavanagh, 2012). As we move from parental involvement to parental engagement, schools must understand the difference between the two. According to Ferlazzo (2011), involvement implies "do to," whereas engagement implies "doing with." Schools that promote parental involvement typically tell parents what to do, identifying projects and telling parents how they can help (Ferlazzo, 2011). Schools that focus on parental engagement want to partner with parents to gain insight on the betterment of their student's education (Ferlazzo, 2011). Parental involvement is not negative; any type of parental support can have a positive impact. Schools tend to create more parental involvement activities because they are easier to implement; however, engaging parents can produce better results (Ferlazzo, 2011). Schools must develop policies that focus on building relationships and address the diverse needs of all families to create an atmosphere that fosters parental engagement (Ferlazzo, 2011).

Under ESSA, there are requirements for schools to use evidence-based parental engagement strategies (Ujifusa & Tully, 2016). Under ESSA, Title I funds are set aside to support parent engagement activities. Parental and family engagement in students' education is linked to student achievement, higher levels of student engagement, and

higher graduation rates (Cavanagh, 2012). Under Title I, schools are mandated to have written parental involvement policies as well as home-school compacts that are developed to describe ways parents should be involved in school (Cavanagh, 2012). Schools receiving Title I funding are required to design and implement parental involvement programs.

Local school districts created general policies for parental involvement. District policies direct schools to create parental involvement policies as a part of the individual school improvement plans. When reviewing parental involvement policies from multiple districts, the researcher found districts have included the need for meaningful two-way communications, parents being part of the school decision-making process, and including parents in student learning as part of their parental involvement policies. These policies, in general, have not lived up to the expectation and do not foster creative partnerships between schools and communities. The policies have done more than create an avenue for random acts of parental involvement (Cavanagh, 2012). The policies have no standard to measure their effectiveness," leaving district leaders trying to create a one-size-fits-all solution. Local districts derived their plan from the federal government's plan, but they are general in nature. Within any district, students represent a variety of demographics, which all have a variety of needs. School leaders must be in tune with their school communities to understand the needs of the families they serve. School officials must not let their ideas override the needs of parents.

The North Carolina General Assembly recognized the need for parents to be involved in their child's education and provided protection for parents to participate in school functions. Although parents are protected under this policy, employers are not

required to pay parents for time away from work to participate in their child's education. This becomes a challenge for low socioeconomic parents who are already struggling to provide for their families. The North Carolina policy stated,

> Employers shall grant four hours per year leave to any employee who is a parent, guardian or person standing in loco parentis of a school-aged child so that the employee may attend or otherwise be involved at that child's school. However, any leave under this section is subject to the following conditions:
>
> > The leave shall be at a mutually agreed upon time between the employer and the employee.
> >
> > The employer may require an employee to provide the employer with a written request for the leave at least 48 hours before the time desired for the leave.
> >
> > The employer may require that the employee furnish written verification from the child's school that the employee attended was otherwise involved at that school during the time of the leave.
> >
> > Employers shall not discharge, demote, or otherwise take an adverse employment action against an employee who requests or takes leave under this section. (North Carolina Department of Labor, 1993, para. 1)

Despite the evidence and legislation to support parental involvement, many schools continue to struggle with building meaningful relationships with parents. Schools must find sustainable strategies and move away from sporadic events to fully include parents in their student's educational experience.

Federal, state, and local policymakers have established what they think parents

should do to support their child's education, but there has been minimal research that asks parents their opinions on effective home-school partnerships. Schools need to do more than keep community members and families knowledgeable of what happens at school, but schools should also open their doors to more significant involvement of parents in school decision-making (Shakur, 2012).

Purpose

Literature on parental involvement not only lacks uniformity around common constructs of what we mean by parental involvement, but this lack of uniformity pervades research and programs designed to engage parents (Cardona, Jain, & Canfield-Davis, 2012). Policies have been set to give school leaders a broad overview of what they think parents should do to be involved in the educational process. The purpose of this study was to examine why parents choose to get involved in their child's education. The study used Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) Parental Involvement Process Model to understand motives and barriers among parents of middle school of students. The researcher utilized a survey, parent focus groups, and individual interviews to gather insight regarding parent perspectives of parental involvement. This research provided school officials with the reasons behind the barriers that affect parental involvement and strategies to overcome these barriers from the parent's perspective. This research specifically identified ways in which middle schools can effectively provide parental involvement opportunities to families.

Research that addresses the perceptions of effective parental involvement from parent perspectives is limited. This study used the findings to organize suggestions for improvement to overcome barriers to increase parental involvement among parents of

middle school students. Leaders must be cautioned that there must also be a "fit"

between the mode of involvement and the school's expectations for that involvement.

Research Questions

The goal of this study was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of

parental involvement among middle school parents. The questions raised for this

research study were

1. How do parents of middle school students define parental involvement?

2. What do parents perceive as barriers to parental involvement in middle

    schools?

3. What school strategies do parents of middle schoolers consider beneficial to

    facilitate their involvement?

Definition of Terms

School-based parental involvement. Parent active participation in any school

setting, such as parent-teacher meetings and extracurricular events which provide parents

with behavioral interaction opportunities with teachers, school administrators, and other

parents (Myers & Myers, 2015).

Home-based parental involvement. Communication between parents and

children about school, engagement with schoolwork, and creating a learning environment

at home (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Parental engagement. An intentional partnership between school and home for

the betterment of students (Ferlazzo, 2011).

Parental involvement. A set of actions that consist of, but are not limited to,

attending school functions and helping their children with homework (Jeynes, 2011).

Parent. One who brings forth offspring. A person who brings up and cares for another (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA was signed on December 10, 2015 to reauthorize the ESEA of 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). ESEA was enacted to establish the federal government's commitment to providing equitable resources to low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Overview of the Methodology

This study was conducted as a phenomenological study to find commonalities regarding parental involvement experiences within two middle schools with different demographic makeups. Qualitative data including surveys, focus groups, and interviews of parents were used to answer the research questions.

Significance

The challenge has been defining parental involvement as it entails a broad range of behaviors. This study used the findings to organize suggestions for overcoming barriers to increase parental involvement in middle schools. There are a number of studies that address parental involvement but few that address how involvement is perceived by parents of middle school students.

 The information gathered will assist school officials in discovering the needs of parents concerning effective parental involvement. The results will provide school officials with a new outlook on school-family partnerships. Parental involvement does not have a one-size-fits-all solution. Family and community demographics make engaging families a dynamic task. Using the information gathered, the researcher will

identify parent feelings regarding parental involvement at the middle school level.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Restatement of the Problem

Many schools continue to struggle with building meaningful relationships with parents. Most schools provide sporadic opportunities for parental involvement (Cavanagh, 2012). Schools must acknowledge obstacles and develop avenues for all parents to overcome obstacles of engaging in their child's education. Schools must understand barriers and challenges of parents. Federal, state, and local policymakers have established what they think parents should do to support their child's education, but there has been minimal research that asks parents their opinions on effective home-school partnerships.

Parent Roles in Education

In a study of parental involvement in student learning, Oswald, Zaidi, Cheatham, and Diggs Brody (2018) measured parental involvement using items from the 2012 National Household Education Survey. Households across the United States were randomly sampled from January through August 2012. Data collected examined levels of parental involvement focused on five categories: child characteristics, family demographics, school characteristics, child school experiences, and parent satisfaction (Oswald et al., 2018). The results of the study determined parental involvement was greater for girls than boys and Hispanic children had lower levels of parental involvement compared to White children (Oswald et al., 2018). The study also determined students in Grades 5-12 had lower levels of parental involvement than students in Grades K-4 (Oswald et al., 2018). Under the family demographic category, stepparents were found to be less involved than biological parents. Parents without a high school diploma were less

involved than any other educational level (Oswald et al., 2018). The characteristics of the school affected parental involvement. In schools with fewer than 300 students, parents were more involved than schools with larger populations (Oswald et al., 2018). Students and parents who were satisfied with their school experiences had higher levels of parental involvement (Oswald et al., 2018).

A major factor for school and student success is parental involvement (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). When families are involved in student education, students are more likely to achieve at higher rates both academically and socially (Garbacz, Zerr, Dishion, Seeley, & Stormshak, 2018). Parental involvement has been linked to positive student outcomes across all grades (Jensen & Minke, 2017). Parental involvement begins at home with parents providing a positive setting that supports learning (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Family structure can influence the level of parental involvement. Homes with two married biological parents generally differ in their level of involvement from single parent homes (Myers & Myers, 2015). Households with two biological parents are more likely to have a higher economic and human capital level which can lead to higher levels of parental involvement (Myers & Myers, 2015).

Schools and families signify two of the most important influences on early adolescent development (Perkins et al., 2016). This idea is supported by Epstein's (2018) Overlapping Sphere of Influence. Epstein's (2018) model of parental involvement is one that is widely recognized among educators. The overlapping spheres of influence note there are three main contexts in which students learn and grow: family, school, and community (Epstein, 2018). Figure 1 shows the relationship between community, home, and school.
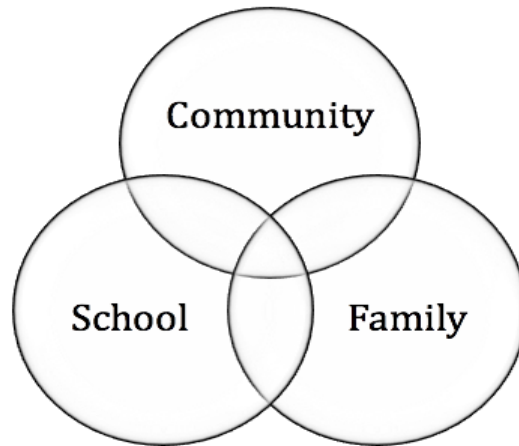
Figure 1. Overlapping Spheres of Influence.

In her research, Epstein (2018) determined that family is one of the major contexts of how students learn and grow. The challenge has become how to fully engage parents in meaningful involvement not only in elementary school but throughout a student's educational career. Time, experience in families, and experience in schools determine the level of overlapping. When a child is younger, the three spheres will have less overlapping; as a child enters preschool and elementary school, the spheres typically see the greatest overlapping (Epstein, 2018). Schools influence the level of overlapping. Schools that only have a few communications and interactions with families will keep the sphere further apart verses the schools who have high-quality interactions with families (Epstein et al., 2002). Epstein's (2018) model demonstrated the shared responsibility between family, school, and community. Partnerships between school, family, and community can improve school climate and provide services that can increase parent skills (Epstein, 2011).

According to Perkins et al. (2016), parental involvement can be divided into three

categories: home based, school based, and academic socialization. The most common form of parental involvement is home based, which includes tasks such as assisting with homework (Perkins et al., 2016). School-based parental involvement are those activities that are visible by school personnel such as volunteering and attending school activities. Academic socialization is how parents convey the importance of education and their aspiration for their student's future (Jensen & Minke, 2017). Parents who have the means to be at the school during school hours are traditionally considered involved, and parents lacking such resources are considered uninvolved despite home-based or academic actualization activities (Jensen & Minke, 2017).

Epstein et al. (2002) created a framework of six types of parental involvement to assist educators with developing parental involvement programs. Epstein et al.'s framework includes six types of involvement:

1. Parenting: Helping families establish home environments to support students.

2. Communication: Design effect forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

3. Volunteering: Recruiting and organizing parents to help and support.

4. Learning at home: Provide information and ideas to families about how to assist students at home.

5. Decision-making: Including families in the school decision-making process.

6. Collaborating with Community: Coordinate resources and services from the community for families.

One of the researcher's questions in this study is how parents define parental involvement. Epstein et al.'s model gives six categories of involvement. With this

framework of parental involvement, Epstein et al. widened the definition of parental involvement to make it more inclusive of all parents and family demographics. Under Epstein et al.'s framework of the six types of parental involvement, parents have options on how to be involved in their child's education.

Adolescence can be a time of great transition for families. During adolescence, students are attempting to realign family bonds and developing their own values and autonomy (Costa & Faria 2017). Costa and Faria (2017) conducted two focus groups with parents of adolescent students in two public schools. Parents reported parenting as a job and being a parent of an adolescent hard (Costa & Faria, 2017). During adolescence, parents have to balance emotional closeness and supporting their child's autonomy, while monitoring the external influences on their child (Costa & Faria, 2017). Schools and families symbolize two of the most important influences on early adolescent development (Perkins et al., 2016). One-way involvement strategies are no longer adequate for supporting the needs of adolescents and can foster the home-school divide that often widens when children transition to the middle grades (Kyzar & Jimmerson, 2018). The researcher addressed barriers to parental involvement with the second research question. In this study, the researcher addressed what parents of current middle school students perceive as barriers to parental involvement.

Barriers to Parental Involvement

Socioeconomic status is determined by income and occupational status, which for the parents, has a correlation to education attainment (Barbee, 2010). Poverty or low socioeconomic status present unique obstacles to conventional forms of parental involvement. Students and parents from low socioeconomic status tend to be less

educated. Unlike their more affluent counterparts, parents from low socioeconomic status do not always convey the significance of education and its correlation to future opportunities; therefore, parents are more likely to express inferior educational expectations for their children compared to more affluent parents (Benner et al., 2016; Ducreux, 2012).

Low-income parents often feel discounted and have the stigma of being uninvolved because they are not involved as the school deems appropriate (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). In a study conducted with mothers living in public housing, Lechuga-Peña and Brisson (2018) interviewed nine mothers living in public housing to pinpoint obstacles inhibiting them from participating in their children's education (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). Four of the participants identified as Latina, three identified as Black, and two identified as African (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). The mothers ranged from 30 to 47 years old and had two or more children (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). The findings determined the key barriers to parental involvement among low socioeconomic families were cultural and language differences, undertones of racism, and single mothers being the primary or sole caregivers (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). The mothers in the study experienced social exclusion from other parents at times when they attempted school-based involvement (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). "Their lack of school involvement due to barriers they experience is often perceived as a lack of interest and caring in their child's education" (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018, p. 6).

When low socioeconomic families engage in schools, it may be informal or unscheduled visits which may be seen as obtrusive by schools and teachers. Malone (2015) cited socioeconomic status as a challenge for parental involvement in schools.

Malone identified five areas of socioeconomic status and their effect on parental involvement: lack of education, work schedules, transportation, the preference for home-based involvement, and the visibility of involvement. Malone suggested offering flexible volunteer opportunities, childcare, and training for parents to assist parents of low socioeconomic status to support their students. It is vital that parents recognize involvement goes beyond the home. Parents must be engaged in the classroom and understand the significance of being vested stakeholders in their children's education (Thomas-Lester, 2017). When schools recognize the barrier of socioeconomics and how they affect schools, schools can plan a culturally responsive answer to involve parents (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018).

Wanat (2010) conducted a study to explore parent perceptions about how schools encouraged or discouraged involvement (p. 162). Wanat conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 parents. The findings from the study revealed participants believed all parents should be involved in decisions about student learning, curriculum, and policies (Wanat, 2010). The study suggested schools should be more welcoming to all parents. One parent who attempted to participate on the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) called the organization exclusionary and political and felt she was not respected because she was not college educated (Wanat, 2010). The PTA representative in the study found it to be challenging to encourage uninvolved parents to come to school (Wanat, 2010). Another theme in Wanat's study was the dissatisfaction of home-school communications. In Wanat's study, parents were dissatisfied with the one-way communication from school. Parents desired updates on student progress before it was too late. Parents in the study valued formal and informal conversations about their student's progress

academically and socially (Wanat, 2010). Parents suggested unstructured classroom open

houses as well as school leaders establishing office hours after school so parents can have

an opportunity to discuss concerns (Wanat, 2010). "Opening the lines of communication

would result in new, creative ways to make parents feel more welcome and to provide

them with an opportunity to contribute to their children's school experience" (Wanat,

2010, p. 184).

In a study conducted by Williams and Sánchez (2013), the researchers focused on

the barriers and facilitators of parental involvement (p. 57). The study focused on

students of color who were from low-income families. The researchers conducted

interviews, 15 with parents of high school students and 10 with school personnel, to

identify and decrease barriers to parental involvement. The researchers found three

major barriers to parental involvement from their parent interviews. Parents indicated

time poverty which is defined as, "the activities at home or away from school that

consume parents' time" (Williams & Sánchez, 2013, p. 62), as a barrier to parental

involvement. Most parents indicated that their job takes up most of their time which

prevents involvement at the level they prefer, and the scheduling of events and meetings

conflicted with working parents' schedules (Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Lack of access

was found to be another barrier to parental involvement. Parents stated the physical

structure of the school made access difficult for parents with disabilities (Williams &

Sánchez, 2013). The third major barrier identified in the study was the lack of awareness.

Parents were not familiar with policies and parental rights and were uninformed in regard

to events (Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Parents stated one reason for the lack of

awareness of events was the use of students as messengers. School officials stated the

lack of updated information (i.e., phone numbers and addresses) as a hindrance of informing parents (Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Parents gave suggestions to decrease these barriers such as giving flexible involvement opportunities, offering incentives to encourage parental involvement, and schools having an open-door policy so parents and school officials can plan together and receive input from parents (Williams & Sánchez, 2013).

School receptivity is created from perceived attitudes toward parents from school staff (Scott, 2011). Schools that are perceived as having low receptivity are viewed from parent perspectives as having limited communications and an atmosphere that does not foster active parents. In Froiland and Davison's (2014) study, the researchers interviewed 5,828 families of students in Grades 6-12 from across the United States to examine the relationship of parental expectations and parental school partnerships (Froiland & Davison, 2014). Froiland and Davison used interview data to measure parent responses about parental educational expectations for their students, how parents feel welcomed at school, and the positive interactions parents have with educators. The findings from the study suggested that parents feeling welcomed at school as well as parental trust and satisfying interaction with staff has a correlating positive impact on parental involvement, regardless of socioeconomic status (Froiland & Davison, 2014). The study also suggested there is a positive correlation between parent-school relationships and school outcomes (Froiland & Davison, 2014). In secondary schools, the promotion of independence and responsibility among students to prepare them for adulthood has given a false sense that parents are not needed in education. Parents need to stay involved with their child's education beyond elementary school. It is natural for

parents to think that as their child gets older, they should be less involved. That is not correct; with the added pressures of students wanting greater autonomy and a greater influence from peers, parental involvement is critical in the middle school years (Ducreux, 2012). Teachers in middle school confuse the need for adolescent autonomy with the need for parent teacher collaboration and do not pursue cultivating these relationships (Flynn & Nolan, 2008). In a study conducted by Flynn and Nolan (2008), the researchers surveyed 144 principals across elementary, middle, and high schools on their perceptions of teacher-parent relationships using a 22-question survey. The study addressed three areas of concern: a need to increase parental involvement, a need to improve communication, and a need to build capacity of new teachers (Flynn & Nolan, 2008). The findings from the survey revealed elementary principals perceived their parents as more actively involved and had more frequent communication with parents compared to what middle and high school principals perceived of their parents (Flynn & Nolan, 2008). When asked, principals contributed the decline of parental involvement to three factors: parents being overwhelmed, the lack of capacity to be involved, and the lack of understanding the importance of involvement (Flynn & Nolan, 2008). There is a natural progression of less involvement for parents as their child gets older, but time spent at school events during middle school years should not decrease (Brannon, 2007).

Brannon (2007) interviewed principals across the state of Illinois in regard to the decline of parental involvement in middle schools and reported her findings in the November/December 2007 issue of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). The principals attributed the decline of parental involvement to a number of factors. The principals reported parents feel their students did not want them

involved. When students were interviewed, a majority of students desired for their

parents to be more involved with their education. Principals also attributed the decline of

parental involvement to parents themselves having a negative experience in school.

Parents may feel intimidated by principals and teachers and may also have had

unpleasant school experiences (Paylor, 2011). Parents whose experience with law

enforcement has been negative also may be hesitant or embarrassed to participate in some

schools or programs that now require fingerprints for regular volunteers (Paylor, 2011).

The third reason principals reported for the regression of parental involvement in middle

schools is the curriculum. As students matriculate through the educational system,

curricula become more challenging, resulting in parent lack of confidence in assisting

with schoolwork (Brock & Edmunds, 2010). Parents want to be involved but lack the

knowledge of how to effectively involve themselves in their child's education (Jenkins,

2017). Parents are unsure where to seek information about curriculum updates and lack

the time to do the research to find the information.

Parental involvement can be affected by their student's reputation. There is a

negative correlation between parental involvement and a child's behavior (Zelich, 2016).

Students who display challenging behaviors often have parents who are reluctant to be

actively involved in their child's education for fear or embarrassment of receiving

another negative report about their students. Parents also become frustrated with school

officials when their ideals of their students do not align with the school (Zelich, 2016).

Parents can have a perception that their students are gifted and should be placed as such;

however, if schools do not have the data to support the request and go against what the

parents perceive, this can cause frustration and become a barrier in building the home-

school connection. Epstein et al. (2002) pointed out key findings from surveys which involved teachers, parents, and students across all grade spans. The survey results revealed partnerships tend to decline as students matriculate through school. Affluent communities on average have more positive family involvement, and schools with more socioeconomic disadvantaged students have parents who are less involved in schools (Epstein et al., 2002). Most families care about their children and want to partner with schools to ensure student success, and school officials want to involve families but are unsure how to effectively reach all parents.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) Model of Parental Involvement

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) developed a model of parental involvement process based on their research on the motives that encourage parents to get involved in their students' education. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's research on parental involvement addressed three questions: (a) Why families do/do not become involved; (b) What do families do when they are involved; and (c) How does family involvement make a positive difference in student outcome (Hoover-Dempsey, Green, & Whitaker, 2010). Figure 2 presents the model of parental involvement motives as developed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997).

Student Achievement			

⬆

Student Attributes Conducive to Achievement			
Academic Self Efficacy	Intrinsic Motivation to Learn	Self-Regulatory Strategy Knowledge & Use	Social Self Efficacy for Relating to Teachers

⬆

(Mediated by) Student Perceptions of Learning Mechanisms Used by Parents			
Encouragement	Modeling	Reinforcement	Instruction

⬆

Learning Mechanisms Used by Parents during Involvement Activities			
Encouragement	Modeling	Reinforcement	Instruction

⬆

Parent Involvement Forms			
Values, Goals, Expectations, Aspirations	Involvement Activities at Home	Parent/Teacher/School Communication	Involvement Activities at School

⬆

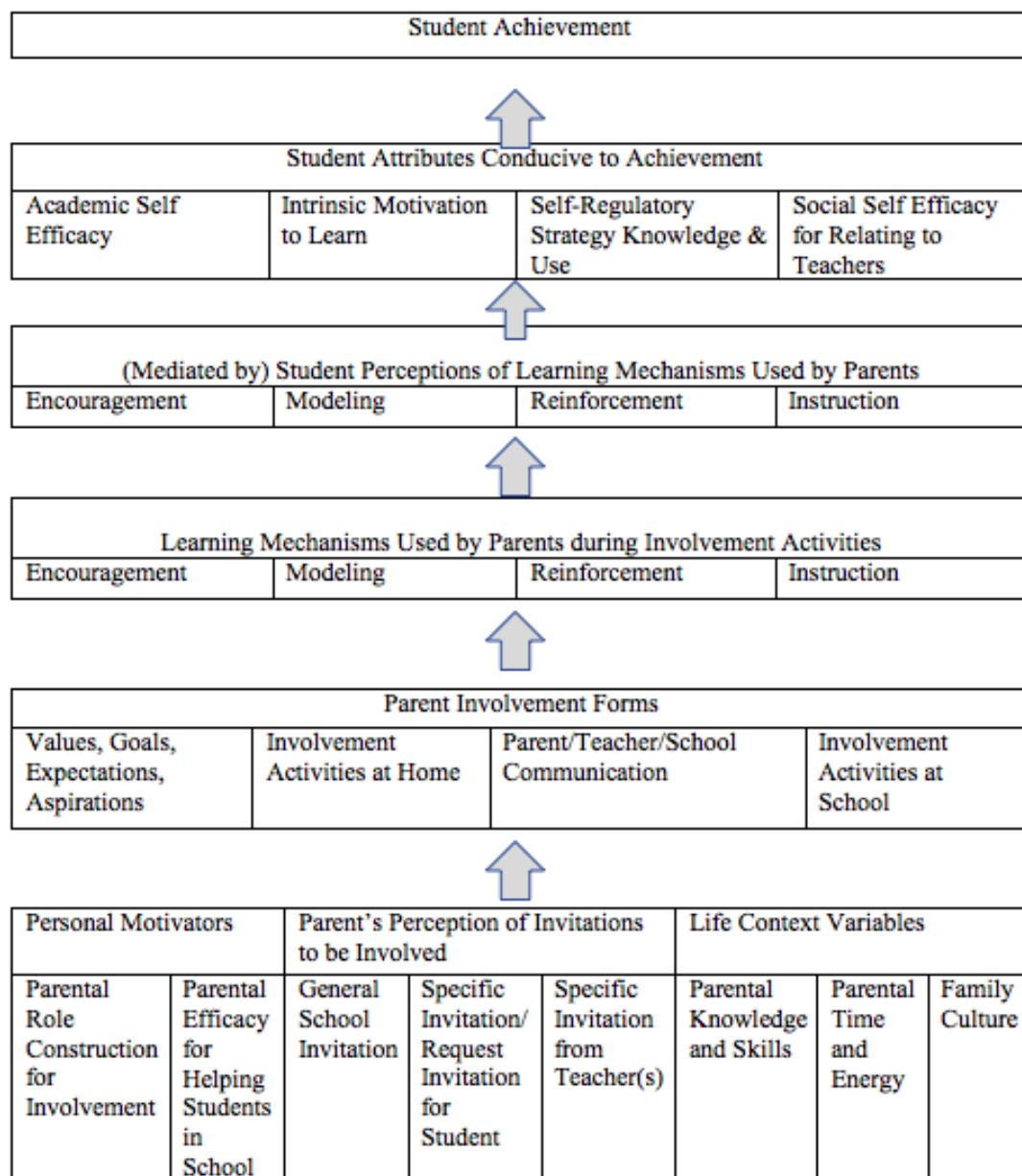| Personal Motivators		Parent's Perception of Invitations to be Involved			Life Context Variables		
Parental Role Construction for Involvement	Parental Efficacy for Helping Students in School	General School Invitation	Specific Invitation/ Request Invitation for Student	Specific Invitation from Teacher(s)	Parental Knowledge and Skills	Parental Time and Energy	Family Culture

Figure 2. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) Model of Parental Involvement.

In the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) model of parental involvement

process, parental involvement and parent-school communications are considered essential

involvement forms. The process has five levels. Level 1 has three categories: personal motives, parent perceptions of invitations to be involved, and life context (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010). During the first level of parental involvement, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2010) suggested parents' personal motivations for involvement in education are captured by two variables: parental role construction and parental self-efficacy (Griffin & Galassi, 2010). Parental self-efficacy refers to parent beliefs about whether their actions and their abilities have a positive influence on their child's educational outcomes (Griffin & Galassi, 2010). Parental role construction refers to parent beliefs about what their responsibilities are towards their child's education, active or passive (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2010).

Parent perception to the invitation to be involved is divided in three categories: general invitations from the school, specific teacher invitations, and specific invitations from the child (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010). The strength of the teacher invitation is associated with the level of parental involvement (Rodriguez, Blatz, & Elbaum, 2014). A welcoming environment in which school officials express appreciation for parental involvement is key in any parental involvement program (Froiland & Davison, 2014). There are variables that also affect parent perception such as parent understanding of their own skills, parent time and energy, and family culture. Parent sense of self-efficacy can also affect the level of involvement. Parents who are more confident in their ability to advocate on their students' behalf, may take the initiative to become involved regardless of the school's invitation (Rodriguez et al., 2014).

Level 1.5 on the model gives forms of involvement such as parent communication of goals, expectations, and aspirations which turn into student beliefs and behaviors. This

type of involvement, academic socialization, was also addressed by Jensen and Minke (2017) in their research. Level 1.5 of the model also addresses home-based as well as school-based parental involvement. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model has an ultimate goal of student success once parents have matriculated through the levels (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010).

For this study, the researcher focused on Levels 1 and 1.5 to understand the motives of why parents become involved and to find the types of involvement that parents of middle school students find beneficial so school leaders can capitalize on these findings, create strategies for involvement, and build capacity for this demographic.

Robbins and Searby's (2013) study examined parental involvement strategies used by middle school interdisciplinary teams in Alabama. The researchers used Hoover-Dempsey et al.'s (2010) model of parental involvement as a basis for their study. The researchers distributed an anonymous parent questionnaire with questions based on Epstein et al.'s (2002) six types of parental involvement and Hoover-Dempsey et al.'s model of parental involvement. The researchers also conducted parent focus groups to explore parent perceptions of effective involvement and to gauge parent satisfaction with the current parental involvement opportunities. From their study, Robbins and Searby were able to align parental involvement strategies to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model of parental involvement to which parents of middle school students could benefit. "There is an alignment of the involvement strategies utilized by the middle school teams and the level one descriptors in the Hoover-Dempsey's model of parental involvement" (Robbins & Searby, 2013, p. 128). Figure 3 presents the results of the connection Robbins and Searby made between Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of

parental involvement and strategies the interdisciplinary teams used to involve parents.

Level One Descriptor	Involvement Strategy Utilized by the Interdisciplinary Team
Parents' Motivational Beliefs	Teams educated parents regarding adolescent-specific developmental characteristic and needs. Teams explicitly suggest and follow up on at-home strategies for parents to implement
Parents' Perception of Invitations from Others	Teams maintained an open and approachable attitude toward parents Teams actively and continuously invited parents of struggling student to face-to-face parent conferences Teams creates plans of improvement requiring parent-student interactions at home
Parents' Perceive Life Context	Team understood the challenges unique to their community's socioeconomic status Team attempted to serve as a resource to parents who lack the time, energy, skills or knowledge to become involved by providing specific interventions strategies

Figure 3. Interdisciplinary Team Parental Involvement Strategies Categorized by Level 1 of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) Model.

From their research, Robbins and Searby (2013) were able to determine four primary themes of middle school teams that effectively involve parents. Effective middle school teams believed that

- parental involvement is essential for student success,

- school staff have to be open and approachable, and

- schools should serve as a resource to parents (Robbins & Searby, 2013).

Parents who participated in this study knew the importance of involvement but struggled with the balance of student responsibility and the level of involvement in

middle school (Robbins & Searby, 2013).

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

In 2011, Mapp worked with the U.S. Department of Education to develop the Dual Capacity-Building Framework. The purpose of the Dual Capacity-Building Framework was to design family engagement initiatives that build capacity among educators and families (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). This framework is scaffold for the development of strategies to create an effective family-school partnership (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The Dual Capacity-Building Framework (Figure 4) builds on existing research which suggests that capacity has to be built between families and schools to have a successful partnership (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Mapp (2018) based this on the findings of Epstein's (2018) Sphere of Influence, making the connection between home, school, and the community. This framework was designed so schools can work through the challenges and build capacity among all stakeholders, to facilitate effective family-school partnerships that support student achievement and school improvement.
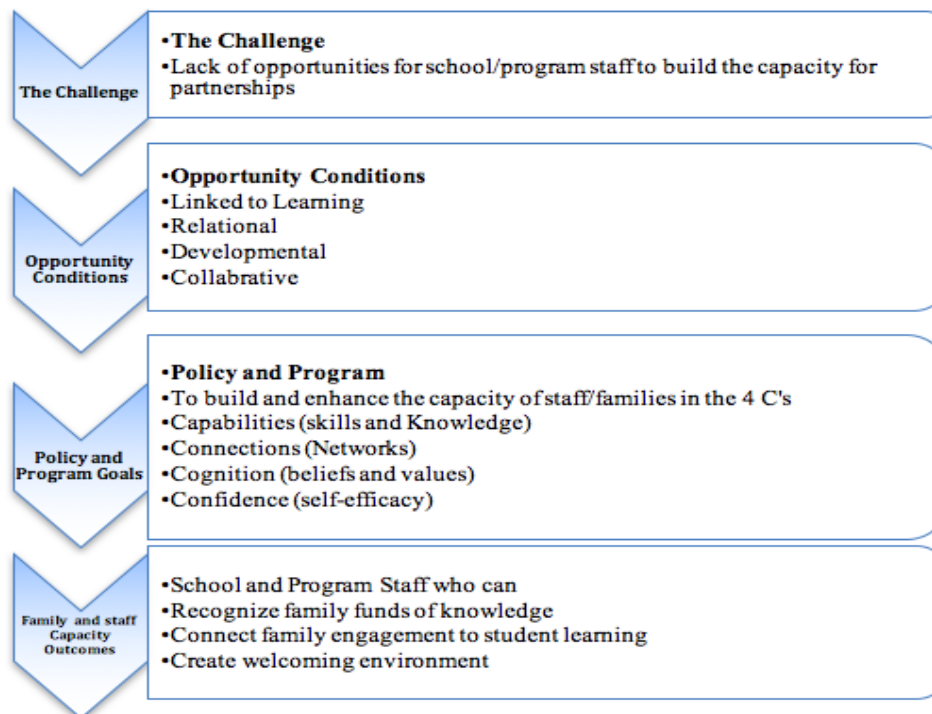
Figure 4. The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnership.

The framework must be developed in the context of the setting in which it is being implemented. The framework has four categories. First, schools must identify the challenges to engaging families. Next, schools must identify what conditions are necessary to engage and sustain families. This is referred to as the opportunity conditions. Schools then must identify goals and policies that will assist in developing positive relationships. Finally, schools have to identify what kind of outcomes are expected from the home-school partnership. Mapp (2018) stated that family engagement is relational and collaborative. Most teachers are not taught how to give those meaningful opportunities for collaboration (Mapp, 2018). In the framework, this is described as an opportunity to embed parental involvement to learning and instruction. The Dual Capacity-Building Framework describes developing policies and programs that

build capacity of staff and families in four areas: capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence. Once this has occurred, the result will be staff who can connect and engage with families as well as create welcoming inviting cultures and foster families who are supportive decision makers. Educators who are not trained to work effectively with diverse populations will not be able to recognize and encourage parental involvement with a strong cultural bias or influence (Malone, 2015). Family involvement in school is equity building. Biases are leveraged when we engage parents in the education process because there is now a partnership between families and schools (Mapp, 2018).

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework is just that, a framework that does not look the same in each school. Schools must develop the framework and use it based on the needs of their school population. The implementation of the framework is based on the context of the school or district. The framework is a tool that school personnel can use to analyze the challenges of schools to build partnerships and attempt to build capacity of the schools and parents by looking at the opportunities and then building programs and policies to enhance the capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence of schools and families.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model, along the Dual Capacity-Building Framework, is supported by Bandura's (1995) self-efficacy theory. "People's level of motivation, affective states and action are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively the case" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). Efficacy beliefs are formed by four main influencers: mastery of experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). Bandura proposed that self-efficacy beliefs are the among the most influential determinants of human behaviors.

Badura stated parents with higher self-efficacy believe they share in the responsibility of their students' education. Bandara's self-efficacy theory assisted the researcher in understanding why parents may or may not be involved in their child's education.

Summary

In Chapter 2, the researcher synthesized current literature on parental involvement. The current literature is clear: The level of parental involvement declines as students move to middle school. Epstein et al.'s (2002) Framework of Parental Involvement adds breadth to the definition of parental involvement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model identified parent motives for involvement. Parents can be influenced by personal motives, their perception of the invitation of involvement, and life context. The Dual Capacity-Building Framework describes how schools can develop policies and programs that build competence of staff and families in four areas: capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence. Once this has occurred, the end result will be staff who can connect and engage with families as well as create welcoming inviting cultures and families who are supportive decision makers to overcome the barriers of parental involvement. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology which details the steps the researcher followed to conduct the study as well as the description of the setting for the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine why parents choose to get involved in their child's education. This research provided school officials with the reasons behind the barriers that affect parental involvement and strategies to overcome these barriers from the parent's perspective. This research specifically identified ways in which middle schools can effectively provide parental involvement opportunities to families.

Schools must acknowledge and develop avenues for parents to overcome obstacles to engage in their child's education. Schools must recognize barriers and challenges of parents. The researcher's objective was to utilize a survey, focus groups, and individual interviews to find commonalities around the three research questions:

1. How do parents of middle school students define parental involvement?

2. What do parents perceive as barriers to parental involvement in middle schools?

3. What school strategies do parents consider beneficial in facilitating their involvement?

In answering these questions, the researcher gained insight into parent perspectives of involvement as well as offered suggestions based on data and literature that will strengthen parental involvement practices at the middle school level.

Parental involvement declines as students move through the K-12 system (Benner et al., 2016). Gender, socioeconomic status, and parent educational attainment are a few of the factors that influence the levels of parental involvement. The researcher used a qualitative phenomenological research design to understand parental involvement as it

related to two middle schools. The researcher examined attitudes and perceptions of middle school parents. The researcher used a survey, focus groups, and individual interviews to gain new insight into the phenomenon of parental involvement. Data were collected in multiple ways and settings to ensure participants were comfortable in their willingness to share their honest beliefs on parental involvement in middle schools. This study was dependent on the willingness and the openness of the participants to share their opinions on parental involvement at the middle school level. The researcher used the data gathered to uncover themes and develop an understanding of parent perspectives of parental involvement to create opportunities for increased parental involvement.

Theoretical Framework

The methodology was based on the structures of phenomenology. "Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry coming from philosophy in which the researcher describes the lived experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 42). The purpose of this study was to understand parent perspectives of involvement. Parent perception was the prevailing foundation for the data that were collected in this study. The researcher gathered information based on participants' lived experiences through the use of surveys and focus groups. The researcher collected qualitative data to find thematic connections in participants' lived experiences and synthesize the commonalities of their experiences and perceptions (Saldaña, 2011). The researcher examined the perceptions of the parents as they relate to involvement in schools.

The researcher looked to generate a general explanation of actions resulting from the data collected from participants, thus the study was a grounded theory study

(Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). Grounded theory is one that is derived from the study of a phenomenon; it does not begin with a theory; the theory emerges through the study as themes surface (Walker & Myrick, 2006). The theoretical framework for parental involvement is supported by Bandura's (1995) self-efficacy theory. "People's level of motivation, affective states and action are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively the case" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2).

Design

The goal of the study was to gather data to provide a detailed investigation into parent perceptions; thus, it was important to look at multiple sources of data. The use of surveys is one of the most common types of qualitative research because of their ease and cost effectiveness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher gained permission via email (see Appendix A) to use and modify the School of Excellence survey developed by the National PTA (see Appendix B). The use of surveys provided data based on trends, attitudes, and opinions of the sample population on the topic of parental involvement (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because the survey questions were close ended, the researcher was able to gain standardized feedback. The survey used a Likert scale to qualitatively measure parent feelings toward parental involvement and the school's efforts to welcome and involve parents in their students' learning. The scale response ranges were unknown, never, sometimes, frequently, and always. The survey consisted of 13 questions. The researcher replaced two questions that did not relate to the focus of this study. The researcher replaced those questions with two of her own questions: "Someone in our family talks to my child about their school day" and "My involvement in my child's education is valued by the school." The researcher validated these

questions by consulting parent involvement coordinators in a neighboring district (see

Appendix C). The survey focused mainly on strategies used to involve parents. The first

five questions of the survey focused on parental involvement activities that assisted the

researcher in answering the question, "How do parents of middle school students define

parental involvement?" The next three questions of the survey assisted the researcher in

identifying barriers parents face which make parental involvement difficult. The last five

questions assisted the researcher in identifying school strategies parents deemed

beneficial to facilitate parental involvement.

The results from the survey were coded so themes could be developed. Thematic

coding consists of identifying responses that are linked by a common theme which allows

the researcher to develop a framework of thematic ideas (Gibbs, 2007). The researcher

used the top five questions with the response of "never" and the top five questions with

the response of "always" to generate thematic open-ended questions to use during the

focus group. In the case where there are not enough questions with the answer of

"always," the researcher used the response "frequently" to generate questions according

to the overriding themes that emerged from the survey.

"Focus groups are small structured groups with selected participants, normally led

by a moderator" (Litosseliti, 2003, p. 1). "They are set up in order to explore specific

topics and individuals' views and experiences through group interaction" (Litosseliti,

2003, p. 1). To gain deeper understanding of the themes from the parent surveys, the

researcher conducted two focus groups. The focus groups allowed the researcher deeper

insight into the phenomena of parental involvement. The focus group gave the researcher

deeper insight into the three research questions. Through the conversation that occurred,

the researcher also was able to ask probing questions to better understand participant answers and examples.

The researcher randomly selected two parents to participate in the individual structured interview using the online number generator. The interviews allowed the researcher to talk one on one with individuals about their parental involvement experiences. The researcher contacted the selected parents via telephone and invited them to participate in the interview. The participants were asked the same open-ended questions so the researcher could gather in-depth information on the participants' behaviors and opinions. Through the conversation that occurred, the researcher was able to ask probing questions to better understand the participants' answers and examples.

The audios from the focus groups and interviews were recorded using an iPad. The recordings were transcribed by the researcher to ensure all information was accurately captured. Participants in the focus groups and individual interviews were provided with a copy of the transcribed meetings via email to ensure all thoughts were captured accurately. Respondent validation allowed participants to read through the data, analyze, and provide feedback on the researcher's interpretations of their responses. This also provided the researcher with a method of checking for inconsistencies and provided another opportunity to check the validity of the data. All data collected associated with the study will be kept secure on the researcher's laptop and protected with a password. Names of the participants were kept confidential.

Setting for the Study

The researcher obtained permission from the Gardner-Webb Institutional Review Board before commencing with any research. All participants were informed regarding

the purpose of the study, and the researcher gained their consent for participation (see Appendix D). The Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction for the district granted permission for the researcher to conduct research within the district via email (see Appendix E). Principals from each school also eagerly gave the researcher access to each site (see Appendix F).

The study was conducted in a school district in the piedmont region of North Carolina. According to the 2016 Census, the total population in the county was 138,694, with a median age of 40.3 years old. The county is 73% Caucasian, 16% African American, and 8% Hispanic. The median income is $44,494 annually. Approximately 18% of the citizens live in poverty. The top three employment sectors in the city are manufacturing, retail trade, and construction.

The school district serves approximately 20,000 students and has approximately 3,000 employees. The district consists of 33 schools, of which 23 are Title I schools. The school district has set system priorities which are maintain school safety, recruiting, developing and retaining quality employees, and engaging the community. The study took place at two middle schools. Blue Middle School (pseudonym) is a Title I school in a northern suburb of the district. Yellow Middle School (pseudonym) is a non-Title I school in a southern suburb of the district. The researcher selected these middle schools because of their demographic makeup and location of each school. The researcher wanted schools that were not similar in their makeup and location to gather perspectives from a diverse group of parents. By having a diverse group of parents, the researcher was able to address the topic from various points of view.

Blue Middle is a Title I school in a small suburb in the county with a population

of 3,290. The median annual income is $39,167. The suburb is 53% Caucasian, 33% Black or African American, and 11% Hispanic. According to PowerSchool enrollment summary data, Blue Middle School has approximately 144 students in sixth grade, 158 students in seventh grade, and 149 students in eighth grade, for a total population of 451 students. Approximately 49% of the students at Blue Middle School are male, and 51% are female. Forty-five percent of the students are Black or African American, 17% are Hispanic, 26% are White, and 7% identified as two or more races or other. The 2017 state end-of-grade testing data indicated 37% of students scored proficient in reading, 27% were proficient in math, and 52% were proficient in science. Over half, 52%, of the students at Blue Middle School are identified as economically disadvantaged, which is over the state average.

Yellow Middle School is located in a suburb of the county, with a population of 3,082. The median annual income is $48,355. The suburb is 84% Caucasian, 11% Hispanic, and 2% Black or African American. According to PowerSchool enrollment summary data, Yellow Middle School has approximately 190 students in sixth grade, 194 students in seventh grade, and 152 in eighth grade, for a total population of 536 students. Approximately 51% of the students at Yellow Middle School are male, and 49% are female. Seven percent of the students are Black or African American, 17% are Hispanic, 70% are White, and 6% of the student population identified as two or more races or other. The 2017 end-of-grade data indicated 38% of student were proficient in reading, 25% were proficient in math, and 58% were proficient in science. Sixty-five percent of the students at Yellow Middle School are identified as economically disadvantaged, which is well over the state average of 49%.

Participants

The goal of this study was to gain insight into a phenomenon, individuals, or events (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Individuals and groups were selected to increase understanding of phenomena of parental involvement. This qualitative study sought to understand parental involvement from the perspective of parents from two middle schools. The principals at each school provided the researcher with a list of all teachers who have a homeroom class. The researcher numbered the list. Using an online number generator, the researcher selected one class from each school to participate in the study. The researcher distributed an envelope to the students to take home. The envelope included a letter informing parents about the study, the survey, a demographic card for parents to fill out to participate in the focus group, and a consent form. Students had 1 week to return the survey to their homeroom teacher. The researcher analyzed the survey data and developed questions for the focus groups and interviews. The researcher contacted the families who volunteered for the focus group via telephone call to invite them to participate in the focus group. Guest, Namey, and McKenna (2017) suggested a sample size of two to three focus groups will capture at least 80% of themes on a topic (Guest et al., 2017, p. 16). The researcher limited each group to a minimum of five participants and no more than eight participants. The researcher repeated the process using the number generator to generate enough participants for a minimum of two focus groups, one at each school.

The researcher allowed the focus group participants to choose to meet at the school or at a different location. The researcher began the sessions with introductions as well as an overview so the participants would know what to expect (see Appendix G).

Participants had an opportunity to ask any questions. The researcher began to ask the questions developed from the survey. Participants had an opportunity to answer the questions and elaborate on responses to the questions. The sessions were scheduled for 1 hour. At the conclusion of the focus group, the researcher thanked the participants and end the group. The researcher completed this process at both schools.

After the focus groups, the researcher conducted structured individual interviews. The researcher allowed the individuals to choose the location of the meeting. The researcher completed the same steps for the interviews that were completed for the focus groups. The researcher completed this process at both schools.

The researcher transcribed and analyzed the data gathered during the focus group and interviews. The researcher shared the study findings regarding parent perspectives of involvement with each school's leadership team. The researcher discussed the emerging themes from the study.

Limitations

At the time of the study, the researcher served the studied district as an assistant principal at a school not included in the study. The researcher worked closely with the school's intervention specialist and the Communities in School liaison in attempt to build the home-school partnership. A limitation of this study is the honest responses of the participants. The researcher cannot ensure the responses of participants are reflective of participant experiences and perceptions. The researcher will assume the information gathered is factual. The willingness of participants is another limitation of the study.

Summary

Parental involvement is one of the focus areas in the district. The goal of this

phenomenological study was to gain insight into the perceptions of middle school parents

regarding parental involvement in schools using qualitative data. Chapter 3 gave an

overview and rationalization for the methodology that was used to conduct the research.

This study utilized surveys, focus groups, and interviews to gather qualitative data around

the phenomena of parental involvement. The data collected in this study supported

school leaders in understanding parent perspectives to influence future practices in

creating meaningful opportunities for parental involvement. Chapter 4 gives an analysis

of the data collected from the survey, focus groups, and interviews. Data are presented in

narratives by thematic headings to address themes that emerged from the parent

responses as they relate to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Analysis of the Data

The purpose of this study was to investigate parent perceptions of parental involvement at the middle school level. Three questions guided the study:

1. How do parents of middle school students define parental involvement?

2. What do parents perceive as barriers to parental involvement in middle schools?

3. What school strategies do parents of middle schoolers consider beneficial to facilitate their involvement?

Data were collected from parent surveys, parent focus groups, and individual interviews to understand the phenomenon of parental involvement. "Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry coming from philosophy in which the researcher describes the lived experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 42).

During the first phase of the study, surveys were distributed to parents of Blue Middle School, a Title I school in a northern suburb of the district, and Yellow Middle School, located in a southern suburb of the district. Between the two schools, 48 surveys were distributed. Thirty-four of the surveys were returned completed for a participation rate of 69.4%. A survey was used so the findings could be generalized. The second phase of the study consisted of the researcher conducting a focus group with parents from each school. The last phase of the study consisted of individual interviews so the researcher could gain further information.

This chapter is a presentation of the results, patterns, and themes as they related to the research questions. The findings are organized to address the research questions.

Each question will be addressed by using a combination of the data collected from the parent survey, focus group, and individual interviews.

Description of the Sample

Parents were selected randomly. The researcher used an online number generator to select a class to distribute the surveys. Each student in the class was given the survey to deliver to their parents. From the survey packet, parents had the option to participate in the focus group and/or individual interviews. Initially, the researcher did not have enough participants for the focus groups. The researcher used an online number generator to randomly select parent participants from a class list. Parents were contacted by the researcher via telephone. The researcher introduced the study to the parents and asked for their participation in the focus group. Five parents participated in each focus group, for a total of 10 focus group participants. All participants in the focus groups were the primary caregivers of students at the study schools.

The researcher selected one parent from each school to conduct an individual interview. The parents were randomly selected from the class list using an online number generator. The researcher contacted the parents via telephone to solicit their participation in the interview. Table 1 contains descriptive information about the parents who participated in the focus groups and interviews. Focus Group 1 consisted of five mothers who all worked full time outside of the home. Focus Group 2 consisted of four mothers and one father. Four of the participants were stay-at-home parents and one was employed full time outside of the home. For the individual interviews, both participants were employed full time outside of the home.

Table 1

Focus Groups and Interview Participants

	Mother	Father	Employment
Focus Group 1	5	0	5 Full Time
Focus Group 2	4	1	1 Full Time
			4 Stay at home
Individual Interview	1		Full time
Individual Interview	1		Full time

Research Methodology

The methodology used was based on the structures of phenomenology. The purpose of this study was to understand parent perspectives of involvement. Parent perception is the prevailing foundation for the data collected in this study. The purpose of this study was to generate a general explanation of actions derived from the data collected from participants; thus, the study is a grounded theory study (Creswell et al., 2007). Grounded theory is one that is derived from the study of a phenomenon; it does not begin with a theory; the theory emerges through the study as themes surface (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

The researcher distributed surveys to parents of Blue Middle School, a Title I school in a northern suburb of the district. Of the 23 surveys distributed, the researcher received 16 completed surveys, for a participation rate of 69.5%. The researcher distributed surveys to parents of Yellow Middle School, located in a southern suburb of the district. Of the 25 surveys distributed, the researcher received 18 completed surveys, for a participation rate of 72%. The researcher calculated the participants' response rate for each question of the survey. Between the two schools, the researcher distributed a total of 48 surveys. Thirty-four of the surveys were returned completed, for a

participation rate of 69.4%.

The focus groups and interviews consisted of parents or primary caregivers of middle school students. The focus groups and interviews gave the researcher an opportunity to gain a better understanding of parent perspectives of parental involvement. The researcher used a semi-structured format which narrowed the questioning but also allowed for deviation in order to probe for more detail (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). During the focus group, seven questions were asked to the parents. The participants freely discussed the topics of each question. The parents of Blue Middle School opted to have their focus group at the school, while the parents of Yellow Middle School opted to meet at a local coffee shop.

The individual interview consisted of one parent from each school who was randomly selected using an online number generator. The parents were asked the same questions as the focus group. This gave the researchers an opportunity to explore the concept of parental involvement in depth.

Data Analysis

For the first level of data analysis, the researcher used the parent survey to uncover any commonalities. Initially, the researcher stated in Chapter 3 that the top five questions would be used with the response of "never" and the top five questions with the response of "always" to generate thematic open-ended questions to use during the focus group. In the case where there were not enough questions with the answer of "always," the researcher used the response "frequently" to generate questions according to the overriding themes that emerged from the survey. Once the survey was complete, the researcher realized she had combined the "always" and "frequently" categories and the

"sometimes" and "never" categories to gain an overall assessment of the frequency of certain behaviors. The researcher wanted to account for questions that were skipped or marked unknown by the participant; this was done by combining those categories. This allowed the researcher to gauge the overall themes of parental involvement.

Figure 5 presents an analysis of the data from the survey. Data collected from the survey indicated 12 respondents, or 38.3% of the participants, agreed that their school establishes polices that recognize and respect diversity. Only six respondents, or 17.6% of participants, agreed their school has signs in multiple languages; and eight respondents, or 23.6%, agreed their school provided translators as needed. All 34 respondents, or 100%, agreed that someone in their family talks to their child about their school day. Twenty-six respondents, or 76.4% of the survey participants, said their school encourages parents to volunteer. The information gathered from the survey was the foundation to build the questions for the focus groups.

	Always/Frequently	Sometimes/Never	Did Not Respond/ Unknown
What is Parental Involvement			
Someone in our families talks to my child about their school day	100% n=34		
Our school encourages families to volunteer	76.4% n=26	23.5% n=8	
Our school informs and encourages families to advocate for students	61.7% n=21	11.7% n=4	26.4% n=9
Our school communicates in multiple ways	67.6% n=23	11.7% n=4	20.5% n=7
My involvement in my child's education is valued by the school	64.7% n=22	26.4% n=9	8.8% n=3
What are the perceived barriers of involvement			
Our school shows respect to all families regardless of differences	64.7% n=22	14.7% n=5	17.6% n=6
Our school listens to families' concerns and demonstrates a genuine interest in developing a solution	67.6% n=23	17.6% n=6	14.7% n=5
Our school establishes policies that recognize and respect diversity	38.3% n=13	26.4% n=9	35.3% n=12
What strategies does my school do to facilitate my involvement as a parent			
Our school has signs in multiple languages	17.6% n=6	61.7% n=21	20.5% n=7
Our school provides translators as needed	23.5% n=8	23.5% n=8	52.9% n=18
Our school helps parents understand how they support their child's learning	58.8% n=20	35.2% n=12	5.8% n=2
Our school provides families with information about our school improvement plan	52.9% n=18	41.1% n=14	5.8% n=2
Our school distributes information on community resources that serve the needs of our community	52.9% n=18	41.1% n=14	5.8% n=2

Figure 5. Parent Survey Results.

Using the information from the survey, the researcher worked with a parent

involvement coordinator to validate questions to ask during the second stage of the

research. To validate the questions for the focus groups, the researcher contacted the

parent involvement coordinator previously involved in the study. Using the information

from the survey and the validation from the parent involvement coordinator, the

researcher developed questions around the themes of diversity, resources, and

communication to ask during the focus groups and individual interviews:

1. What is parental involvement?

2. Give examples of activities that the school/teachers do that make you feel
   welcomed.

3. What activities/strategies does your school do to recognize diversity of
   families?

4. What resources does the school provide to assist parents with their student's
   education?

5. What does your school do to facilitate two-way communication with families
   from diverse cultures and languages?

6. How has your involvement evolved over the years?

7. How does your school communicate volunteer opportunities?

The researcher conducted two 60-minute focus groups sessions, one with

participants from each of the research sites. The researcher conducted the focus group

with parents from Blue Middle School in the school's conference room with five

participants. The transcription of the meeting was emailed to the participants so they

could check for accuracy. A week later, the researcher conducted an individual interview

with a parent from Blue Middle School in the school's conference room. The interview

lasted 45 minutes. The researcher transcribed the interview and emailed the document so the participant could check the document for accuracy.

The parents of Yellow Middle School opted to meet at a local coffee shop. The researcher met with five parents during the focus group. The transcription of the meeting was emailed to the participants so they could ensure their thoughts were captured accurately. The researcher met with one parent from Yellow Middle School and conducted a 40-minute interview. The interview was transcribed and emailed to the participant to allow them an opportunity to ensure their thoughts were captured accurately. The researcher recorded all sessions with the use of an iPad and the Microsoft Word dictate to text function.

The researcher analyzed the data collected from the focus groups and interviews by using the process of data reduction. "Data reduction happens through editing, segmenting and summarizing" (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 174). The study is grounded theory in which the researcher is allowing the themes to emerge from the data collected. The researcher identified keywords and patterns in the information given by the participants, through the process of open coding. Codes used in qualitative research are often words or short phrases that symbolize an important attribute (Saldaña, 2011). The researcher listened to the audio recording of both focus groups and transcribed the recording. The researcher listened to the recordings and read the audio transcript to ensure accuracy. The researcher then read the transcribed focus group and interviews to determine common words and ideas. The researcher listed the common words and ideas, then listened to the recording again to keep a tally of how many times those words or ideas were mentioned by participants. Table 2 presents the frequency count of the words

captured during the focus groups and individual interviews. The keywords that emerged after the data reductions were diversity, time, timely communications, resources, school climate, school-based parental involvement, home-based parental involvement, and student autonomy.

Table 2

Word Frequency

Word/Phrase	Frequency
Diversity	2
Time	20
Timely Communication	21
Resources	4
Climate	13
School Based Parental Involvement	6
Home Based Parental Involvement	5
Student Autonomy	4

Some themes were stated more frequently than others during the course of the focus groups and interviews. In the next section of this chapter, the researcher discusses the themes that emerged as they related to the study research questions.

Research Question 1: How do parents of middle school students define parental involvement? This question was asked to develop a foundation for parents to articulate their overall feelings or concepts regarding parental involvement. From the survey, 100% of parents affirmed that someone in their family speaks to their student about school. To gain a better understanding about how parental involvement is defined by parents, the researcher asked parents in the focus groups and interviews how they defined parental involvement and how their involvement has changed.

What is parental involvement? One parent said parental involvement is "being at the school to fulfill the needs of the school" (Focus Group 2 Parent 1), while another

parent stated,

> A parent can be involved but not be seen at the school. I know for me I check
>
> grades and get the calls so I know what is going on at school and if I have an issue
>
> I know to contact them directly. (Focus Group 1 Parent 1)

Another parent stated,

> I think there is a fine line between involvement and engagement. An involved
>
> parent would be one who goes to open house, communicates with the teachers and
>
> knows the homework. I think an engaged parent more of the PTA and
>
> volunteering. I think at the middle school level there is more involvement than
>
> engagement but both engagement and involvement are lacking. (Focus Group 2
>
> Parent 2)

During the focus groups, the views of parental involvement differed. The parents who were stay-at-home parents were focused mostly on the volunteer aspect of involvement, physically being at the school during the school day. Parents who worked full time focused more on the at-home involvement, checking grades and speaking to their child about school. The parents who worked expressed the willingness to volunteer when their schedule allowed.

How has your involvement evolved over the years? The researcher asked parents how their involvement changed over the years. Parents overall had different experiences and were in different places with their involvement. Some parents stated they have always been involved at the same level, while other parents stated their involvement has decreased now that their student is in middle school. Parents discussed the idea of student autonomy as it relates to parental involvement. Parents from both focus groups

agreed that student autonomy is dependent on student maturity. One parent stated,

> When my children were in elementary school I was more about PTA as my
>
> children have gotten older, I have one in middle school and one in high school,
>
> I've become less present, more behind-the-scenes involved instead of at the
>
> school all the time. My reason for that is I want them to be who they are and
>
> establish their own connections with teachers. I am around enough for them to
>
> know that I am still mom but I am away enough they can be themselves and enjoy
>
> school activities. I am giving my children more of the responsibility of
>
> communicating what's going on. I see them becoming young adults I have to
>
> push them and be hands off on certain things. I don't want to overshadow them to
>
> where they can't be themselves because they feel their mom is always lurking.
>
> (Focus Group 1 Parent 5)

Another parent had an opposing viewpoint and stated, "I go to the school two or three times a week and I might not see my daughter, I don't think I impede her from being herself" (Focus Group 2 Parent 3).

Parents from the focus groups and interviews agreed on the idea of wanting their students to be more responsible for school and communicating their needs to their teachers. The parents had opposing perspectives on how to let their students have the autonomy to navigate through school.

One parent suggested as a reason for parents not being as involved in middle school: "Parents have invested 6 years at one elementary school, now they have to go to a new school and do it all over again and that is overwhelming for parents" (Focus Group 2 Parent 1). One parent mentioned being very involved in elementary school for 6 years

when their students were younger. As their students matured and moved to a new school, the parent desired for their student to become more responsible and aware of their grades, managing schoolwork, and advocating for themselves. Parents mentioned although they want their students to be able to manage school, they are continuing to check behind them and stepping in when needed. "I want my child to start making wise decisions. I am watching them to see how they navigate through the process and I can step in when needed" (Interview 1).

Another parent stated,

Years past, I've never joined PTA, last year I did a little PTA and chaperoning, this year I joined PTA day 1 and I've never done that, I joined and started helping because a friend showed that was involved talked to me and I saw there was a real need for volunteers at the school. (Focus Group 1 Parent 2)

Parents in both the focus groups as well as the individual interviews affirmed that they are involved in their student's education. The information from the focus groups and individual interviews was consistent and supported the results from the parent survey in which all parents answered someone always or frequently talks to their child about school. Parents had reasons for the type of involvement, which included availability and student autonomy; but all the participates affirmed that parental involvement on any level whether it is at home or in school is critical for the school and student success. "Being involved is not one particular thing that you do, it is going to look different based on parents' availability, interest and experience" (Interview 1).

Research Question 2: What do parents perceive as barriers to parental involvement in middle schools? The common themes that emerged from the survey

were lack of diversity, time, timely communication, and resources.

What activities/strategies does your school do to recognize diversity of families?

From the survey, 26.4% of parents affirmed that their school sometimes or never establishes policies that recognize and respect diversity, while 35.3% of parents did not know or opted not to respond to this question. Sixty-one point seven percent of parents stated their school sometimes or never has signs in multiple languages, while 20.5% of parents did not know the answer or chose not to respond. During the focus group, parents were asked, "What activities/strategies does your school do to recognize diversity of families," "What does your school do to facilitate two-way communication with families from diverse cultures and languages," and "What resources does the school provide to assist parents with their child's education?" The results from the survey were supported by the focus group responses and from the interview. Focus Group 1 Parent 5 stated,

> I don't see or notice that our school makes a point to overly recognize different cultures. If there is a paper communication sometimes it can be one side English and one side Spanish, but I don't see much of anything else.

Parents in the focus group nodded their head in agreement with this statement. The first language of the parents in this focus group was English, so they unanimously admitted they never paid attention because it did not affect them directly. One parent stated, "It never occurred to me how hard it might be to be involved if English is not my first language" (Interview 1). The information from the focus groups and individual interviews was consistent and supported the results from the parent survey in which 17.6% of parents answered their school always or frequently has signs in multiple languages and 23.5% agreed translators are provided when needed.

What resources does the school provide to assist parents with their student's education? Forty-six point eight percent of parents surveyed affirmed that their school provided information about the school improvement plan and distributed information on community resources. Parents all agreed the school does not outright provide information; but if they need something from the teacher, most will provide them with information or tell them where to locate information. "I know how to reach the teachers through email and if I need to know how to get my child extra help most all teachers have been responsive" (Focus Group 1 Parent 4). The other participants nodded their head in agreement with this statement. The researcher asked a follow-up question, "What about on the school level? Do you have input or access to the school improvement plan?" The parent from Interview 1 stated she did not know where the information was and was unsure how to access it. "I am going to assume it is on the school's website" (Focus Group 1 Parent 3). The other parents during the group shrugged or looked around in silence. The information gathered from the focus groups and interviews aligned with the parent survey results. In the focus groups and interviews, parents were unsure how to find resources on their own; but the parents agreed they felt comfortable asking their child's teacher where to find resources they needed.

Research Question 3: What school strategies do parents of middle schoolers consider beneficial to facilitate their involvement? According to the data from the survey, 76.4% of parents agreed that their school always or frequently encourages families to volunteer. Sixty-seven point six percent of parents said their school communicated in multiple ways and their school listens to families' concerns and demonstrates a genuine interest in developing a solution. Using this information, the

researcher asked, "How do schools communicate volunteer opportunities?" and "What strategies do schools implement to make parents feel welcomed?"

How does your school communicate volunteer opportunities? From the survey, 67.6% of parents said their school communicates in multiple ways. During the focus group, this was affirmed with parents listing multiple communication tools the school uses: Facebook, Twitter, Remind 101, and ConnectEd telephone calls. Parents stated the timeliness of the information being communicated can sometimes become a barrier for their involvement, especially for parents who work. Parents want to participate in events at the school to support their student, but the time in which the information is communicated with the parents does not allow for parents to rearrange their schedules. Focus Group 2 Parent 2 stated, "If being at the school is a priority to parents, they will make a way to get there." Parents also discussed the type of event. One parent stated, "if it is for awards day to see students getting recognized, I will make a greater effort than if it is just for a meeting during the day to give information" (Focus Group 1 Parent 1). During Interview 2, the parent stated,

> I will always show up for a parent conference. I will just have to rearrange my schedule, but something that is not directly involving my students and I did not receive advance notice, I will not make an effort to change my schedule.

Focus Group 1 Parent 5 stated,

> There have been times that I received information on the Sunday ConnectEd call and it is for something happening and the next day, Monday, and then I can't even flip my schedule to make it work. Had I known like two weeks or three weeks in advance, I would have a chance to look at my schedule at work or set up a ride if

necessary.

> ***What strategies do schools implement to make parents feel welcomed?*** When surveyed, 76.4% of parents affirmed that their school encourages families to volunteer. The focus groups had opposing perspectives on what the school did to encourage parents to volunteer based on schools. During the focus groups, the theme of climate emerged. Parents stated the administrators and teachers make a difference in making parents feel welcomed at the school. During the focus group, one parent from Blue Middle School stated when she sees administration in passing, they will casually invite or mention events at the school. "There has never been a time where I felt like I was not welcomed at school, when I haven't been around, they ask me where have I been?" (Focus Group 1 Parent 1). "I think now with my role being on PTA, school leadership expects me to participate at certain events" (Interview 1). Parents also agreed once they met their child's teacher, the teacher was open and receptive and kept them informed about their student's progress. "I think teachers feel there is no parental involvement until they see otherwise" (Focus Group 1 Parent 2). "I have had to reach out first to my child's teachers, but once they know I am on top of checking grades, I think they are more comfortable reaching out to me and communicating with me" (Focus Group 1 Parent 4). "I think overall our school community is small enough where everyone knows everyone. From the elementary, middle to the high school we are our own little community" (Focus Group 1 Parent 5). From the focus groups, the strategies parents found beneficial were personal invitations/reminders, being welcomed by teachers and staff, and two-way communication.

When the researcher discussed the topic with the focus group at Yellow Middle

School, the sentiments of the parents differed. One parent mentioned the school did not have a "family atmosphere" because of the change in administration.

> I think we have some really good teachers who reach out and communicate and letting parents feel welcome and not intimidated, I think as a whole, from administration support staff and even PTA things can improve a lot. Our current administrative team has been together for a couple of years now and they are beginning to come together. (Focus Group 2 Parent 1)

The parents discussed the teacher role in making them feel welcomed: "There are some teachers who keep you informed on what is going on in the classroom, sending out pictures of activities, that's the teacher I would be more comfortable interacting with verses someone you never hear from" (Focus Group 2 Parent 3). One parent stated,

> I thought all teachers wanted to teach and were very passionate about education until I started being involved and I realized some teachers are just here to collect a paycheck. They are not engaging at all and it is very sad. (Focus Group 2 Parent 3)

Parents agreed that the actions of school officials are a major factor in their participation with school events. Parents at Yellow Middle School echoed the sentiments of the parents of Blue Middle School by stating they feel like they have to initiate the conversations with the teachers and school, whereas they feel the school should do a better job initiating conversations and informing parents about classroom and school activities. Both groups feel teachers are more helpful after the parent reaches out to the teacher first.

Summary

To examine parent perspectives of parental involvement, the researcher used a qualitative research design to answer three research questions:

1. How do parents of middle school students define parental involvement?

2. What do parents perceive as barriers to parental involvement in middle schools?

3. What school strategies do parents of middle schoolers consider beneficial to facilitate their involvement?

During first stage of the research, the researcher surveyed parents from both research sites to find initial trends in the data. The researcher found commonalities around the ideas of diversity, resources, and communication. The researcher developed six questions to ask during the focus group and individual interviews. Parents agreed that parental involvement can be home based or school based and both have value to the students' educational experience. Overall, parents agreed effective parental involvement is essential for success of the school and students. Parents also perceived time, timely communications, lack of diversity, and school climate as barriers parents face when attempting to be involved in their students' education. Last, parents felt personal invitations, two-way communication, and multiple communication tools from teachers and school officials aided in their involvement. Chapter 5 provides a conclusion to the study and recommendations for further study points. Chapter 5 relates the findings to literature on the topic and discusses applications and recommendations for the findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Parental involvement declines as students move through the K-12 system (Benner et al., 2016). As students move to middle school, the educational structure changes. It is suggested that a family's involvement follows the trajectory of a student's development; as the student gets older, the ways in which their families are involved changes (Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018). During the elementary years, parental involvement activities are defined by school-based activities. As students move to middle school, students go from having one teacher to multiple teachers which presents a challenge to parents as they are in the habit of building a relationship with just one teacher (Ducreux, 2012). As students transition from elementary to middle school, some forms of parental involvement have a neutral effect or a negative effect on student achievement (Froiland & Davison, 2014). Middle school students face increased social pressure, greater academic expectations, and a desire for independence that makes the middle school years a challenging time for parents who are trying to be involved and students who desire greater autonomy (Ducreux, 2012). To have successful parental involvement, we have to understand the factors that facilitate or impede involvement (Patel & Stevens, 2010).

The intent of this study was to determine what parents consider parental involvement and to identify barriers and effective strategies to facilitate positive home-school partnerships. The methodology was based on the structures of phenomenology. The researcher collected qualitative data to find thematic connections in participants' lived experiences and synthesized the commonalities of their experiences and perceptions though the use of a survey, focus groups, and individual interviews. Three research questions were developed and explored to identify the perceptions of parents in two

middle schools with varied demographics to gain their perspective on parental

involvement:

1. How do parents of middle school students define parental involvement?

2. What do parents perceive as barriers to parental involvement in middle

   schools?

3. What school strategies do parents consider beneficial in facilitating their

   involvement?

This chapter provides an overview of the findings, a discussion of the framework,

the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future studies.

Discussion of the Findings

Chapter 4 presented an analysis of data based on the parent survey, focus groups,

and individual interviews from parents of middle school students. Literature on parental

involvement not only lacks uniformity around mutual understandings of what we mean

by parental involvement, but this lack of uniformity pervades research and programs

designed to engage parents (Jefferson, 2015). Research that examines the perceptions of

effective parental involvement from parent perspectives is limited. Parent perception was

the prevailing foundation for the data that were collected in this study. The researcher

collected qualitative data to find thematic connections in participants' lived experiences

and synthesized the commonalities of their experiences and perceptions (Saldaña, 2011).

The researcher collected data from parent surveys. The overriding themes that

surfaced from the survey were (a) diversity, (b) resources, and (c) communication. The

researcher was able to develop themed questions to ask during the focus groups and

individual interviews. Participants were asked questions surrounding the themes which

allowed them to elaborate on their parental involvement experiences.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) suggested the decisions to become involved are based on (a) the parent's construction of his or her role in the child's life, (b) the parent's sense of efficacy for helping his or her child succeed in school, and (c) the general invitation, demands, and opportunities for parental involvement presented by the child and the child's school.

In response to Research Question 1, "How do parents of middle school students define parental involvement," the definition of parental involvement varied based on their employment status and their current involvement practices. Parents who were stay-at-home parents believed that they needed to be at school volunteering to be involved effectively. These parents also believed that all parents are given the opportunity to be involved, but the decision to be active in the school came down to parent priorities. Volunteering is defined as enlisting and coordinating parent help and support (Epstein, 2010). Volunteering is also an important aspect of parental involvement. Volunteering can lead to parents' increased comfort in school by building their self-confidence in regard to their ability to assist in a school setting and create an environment in which parents feel valued (Epstein et al., 2002). For volunteering to be effective, schools must let all families know that their time and talents are appreciated and welcomed at school, create accommodating schedules for events to enable parents who work to participate, and organize volunteer training to ease the comfort level for those parents who may not be confident in their skills to volunteer at school (Epstein, 2010).

Parents who work outside of their home believed if they are talking to their students about school, checking grades, and ensuring homework is being completed, they

are involved; and their at-home efforts are equally as important as those parents' efforts who volunteer at the school. Epstein (2010) defined learning at home as providing parents with information on how to help their student with homework and other academic-related activities. Learning at-home activities, if implemented correctly, will help parents' capacity to understand instructional programs, have a greater awareness of their students as a learner, and allow parents to have effective discussions regarding school with their students (Epstein, 2010).

Based on the information gathered from the study participants, parental involvement can be characterized as the two-way communication of parents or caregivers with students and schools to keep abreast and participate in academic and extracurricular activities. The findings support Jeynes's (2011) definition of parental involvement. Jeynes defined parental involvement as a set of actions that consist of, but are not limited to, attending school functions and helping their children with homework. Not naming specific activities in the definition of parental involvement creates flexibility in which parents participate in their child's education. Schools need to ensure that they are not naming specific activities when defining parental involvement. Parental involvement will vary from family to family based on factors such as employment and parental availability. When schools restrict parental involvement to a set of actions, they will miss the participation efforts of non-dominant parents because their actions do not fit the dictated norm (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013).

In response to the second research question, "What do parents perceive as barriers to parental involvement," parents mentioned not feeling welcomed at the school, communication, and lack diversity as barriers to their involvement. When families do not

feel their time and talents are appreciated or welcomed at school, this creates a barrier for involvement. Parents also mentioned the general invitation to participate in activities such as recorded phone calls as a factor for their level of involvement. Parents stated when they received a general announcement regarding activities, they did not make an effort to attend if the activity did not directly affect their student. For activities that directly affected their student, parents desired more personal invitations. Parents also made a greater effort to attend events that showcased their student, such as award ceremonies, performances or athletic events. As suggested by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), "children hold more emotional influence over parental decisions because of their personal relationship with their parents" (p. 27).

Parents cited the forms of communication and the timeliness of communications as barriers to their level of involvement. When events do occur, often schools use students to deliver messages about events; and in most cases, the information is not received by the parents unless it directly impacts the student positively. Schools must develop effective two-way communication regarding programs and student progress (Epstein, 2010). In a 2018 survey by New Bay Media, 80% of parents agreed email is the most effective way for schools to communicate with them (Parents Say Email is Most Effective Vehicle for School-to-Home Communications, 2018). The findings also revealed that one in three parents are dissatisfied with communication and listed email, face-to-face meetings, texting, and phone calls as the top four preferred communication avenues respectively (Parents Say Email is Most Effective Vehicle for School-to-Home Communications, 2018). Findings from this study showed parents overly reiterated the idea of timely communications or invitations. Parents in the study stated when they

receive communications about events, there is not enough advance notice for parents to attend events. Information is received and parents do not have enough time to adjust their work schedules or make the proper arrangements to attend.

Immigrant and minority families encounter linguistic and cultural barriers when attempting to be involved. Data from the parent survey and focus groups revealed parents were unsure about the policies that recognize cultural diversity as it relates to parental involvement. Parents were asked about signage, the availability of translators, and the awareness of diverse cultures. The first language of the parents in this focus group was English, so they unanimously admitted they never paid attention because it did not affect them directly. One parent stated, "It never occurred to me how hard it might be to be involved if English is not my first language" (Interview 1). "Validating the first language of diverse families is an approach to involving immigrant families" (Guo, 2012, p. 135). Cultural backgrounds dictate educational values and how parents perceive their roles in the academic learning of children (Rivera & Li, 2019). Schools currently are characterized by Eurocentric standards and are not prepared to deal with parents from different cultural backgrounds (Guo, 2012). Schools should include the diversity of families as an opportunity to enrich learning by using skills and views of families from various cultural groups (Guo, 2012).

To combat communication and cultural barriers, schools need to evaluate if their modes of communication are effective for their specific school audience. Schools can do this by doing a simple survey to see which mode of communication is preferred by parents. Schools use technology to communicate; but in many instances, students are being raised by older adults who are not tech savvy and do not use social media. Schools

that rely heavily on social media platforms to advertise events are disenfranchising parents who do not use these modes of communication. Schools also need to evaluate the communication and inclusion of families from different backgrounds. To overcome these barriers, schools must also acknowledge cultural differences of the families they serve. School leaders must build their capacity to take charge and initiate positive conversations with parents and students of all cultures to strengthen the home-school relationship. Schools need to have the mindset that immigrant parents do not bring a deficit, but they bring valuable language and cultural backgrounds to our schools (Guo, 2012). Schools need to acknowledge the cultural difference by having resources available such as translators, newcomer support, and appropriate recognition of various cultures throughout the school environment. Schools need to ensure their efforts to encourage participation take into account all cultural qualities (Berkowitz et al., 2017).

In response to Research Question 3, "What school strategies do parents consider beneficial in facilitating their involvement," parents stated a welcoming environment, open communications, and flexible times for events as strategies that facilitated their involvement. Parents in the study stated the welcoming environment made them want to volunteer and assist with school functions. Parents said the act of school staff speaking and being engaging and friendly with them as they visited the school made them want to volunteer. At one study site, the idea of the family environment emerged. Parents said they felt comfortable because of the family atmosphere. Parents spoke positively about the use of pictures and newsletters. One parent stated having a teacher who kept her abreast of classroom activities and her child's progress made her excited and she wanted to assist when she could. Parents agreed that they have to initiate contact with the

teachers; but once they did, the lines of communication were open. Parents said the same about school administration and support staff. Having administration and support staff who interacted with parents and who had an open-door policy increased parents' desires to be involved. The timing of events and invitations to events made the difference in how parents responded. Schools offering events at varied times and on various days are considered to be more accommodating and parent friendly. Parents who must work have been given an opportunity to participate by schools offering flexible times for events. One parent stated, "Everything is not during the day or during the week. There are activities at the school on weekends too" (Interview 1).

Recommendations

As discussed in Chapter 2, Epstein's (1995) Overlapping Sphere of Influence stated family school and community all have influence over a student's context of how they learn. Parental role constructs with inputs from all stakeholders need to be examined and developed. Once this occurs, schools can develop a prescriptive plan to effectively involve parents and build meaningful relationships. "Just about all families care about their children, want then to succeed and are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities so as to remain good partners in their children's education" (Epstein, 1995, p. 84).

The findings of this study indicate families and schools need to work together to develop a parental involvement framework. From the parent survey, 100% of participants affirmed that someone in their family speaks to their child about their school day. Parents in the focus groups and interviews spoke to their children about school. Some parents had time available to volunteer during the school day. Speaking to children

about school is a home-based parental method that can be overlooked because it is not visible to others. In response to those findings, one of the recommendations is to create a diverse committee of parents, teachers, and school leaders to discuss and define parental involvement as a continual process. This study revealed there is a gap in the expectations of what parents expect and what schools expect. By forming a committee, all stakeholders will have an opportunity to share their needs and a framework can be developed that includes diverse perspectives. The researcher recommends the committee meet frequently to revisit the framework to ensure the framework is meeting the needs of all parties.

The findings of this study indicate schools need to gather information from the families they serve regarding school climate. Parents in the focus groups were more engaged or willing to assist schools when they felt welcomed in the school. In response to those findings, one of the recommendations is to survey parents about the school climate. Schools must use the data gathered to adjust the school climate to ensure it is welcoming to all families. One strategy is for schools to develop a partnership with a local business focused on customer service. Schools can provide staff with training and extra supports in the area of customer service. Schools can increase stakeholder contact by adding activities and opportunities to engage with families such as curriculum days, family game nights, and general open houses at various times of the day. By adding activities such as these, parents will be able to interact with school personnel in a relaxed environment. The researcher recommends after the whole school notification of the events, teachers call and personally invite parents to come to events. According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), parental involvement levels are influenced by the

invitation to the event. Another way to increase interaction is by getting outside of the school. Schools can go to local recreation or community centers in the neighborhoods they serve and provide school information and other school-related resources. Schools can also host family events at local bowling alleys and skating rinks. Another recommendation to build the school climate is for schools to create a parent center in the school. A parent center will provide parents with an inviting space for promoting parent education, volunteer opportunities, and community resources. Adding these activities will allow parents and school officials to build relationships, ultimately changing the climate of the school.

The findings of this study indicate schools should evaluate the communication modes and the timeliness of communications to families. From the survey, 67.6% of participants agreed their school communicated in multiple ways; however, during the focus groups, parents were not satisfied with the timeliness of the communications. In response to these findings, it is recommended that schools establish multiple forms of two-way communications and share the communication modes with parents. Schools also need to establish and communicate the frequency of the communications. Schools should also be mindful of the various communication needs of families. For example, schools can establish a monthly newsletter that will be emailed to all families on the first of each month that includes events and opportunities to participate in school functions. Reminders and weekly follow-up information in the newsletter can be sent out via automated phone calls and social media. This will allow parents to have an overview of events for the month as well as having weekly reminders in multiple forms.

The findings of this study indicate there is a lack of diversity awareness. From

the parent survey, 38.3% of the participants agreed that their school establishes policies that recognize diversity. Only 17.6% of participants agreed that their school has signs in multiple languages, and 23.5% agreed that the school provides translators as needed. In response to these findings, it is recommended schools include families from diverse backgrounds into the schools to share their culture with students and staff as well as create culture displays celebrating diversity. Adding cultural awareness to the curriculum is one strategy to acknowledge the values of various cultural perspectives. Schools can also offer dual language materials for dual language families including directional signage around the school premises. Schools should host multicultural nights and showcase the diversity of their school. School must ensure that basic needs, such as bilingual staff members, are available to assist with communication needs. Districts should also establish a newcomer program to ease the transition for immigrant students. The goal of any newcomer program is to assist students and families in adapting to their new country by connecting them to resources within the community.

Implementation of these recommended involvement opportunities and adapting them to the school's particular demographics should assist in giving parents avenues to attend and participate in school activities, which can be the first steps in building and sustaining an equitable parental engagement framework. As mentioned is Chapter 1, parental involvement is telling parents what to do or giving sporadic opportunities for involvement. Engagement is moving toward building partnerships so each party can have a voice in the decision-making process. The goal for any school should be to move from involvement to effective engagement.

Limitations of the Study

For this study, the researcher solicited volunteers to complete the survey, participate in focus groups, and participate in individual interviews. The researcher had to depend on the honest accounts of parents regarding their experiences of being involved in their student's education. At the time of the study, the researcher worked in the study district as a middle school assistant principal.

Creswell (1998) suggested an investigator will use his or her own abilities and intuitions throughout most of the research effort, which can be seen as a limitation to qualitative research and interview data collection. The researcher minimized this by using three sources of data (surveys, focus groups, and interviews) to triangulate the data to find to common themes.

Recommendations for Future Studies

This study sought to define parental involvement and to identify strategies that impede or foster involvement. The findings of this study indicate there are multiple opportunities for future research on the topic of parental involvement. Schools and educators must be willing to have an inclusive and honest conversation with all families about the needs of both parties to build effective supportive partnerships. Studies that include focus on cultural diversity would provide additional insight into the phenomenon of parental involvement. Future studies that focus on understanding the ways culture effects the academic experience of families will give school leaders information that will assist in overcoming biases that influence their decision-making with respect to their relationships with diverse parents, which was one of the key barriers discovered in this study. This will provide teachers and school officials with information on how to create

effective and supportive partnerships by proactively addressing the cultural diversity of families.

Conclusion

Middle school years and adolescence are times of great change for family dynamics. During these times, students are striving for more autonomy and engage less with their parents (Murray et al., 2014). Middle school students face increased social pressure, greater academic expectations, and a desire for independence that makes the middle school years a challenging time for parents who are trying to be involved and students who desire greater autonomy (Ducreux, 2012). Parents are learning how to function with their child's newly found independence and yet still be supportive and involved in every aspect of their child's life.

In this study, the researcher explored parental involvement through the perspective of middle school parents. The research wanted to know (a) how parents of middle school students defined parental involvement, (b) what parents perceive as barriers to parental involvement in middle school, and (c) what strategies do parents of middle schoolers consider beneficial to facilitate their involvement?

During this study, parental involvement was characterized as the two-way communication between parents or caregivers and schools to keep abreast and participate in academic and extracurricular activities. Parents reported the key barriers involved were the lack of cultural diversity, communication, and resources. Parents felt having a family atmosphere with engaging school personnel facilitated them being more involved at the school. Engaging parents in effective and respectful communication should be an active principle for all schools. Schools that can put aside their Eurocentric and outdated

preconceptions about family involvement will build stronger culturally relevant involvement opportunities that will assist with the inclusion of all families.

Based on the findings in this qualitative study, to have effective parental involvement, schools must distinguish between if they are building parental involvement or engagement. School must begin to build the relationship between school and home. Schools need to build the capacity of staff members to recognize that involvement will not look the same for every family. This research revealed there is a need for an inclusive two-way conversation with parents and school leaders about the meaning of parental involvement. Both schools and families should share their expectations and needs. Without this vital conversation, there will continue to be a disconnect between the two parties. Schools must have discussions with the families they serve, examine the needs, and then develop a holistic plan for involvement based on the needs of the family. This plan must be fluid enough not to disenfranchise parents from various cultures or socioeconomic statuses. Parental involvement is a phenomenon that is relative by family. Schools need to continually evolve their approach on how to effectively involving families by addressing barriers that inhibit family participation.

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Appendix A

Survey Permission

January 2, 2019

Good Afternoon,

Per my conversation with XXX, I am writing to request the use of the PTA School of

Excellence Survey Questions. I am currently writing my dissertation on Parent's

Perspective of Involvement in middle schools. I would like to administer the survey to

middle school parents to gauge their involvement in their child's education.

Here is the link to the survey from your website:

https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/programs/school-of-

excellence/2018/survey-questions-2018-19.pdf

Should you have additional questions, I can be reach at the contact information below

Thank you in advance,

Brittany Orange
Doctoral Candidate
Gardner-Webb University

Appendix B

Parent Involvement Survey

Parent Involvement Survey

	Unknown	Never	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
What is parental involvement					
Someone in our family talks to my child about their school day					
Our school encourages families to volunteer					
Our school informs and encourages families to advocate for students					
Our school communicates in multiple ways					
My involvement in my child's educations is valued by the school					
What are perceived barriers of involvement					
Our school shows respect to all families regardless of differences					
Our school listens to families' concerns and demonstrates a genuine interest in developing a solution					
Our school establishes policies that recognize and respect diversity					
What strategies does my school do to facilitate my involvement as a parent					
Our school has signs in multiple languages					
Our school provides translators as needed					
Our school helps parents understand how they support their child's learning					
Our school provides families with information about our school improvement plan					
Our school distributes information on community resources that serve the needs					

Adapted from the National PTA School of Excellence https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/programs/school-of-excellence/2018/survey-questions-2018-19.pdf

Appendix C

Parent Involvement Question Validation

February 15, 2019

Good Afternoon XXX,

    As you know I am getting closer to the research portion of my study on parental involvement. I have been granted permission by the National PTA to use one of their surveys but I would like to switch out 2 of the questions because they are not a good fit for what I am trying to study. I would like to replace them with two questions of my own and I would like your feedback on these questions.

Someone in my family talks to my child about their school day?

My involvement in my child's education is valued by the school?

Thank you in advance and for all your support during this journey

Brittany

Appendix D

Introduction Letter/Participant Consent Form

Greeting Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

My name is Brittany Orange and I am a doctoral student at Gardner-Webb University. I am conducting research on Parental Involvement in Middle schools and I am soliciting your participation. With your input, I will be able to use parent's perspectives to assess the effectiveness of parental involvement strategies and suggest improvements to school leaders.

Enclosed is a consent form to participate in the study, a brief survey, and a contact card if you wish to participate in the focus group. I ask that you complete and return the information within one week.

Thank you in advance,

Brittany Orange

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Parent Involvement in Middle School: The Parent's Perspective

Researcher: Brittany Orange/Doctorial Candidate Gardner Webb University

Purpose: The study will answer three primary questions: How do parents of middle school students define parental involvement? What to parents perceive as barriers to parental involvement? and What school strategies do parents consider beneficial to facilitate their involvement?

Procedure
What you will do in the study: If you agree to be in the study you will be asked to:
1. Complete the enclosed survey
2. Participate in a focus group discussion

Participants are allowed to skip any questions that cause discomfort. Participants can stop participation in the focus group at any time.

Time Required
It is anticipated that the study will require about __60__ *minutes/hours* of your time.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

Confidentiality
Information will be collect from the focus group recording. The data will be transcribed and reported in the narrative of the study. Names of participants will not be used in the reporting. Data will be stored on the researcher's password protected laptop and will be deleted at the conclusion of the study.

Anonymous Data
The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be anonymous which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data.

Confidentiality Cannot be Guaranteed
Because of the nature of the data, I cannot guarantee your data will be confidential and it may be possible that others will know what you have reported

Risks
There are no anticipated risks in this study.
If, as a result of the study, you experience discomfort and would like to discuss your thoughts or feelings with a counselor, please contact the following individual for assistance.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us to understand how school can effectively involve parents in their child's education in the middle school years. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

Payment
You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

Right to Withdraw From the Study
You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your audio or video tape will be destroyed.

How to Withdraw From the Study
- If you want to withdraw from the study, Please tell the researcher and leave the room. There is no penalty for withdrawing.
- If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact: Brittany Orange at 704-213-6757 or Borange@gardner-webb.edu

If you have questions about the study, contact the following individuals.
Brittany Orange
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017
(704) 213-6757
borange@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Bruce Boyles
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017
(704) 406-3275
bboyles@gardner-webb.edu

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact:

Dr. Sydney Brown
IRB Administrator
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017
Telephone: 704-406-3019
Email: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

Voluntary Consent by Participant

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me.

_____ I agree to participate in the confidential survey.
_____ I do not agree to participate in the confidential survey.

_____ I agree to participate in the focus group.
_____ I do not agree to participate in the focus group.

_____ I agree to participate in the interview session(s). I understand that this interview may be video recorded for purposes of accuracy. The video recording will be transcribed and destroyed.
_____ I do not agree to participate in the interview session(s).

_____ Date: _____
Participant Printed Name

_____ Date: _____
Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix E

District Permission to Conduct Research

Good Afternoon Dr. XXX

As you know I am embarking on my research portion of my program. My research topic

is Parental Involvement in Middle School: The Parent's Perspective and I am requesting

permission to conduct my research in our district.

Please let me know if you have any questions

Brittany

Appendix F

School Permission to Conduct Research

Good Afternoon XXX,

I am writing my dissertation on Parent Involvement in Middle School: The Parent's

Perspective and I would like to use your school site as a site that I study. I am available to

meet so we can discuss the details more further.

Thanks

Brittany

Appendix G

Focus Group Script

Focus Group Script

Researcher: Good Evening, thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study.

My name is Brittany and I will be the moderator for this evening. I have XXX will assist

me with today's session. The session will be video recorded using an iPad. At no time

during my reporting will I use any names and this recording will be deleted at the

conclusion of the study. The is an informal setting. I will ask that only one person speaks

at time so everyone's voice can be heard.

I will start by asking questions again this is a conversation, please share your experiences

freely. At times, I may ask if you can explain, provide an example or to clarify you view

point

1. What is parent involvement?

   a. How has your involvement changed over the years?

2. Give examples of activities that the school/teachers do that make you feel

   welcomed.

3. What activities/strategies does your school do to recognize diversity of families?

   a. What does your school do to facilitate two-way communication with

      families from diverse cultures and languages?

4. How does your school communicate volunteer opportunities?

5. What resources does the school provide to assist parents with their student's

   education?

Possible probing questions:

Can you provide an example?

Can you tell me about a time when…?

Can you tell me more about that?

What happened after that?