A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS

AND ADMINISTRATORS AT AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN VIRGINIA

A Record of Study

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between administrators and parents at a high-performing elementary school in Virginia over the course of an academic year. The school has a population of parents who expect and require a high level of communication. The reviewed literature considered the importance of parental support in schools, but also the zeitgeist of "overparenting" and its influence on parents' perceptions of their rights. Pilot interviews with mothers revealed parents expected and often demanded to be consistently informed. Interviews with administrators revealed that parents' persistence could obstruct decisions made by administrators. Survey analysis revealed that academics, school safety, and "best interest of students" were concerns for parents.

During a final meeting with administration, survey results were discussed, and the principal and assistant principal identified a possible action plan for each theme illustrated by the survey. The hope is that by identifying and then addressing these issues that trust and communication between parents and administrators will grow and there will be a stronger relationship between stakeholders.

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to the administrators and families at the elementary school in Virginia. Their openness, honesty, support, and willingness to share were invaluable to the writing of this paper.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NOMENCLATURE

IEP	Individualized Education Plan
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
Watch D.O.G.S.	Dads of Great Students
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
SOL	Standards of Learning
GATE	Gifted and Talented Education
VAAP	Virginia Alternate Assessment Program

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Problem Space

For years, research has shown that when parents are involved in their child's education, the child will have stronger motivation to succeed, will perform better, and will have greater success in school (Fan & Williams, 2010; Fan, Williams, & Wolters, 2012; Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989). Since the publication of the 1983 federal document "A Nation at Risk," and then the 2001 passing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the importance of family involvement has been a priority for the national government as well as local educators. In fact, a section of the NCLB law specifies that Title I schools must have written procedures to ensure strong and effective parental involvement. A Title I school cannot even receive funding until the parental program has been implemented (Parental Involvement, 2004).

In creating these sections of NCLB, it was evident that parental involvement needed to be a key piece in ensuring student success. However, schools that already have a strong parent presence do not need legislation to mandate parental support. These schools face a different challenge that is not often written about in journals or in legislation. The assumption is that because the parental support is there, research is not necessary. However, these schools face distinct challenges. What issues are priorities for parents, and how can a trusting relationship between stakeholders be built? Finally, how can a balance be reached between administrators, who need to be trusted, and parents who want to be informed and require a high level of communication? There needs to be

a relationship of trust and an environment of strong communication in order to establish an effective connection between administrator and parent, and consequently a more successful environment for students. However, this environment is not simple to obtain, and there is not a simple formula that can magically create success. Each school brings its own distinctive population and distinctive challenges. Specifically, in the school examined here, major policy changes over the last three years have caused both administrators and parents to adjust goals and expectations.

Family involvement is defined in this project with the following terms; *involved*, *highly involved*, *moderately involved*, *mildly involved* and *non-involved*. Working definitions are as follows:

- Involved: participating in any activity on school grounds, including but not limited to drop-off, pick-up, PTA, parent conferences, room parent, or volunteering.
- Involved: Breaks down into four categories:
- Highly involved: A mother who participates in the school between 10-15 hours (or more) per week.
- Moderately involved: A mother who participates in the school between 5-10 hours per week.
- Mildly involved: A mother who participates in the school between 3-5 hours per week
- Non-involved: A mother who participates in the school less than 3 hours a week and does not take active participation in the child's activities

1.2 The Problem of Practice

    1.2.1 Context setting. North Elementary School* resides in a suburb south of a major city in Virginia. Some of the 28 elementary schools in this suburb have high to middle-income families while others have high reduced and free lunch populations and receive Title I funding. This qualitative, exploratory study is focused on North Elementary, a rural elementary school that houses a reverse mainstream preschool, as well as grades K-5, encompassing 739 students. The free, reverse mainstream preschool is a government funded program, and one of the only free preschools in the city. Children who have been identified as having risk factors that can lead to challenges in school may attend the preschool. However, it is also open to non-disabled children in order to create balance in the classroom. Space is very limited for non-disabled children, and all parents must apply to be accepted into the program.

    The school has a total of 35 full-time teachers. They also employ resource teachers for art, music, PE, guidance, and strings. Special education services offered include physical, occupational, and speech therapy, adaptive PE, and services for moderately to severely disabled students. Additionally, they have two reading specialists, one who works with students on phonemic awareness and fluency, and the other who works with students on comprehension. Alternatively, there is one gifted and talented education (GATE) class in third, fourth, and fifth grade. Student teacher ratio is generally 21:1.

    Two administrators are in charge of the school, one female principal, and one male assistant principal. Twelve percent of the students are on free and reduced lunch,

and the student population is mostly Caucasian, with students from military families, students from large family farms, and multi-generational students making up the majority of the population. It is the largest demographic served as far as geographic area; some students are even on the bus for 45 minutes in order to reach the school.

The student population of this elementary school is very geographically diverse, but it is also quite stable; a contradiction, according to the principal (principal, personal communication, September 10, 2014). For example, students come from suburban communities, secluded farmhouses, and apartment complexes. However, because the town has a high military population, there are many military families, who leave after a couple of years, but there are also families who have attended the school for multiple generations.

The teacher population is stable. Often, a teacher starts at this school and stays for her entire career. In fact, some of the bus drivers have been with the district for so long that they have driven multiple generations of the same family.

Many students come ready to learn. According to the principal, at least 70% have been enrolled in preschool prior to attending kindergarten (principal, personal communication, September 10, 2014). Additionally, she noted that these early and diverse experiences give children more background knowledge and help young students to understand rules such as sitting, standing in line, and listening to directions (principal, personal communication, September 10, 2014).

The teachers are experienced, with two-thirds of them holding a master's degree. According to the principal, they know their content well, but often have trouble

differentiating instruction. In the last few years, the rigor has changed, and the state test has become more difficult (principal, personal communication, September 10, 2014). Teachers are used to being able to introduce content with one particular strategy, with most students understanding it the first time. However, now teachers must differentiate their instruction to develop student understanding, and they are also required to teach students to reach the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy. According to the principal, this is quite a challenge, especially for the most experienced teachers who have been with the school for years.

New to this year is a Professional Learning Community (PLC) program, where teachers will, once a month, have time to speak to others on their team to deal with challenges. The last few years have seen the implementation of Response to Intervention programs and balanced literacy. In the last year, the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) scores, which is the adaptive exam for students with special needs, were excellent. Every student but one passed, with most receiving perfect scores. According to the assistant principal, this is because there was a "defacto PLC," with the assistant principal working with the teachers, pushing them to the next level of lesson planning, and trying to encourage high expectations for instruction. For example, teachers would create goals such as, "80% of students will show understanding in figurative language assessments." If, as the year progressed, it looked like the teacher could not reach her goal, she and the assistant principal would either readjust her teaching strategy or, if necessary, her goal (assistant principal, personal communication, September 10, 2014). Scores on Standards of Learning (SOL) testing are excellent as

well, with most students passing and a large number scoring above average. According to the assistant principal, preliminary and unofficial results from spring of 2014 show that 82% of students passed the English portion with 75% as the benchmark, 86% of students passed in math with 70% as the benchmark, 98% of students passed in history with 70% as the benchmark, and 89% passed in science with 70% is the benchmark.

The school not only performs high academically but has strong enrichment activities as well. For example, each spring, the school offers after-school enrichment clubs, which in the spring of 2015 included chess, crafts, drama, sign language, soccer, "Harry Potter," ping pong, and cheerleading. A total of 192 students from K-5 signed up. Many of the clubs are only available for grades 2-5, so a count of 192 is moderately high. There were 750 students in the building during the 2014-2015 school year, ranging in grades pre-K-5 (assistant principal, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Clubs also include the SOL club, (which is academic enrichment and available to grades 3-5) and safety patrol (fifth grade only). These clubs had 84 students and 50 students respectively (assistant principal, personal communication, March 27, 2015). There is some overlap with clubs in terms of enrollment.

1.2.2 Parental support in the community. Support for the student community is excellent. There is an enthusiastic PTA board, which meets once a month and develops events and one fundraiser throughout the year. According to the fall of 2014 newsletter, their balance forward in 2014 was $12,865. They planned to spend $47,557, which was equal to the amount of money they intended to raise. They spent money on educational enrichment, a library renovation, technology and arts in education, among other items.

As evidenced on the district website, this school was given a "National PTA School of Excellence" award for its ability to empower families and creating opportunities for student success. An example of a school program implemented by the PTA includes the successful Watch D.O.G.S. program, which is a volunteer program for fathers or father figures. A father, grandfather, or father figure volunteers for one day in the school, and work with students, walks around the building, and helps with general tasks as needed.

1.2.3 Initial understanding. After spending the spring of 2014 with the administration during my first internship, it became evident that both the principal and assistant principal were communicating with parents often through weekly newsletters, open house, and recorded phone call updates. It also seemed that parents had a strong presence at the school. Each day I saw volunteers, parents who wanted to voice opinions or discuss frustrations, parents who met with administrators for special education meetings, or members of the PTA, who met with administration. Although most interactions I observed were courteous, I was curious to see if the phenomenon of overparenting existed here, and if there were trust or miscommunication issues present between stakeholders. After interviewing eight mothers, I did find there to be some trust and communication issues and found that there was more tension that I initially expected.

1.2.4 Relevant history of the problem. Through semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes, newsletters, and informal conversations, I learned the history of this dilemma. The dilemma is more prevalent from the administrators' point of view. For example, the assistant principal gave an example of a cello and bus incident. I

happened to be at the school as this issue initially unfolded, and was present when the first parent complained to the school security guard. A parent came to the school and complained that another student was bringing her cello on the bus, which was against the rules because it is oversized. This parent was following the rules and taking her child to school on orchestra days, and she believed it was unfair that other parents were not following the rules. When the assistant principal called transportation to confirm this rule, he found that some buses were allowing cellos and others were not. The rule was then enforced across all buses—no cellos. Some parents were angered by this, and appealed to the principal, and then the school board. Eventually, the rule was changed; the argument became that there was room on the bus for oversized objects. This change was most likely due to parent complaint (assistant principal, personal communication, October 2, 2014)

Interestingly, during the eight mother interviews that took place in the fall of 2014, when each one was asked if she had ever overstepped her boundaries as a parent, only one, a member of the PTA board, said yes. Her example was that she had brought her toddler daughter to a school function even though bringing younger siblings was explicitly not allowed. Her daughter was sick, and she could not use her day care. She asked the teacher, who said yes, and put her in a stroller. She noted that several parents were angry because she had brought her daughter, and made comments to the security officer, who then asked her to leave. She felt horrible about the situation and apologized to the entire grade teaching team as well as the principal, who understood. "It was completely unintentional. . . . I didn't realize the effect it would have, and I still feel

8

horrible about it" (Mother Interview One). She knew that in bringing her daughter she had overstepped boundaries, but did not have childcare that day and did not have a choice (Mother Interview One). This example was similar to the cello incident, in that when one parent breaks the rules, other parents are quick to inform on their peers to ensure that the rules, especially the inconvenient ones, are followed by all.

The other seven participants answered this question with "no." Their answers may be because mothers rarely overstep their boundaries, or perhaps, parents cannot recognize the behavior of overstepping boundaries because they believe their actions are justified. The survey, completed in the next semester, brought a bit more insight into this phenomenon.

The school's current administration used preemptive strategies to try to alleviate any parent miscommunication or frustration. For example, a beginning of the year open house allowed all parents to meet administration. Additionally, the active PTA, the Watch D.O.G.S. program, the Booster-thon, and multiple opportunities for parents to volunteer in the classroom allowed families to observe the classroom.

The administration shows support for the families outside of school hours as well, attending extra events when possible. As the assistant principal indicated, he would even attend sports games on the weekends when invited by the children (assistant principal, personal communication, October 2, 2014).

However, even with these programs to pull parents in, in the last few years, rules have been changed to keep them out. When the current principal came to the school, she believed that school security was at risk because parents had too much freedom.

Walking their children to class, roaming the hallways unattended, and dropping off students before the morning bell were all policies that had been in place, but were not in the best interest of student safety. Therefore, over the last three years, the principal put new rules in place that prioritized student safety over parent convenience. For example, students are not allowed in the building before the first morning bell. Parents may walk through the hallways, but only if signed in by the security officer, expected by the teacher, and only if they continue straight to their preapproved destination. In general, no parent may walk a student to their class but can drop his or her child off at the office. These changes were a perfect example of varying priorities for stakeholders. Whereas the administration prioritized student safety and changed the policies to reflect this priority, parents were initially frustrated by these changes because their priority was their child's comfort and their own agenda. Although they now follow the rules, it was initially a source of frustration.

1.2.5 Stakeholder groups and values. There are two major stakeholder groups in this study. The first are the two administrators of North Elementary School. The other group is the families whose children currently attend North. After spending the spring semester of 2014 observing the school and speaking with the administrators, it became evident that the mothers, in particular, wanted a lot more information than sometimes, administrators were able or willing to provide. Although administrators make many efforts to communicate with parents, for some parents, these efforts are not enough. Because much research has been done on gaining parental involvement in schools, but not much has been done on how to create strong communicative relationships once this

involvement was established, it seemed natural to complete a study that would begin to fill a hole in the research canon.

In the fall semester of 2014, I completed eight interviews with mothers of students attending North and one interview with each administrator. I also held informal conversations with stakeholders and other school personnel. Initially, many of the mothers outwardly stated that there were no problems with trust or communication. They believed they had an open relationship with the administration. However, in the next breath, they laid out their expectations, and then, as they became more comfortable and a cadence traveled through their voice, they began to outline their frustrations. Additionally, their actions did not always match their words, which was evident when they gossiped about each other, but did not talk about themselves in the same way. One mom said, "I know many moms who are frustrated by the principal. To sum up a little of the frustration, she has to play too much of the political side, and it may come across that their concern is being brushed over with a political agenda" (Mother Interview Five). This quote is a perfect example of one mother explaining others' opinions, but not owning them herself.

Another particular parent, who had two children in upper elementary and was defensive of the administration, said, "It bothers me how ungrateful they are; your kid is not the only one here" (Mother Interview Four).

Mothers shared that they expected to be continually informed, to know first when something happened, and to be told whenever administration talked to their children. They spoke about the pressures facing today's parent to be perfect and to live up to a

11

"standard that is only a picture" (Mother Interview One). This quote referenced social media such as Facebook and Pinterest. For some, this idea of perfection and overprotectiveness bled into the kind of overinvolved parent they were. Some parents admitted to volunteering for hours, with the agenda of understanding what is happening in the school, and even earning an extra audience with the administration, "The more involved you are . . . the more they see your face, the more they take care of your children" (Mother Interview Two). A mother of a third grader said, "If you want to know the quality of education, you need to be as involved as you can be" (Mother Interview One).

Being involved in their child's school was a way to keep track of their child, even as their child grew more independent. However, these mothers also felt a need to protect and to nurture. Their need for information and communication came from love and from the current and common parenting culture of overprotection (Pilot Interviews).

A few values continued to be discussed in conversations with both stakeholders. Power/control, trust, and student safety were themes that ran throughout the discussions. While the administrators continued to reinforce student safety and the fact that not all problems were about the parents' needs, but sometimes part of a bigger picture, some mothers asserted that they were not sure the level of trust was high enough and that it was important to them to know every time an administrator spoke to their child. Alternatively, other mothers, usually the most highly involved ones, argued that many parents do not know how lucky they are to have children at North and that more parents needed to give administrators the benefit of the doubt. Clearly, there were some issues

that needed to be explored further. When creating the next step of data collection, the all school survey, I based the questions on themes and specific conversations from the pilot interviews.

Minor stakeholder groups included teachers and students. Although these groups were not directly involved in the study, the collected data will have a trickle-down effect on their experience with the school. For example, a more constructive connection between administrators and parents will result in a more positive experience for students and teachers.

1.3 Roles and Personal Histories

1.3.1 My background. Presently, I work as a writer, and I am a stay-at-home mom. I write about parenting and education and have three children, ages five, two, and four months. In 2013, I published a book through Lesson Ladder called "Making Kid Time Count: The Attentive Parent Advantage; Ages 0-3." Now, I write study guides for teacher certification exams for various states, including Texas and Florida. I am the co-creator of merelymothers.com, a website about balancing motherhood.

Before I had my children, I taught for eight years, working as a sixth grade language arts teacher, a first-grade teacher, and a K-8 literacy coach in private, charter, and public schools in California, Indiana, and Kansas respectively. In my roles as a teacher, I worked in two schools with high parental involvement and one school with low parental involvement. In Kansas, where some parents struggled with finances and the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, they were less involved with the school. It was often difficult to reach these families. Some did not have email, and some

did not have working phone numbers. These parents wanted their children to succeed but often were not educated themselves, or were worried about covering basic needs and could not attend parent conferences, school functions, or be a member of the PTA. These difficulties presented challenges; often, students were not motivated to succeed and needed more extrinsic motivational strategies in the classroom. Many needed to be rewarded just for remembering to bring a pencil and paper.

In the other two schools, a charter and private school in Indianapolis and San Diego, CA, most parents were highly involved, even though both schools had varying levels of socioeconomic families. It was not unusual for me to receive daily emails from parents of children who struggled, academically or behaviorally, or for parents to call me at home in the evening. Parents attended parent/teacher conferences with their own agenda, and already knew most of the comments I would be making, due to previous conversations. Students were motivated to succeed and had the backing of both teachers and parents to help them. However, as a teacher, I faced distinctive challenges with these highly involved families. I often believed that not only was I teaching the children but managing parents expectations as well. This balancing act created more stress and some tension because I had three times the number of clientele to monitor and please.

Both types of schools presented challenges. However, there is a large body of research on various ways to reach parents who struggle with school involvement. What is not in the canon are strategies to balance highly involved parents and the autonomy of a strong administration. After experiencing these challenges directly, and having had

experience writing about parenting as well as being a parent of school-aged children, I find this topic timely, engaging, and important to school success.

I have not been employed at North Elementary School. I had experience working with the administration last spring during my internship and somewhat in the fall during the second internship, but these two semesters have been my only experience with this school.

1.3.2 My field-based mentor. My field-based mentor, who needs to remain anonymous for the purpose of the study, is the principal at North Elementary School. She has been the principal for three years, and before that, worked in Title I schools in the same district, where she was responsible for making significant changes in curriculum, instruction, and state test scores. She has just completed her doctorate work in education and was, therefore, helpful on an academic level as well. Because she has just completed a similar project, she was valuable in discussing academic issues as well as practical ones.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Theories

The first theory that grounded this inquiry is that parental involvement is key to student success. It has been documented for the last 20 years that school climate is made stronger by parental involvement (Fan & Williams, 2010; Fan, Williams, & Wolters, 2012; Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989; Plunkett, 1997). According to Greene and Tichenor (2003), "Parent involvement not only leads to gains in student achievement, it also increases student graduation rates; improves students' self-esteem, behavior, and motivation; creates a more positive attitude toward school among parents and students" (p. 1). When parents take an interest in school, they are taking an active role in connecting their child's two major environments; home and school.

Parental involvement does not mean just volunteering at the school or being involved in parent/teacher organizations. Being an involved parent can be as simple as being aware of a child's school experience, or discussing school activities with them (Blau & Hameiri, 2012). Greene and Tichenor suggested that parents can talk to their children about high and low points of their day, encourage two-way discussion with teachers, volunteer, provide an appropriate space for homework, or even write about school events on a website or local paper (Greene & Tichenor, 2003). All of these suggestions provide ways parents can stay in their personal comfort zones and still be involved. Additionally, schools must be communicative by providing newsletters, online communications, or opportunities for face-to-face interactions.

While some schools struggle to obtain a high level of parent involvement, others cater to a population that finds involvement in school a natural fit. However, when there are many engaged families in a school environment, new challenges are presented, especially when expectations of parents are changed by the administration and new boundaries must be formed, which is what has occurred over the last three years in the specific environment discussed in this record of study. This record of study focuses on describing the relationship between families and administrators when family involvement is already at a high level. When a school has reached a point where the parents understand their roles are important and take these roles seriously, how do administrators balance these sometimes overzealous parents with their own professional agendas?

The second theory that grounded this literature review is that overparenting is a current parenting phenomenon and may affect parent involvement in particular schools. Overparenting is a contemporary paradigm that can begin for parents while their child is still in the womb, and can easily extend into school age and even young adulthood. Some pregnant women research every part of pregnancy and childbirth, create "perfect" birth plans and are stressed out, frustrated, and even devastated if their plans are derailed. The goal is to protect their child, create positive experiences for them, and encourage high self-confidence, "I always make sure to read the various warnings that adorn toys and baby equipment. I've bought the lead test strips and run them across my children's lunchboxes (clean), purchased a radon detector to suss out conditions in our basement" (fine; Ozment, 2011, p. 1). As their toddler grows and reaches school age,

this behavior can turn into action that affects a child's independence and self-confidence. Definitions of overparenting vary, but generally, "overparenting involves the application of developmentally inappropriate levels of parental directiveness, tangible assistance, problem-solving, monitoring, and involvement into the lives of children" (Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, & Montgomery, 2013, p. 569). Recent research has shown that overparenting, or helicopter parenting, can have detrimental effects on a child's development, "All of this hand wringing is making our kids more fearful and less inclined to take risks" (Ozment, 2011, p. 1). Because overparenting decisions can affect a child's academic life, and because it can be a detriment to a high level of parental involvement in schools, it was a critical piece to study in this literature review.

2.2 Relevant Literature

      2.2.1 Obstacles to involvement. Without question, it is critical for parents to be involved in their child's education. Its importance was mentioned in both the federal programs of Head Start, beginning in 1964, and Title I, beginning in 1965 (Plunkett, 1997). Additionally, prior to NCLB, the 1983 document, A Nation at Risk, explained that parents are a child's first and most important teacher (Mother Interview One). A Korean qualitative study, with 34 participants completing semi-structured interviews, found, "most importantly parental attitudes towards education have the potential to influence their children's daily life" (Yang & Shin, 2008, p. 1334). If a parent prioritizes education, the child will as well. This study found that too much of a priority on academics can be detrimental to a child's social development, but the crux of the study, which was to prove that parent attitude will influence child attitude, was successful.

Additionally, particular parent action has been studied, and certain conclusions have been drawn about which choices can positively affect a student's experience more than another has. For example, according to Brandt's interview with Joyce Epstein, if a parent helps her child with homework, the child is more likely to be interested and successful in that school subject. Alternatively, just attending a PTA meeting every so often may not have an effect on student achievement (Brandt, 1989).

It is also important to note that gender plays a role in measuring parental involvement. It has been noted, in a longitudinal three-year study that examined communication with an online school data system, that mothers are generally more active in corresponding with the teacher in comparison to fathers (Blau & Hameiri, 2012). Although I began my research speaking with only mothers during the pilot interviews, the survey included one adult in each household in order to gain a larger cross-section of the population.

Most research on parents and schools focuses on how to get parents involved, (Haynes et al., 1989), and discusses the hurdles various families face, such as language barriers, socioeconomic challenges, or disinterest (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). However, very little research focuses on how to manage an environment where parents are very involved. What does a relationship look like between experienced and strong administrators and active (and sometimes overbearing) parents? What are the boundaries between administrators and mothers and how should those boundaries be articulated? This research hopes to begin to answer that question.

However, there are sociocultural and socioeconomic issues that cannot be overlooked. Some parents may have to work and, therefore, cannot be in the classroom, or may feel intimidated or overwhelmed stepping into a school, and, therefore, do not volunteer:

> The constitution of parental involvement in education is inflected by issues of class, gender, and culture . . . There is little systematic recognition that schools in low socio-economic communities require additional funding in order to provide some of the advantages middle-class children receive at home. (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010, p. 511)

Schools in middle-class areas often enjoy active PTA boards and parent volunteers, who can take the pressure off teachers for particular extracurricular events that boost student and community morale. In schools of lower socioeconomic populations, often teachers take this burden on themselves, and then can feel overextended (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010). This particular study also mentioned a "subtle process of exclusion," whereas parents from different sociocultural backgrounds can feel as though their involvement is not necessary or useful. Perhaps they feel too intimidated to volunteer, attend conferences, supervise field trips, or sometimes, to even physically enter the school.

These types of conflicts can prevent an open and all-inclusive community with honest communication, even if the school is making great effort to include its entire community (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010, p. 511). Often, traditional communication efforts such as surveys (e.g., the one used in this record of study) can be unsuccessful for

low-income and/or minority parents. Perhaps the survey instrument seems intimidating, the parent does not understand it, or feels that it is useless, and, therefore, does not participate (Gillanders, McKinney, & Ritchie, 2012). Other strategies must be employed to engage this type of parent. Researchers who conducted focus groups with "uninvolved mothers" who were in a low-income minority, learned that these mothers prioritize education, and felt that communication with the teacher is important.

The authors suggested home visits, very clear communication, and professional development to help teachers understand the best way to form home/school partnerships with this particular population (Gillanders, McKinney, & Ritchie, 2012). Consequently, it is important to note that when dealing with a diverse population, more than one solution may be necessary to improve parent/school relationships.

2.2.2 Overparenting and parental involvement. The idea of *overparenting, helicopter parenting*, or *lawnmower* parenting is relatively new. There is not yet a formal definition, but researchers have been searching for various ways to define this new cultural phenomenon, and analyze and evaluate its benefits and weaknesses in the long term,:

> A tentative definition of overparenting is that it is very high levels of parenting responsiveness and high demands for child success, often resulting in parental behaviors that reduce demands on the child to undertake actions that would effect change in their own life. (Locke, Campbell, & Kavanaugh, 2012, p. 261)

How can this affect a child's school life? According to Locke, Campbell and Kavanaugh (2012), "Parents who are highly responsive to their child may be more likely

to invest intensive parental effort, and ask people and institutions the child encounters to alter policies and procedures to maintain an ideal and pleasant life for them" (p. 260). Additionally, in the long term, "youngsters whose parents intervene inappropriately-offering advice, removing obstacles and solving problems that kids should tackle themselves-actually wind up as anxious, narcissistic young adults who have trouble coping with the demands of life" (Alecia, 2013, p. 1). This type of parental behavior can interfere with administrator and teacher policy, especially if parents disagree with policies that are currently in place and believe that is their place to spearhead change.

Why are some parents turning to this type of parenting philosophy? According to Time Magazine, "this generation of parents, born after 1965, waited longer to marry and had fewer children. Families are among the smallest in history, which means our genetic eggs are in fewer baskets, and we guard them all the more zealously" (Gibbs, 2009, p. 4). Feeling protective toward one's children is not a new phenomenon, but this idea of smoothing out all bumps in the road is more recent and perhaps, due to this idea of waiting longer to have children and having smaller families, "Although error and experimentation are the true mothers of success, parents are taking pains to remove failure from the equation" (Marano, 2004, p. 59). Overparenting can also show other characteristics. For example, "in their zeal to be good parents, they monopolize their children's time. Instead of providing guidance, they try to mold their children to meet their own personal needs" (Garland, 1981, p. 17). This type of parenting can place immense pressure on a child as he or she tries to be his or her own independent person and the person his or her parent is encouraging. As evidenced in research, overparenting

can have various faces. Being too pushy, being too friendly, and making too many excuses for their children are all characteristics of someone overparenting.

This particular parenting culture can be evident in a school where mothers want as much information as possible, all of the time, and believe that their agenda for their child is by far, the most important. In a British study completed in 1998, a researcher analyzed data from 120 parents and 29 teachers in 2 schools. He analyzed data from both middle-class and working parents, and determined, "while middle-class parents are more likely to 'interfere' than working parents, they are also more likely to work in harmony with the school and the teachers" (Crozier, 1998). Additionally, he noted that when parents and teachers goals aligned and the views were the same, all stakeholders were happy. However, when there were disagreements, "criticisms of parents or indeed a deficit model of parents developed" (Crozier, 1998, p. 132). He determined that although parents and teachers form a partnership, teachers have expectations of parents that ultimately, should be the guiding boundary for parents. Respecting these boundaries can prove to be more difficult as some parents choose to be more involved in their child's education, "Professional judgment, as a result of the potential power of parents, is more likely and increasingly to be under threat" (Crozier, 1998, p. 129). Therefore, the author noted that teachers are going to need to assert themselves as professionals in certain circumstances, "As parents gain more confidence in utilizing their 'rights,' it will become increasingly important for schools to harness their power" (Crozier, 1998, p. 135). Educators should be confident in their ability to teach and then assert these skills with parents.

The current generation of children, referred to as *Generation Z* (Malone, 2007), was born into a world of constant communication, instant gratification, and the ability to know information almost immediately. Overparenting, as defined by Locke, Campbell, and Kavanaugh (2012) "is very high levels of parenting responsiveness and high demands for child success, often resulting in parental behaviors that reduce demands on the child to undertake actions that would effect change in their own life" (p. 261). Parents who fit this definition have a tendency to "hover" over their children to be aware of their every decision, or, they may smooth the road, eliminating as much negativity as possible, so the children do not have to experience anxiety, failure, or frustration. With the current opportunities that technology offers, to be in touch every minute of every day, parents who want to be overinvolved in their child's life can actually be aware of almost their every move. Therefore, Generation Z, born into a world where communication is continual and knowledge is instantaneous, lends itself to the particular parent who wants to be included in her child's every move. It is almost too easy.

Parents and children in Generation Z are given more opportunities for new knowledge and improved communication due to ubiquitous technology, "Intensive parenting is enhanced by the parental use of new technologies, such as the Internet and cellular phone. These technologies enable access to vast amounts of information about child rearing and facilitate the monitoring of children" (Bernstein & Triger, 2010, p. 1226). Parents can learn about every developmental stage their child experiences, Google any minor problem a child may have, and even monitor their whereabouts. These instant resources, although useful and educational, can provide parents with multiple

opportunities for high anxiety and competitiveness as they compare their child with peers. Additionally, some elementary aged children are given cell phones and iPads, and often bring these to school for academic engagement. However, these seemingly useful and protective policies come with a warning,:

> The changing environment and climate of fear have meant that many parents are restricting children's movements to such an extent these children will not have the social, psychological, cultural, or environmental knowledge and skills to be able to negotiate freely in the environment. (Malone, 2007, p. 513)

Keeping track of a child's every move may make the parent feel safer when in reality it is restricting the child's ability to make independent choices and feel confident in his or her own abilities, "Overparenting also includes components of excessive parental involvement, risk aversion, and anticipatory problem solving by the parent, in an effort to keep the child out of harm's way" (Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, & Montgomery, 2013, p. 570). Parents who fit into this category may be more involved in schools in order to gain more knowledge about the school, manage their child's school life, or may be trying to anticipate issues and solve them before their child is affected.

It is unrealistic to assume that parents and teachers or administrators will never disagree. It is also unrealistic to believe that parents will give administrators and teachers full reign over decisions affecting their children. However, the way the parent handles disagreements can be instrumental in how a child perceives her parent's role at school, her teacher's or administrator's authority, and her own self-confidence. How should a parent react when a child comes home complaining about a teacher, a failed grade, or a

bullying situation? Research suggests that simply listening, asking questions, or offering

to talk to the school authority figure can make the child feel validated, but not

overprotected (Churnin, 2009).

Because this is a complex issue that is non-linear, incremental, and extremely

personal, small solutions will be the only way to see a change. Researchers have

suggested, "developing a parental involvement guidebook for parents and teachers that

includes information about what works, developing cluster workshops for parents and

teachers" as opportunities for setting boundaries and open discussions. Teaching parents

how to help from home will also be key in establishing a parent/school partnership

(Family-School Partnership Lab, 2002). Additionally, it is important to "listen to parent

concerns, allow parents' expertise to shine and share information and resources with

them when legally permissible" (Wells, 1992, p. 47). Understanding specific parent

needs and creating resources that are pertinent to specific parent needs will also create a

higher level of parent trust, "Schools that also serve as parent resource centers—

providing specialized services for families . . . parenting classes and workshops, along

with an interesting and challenging educational program for the children—increase the

likelihood of reducing student mobility and increasing the quality of the children's

education (Plunkett, 2009, p. 327).

If minor movements toward additional trust and communication are

accomplished, the administration may deal with less parent anxiety, and parents will be

able to leave their child in the school's care without the constant worry that something is

going to go wrong. However, because we are talking about parents and their children,

finding a solution may mean changing the entire current and popular paradigm of parenthood, pulling back on the overinvolved culture of this particular population and relying more on the school to do its professional job . . . and that may be an impossible challenge.

List of most significant research and practice studies:

- Parental involvement. (2004). Retrieved from http://www.ncpie.org/nclbaction/parent_involvement.html

- Blackmore, J., & Hutchison, K. (2010). Ambivalent relations: The "tricky footwork" of parental involvement in school communities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 14*(5), 499-515. doi:10.1080/13603110802657685

- Blau, I., & Hameiri, M. (2012). Teacher-families online interactions and gender differences in parental involvement through school data system: Do mothers want to know more than fathers about their children? *Computers and Education, 59*(2), 701-709. doi:10.1016/j.compedu.2012.03.012

- Crozier, G. (1998). Parents and schools: Partnerships or surveillance? *Journal of Education Policy, 13*(1), 125-136. doi:10.1080/0268093980130108

- Cuban, L. (2001). *How can I fix it: Finding solutions and managing dilemmas.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

- Fan, W., & Williams, C. (2010). The effects of parental involvement on students' academic self-efficacy, engagement, and intrinsic motivation. *Educational Psychology: An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology, 30,* 53-74. doi:10.1080/01443410903353302

- Gibbs, N. (2009, November 20). The growing backlash against overparenting. *Time*, 1-7.

- Gillanders, C., McKinney, M., & Ritchie, S. (2012). What kind of school would you like for your children? Exploring minority mothers' beliefs to promote home-school partnerships. *Early Childhood Education, 40* 285-294. Doi:10.1007/s10643-012-0514-0

- Greene, P., & Tichenor, M. (2003). For parents particularly: Parents and schools. *Childhood Education,* 79:4 242-243, doi:10.1080/00094056.2003.10521202.

- Harland, T. (2014). Learning about case study methodology to research higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development, 33*(5), 1113-1122.

- Haynes, N., Comer, J., & Hamilton-Lee, M. (1989). School climate enhancement through parental involvement. *Journal of School Psychology*, *27*, 87-90.

- Locke, J., Campbell, M., & Kavanaugh, M. (2012). Can a parent do too much for their child? An examination by parenting professionals of the concept of overparenting. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counseling, 22*(21), 249-265.

- Malone, K. (2007). The bubble-wrap generation: Children growing up in walled gardens. *Environmental Education Research, 13*(4), 513-527. doi:10.1080/13504620701581612

- Marano, H. (2004). A nation of wimps. *Psychology Today*, *37*(6), 58-62.

- Plunkett, V. (2009). Parents and schools: Partnerships that count. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 2*(4), 325-327. doi:10.1207/sl532761espr0204_2

- The Family-School Partnership Lab. (2002). *The social context of parental involvement: A path to enhanced achievement: Study I: What motivates parents to become involved in their children's education.* Nashville, TN: Peabody College, Vanderbilt University.

- Wells, L. A. (1992). Getting parents involved in the classroom. *Contemporary Education, 64*(1), 46-48.

- Yang, S., & Shin, C. (2008). Parental attitudes toward education: What matters for children's well-being. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *30*, 1328-1335.

2.3 Significance of the Literature Review

The literature review provided background on two major topics. The first was the framing of the problem. Why should parents be involved in their child's education and what are the advantages to the students? What research has been done to show the benefits of parental involvement in various school environments? Researching this question brought me to the second part of the process, which was to research the current culture of overparenting and how this type of parenting has contributed to the overall zeitgeist of the parenting paradigm.

When looking at a solution, the culture of parenting was an important factor to consider, because it is going to be critical to see their anonymous perspective in their communication with the administration. Specific studies that talked about case study, content analysis, and qualitative data collection through interviews were useful in creating the solution tool.

III. PROBLEM SITUATION

3.1 The Problem Situation

3.1.1 Learning more. Through transcribed interviews, informal conversations, observations and written data, three conflicting values emerged; trust, power, and best interest. In ranking these values, it became evident that power and control were the most critical. Various mothers spoke about how they wanted to know immediately when there was an issue with their child. Administrators commented that they truly have the best interest of the student in mind, but often, this idea of best interest conflicts with the parent's idea of best interest. It became evident through all of this data collection that the power scale is always tipping one way or another, and each stakeholder is subtly fighting for the upper hand.

The value placed second on the table was student safety. Every decision administration makes concerns student safety, and of course, this issue is paramount to parents as well. Administration makes a point to bring up student safety whenever there is a conversation about students. In her tenure of three years, the principal has tightened school security in order to protect student safety. Although parents were not always thrilled with these changes, violent events in schools in the last 10 years have made student safety a more critical priority. In a school like this one, where parents feel as though school is just an extension of home, and in previous years have had the freedom to roam the hallways at their leisure, tightening school security was a challenge.

Trust and personal responsibility were the last two values illustrated in the table.

Trust is the backbone of this record of study, and the value that it is hoped will improve

through the solution implementation process. Although some mothers mentioned that

other parents do not know how wonderful the school actually is, others were quick to

argue that administration is either not present enough, or not communicative enough.

The table illustrates the statements made by stakeholders in these subjects.

Table 1 Rank-oriented table of values, participants, and illustrative statements

Rank	Category/Value	*Participant	Illustrative Statement
1.	Professional values: power/control	Mrs. Smith Parent participant 3 Parent participant 4 Dr. Tate	I get complaints if I'm not at my desk. If I'm sitting out front, I get a complaint. If I'm walking around the front hallway, I get a complaint. The parents want to know that I'm here, at this desk, all day. If you talk to my kid, just notify me. How hard is it to just jot down an email? Parents look at the situation like it's a "me me" situation.
2.	Organizational values: student safety	Dr. Tate Mrs. Leeds Mrs. Smith	Student safety is our number one priority, above all else. Sometimes people don't understand how serious my job is. If I make a mistake, a kid's life could be in danger. The parents want to know that I'm here at my desk, all day.

Table 1 Continued

Rank	Category/Value	*Participant	Illustrative Statement
3.	Social and political values: trust	Parent participant 4	Parents need to understand their child isn't the only child in the classroom. The parents need to have more faith, not to say I have full faith.
		Parent participant 2	I'm not sure the level of trust is there. I can't say I trust them when I don't know them (the administrators)
		Mrs. Leeds	Parents don't need to know everything, and they want to.
		Parent participant 4	I want to know why the parents don't just give the administrators the benefit of the doubt. It's like their assuming they don't have our kids best interests in mind, but I'll go to bat for them because they do. I don't think there's much trust. Parents don't know how good they have it here.
4.	Social and political values: personal responsibility	Mrs. Smith	The parents do everything for the kids. They carry their backpacks. But at school, they do things, like sweeping the floor at lunch and the parents are surprised to hear that the kids do those things at school.
		Ms. Jones	A lot of parents bring things in and say, "My son forgot . . . no, I forgot to pack my son's folder." The responsibility is not on the child but on the parent. I want to know when the parent is going to let the child take responsibility for themselves.

Note: Participants who are parents are completely anonymous. In terms of school personnel: (a) Mrs. Smith: Security guard of nine years, (b) Mrs. Leeds: school nurse of 13 years, (c) Dr. Tate: principal of three years, (d) Ms. Jones: school secretary of 24 years, (e) Parent participant 2: Parent of second grader, (f) Parent participant 3: Parent of third grader, (g) Parent participant 4: parent of third and fourth grader.

3.1.2 Problem or dilemma. Although, for the most part, mothers spoke highly of

administration, some also spoke and acted as though the trust was not there.

Additionally, although both stakeholders have the child's best interest in mind, the working definition for each stakeholder was different, and this caused friction when there could be cooperation. Because of this situation's complexity, a specific solution is impossible. Instead, the solution will be a compromise, and, therefore, the issue has been defined as a wicked dilemma. According to Cuban, a problem is "a situation in which a gap is found between what is and what ought to be" (Cuban, 2001, p. 4). Problems are identified based on perceptions and subjectivity. Often, solutions include closing a gap and can be clear-cut. Alternatively, a wicked dilemma is messy. Key features include "competing prized values, unattractive choices, compromising, and managing, not solving" (Cuban, 2001, p. 12). Because this issue is messy, personal to the participants, and can only be solved with a compromise, it has been identified as a wicked dilemma, not a tame problem.

3.2 My Journey in the Problem Space

3.2.1 Considering alternative viewpoints. Initially, I viewed this problem as a cultural issue. As Cuban noted, cultural problems and dilemmas focus on "norms, rituals, expectations, and beliefs shape behavior; conflicting norms, etc. cause problems" (Cuban, 2001, p. 27). The problem was defined as a dilemma because the crux of the issue is communication, trust, and positive relationships, which only occur when expectations are similar. When conflicting norms cause problems, relationships become more negative. To reframe the dilemma, I spoke with the principal and assistant principal of the school, as well as one of the mothers I had interviewed. To consider an alternative viewpoint, I will reproduce her answers here. The dominant formal and

informal norms, beliefs, and rituals in the organization varied. However, for this particular mother, communication, pressure for perfectionism, and advocating for the children are common issues faced within this school. She shared that social media pressures are significant, and that mothers today live to an impossible ideal, "We hold ourselves up to a standard that is just a picture" (mother of a fifth grader). This pressure for perfectionism encourages insecurities and instead, parents do things to excess. She discussed the fact that many parents are well educated, smart, and in this media heavy society, have almost too many influences telling them how to parent and what their role should be.

In her opinion, better communication and relationships could be aided through inviting parents to attend school events more often. To her, volunteering is not just about the children, but also about creating a relationship where there are open communication and respect. Her sentiment echoed one of the first things the principal said, which was, "relationships come out of the trust realm." However, there also needs to be a cultural change to somehow lessen the pressure on "overparenting." Current pressures contribute to a society of needing and wanting "perfect" children. When that impossible ideal is not realized, the next step is only disappointment. This problem is becoming less about this one school, but more as a microcosm of today's society, today's parent, and the unique challenges schools face when dealing with the "instant gratification" paradigm.

3.2.2 The evolution of my current understanding. During the fall semester of 2014, after obtaining IRB approval, I interviewed eight mothers and two administrators. Four of the mothers were stay-at-home parents, and four were working parents. All had

children currently attending North Elementary School. Additionally, I interviewed the principal and assistant principal. The interviews were semi-structured and focused on demographic questions, but there were also questions about the relationship between mothers and administrators, their ideal and real relationship, its strengths and challenges, and what could be done to improve communication and trust. Through these interviews, I was able to gain a clearer understanding of the culture of the school, the expectations of the mothers and administrators, and the crux of the challenges facing the stakeholders. Trust, communication, and balance of power were recurring themes in the interviews.

What I began to see during the interviews was the complicated nature of this issue. These were focused, loving, protective, and driven parents, pressured by society's need for perfect children and families, who believed that their advocacy for their child was the best and sometimes, the only option. While they may not have intended to be overbearing, sometimes, they found themselves in situations where a conflict arose between their point of view and an administrator, and in these situations, they had a difficult time seeing the problem through a different lens. Alternatively, the administration, who are experienced, professional, and caring, believed that they always have a student's best interest in mind, but often, these opinions did not match with the parental opinion. Tension had been created between two stakeholders who felt strong about a certain issue. Therefore, there was a conflict where there could be and should be collaboration.

The goal behind the solution of creating an all school survey was to improve communication, help parents to understand that administrators are working toward the best interests of their children, and give parents a voice to discuss their concerns.

IV. PROPOSED SOLUTION AND METHODS

4.1 Audience

This record of study was intended to help to create a stronger and more trusting relationship between the administration and parents at North Elementary School. North Elementary School is a rural prekindergarten through grade five school that enrolled 750 students last year. The principal and assistant principal of the school have been with the school for three years and four years, respectively. Both administrators are very active with parents and attend both school and out of school events. Now that the survey is complete, it is up to the administrators to use it in the most appropriate and effective way.

4.1.1 Ideal scenario/vision. School staff and parents at North Elementary School work toward the best interest of the children. High involvement is evident in the long hours put in by the staff, the ever-present parents, the active PTA, and the opportunities provided by the school for parental involvement and communication with the administration. Stakeholders, who include mothers and administrators, should believe that they are (a) heard, (b) respected, and (c) trusted. Currently, parents often believe that the school is an extension of the home. They have high expectations for the school, which the school tries to meet. In an ideal situation, mothers would not undermine administration but instead trust their professional experience.

4.1.2 The real. It is difficult for the ideal vision to be realized at this time because although every stakeholder has the best interests of the children in mind, best

37

interests are defined differently for each stakeholder. Additionally, because parents had much more freedom in the school before this principal's tenure, they still believe as though they have more "rights" than they do, and often push boundaries.

Many types of conflicts prevent a united goal for students, and instead split the stakeholders, making compromise difficult. If this problem becomes worse, this lack of respect could undermine the goals of the school. Additionally, this problem could cause students to worry about issues that are not in their scope of responsibility. Ultimately, student attitude toward school could be negatively affected if this issue continues.

4.1.3 Consequences for the audience. Without a foundation for creating similar goals and moving toward these goals, there is dissent when there should be cooperation. Some mothers are unhappy with the communication, stating that they should hear about problems from the administration, not their children or others. If the dilemma continues on the same path, friction may become worse, eroding trust even further. Students will be the ones ultimately jeopardized in being unable to reach their full potential. The solution should, (1) create an awareness of the issues for both sides, (2) create a plan where both sides can be heard and respected, (3) handle the issues discussed, even if it is only to validate concerns.

4.1.4 My role. I created a survey based on conversations from the pilot interviews. This survey was available online and in hard copy to the families from the school during the month of May 2015. After obtaining the anonymous data, I analyzed and synthesized the responses. I used percentages, graphs, and examined themes from the open-ended questions, which I then presented in paper and oral form to the

administration in July of 2015. After discussing the data summary, we brainstormed

solutions for each common theme. The administration can take the data and decide how

to proceed from here.

V. THE SOLUTION

5.1 Solution 1

Two solutions were considered, and after speaking to classmates and professors, the more effective and anonymous solution was chosen.

5.1.1 Solution 1: The problem. Parents want to be heard and respected. Some believed that communication with administration needed to be improved. Others believed it was satisfactory. Some mothers believed that there was not enough "real" communication, but instead, false pretenses. Administrators believed that they were communicating as best as they could, but also sometimes could not change a policy or might not have agreed with a parent's decision.

5.1.2 Solution 1: Part I. The first brainstormed solution was to create an opportunity for three roundtable discussions or open forums throughout the semester. With strict boundaries in place to ensure the discussions were constructive and not destructive, parents could have a place to discuss issues with the administration. The administration would also have the opportunity to present their professional background and give a short talk on certain issues and then allow for discussion. The administration could hear the frustrations and notice any common themes.

5.1.3 Solution 1: Part II. Next, the administration would try to address any major concerns through parent education nights, changes in policy, or just validation of concerns, even if they were not able to take action.

5.1.4 Solution 1: Favorable outcomes. Parents will feel heard. Administrators also need to be heard and respected. It is important that parents recognize that data collected during round tables might inform some, but not all policy decisions. Administrators will hear concerns. Administrators will explain their background and create awareness of their professional experience. Parents will understand some complexities behind certain issues.

5.1.5 Solution 1: Data collection to support a favorable/not so favorable outcome. Surveys were handed out at the end of each roundtable discussion to all participants to measure satisfaction.

5.2 Solution 2

5.2.1 The problem. Parents want to be heard and respected. Some believed that communication with administration needed to be improved. Others believed it was satisfactory. Some mothers believed that there was not enough "real" communication, but instead, false pretenses. Administrators believed that they were communicating as best as they could, but also sometimes could not change a policy or might not have agreed with a parent's decision.

5.2.2 Solution 2: Part I. There would be anonymous data collection, such as an online survey or a suggestion box that would be available to one adult member of each household at the end of the spring semester. The anonymous nature would help parental figures discuss matters of a more personal nature. The survey would focus on issues such as communication, school security, and discipline, and would be written by me. A

41

suggestion box would be more open ended. If using a survey, I would measure the data and synthesize and categorize themes.

5.2.3 Solution 2: Part II. After discussing the data with administrators, we would then choose one theme, such as assessment, and hold an evening seminar on this topic, to educate and answer questions. If this evening were successful, we would choose another topic and do another one. Once I completed my project, the administration could continue holding night seminars to handle one topic at a time.

5.2.4 Solution 2: Favorable outcomes. Mothers will feel heard and validated. Administrators also need to be heard and respected. It is important that parents recognized that the survey was completed, and the data may inform some, but not all policy decisions. The administration will hear from many voices and understand common frustrations. Trust and relationship building will occur.

5.2.5 Solution 2: Data collection methods to support a favorable/not so favorable outcome. Initial survey data will measure participation and issues discussed. A second survey can be distributed on the night of evening seminar, to see if the seminar satisfied all participants and built trust.

5.2.6 Input from others. I spoke with three stakeholders; the principal of the school, the assistant principal of the school, and a working mother. The assistant principal was the one who changed the plan the most. He mentioned that the district, being conservative, would most likely only approve a plan that involved parents anonymously participating. Therefore, he suggested that in the second solution, we create an online survey with specific questions based around the topics gleaned from the

pilot interviews. He then explained that we could choose a few themes that seemed to be the most important to the parents, and hold seminars to discuss these issues. When I spoke to the principal, she also preferred this solution and mentioned that she would like to have one seminar, see the participation and satisfaction, and then do another. Both administrators noted that this type of solution would give them much more data from a larger population than a simple roundtable discussion. It would also provide an opportunity to see which issues parents would like to discuss, and could end up being a longer-term solution than just one evening seminar.

Alternatively, the mother I spoke with did not like the idea of anonymous surveys because she believed parents should have to own up to their opinions. She noted that parents might be more nasty and dramatic if they knew they did not need to put their name on the document. When drafting the final solution, I considered the district requirements and the fact that both administrators supported the idea of the online survey and evening seminars with parents.

5.2.7 Classmates' input. My classmate preferred solution two but gave a few suggestions to help strengthen the strategy. Primarily, he suggested using a combination of both multiple choice and open-ended questions in the initial survey to obtain the qualitative data behind the quantitative data. He also suggested placing a word limit on the open-ended responses so that parents did not just write pages on one particular topic. He then suggested that I create a newsletter for the parents following the seminars to explain the action taken. Additionally, he suggested inviting all parents to take the survey, not just the mothers.

I chose to implement a few of my classmates' suggestions in my final solution. I added three open-ended opportunities to the survey, and I invited one adult from each household to participate in the survey, not just mothers. I did not choose to create a parent newsletter because it was decided that my final action piece would be the meeting where administrators and I privately discussed the survey results. We did not have an evening seminar. Additionally, I did not add a word limit because I wanted participants to feel free to express their thoughts.

5.2.8 Field advisor's input. My field advisor stressed the need for a survey following the evening seminars to see if this type of data collection worked for the parents. She also preferred solution *two* and explained that the beginning of the next semester would be the perfect time for the survey. As the principal of the school, she believed we could send out a letter explaining that it was a new semester and a time to hear parent voices. However, when we spoke later in the school year, she also noted that sending the surveys out in early May could give us the summer to analyze and discuss the data, in order to start the new school year with new and relevant information.

She stressed that we keep it positive, using terms such as "greatest areas of interest," instead of "greatest areas of concern." She explained that we should give out a hard copy and link to the survey on the website. The survey should be short and succinct, with no more than 20 questions. When designing the final solution, I used her suggestions for how I handled the delivery of the survey and its details.

5.2.9 Others' input. Finally, I spoke with my ROS advisor about the proposed solutions. She also preferred solution two. She believed that solution one would be too

controlled, and she also understood why administrators would not want to step into a forum for which they were not prepared. She suggested creating a parent advisory group to the administration. This group could be responsible for discussing parent concerns with the administration, and then would have the ability to go back to the parents and explain why policies were in place, or if any changes could be made. This group would share the process with concerned parents and explain what administrators were doing to solve the issues. With this solution in place, frustration on both sides could be alleviated. Both stakeholders would feel heard, validated, and respected.

When speaking of solution two, she explained that the key would be to ensure that administration takes an active role in addressing issues and concerns. She suggested showing the data from the surveys in the first evening seminar to illustrate to the parents what issues were examined and how the majority felt in terms of positive and negative feedback. She then suggested that administrators choose one or two issues, tell parents these would be the focus this semester, and then move toward a solution. Taking action would be key.

Although I agreed with my advisor's suggestions, I explained that forming an advisory committee would be very difficult in this conservative district, but that did not mean it was not the right conversation to have. When I met with the administration that summer to go over the synthesized data from the survey, a parent representative advisory group did actually come up as a way to encourage better communication between parents and administrators. For example, perhaps each grade could have a parent representative who may meet with administration once a month, bringing anonymous

issues to the conversation. Administrators could explain their policies, or choose to make changes, but the representatives could take these conversations back to the parents.

5.3 The Proposed Solution

      5.3.1 Informing the solution. After speaking with stakeholders, my classmates, my advisor, and the Human Resources department of the school district, I had a much clearer picture of how this process would occur. It also became clear that the open forum solution might possibly be destructive and combative, and not a constructive situation. Additionally, the process of how to collect anonymous data became clear, as well as how to handle the data and the roles of both stakeholders in the process. The audience was the administrators, (i.e., principal and assistant principal) who would continue to grow their relationship with the parents after the formal research was over. The benefit of using a data collection device such as a survey is that they now have copious amounts of information, and can choose salient topics for discussion and education based on the priorities of each semester.

5.4 The Final Solution

      5.4.1 The problem. Parents and administrators want to be heard and respected. Some mothers believed that communication with administration needed to be improved. Others believed it was satisfactory. Some mothers believed that there was not enough "real" communication, but instead, false pretenses. Administrators believed that they are communicating as best as they could, but also sometimes could not change a policy or might not agree with a parent's decision.

5.4.2 The solution. I devised a short, anonymous survey through Google docs that was somewhat modeled after previous surveys used by the district, but mostly modeled after concerns brought up during the pilot interviews. Questions were formatted using a Likert scale, but there were some open-ended questions that related to various topics discussed in last semester's semi-structured interviews with mothers and administrators. At the beginning of May of 2015, the parents were given a letter with the link to the survey. It was available to them for one month. The tone was positive, with the goal of encouraging communication. The survey was available in hard copy and online. After collecting survey data, I noted and categorized themes of greatest interest or concern, based on the answers chosen on Likert scales and open-ended comments. Survey topics included issues such as communication, discipline, special education, and trust.

After analyzing the data, I met with the administration over the summer to privately discuss the opinions on the survey, both positive and negative. After this conversation, the administration could choose how to proceed and what the next steps would be. We chose not to have an evening seminar because the conversation would no longer be anonymous, and additionally, based on past seminars like this, attendance may have been difficult to obtain.

5.4.3 Favorable outcomes. The administration will become more aware of issues frustrating and pleasing the parents. The survey provided a sampling of the 750 family population, so it was more evident what parents were looking to change and what they believed was successful. Administrators are now able to confront one issue at a time

and move toward creating solutions when possible, even after the formal research was completed.

5.4.4 Data collection methods to support a favorable/not so favorable outcome. The initial survey developed a foundation with which to build the process of taking action toward a solution.

VI. METHODS

6.1 Statement Regarding Human Subjects and the Institutional Review Board

In the summer of 2014, I submitted a proposal for IRB review in order to complete 10 interviews during the fall semester of 2014. It was approved for expedited review and after two revisions, was approved in early September of 2014.

In February of 2015, I approached IRB for an amendment to the proposal to ask permission to complete the survey. I also received permission from the district to continue the study. It was approved by IRB as well, and I was able to complete the survey.

6.2 Goals, Objectives, and Activities

Table 2 Goals, objectives, and activities associated with the problem solution

Goal	Objective	Activity
1. Administrators will become aware of the issues frustrating parents, and will become aware of the subjects that are satisfying parents.	A. Administrators will read and evaluate synthesized data from the online survey made available to all parents.	1. An online survey will be available to one member of all families. The survey has about 20 questions that asked for opinions on issues identified as important to the parents.
II. Trust and communication between parents and administrators will grow stronger.	A. Administrators will understand in more detail the policies that satisfy and challenge parental trust.	1. Based on survey data, administrators and parents may hold a meeting to discuss major issues.

Table 2 Continued

III. Parents will feel heard. Administrators will feel supported.	A. Parents will be able to discuss the issues they find important and understand administrator point of view.	1. Administrators may put a plan in place that alters policy, or if unable to, may express why this is not possible. Sometimes validation of concerns is all that is necessary.

6.3 Guiding Questions, Information Collection Methods, and Rationale for Methods

6.3.1 Guiding questions. The guiding questions focused on exploring whether the recent research about millennial parents and their hovering tendencies were evident in this school. Additionally, they focused on gaining trust between stakeholders and improving communication. When administrators are aware of the specific issues challenging and satisfying parents, they will able to decide which subjects to focus on and to begin a path to change. Therefore, the open-ended, guiding questions were the following:

1. What are the major issues that frustrate and satisfy parents at North Elementary School?

2. Which issues should be a priority of administration? Are there possible solutions to these issues, or are some of them impossible to change?

3. What action might be taken by the administration to solve the major communication issues facing the school?

4. How can administrators continue with their professional agenda and still create an open and communicative relationship with the parents of the school?

6.3.2 Collecting data/methodology. Through inquiry, there is change. The theory grounding the method of data collection is the case study. A case study "involves the study of a case as a specific illustration" (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). The setting is North Elementary School, and in studying the relationship between administrators and parents, and exploring the possible lamppost markers of the overparenting phenomenon present in the school, future researchers may be able to use this particular case study as a foundation for their own inquiry.

As noted in research, it is important to go into a case study with a plan. Stake argued, "to set out upon an unstructured, open-ended study is a calamity in the making" (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 453). Additionally, Stake argued that the research questions must emphasize a particular theme or idea, in order to organize the study and keep it focused. By using the pilot interviews to gather data that were then used to create the survey, the study was focused, strategic, and manageable.

There are advantages and disadvantages to using the case study methodology. Case studies are specific but subjective, and can be so individualized that they are limited to one particular context. Therefore, a solution that works for one particular context may be entirely wrong for another (Harland, 2014). Replications may not be available, but it is possible to learn from a case study and use this information to inform a similar study.

This past fall, I conducted 10 pilot interviews and used classification to find common themes, which were then the foundation of the online survey conducted in the spring of 2015. Classification is a method of data collection that "looks for categories,

themes, or dimensions of information . . . several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). Emerging themes, created by coding the conversations, helped to create the online survey. The themes emerged from the stories told by the mothers and administrators, quotations that discuss specific topics, or common stakeholder values.

During the fall semester of 2014, I interviewed four working mothers and four stay-at-home mothers, along with both of the administrators. In these semi-structured interviews, we discussed, among other topics, what an appropriate relationship between administrators and parents should be, what the realistic relationship is, and how the stakeholders believed the relationship could be improved. While some mothers were complimentary of the relationship, others were critical. This dichotomous data brought me to creating the next step of data collection, which was the online survey, available to all families. The questions on this survey were derived from the information collected in the pilot study completed in the fall of 2014, as well as conversations with the principal and assistant principal. Parents responded to multiple-choice questions and a few open-ended questions that discussed issues such as discipline, special education, and communication.

When the survey was complete, I analyzed and presented the data to the administration during a private meeting over the summer. The administrators and I then discussed the results, and now, if they would like, they can move forward with any action they believe necessary.

6.3.3 Summary

Table 3 Goals, objectives, activities, guiding questions, and assessments associated with the problem solution

Guiding Questions	Data Collection Methods	Rationale for Methods
What are the major issues that frustrate and satisfy parents at North Elementary School?	In the spring of 2014 or fall of 2015, offered a specifically written Likert scale anonymous survey with a few open-ended responses that ask parents to rate their satisfaction with multiple important issues at the school. Used content analysis to identify the most common communication challenges, but also the issues parents are most satisfied with.	Unlike interviews, an online survey is available to everyone, and could yield many participants. The anonymity created a safe space for parents to voice true opinions.
Which issues should be a priority of administration? Are there possible solutions to these issues, or are some of them impossible to change?	Following data collection and analysis of the survey, the administration held an informal conversation with me where we discuss the data. Conversations were partly transcribed as administrators decided, which issues to focus on and if there were some that do not have solutions.	Giving the administration a chance to privately discuss the data helped them to retain the ability to be prepared and to choose which issues to focus on during the semester.
What action can be taken by the administration to solve the major communication issues facing the school? How can administrators continue with their professional agenda and still create an open and communicative relationship with the parents of the school?	Administrators will discuss the data among themselves and choose how to proceed.	Giving administrators time to discuss the data, analyze its meaning, and choose how to proceed will provide them with time for strategizing and prioritizing.

6.4 Instruments and Analysis

      6.4.1 Protocols and instruments. The first instrument used to collect primary data was a group of semi-structured questions that I created based on my previous observations at the school. The questions focused on the mother's relationship with the administrators, the history of their interactions, and how they believed relationships could be improved. The principal and assistant principal were also interviewed, and these questions focused on what they believed the appropriate and best relationship between administrators and parents could be. In developing these questions, I consulted my Texas A&M advisors. While interviewing the stakeholders, it was important for me to be aware of my own biases while listening to the answers. I am a parent as well, so it was important for me not to incorporate my opinions into my follow-up questions. Because the interviews were semi-structured, I had the opportunity to probe for answers that were more detailed when I wanted to learn more about the subject being discussed. However, as much as I may have wanted to share my opinions with the stakeholders, I needed to be careful not to sway the answers and instead respond with phrases such as, "Tell me more about that," or "What happened that made you think this?" Although I was initially reading from an interview script, I was also having a conversation with each interviewee. To keep the participants talking about their subjects, in their voices, with their opinions, my responses needed to be encouraging, but unbiased.

      I designed the online survey with a small amount of help from my field advisor. The principal gave me a survey she used, and this example helped to develop a little of the template for the survey for North (see Appendix B). Additionally, the answers to the

questions given in the interviews provided a solid idea of the topics that needed to be covered in the survey. I used Google Docs. Google Docs imported the data into Microsoft Excel, where I analyzed percentages and graphed the numbers. I was the only one able to access the data. However, anyone who had the short link to the survey was able to access the survey. This could pose a minor reliability issue because technically, anyone could take the survey, if he or she had the link, even if he or she were not part of the North population. However, we distributed the link through school communication at the beginning of May of 2015 and had it available through hard copy. Therefore, most likely, the participants were all parents of North students.

To keep the instrument reliable, I gave the survey to three parents whose children did not attend North Elementary School. These parents attested to the questions being clear and easy to understand. Many of the questions were formatted to a Likert scale, but there were a few open-ended opportunities as well.

Finally, after analyzing the data, I met with the administration over the summer to have a private discussion about the synthesis. During this conversation, we discussed possible solutions to each major topic. Now, they can choose how to proceed from here and which topics should be pursued at the start of the 2015 school year.

6.4.2 Analysis of data. Data from the interviews from the fall semester of 2014 was analyzed using content analysis. I looked for common themes in discussions and placed them into categories. Additionally, I used frequency counts to count the most common frustrations and satisfactions in the Likert scales. There were open-ended questions in the survey, and those were analyzed using content analysis. As Creswell

stated, content analysis "looks for categories, themes, or dimensions of information . . . several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). The process of coding, "aggregating the text into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code" (Creswell, 2103, p. 184). These categories created lampposts that became the boundaries by which to sort the data. Once I analyzed the data from the initial survey using content analysis and frequency counts, I discovered common themes that could be used in any solution the administration chooses to implement. I created charts that separated data into categories such as "trust" and "school security." For example, "75% of parent participants believed that they have had positive interactions with administrators."

6.5 Timeline

- September 2014: obtained IRB approval for initial pilot interviews

- September-November 2014: Completed 10 interviews; 4 working mothers, 4 stay at home mothers and the principal and assistant principal of North Elementary School. All mothers had children currently attending North Elementary School. Interviews were semi-structured, formal, and transcribed.

- November 2014: Met with field advisor and assistant principal to discuss the initial idea of the two initial solution ideas. Received feedback from them as well as from classmates to alter the solution.

- December 2014: Met with field advisor to discuss more concrete plans for the solution, worked on survey.

- January/February 2015: Completed survey and approached IRB for amendment to the study to include the online survey. Began to obtain district approval.

- January/February 2015: Requested district approval to implement the solution in May of 2015.

- January-March of 2015: Completed, presented, and received approval for the ROS proposal from advisors and committee.

- Early May 2015: Notified parents of survey.

- May 7-15 of 2015: Uploaded online survey and distributed hard copies.

- June/July/August 2015: Analyzed survey data and met with field advisor to discuss data summary. Met with principal and assistant principal to discuss the summary of the data.

- August of 2015: Began writing the rest of the record of study.

- September of 2015: Finalized record of study, and with permission of advisors, sent to committee and set a date for defense.

- October of 2015: Defended Record of Study

6.6 Issues of Reliability, Validity, Confidentiality, and other Ethical Concerns

6.6.1 Reliability. Before the online survey was distributed, it was given to three parents whose children did not attend North Elementary School. The parents read the survey and commented to me whether the questions made sense, if they were clear, and if there was a comprehensive understanding of each question. These answers were documented through informal notations of each conversation.

6.6.2 Validity. I created the survey based upon the issues discussed during the fall of 2014 interviews. My field advisor and Texas A&M chairs looked at the final version of the survey before it was administered. Do the questions measure what we intended to measure? Do the questions match topics discussed in the parent interviews from fall of 2014? Content was focused on collecting demographic data as well as their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with specific issues concerning their relationship with the administration. Subjects in question included discipline, special education communication, special education services, transportation, and school safety.

6.6.3 Confidentiality. The online survey, available to all families at the school, was completely anonymous. There were hard copies available for those families unable to access the Internet, and a drop off box in the office ensured confidentiality for those families as well.

VII. RESULTS

Parents received a letter where I reintroduced myself, reminded them of my previous internships, and asked for participants to the survey. The letter included the link to the survey, through Google Docs, and it was available in hard copy form in the office. Parents were assured in the letter that all collected data would remain anonymous, and the name of the school would also remain anonymous in the final paper.

Initially, the survey measured demographic characteristics. It asked parents to identify their own identity, (e.g., mother, father, grandmother, or grandfather,) their child's grade level, family income and asked parents to identify if they worked or stayed at home. Next, I asked them to estimate their hours spent volunteering at the school per week.

After the demographic questions, parents were asked to answer questions about relationships, trust, and school policies. The parents were asked what their relationships with administrators were like, whether they trusted the principal and assistant principal, and how they would felt and act if they disagreed with the principal and assistant principal. Trust and communication were measured with these questions.

Next, the survey moved on to academics, asking parents if they believed children with special needs were accommodated appropriately and if they believed parents should have more say in the academic and behavioral policies at the school. Finally, parents were asked if they believed school security was appropriate and relevant.

The three open-ended questions measured why parents viewed trust between stakeholders as important, to give an example if they believed that they had ever overstepped their boundaries as parents, and finally, asked parents if there was anything they would change about the current administration.

There were a total of 31 participants; 30 mothers and 1 father. No grandparents took the survey. This result matches with the initial conclusion mentioned earlier in the paper that mothers are generally more involved in their child's schooling. There was a mostly even split in terms of child age ranges, with 45% of participants children in grades K-2 and 55% of participants children in grades 3-5. Additionally, 52% of survey participants identified as stay-at-home parents while 48% identified as working parents. The median income of the survey participants was between $90,000-110,000. The city's median income, according to the city census, was $69,743 between the years 2009-2013. Therefore, the median income of the study participants was greater than the median income of the city, which makes sense, because the area where North is located is a higher income area of the city.

For the purpose of this study, *volunteering* was defined as spending time in the school. When asked about how many hours a week they volunteered at the school, 45% of participants did not volunteer at the school at all. Thirty-nine percent volunteered between one and five hours per week. However, 94% believed that parent volunteering is critical to student success in this particular environment. This mismatched result became a priority in the final discussion with administrators because it was evident that

although a high majority of parents believed volunteering was important, their presence in schools was slim.

As noted in Figure 1, 66% of participants had a family income of between $90,000-$110,000 per year. As the yearly incomes lessened, so did the participants. The fact that so many of the participants were of a higher family income may have skewed the data toward families with more money, (who may then have more formal education, more time to volunteer, and more time at the school) but without knowing the average family income of the school, which is information I was not privy to, it was impossible to know if the participant family income split is illustrative of the actual demographic at the school. However, because the income bracket of participants was high, and the actual volunteer percentage was 45%, below half, it may be safe to assume that the actual percentage of volunteers, if looking at the entire school population, may be lower.
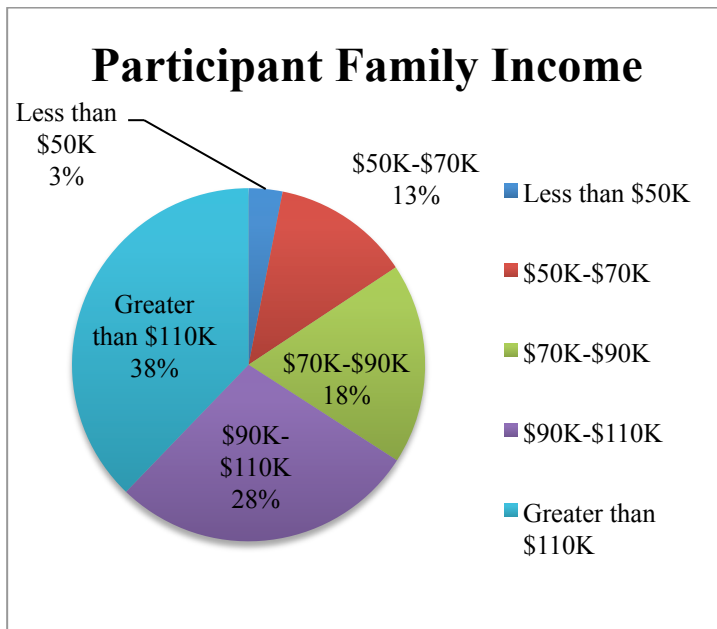
Figure 1 Family income.

As noted in Figure 2, the grade level spread was relatively even among the survey participants. While fourth grade is one of the larger grade levels in the school, it represented only 13% of the survey participants, with parents of third graders taking the lead with 28% of participants. However, 46% of participants had a child in grades K-2, while 53% of participants had children in grades 3-5. This close to 50/50 spread is useful because, when looking at the percentages when answering questions about trust, relationships, and communication, one grade level was not so grossly over- or underrepresented, which means that in this sample, opinions were similar across grade levels.
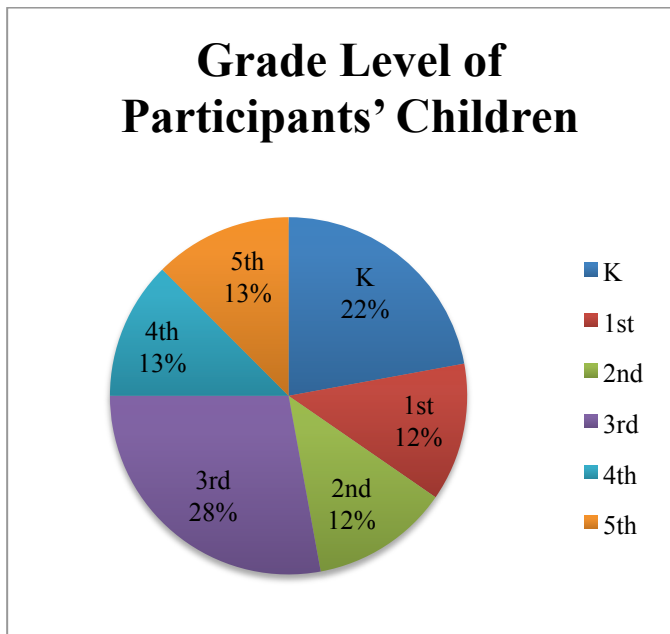
Figure 2 Grade Level.

The vast majority of participants, as shown in Table 5.3, trust and communicate well with the administration. In looking at these percentages, it seems as though parents and administrators have a strong relationship, and in the final meeting, the principal was pleased with these data:

> I am thrilled that 85% of parents feel like they have a positive relationship with us and even that 77% believe we have a positive, working relationship. They know that it's okay to disagree with us . . . they feel we have an open door policy . . . so many of them feel like they can trust us even though we may disagree. That repertoire is give and take. (personal communication, July 13, 2015)

These percentages reiterate that parents generally do trust and respect administration. The questions probed further, asking participants if they believed it was "okay" if

administrators disagreed with parents, and if they believed communication was strong and appropriate. The majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed with these statements on the Likert scale.

Table 4 Trust and relationships

71%	Trust administration
85%	Believed they have had mostly positive interactions with the principal and assistant principal
77%	Believed they have a positive, working relationship with administration
81%	Believed that it's okay if administration disagrees with them
74%	Believed that if they have a concern, it is promptly addressed by teachers and/or administrators

From just the responses from Table 5, it seems as though actually, parents and administrators have an excellent relationship. However, these results reinforce the results from the pilot interviews. The surface of trust is there, but, as shown in Table 6, when issues arise, it becomes more of a power struggle. When looking at Table 6, the results became more complicated. Although most participants have respect for administrators and feel satisfied with their relationship, they still ultimately feel protective over their children and any decisions made concerning them.

For example, 74% believed they should have the final say over any decision concerning their child, and 65% believed they have the right to "go up the ladder" if a policy they disagrees with was not changed. This high percentage suggests that even though participants say they "trust" administrators and are "okay" with disagreements, if a real issue were to become a problem, many of these parents may be very quick to take action against those who disagreed. Fortunately, 81% of participants say this type of problem has never been an issue, but the cello and bus incident and the example given by a participant in which she brought her young daughter to an event, both described earlier in the paper, are key examples of this pattern of behavior. In both cases, parents disagreed with the decision made by the administration and then brought the issue to every higher administrative level until the policy was ultimately changed, or the person was reprimanded. This behavior is in line with the answers to similar questions asked in the survey.

It is unrealistic and incorrect to ask a parent to completely give another person the final say on a decision related to their child, especially in this current parenting culture of hovering and overparenting. However, it is important to respect and understand the point of view of administration; they need to be able to make decisions and not feel undermined. There are multiple layers to this dilemma, and this was why the final meeting with administrators was so important to the data collection. In that meeting, we went over the answers, brainstormed possible solutions, and discussed ways to open communication even further in order to help stakeholders understand each other. Every stakeholder should be respected, but this takes a foundation of trust, which needs

to be adjusted continually. During this meeting, we were able to brainstorm ideas to encourage trust. These ideas will be discussed further in the next section.

Table 5 Policies

74%	Believed they should have the final say over any decision concerning their child
65%	Believed that if a policy is made and they disagree with it, they have the right to go up the ladder until the policy is changed.
81%	Say this (the above) has never happened
61%	If the policy is not changed, it stays their concern until addressed
29%	Had no opinion/unable to judge this question

Prior to completing the survey, pilot data suggested three themes prioritized in parents minds; trust, control, and student safety. The concept of best interest was also discussed during pilot administrator interviews. The administration mentioned many times that although both stakeholders had the best interests of the children in mind, the definitions for this concept were different, and, therefore, the source of some of the tension.

The term *best interest* was never used in the survey; instead, the question was worded, "Why is trust important?" However, in answering this question, one-third of participants used the phrase "best interest," when discussing their answer. Because this

phrase presented itself organically in the survey, it became a prioritized issue in the final meeting with administrators. Administrators had already mentioned it many times in our initial conversations, and then it was brought up by the parents in the survey. Table 7 illustrates the comments made by the parents that included the term best interest.

Even in the participant answers, the concept of how to use the term best interest varied. Whereas for some it was used in a positive and general way, "I trust the administrators and know they have always had my child's best interest!," others used the term best interest in a critical way, arguing that administration acts in the best interest of the school or the best interest of a political agenda before the best interest of the child. However, what exactly does that mean? This term has a distinctive definition to each person using it.

It became obvious when categorizing the open-ended responses that the idea of best interest was important to the parents, as it came up in conversation during the interviews, and then often in the survey. The difficulty lies in the subjective nature of this phrase. To a parent, the best interest of his or her child can mean one thing, but to an administrator, who sees the child in an entirely different environment, best interest can mean something else. In the final meeting with the administrators, we discussed this concept for quite some time.

Table 6 Best interest concept according to survey participants

Participant 1	If there is not a level of trust between parents and administrators that they have the best interest of the students at heart, then it will be difficult to maintain good standing as a school.
Participant 2	Trust is important so that all feel comfortable in knowing that everyone makes decisions in the best interest of the child. I do not have trust in the administration.
Participant 3	I trust the administrators and know they have always had my child's best interest!
Participant 4	I do not have complete trust in the administrators. Sometimes it feels as though there is somewhat of a "political" agenda instead of my children's best interest.
Participant 5	I do not have ultimate trust that the administrators will act in the best interest of MY children because I have seen them act in the best interest of the school and the policies over my children.
Participant 6	If we can understand the issues better, then we can trust them to make the right decisions for our children. Without that trust, and information flow, I can't be sure their (children's) interests are the number one priority.

The principal explained, "I like that the term 'best interest' came out because that is our goal as well. . . . We have a little bit of a variance on understanding of what is best

interest, but we are looking at the child as a whole in the school environment and not in their home, and that makes a big difference. . . . I think every parent should be their child's advocate. . . . We may not have the balance, but I'm pleased to see it" (July 13, 2015).

The common goal for both stakeholders is the success of the child. However, as explained by both the principal and assistant principal in our final meeting, the parents see the children at home, in an entirely different environment and, therefore, may not prioritize the same issues that the school does. At school, children act different, have different priorities in their day, and are not seen in a vacuum, but among peers of varying levels. When discussing how to take this concept further, we brainstormed a solution that may create more communication between stakeholders. This solution will be detailed further in the discussion section.

Another important theme discussed in the question "Why is trust important?" was school security. As the principal explained in our final meeting, "I'm glad they understand what trust is really all about. This is their child's home most of the day. I'm glad they really understand that trust is critical" (personal communication, July 13, 2015). Best interest and school security are connected issues, because although best interest has to do with providing a strong academic environment, it can also have to do with security and safety of the children, and participants noted both of these ideas in their discussion of best interest. In the last few years, the administration has tightened security in the schools. For example, they have locked more doors, created codes for exterior doors, not allowed parents to walk students to classrooms, and began requiring

background checks for volunteers. Fifty-five percent of the survey participants said that school safety was sufficient and relevant, but one commented that it was lacking after school and during evening activities:

> I am concerned about security. There have been several occasions where I have been allowed to walk in, go down the halls without the pass from the front desk. The security for the after school enrichment classes is a joke. People just walking in from every door, no checking of IDs at the desk, etc.

Although only one participant made a truly negative comment about security, the administrators took it seriously and discussed how to handle this opinion. This discussion will be explained in more detail later in the paper.

The last open-ended question of the survey asked participants if there was anything they would change about the current administration. Forty-two percent said nothing. The analysis of the other 58% yielded three major themes; school safety, academics, and the phrase best interest, which will be discussed in more depth in the next section.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Parental involvement is a key factor in student success and motivation (Fan & Williams, 2010; Fan, Williams, & Wolters, 2012; Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989). In a school such as the one studied here, parental involvement is not necessarily the traditional volunteer-in-the-classroom-join-the-PTA type of volunteering one would assume. Forty-five percent of survey participants did not volunteer, as defined as spending time in the classroom, but 52% believed parents should have more say in the academic and behavioral policies at their school. Additionally, 65% believed that if a policy was made that they disagree with, it was their right to go up the ladder until it was changed. Finally, 61% also identified with the statement, "If the policy is not changed, it stays my concern until addressed."

These statements echoed the sentiment of the culture of overparenting, which as discussed in the literature review, and defined by Locke, Campbell, and Kavanaugh "as very high levels of parenting responsiveness and high demands for child success, often resulting in parental behaviors that reduce demands on the child to undertake actions that would effect change in their own life" (Locke, Campbell, & Kavanaugh, 2012, p. 261). The participants of this survey trusted the administrators on a day-to-day basis, but with the reserved right to challenge them when they felt threatened. This type of culture creates a subtle but constant power struggle. The goal of the survey, especially of the open-ended questions, first was to find if this phenomenon of overparenting existed in this school, then to identify issues that were frustrating and pleasing parents, and finally,

to give administrators a chance to privately learn about these issues and create plans of action to help foster more positive relationships and higher levels of trust and communication.

The study was guided by four questions:

1. What are the major issues that frustrate and satisfy parents at North Elementary School?

2. Which issues should be a priority of the administration? Are there possible solutions to these issues, or are some of them impossible to change?

3. What action might be taken by the administration to solve the major communication issues facing the school?

4. How can administrators continue with their professional agenda and still create an open and communicative relationship with the parents of the school?

The first question was answered through both the interview and survey process. By using the semi-structured interviews to identify issues that concerned parents, I created the survey, in order to further analyze these issues of academics, school security, trust, and communication between the parents and the administrators. Issues identified included an environment that is too focused on testing and SOLs, the two stakeholders varied definitions of the phrase best interest, school security, trust, politics, and communication. Looking at the data, the most prevalent themes included school security, trust/communication, and best interest. During the final meeting with administrators, we focused on answering the last three guiding questions. The administrators decided to brainstorm an action plan for each of the major issues brought up in the survey. Ideas

ranged from inviting parents to sit on committees, to encouraging parent education in special education procedures prior to eligibility meetings, to asking parents to create a definition of best interest. This section will go into further detail about these ideas.

As administrators began to create plans that would create a higher level of trust and more effective communication, they began the journey to answering the fourth guiding question, which will be a long process of encouraging open communication and establishing a higher level of trust.

8.1 Call to Action/Future Research

During the final meeting with the administration, we discussed action plans for each theme that was prevalent in the pilot interviews and then in the survey. In the following section, each theme is presented with a summary of its synthesized data and the initial action plan, which was brainstormed in the final meeting.

8.1.1 School security. Although the administration has spent the last three years tightening security, this issue came up for one-third of the survey participants when asked about trust. Student safety is paramount to both administrators and parents. A few of the safety comments were as follows.

After browsing these comments, and noting that school safety was an issue of concern for the parents, the administrators discussed an action plan that would include educating the parents on current policies and why they are in place, in order to heighten confidence. Additionally, they also acknowledged that participant four's comment was correct in terms of after-school security, but budget constraints did not allow for after-school or evening security; instead, the principal and assistant principal take on that role.

While they would both like to have school security after hours, it is not in the budget right now. From this conversation, the principal suggested creating a parent safety committee or inviting parent volunteers to serve on the safety committee. These liaisons could help educate parents on the details of school safety, and parents could bring concerns to this parent volunteer.

Table 7 School safety comments

Participant 1	Because they have my children a great deal of the day. I need to trust anyone with that responsibility.
Participant 2	My kids are under their ultimate care so I'd better have a trusting relationship with the administrators.
Participant 3	I need to be able to know that he is safe and treated with respect.
Participant 4	I am concerned about security. There have been several occasions where I have been allowed to walk in, go down the halls without the pass from the front desk. The security for the after school enrichment classes is a joke. People just walking in from every door, no checking of IDs at the desk, etc.

However, as we moved further into this conversation, the assistant principal, who has a prior military background, added that he did not want parents on a safety committee because "I don't want them knowing my vulnerabilities" (personal

communication, July 13, 2015). He believed it would be inappropriate for parents to sit on safety committees because it is not in the best interest of school safety. If parents knew every safety procedure in place, then the confidentiality would be flawed. This conversation was illustrative of one of the major issues dividing the stakeholders. While administrators believe that there are issues, such as school security, where parents should not know every detail, parents want to be consistently informed of the decisions made in the school. However, it is in the students' best interest that not everyone is privy to security procedures at the school. There are also some issues with school security over which administration does not have control. For example, a parent brought up wanting school security after hours, but administrators explained that this concern, while valid, is not financially possible. These issues would be easier to manage if there was a shared view of the best interest of the students. Parents need to trust administrators, even if they cannot always be told all of the information.

Instead of creating a committee with parent volunteers, the administrators discussed the possibility of holding an evening where school safety is addressed as an individual issue. This way, administrators could share the information they felt comfortable sharing, and parents could become more educated about an issue they felt strong about. They did note in this discussion that past evening seminars with topics such as study skills were met with very poor attendance. The hope for a seminar on student safety would be that it had been mentioned in the survey as an issue that parents were passionate about, and may then have higher attendance.

8.1.2 Academics/special education. During the final meeting, the principal

mentioned that both administrators "do our best to stay current as possible and provide

professional development for administrators, but special education is a floating target

because it can change" (personal communication, July 13, 2015). Our discussion focused

on helping parents stay informed and educated about the special education process. To

do this, they discussed pointing parents toward the Parent Resource Center as they begin

the process of eligibility. As the assistant principal indicated, "I've had some parents

attend eligibility meetings and not know what the process is. Parents didn't know the

Parent Resource Center was available." They discussed mailing a letter to parents after

the referral is made to strongly encourage them to attend a Parent Resource Center class,

so they are able to learn the process prior to the eligibility meeting. Additionally,

handing out flyers about the Parent Resource Center can help parents become aware of

the resources available.

A study done in 2014 examined the relationships between parents of special

needs students and administrators. The purpose was to discover what administrators

could do to create more trusting relationships. Like this study, the 2014 study examined

the perspectives of the parents. The researchers found:

> while parents reported they believed administrators were working in the best
>
> interests of their child, some parents worried about repercussions when they
>
> approached principals with concerns for their child. Parents did not report that
>
> this had happened in the past; it was a fear for a future event. (Allen & Burns,
>
> 2014, p. 77)

This conclusion is fascinating because it shows that parents' lack of trust may not come from anything tangible, but an irrational fear that stems from the natural protectiveness of their own child. To combat this complex challenge, administrators must be open and honest about the process, so parents do not feel intimidated while sitting in IEP or eligibility meetings. In our final meeting, the administrators suggested making better use of the Parent Resource Center. This could be the first step to helping educate parents that administrators really are completely on their side.

8.1.3 Best interest. Initially, this discussion became about the generational gap. The assistant principal echoed the sentiments discussed in the literature review; the idea that this generation of parents struggles with distinctive challenges that, of course, are naturally different from the generation of leadership at this school. As the assistant principal commented:

> You have parents who have a different set of generational norms, which they look at things with a lens that is sometimes not congruent with what they believe to be what they have experienced. That tends to be where this best interest issue comes up. What we as educators view as best interest and what parents view may be dramatically different. (personal communication, July 13, 2015).

Both administrators felt strong about their feelings toward the children attending the school. "These are our kids," the principal explained, her emphatic tone echoed by the vigorous nodding of the assistant principal (personal communication, July 13, 2015). However, because the administration sees students in an academic environment and does not have an intimate relationship with the children, they are less biased toward making

decisions than parents can be. This does not mean, of course, that parents do not know what is best. However, in certain situations, the best decision may be one with which parents disagree. In addition, although 81% of participants believed it was all right if the principal or assistant principal disagreed with them, 74% believed they should have the final say over any decision concerning their child. These dichotomous percentages suggest that although "disagreements" are okay, parents would not be pleased if the actual action taken was a decision with which they did not agree.

This concept of best interest is a tricky term with varying degrees of emotion, subjectivity, and protectiveness. To get a fuller picture of parents' ideas of this concept, the natural follow-up study would be a survey where parents answer the question, "What does the term 'best interest' mean to you?" The principal suggested this analysis during our final meeting as we discussed the subjective nature of the phrase and how to determine a common theme among stakeholders. If the administrators could discern a particular definition or even categories of definitions, it may be helpful to help communication with parents and to encourage a more trusting relationship. Finding a common definition could also help to close the generation gap that may cause some of the tension between stakeholders.

8.1.4 Communication/volunteering. The administration believed that volunteering needed to be addressed as well. Ninety-four percent of parents believed that volunteering is a critical piece of student success at the school, but nearly half of participants did not volunteer at the school at all. With this piece of data, one can conclude that volunteering is important to the population of parents, but that some do not

volunteer, even though they believed it is a priority to student success. As found in previous research, "the more parents trusted the people who worked most closely with their children and the administrators who supervised them, the more they wanted to participate in the child's classroom and school" (Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Tschmann-Moran, 2004 as cited in Allen & Burns, 2014, p. 66). In the survey completed for this study, it was clear that the majority of participants did trust administrators to be with their children and keep them safe, and believed that their relationship was positive. However, the trust lessened when asked about whether administrators should be trusted with the final word on decisions. If there were a higher percentage of volunteers, perhaps the parents would see a more personable side to the reason decisions are made, and may be more trusting of administrators to make decisions in the best interest of the children.

It is important to inquire why parents are not choosing to volunteer, even though the majority believed it to be a critical part of student success. A follow-up study could examine why this phenomenon exists, asking parents the challenges they face when deciding whether to volunteer. However, during the final meeting, the administrators wanted to take some action to begin to solve this dilemma. Their suggestion was to make the PTA more inclusive so participation would become higher. As they noted, often, it is the same few mothers who put together and manage many of the school events, and other parents may feel left out or not needed. Making the meetings, the events, and the discussions more inclusive may encourage new voices and new participants. However, as they specified in conversation, it is important for parents to recognize that

volunteering is not specific to working in the classroom or joining the PTA. There are many other avenues for parents to volunteer.

8.2 Limitations

The pilot study and the interviews were always intended to be small in order to get a more intimate idea of the issues concerning parents and administrators. However, the survey was intended to reach a much larger audience. The initial goal was 200 participants of the 750. However, it was incredibly difficult to obtain participants. The letter was sent to families twice, and the link to the survey was posted by the PTA board on its Facebook page, but still, the final participant tally was 31. This difficulty could have been averted had I been given the opportunity to email parents or discuss the study with them individually, but the district did not allow this type of contact. My contact with participants was limited to the letter. The Facebook link was posted by a PTA board member.

Additionally, because of the small number of participants, the analysis was limited in its scope. However, the spread across grade levels and working versus stay-at-home parents was close to 50/50. Forty-five percent of participants had children in grades K-2, and 55% of participants had children in grades 3-5. Fifty-two percent of participants are stay-at-home parents, and 48% of parents work part or full time. This even split did show some evenness in the participant sample, even though it was small. However, another limitation is that the parent participant sample may not be illustrative of the entire population of the school. While I was given the number of children attending the school, I was not given any breakdown of the parent population, and so,

while having almost a 50/50 split of stay at home vs. working parents, this may not be an accurate representation of the demographics of the school.

8.3 Conclusions

In this yearlong study, it became evident that the parents and administrators at this elementary school have a very complicated relationship. Although the trust from parent to administrator is present, it is easily disrupted if an issue presents itself that angers or upsets the parents. In addition, although 81% of parents said there had never been such an issue, over half explained that if there were, they would believe that they had the final decision, and would pursue an issue up the ladder until the policy was changed. This type of relationship creates a continual but slight shift in control; administrators have it until parents believe something needs to shift; then, parents believe that they should step in to change policy. This type of tension can prevent administrators from doing their jobs effectively.

Can parents ever implicitly trust others with their children? Should they? Of course not. Due to the inherently protective relationship between parents and their offspring, parents will not and should not just blindly give authority to another, even a professionally educated one. However, once administrators have proven their agendas are genuine, the goal would be for parents to place a strong enough level of trust in administrators so that the two stakeholders can have a productive conversation about issues, where both parties respect each other's beliefs and opinions.

The survey, which was created based on pilot interviews, yielded four major themes; security, academics, best interest, and communication. These concepts

intertwine with each other; one does not exist without another. In the final meeting with administrators, we discussed the survey data. The administrators then brainstormed a call to an action plan for each major theme illustrated in the survey. This meeting took place in the summer, giving administrators some time to think about how to manage each of these concerns strategically throughout the school year. Administrators were pleased with the general consensus that parents trusted and enjoyed working with them, but wanted to take the concerns seriously and address them as best they could, with the hope of creating a stronger, trusting relationship with a higher level of communication.

In adding this study to the canon of research on parental involvement and parents relationships with administrators, it is important to note that parental involvement is not just measured by volunteer hours at school, and parent satisfaction is not easily measured by a few questions on a survey. The relationship between parents and administrators is a complicated one, with layers of trust and communication that need to be worked on and managed continually. Expectations from both parties will change based on circumstances, but, if communication lines stay open, and both parties understand that each stakeholder views the child from his or her own lens of best interest, communication and trust will flourish.

8.4 Scholarly Significance of the Study

This study begins to examine how the current subculture of overparenting may affect the public school, and specifically evaluates the relationship between administrators and parents in a school where parents expect to be continually informed. Parents who fit this definition have a tendency to hover over their children, to be aware

of their every decision, or, they may smooth the road, eliminating as much negativity as possible, so the children do not need to experience anxiety, failure, or frustration. Creating this type of environment can have ripple effects on the other adults in the child's life, such as teachers and administrators. How this phenomenon, which is present in this particular school, affects the relationship of trust between administration and parents is just the beginning of what can be studied in terms of the current cultural zeitgeist of parenting and its effects on the other adults in a child's life.

The current parenting culture of some of the American middle to upper middle class can affect the structure and contextual culture of the school as shown in the data collected through this past year. Through the conversations with mothers and then the survey answers, it became evident that in this particular environment, parent needs, not just parent participation, can affect educational processes. Whether this is a positive or negative effect could be the focus of another inquiry.

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Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Fall 2014

Interview Questions for Administrators

What is your name and position with the school?

How long have you worked at Southeastern in this position?

What is your relationship like with the parents? Can you explain?

Can you talk about a time where you had a successful partnership with a parent?

Can you talk about a time where you had an unsuccessful partnership with a parent?

What do you think the parents want in terms of their relationship with you?

What do you see as an appropriate role with the parents? Is that your role in reality?

Why or why not?

What types of boundaries should be set between parents and administrators?

Are those boundaries regularly followed? Why or why not?

What strengths do you feel this population of parents brings to this school?

What challenges do you feel this population of parents brings to this school?

How do you feel the relationship between parents and administrators could be

improved?

Interview Questions for the Mothers

How old are your children/what grade level?

How would you describe your socioeconomic status? For instance, high income, middle

income, or low income?

Do you work outside the home? If so, is it full time or part time?

How would you classify your ethnicity? For instance, Caucasian, black, Hispanic, etc.

What is your involvement like within the school? Are you as involved as you'd like to be? Why or why not?

What is your relationship like with their teacher? The administrators?

Can you talk a time where you've had a successful partnership with the administrators?

Can you talk about a time where you've had an unsuccessful partnership with the administrators?

What do you think your relationship with the administrators should be like? Do you think there is a difference in the relationship between the principal and vice principal? Why or why not?

Is that the relationship you have in reality? Why or why not?

What types of boundaries should be set between parents and administrators?

Have you ever overstepped your boundaries as a parent? If so, why?

What strengths do you feel that you bring to the school community?

How do you feel the relationship between parents and administrators could be improved?

Sample Parent/Community Survey

(All identifiers have been removed.)

Please take a few minutes to complete the following survey about our school. Read each statement and rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement. The rating is: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = No Opinion or Not Able to Judge, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree. **PLEASE RETURN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO SCHOOL BY FRIDAY, May 9.** Thank you for your input.

School/Community Relations

In our school, there are opportunities for parental involvement

....S   A   N   D   SD

Teachers communicate with parent..S   A   N   D   SD

I can get an appointment to meet with a teacher ....S   A   N   D   SD

I can share my concerns or get an appointment to meet with the administrators or our

school when needed ....S   A   N   D   SD

Parents feel welcome in our school ....S   A   N   D   SD

Information regarding school programs and activities is communicated effectively

....S   A   N   D   SD

Our parents (i.e., PTA, advisory groups, and volunteers) are actively involved in our

school ....S   A   N   D   SD

The office staff is courteous when communicating with the parents

....S   A   N   D   SD

School Climate

Students are safe at our school ....S   A   N   D   SD

The staff has high expectations for all students ....S   A   N   D   SD

Students feel a sense of belonging and school pride ....S   A   N   D   SD

The accomplishments of the students are recognized ....S   A   N   D   SD

Students are treated fairly at our school ....S   A   N   D   SD

Administrators enforce school rules consistently ....S   A   N   D   SD

Teachers enforce school rules consistently .... S   A   N   D   SD

Parents and teachers of our school have a good working relationship with each other

.... S   A   N   D   SD

Comments/Suggestions:

_____

APPENDIX C

School Survey

Please take a few minutes to complete this survey about our school. Your input is highly valued and will help us to create stronger relationships between parents and administrators. The first few questions are demographic, to help us determine the population of the school. The next set of questions will ask you about your experience and how it can be improved. Please use this rating scale: SA = Strongly Agree. A= Agree, N= No opinion or not able to judge, D= Disagree or SD = Strongly Disagree. Choose one answer for each question. Additionally, please take a few moments to give us more detail with your answers to the open-ended questions.

All answers will be kept entirely anonymous. There is no need to state your name anywhere on the survey.

Demographic Questions

I am a _____ of a child/children at currently attending.

Mother   father   grandmother grandfather   other guardian

Please circle the grade(s) your child/ren are currently in:

Pre-K K   1   2   3   4   5

My household income is:

Less than $50,000 per year

Between $50,000-$70,000 per year

Between $70,000-$90,000 per year

Between $90,000-110,000 per year

Greater than $110,000 per year

I identify with the following description:

I work full time outside the home

I work full time from home

I work part time outside the home

I work part time from home

I am a stay at home parent

I volunteer at the school:

I do not volunteer at the school

1-5 hours per week

5-10 hours per week

10-15 hours per week

more than 15 hours per week

I am a PTA board member or very active member.

School/Community Relations

I have had mostly positive interactions with administrators.

SA   A   N   D   SD

I have a positive, working relationship with administrators.

SA   A   N   D   SD

I feel that the administration respects me, my needs, and my opinions.

SA   A   N   D   SD

When I have a concern, it is addressed promptly by teachers or administration.

SA   A   N   D   SD

I trust the principal and assistant principal.

SA   A   N   D   SD

It is okay if the principal or assistant principal disagrees with me.

SA   A   N   D   SD

Open Ended Question: Why is trust important between parents and administrators? Do I have enough trust in the administrators? Why or why not?

School Climate

I should have the final say over any decision made concerning my child(ren).

SA   A   N   D   SD

If a policy is made and I disagree with it, it is my right to go up the ladder until the policy is changed.

SA   A   N   D   SD

Has this ever happened to you? If yes, please explain your process and the results, and why you took the steps you did.

If the policy is not changed, the issue stays my concern until it is addressed.

SA   A   N   D   SD

School security is sufficient. I feel that the security rules are relevant and purposeful.

SA   A   N   D   SD

I believe the administrators should accommodate more of my child's individual needs.

SA   A   N   D   SD

I believe that parent volunteering is a critical piece of student success at our school.

SA   A   N   D   SD

I believe parents should have more say in the academic and behavioral policies of this

school.

SA   A   N   D   SD

Open-Ended Question: If I could change anything about the administrators current

policies, what would it be and why?

APPENDIX D

Data Presentation for the Administrators following the Survey

Demographic Information:

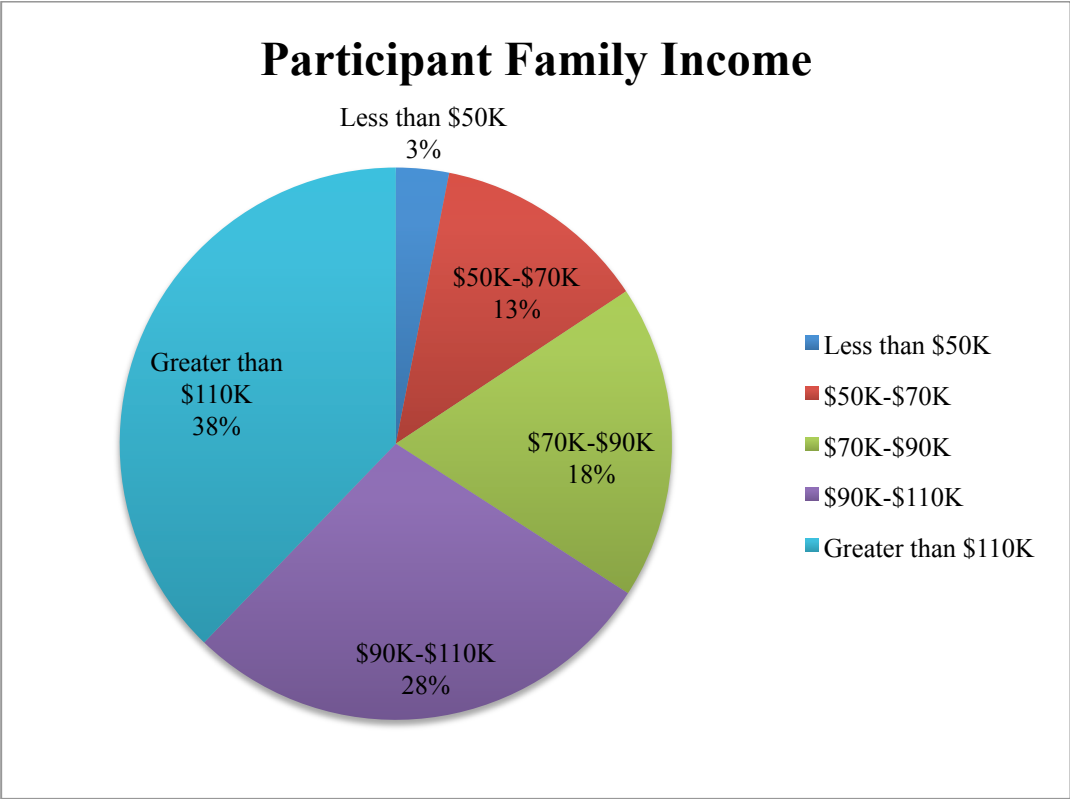There were 31 total participants.

There were 1 father and 30 mothers.

Income:

Sixty-eight percent have incomes of over $90,000 (greater than $110,000 was 39%; the largest percentage of participants).

The median of participant family income in the survey was $90,000-$110,000.

The median of Chesapeake income, according to quickfacts.census.gov was 2009-2013; $69,743.

Participant Family Income

Less than $50K
3%

$50K-$70K
13%

$70K-$90K
18%

$90K-$110K
28%

Greater than $110K
38%

- Less than $50K
- $50K-$70K
- $70K-$90K
- $90K-$110K
- Greater than $110K

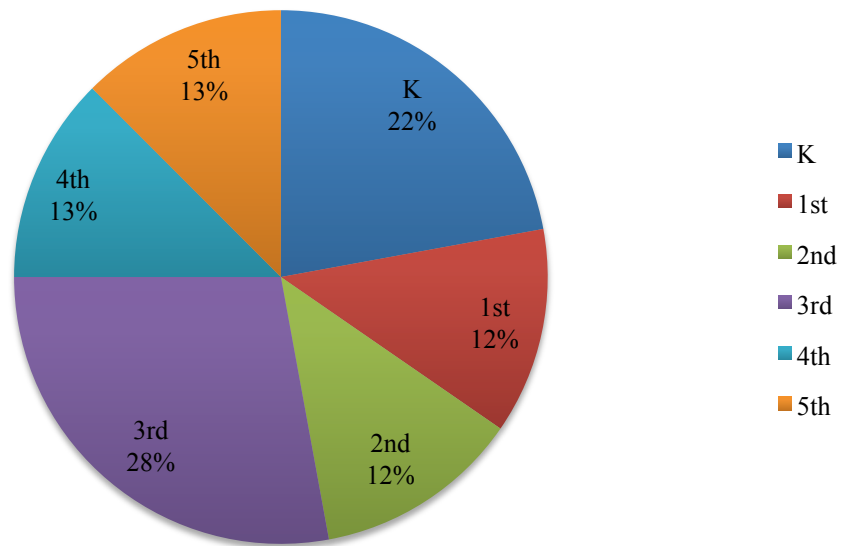Fifty-two percent are stay at home parents.

Forty-eight percent are working part or full time.

Grade Level:

Forty-five percent: Grades K-2

Fifty-five percent: Grades 3-5

Grade Level of Participants' Children

Volunteering:

Forty-five percent do not volunteer at the school at all.

The next largest percentage was 1-5 hours per week at 39%.

However, 94% believed that parent volunteering is a critical piece of student success at our school.

Comment:

I think there could be more parent involvement if younger siblings were allowed to come as well. It is sometimes difficult for me to find a sitter when I volunteer.

Relationships:

Eighty-five percent believed they have had mostly positive interactions with the principal and assistant principal.

Sixty-one percent believed that administrators respect me, my needs, my opinions, but Thirty-two percent had no opinion on this topic.

Seventy-four percent believed that if they have a concern, it is promptly addressed by the teachers and/or administrators.

Trust/Policies:

Seventy-one percent trusted the principal and assistant principal.

Seventy-seven percent believed they have a positive, working relationship with administrators.

Eighty-one percent believed that it is okay if the principal and assistant principal disagree with me.

Seventy-four percent believed they should have the final say over any decision concerning my child.

Sixty-five percent believe that if a policy is made and I disagree, it is my right to go up the ladder until the policy is changed.

Eighty-one percent said this has never happened.

Sixty-one percent said that if the policy is not changed it stays their concern until addressed.

Twenty-nine percent said they had no opinion or were unable to judge this question.

Comments:

1. Yes, and I can go up the ladder, but even at the very top we may disagree. The "final say" belongs to the school. Otherwise, there would be chaos. They must maintain the right to have uniformity; there is not time, money, teachers or resources to give every child/parent their own way. However, because it is ultimately my responsibility to ensure that my child is safe and properly educated, I should (and do currently) have the right to remove my child from the school. So in the end, I can "complain" higher and higher, but I have to either abide by their decisions or remove my child from the school. If it is a big enough issue, I could start lobbying for a change of policy before the school board (or even enter the political process/scene to lobby for change), but at that level it will up to the voters, most of whom are not paying attention. In most cases, I would have to assume that other parents (like me) did not have the time, energy, money, or patience to pursue that course for change.

2. We just moved here a few months ago, so there hasn't been anything to date.

3. Honestly, I am also a homeschool parent, and I send this child to school because it was required by social services until the adoption was finalized. He is still there because it works for him and for our family, but if I ever had an issue that couldn't be resolved at the school level, I would most likely bring him home and educate him here.

N/A 5 (added in)

Why is trust important?

Communication:

1. Trust is important because you are relying on the administrators to nurture your child while you are not able. If I can't trust them, how can I let my child learn from them. Also, if the administrators don't trust me to do my part how can they do theirs. I do have enough trust in the administrators. I allow them to make decisions for my child when I am not there. I have to trust that they know what they are doing.

2. Trust is important because, without it, my children wouldn't be attending this school!

1. Great work!

2. Any issues my child had this year were addressed by the teacher, and we never had any need for more than that. I'm not able to comment intelligently about what policies might need changing. It's working for us so far!

Student Safety:

1. Trust is important because we have placed our responsibility to educate and care for our children into the hands of somebody else—people who are not family, and are (at the beginning) strangers. I have to trust the administrators enough to feel that the children are safe, and are learning and growing in a public school environment. If I can't obtain/maintain a certain level of trust in the administrators, I would have to remove the children from school (and homeschool).

2. There has to be trust because you are sending your child into an environment where you expect not only a well-rounded education but also protection. I definitely have trust

in my child's administrators. I feel (and have witnessed) that they have my child's best interest in mind.

3. My kids are under their ultimate care so I'd better have a trusting relationship with the administrators.

4. Trust is absolutely a must. They are responsible for my child during the school day. My child would not be enrolled in the school if I did not trust the administrators to do their jobs.

5. Because they have my children a great deal of the day. I need to trust anyone with that responsibility.

6. Trust is important because I am sending my child to them for several hours of his day. I need to be able to know that he is safe and treated with respect even when I am not around. I also need to believe that I can come to them and talk with them about any family issues that may impact my child's school life and that the conversations will stay confidential.

7. I feel like I have to trust the administrators since they have my baby in their care all day. I trust that they have his best interest and safety in mind.

8. Trust is very important—we, as parents, rely on the administration and teachers to help protect and mold our children. I do have trust in the administrators because they have shown support through their actions, support of the teachers and parents and involvement.

9. I do trust them because they have my child the majority of the day.

10. I believe in order to feel comfortable in where your child spends his day and learning then you have to have trust in the people that are teaching your children.

Politics:

1. Because these are my children and their future at stake; trust is critical for me to feel that they are getting the most they can out of their elementary education. I do not have complete trust in the administrators. Sometimes it feels as though there is somewhat of a "political" agenda instead of my children's best interest.

2. Administrators are the final decision at the building level for matters of classroom placements, discipline matters, IEP concerns, and scheduling. A parent has to trust that the administrator is going to act in the best interest of each individual child. I trust the administrators in matters concerning the PTA, but I do not have ultimate trust that the administrators will act in the best interest of MY children because I have seen them act in the best interest of the school and the policies over my children.

3. Trust is important. Sometimes I don't trust the school admin because of the politics of school rules and regulations regarding scores etc. I would like to feel that admin would stick up for a child regardless of the situation, but that's not always the case.

Best Interest:

1. I feel trust is important because the administrators are the people in charge of running a school where two of my children spend the majority of their time (one is in first, one is in 3rd). If there is not a level of trust between parents and administrators that they have the best interest of the students at heart, then it will be difficult to maintain good standing as a school.

2. I trust the administrators and know they have always had my child's best interest!

3. It is important that I trust the administrators because I need to think that they have the best interest of my child in mind. I haven't had enough issues to know if I have trust in them or not. But I would like to think that I do.

4. As parents, we need to understand the motives and intents of the administration. If we can understand the issues better, then we can trust them to make the right decisions for our children. Without that trust, and information flow, I can't be sure their (children's) interests are the number one priority.

5. Trust is important so that all feel comfortable in knowing that everyone makes decisions in the best interest of the child. I do not have trust in the administration. They did not follow through on investigating a teacher's grading material that had not been taught.

6. It is critical that the needs and best interest of the child are always the focal point.

7. I think that many teachers, etc. view caring/concerned parents as "helicopters." I mostly trust the administrators but many times, I've felt that my concerns, issues are brushed aside because they feel that I'm hovering. No one will be an advocate for my child as much as I am and I want that recognized. Many parents definitely do go overboard, but I feel like regardless of the perceived notions about some parents, we all have a right to be heard.

8. Trust is important to help the students have a positive learning experience. The students need to know that all of the grow ups are on the same team and are working for a common goal.

Academics/ Special Education:

Thirty-five percent believed that administrators should accommodate more of my child(ren's) individual needs.

Fifty-two percent believed parents should have more say in the academic and behavioral policies at our school.

1. More individual concern when dealing with issues with the children. In my older child's school, the policies are so general, but they do not seem to consider individual circumstances.

2. The administrators set the tone for the entire school, which affects every interaction my child has in each classroom or learning setting. The trust I have in our administrators helps our family to know that my child's special needs will be accommodated to the best abilities of the school and our faculty and staff.

3. I do not have trust in the administrators. I have two children with IEPs. While my oldest is now entering high school and my youngest is in Kindergarten. I receive the same blank stares and "Oh, we can't do that here" from teachers on up when it comes to the accommodations and goals I have for my child versus what they are willing to provide. I feel the administration as a whole is not versed in special education and the laws that govern it.

4. Without trust that families will support the school and without trust that the administrators will do all they can for individual student, the students, and their education ends up suffering.

End of survey comments, (anything you would change . . . these are the academically-focused answers).

1. Ease up on the SOL prep (pep rallies, continuous talk, obsessive silence during testing, etc.). Kids who don't normally panic for a test suddenly become so worried they experience unhealthy levels of stress. If the teachers are relaxed and present, the review in an "it is only a review of what you've already learned" way then kids will be better off.

2. Less focus on SOL testing, more focus on hands-on and project based learning.

3. I can wish that parents had more say, but as the country moves more toward nation-wide policy/education practices (like common core) more and more issues/topics/policies will be decided at an extremely high level and any administrators that I might have face time with will only be able to repeat that they are doing what they are told/following policy. They won't have the desire or ability to make change at their own level. This trend has been going on for a long time, and will take significant pushback from the public to reverse the tide. So far, I don't see that happening.

4. More individual concern when dealing with issues with the children. In my older child's school, the policies are so general, but they do not seem to consider individual circumstances.

5. I feel as if the administrators have not done enough to get to know each family personally to the best of their ability and are, possible, not best suited for elementary school. Interactions that I have observed between young students and the principal and VP have led me to believe that they would both be better suited for higher grade levels. I

also believe that overall in the school district, too much stress has been placed in the wrong areas and the important goal of a wonderful education for each student has fallen to the wayside (volunteers 1-5 hours per week, grade 3, 4 No opinion/unable to judge for 4 questions "I feel admin respect me . . . I have a positive working relationship . . . when I have a concern . . . I trust the principal and assistant principal."

6. Virginia as a whole needs to allow teachers to teach rather than to a standardized test.

7. I would allow more recess time into the day as children develop and learn better when they are allowed to "let off steam" at various intervals during the working day. It also improves behaviors and helps build stronger relationships and social skills.

8. Twin policy: This administration believes that all twins should be in separate classes. (There is a law in VA that gives parents the final say.) The administration does not always look at the specific child's needs, especially in a case of children with special needs. Blanket discipline policies do not always work with children with documented special needs. I would make that policy a little more understanding for those special cases.

School Security

Fifty-five percent agreed or strongly agree that school security is sufficient, and rules are purposeful and relevant.

Thirty-two percent disagreed or strongly disagree

1. I am concerned about security. There have been several occasions where I have been allowed to walk in, go down the halls without the pass from the front desk. The security

for the after school enrichment classes is a joke. People just walking in from every door, no checking of IDs at the desk, etc.

Anything I would change?

Forty-two percent said nothing.

(The rest of the comments on this question are interspersed throughout this synthesis, categorized by topic.)

Miscellaneous comments not fitting into the other categories

Trust is based on respect. When a principal calls your home for a school update, the principal should talk to a parent like an adult and not one of her students. Also, teacher moral is something that a parent notices. I do not have much trust in the administrators. Teachers are unhappy.

Parents and administrators should act like a team to ensure the students are getting the more from their experience at school.

It allows a parent to get to the truth of a situation. Not all kids are perfect; not all teachers are perfect. If you have had positive interactions with administrators, you will be more trusting that the school will address a situation fairly.

One: N/A

Conclusions/Takeaways:

Based on the collection of the data, the issues that seemed to be the most important are the following:

1. Student safety: 32%, (1/3) of participants mentioned school safety or school security as a prioritized issue

2. Academics: 39% of participants mentioned academics, special education, or copious testing as a prioritized issue.

Volunteering:

Forty-five percent did not volunteer at the school at all.

The next largest percentage was 1-5 hours per week at 39%.

However, 94% believed that parent volunteering is a critical piece to student success at our school.

Opportunity:

Parents strongly believe that volunteering is important to this particular school environment, but many are not taking advantage of opportunities already presented. Perhaps engaging parents in new ways can help to bolster volunteers, or even asking parents what types of volunteer opportunities would be engaging.

Best Interest:

The term *best interest* was not used at all in this survey. However, 32%, (1/3) of parents brought these words up in their answer.

Opportunity: We have had many conversations surrounding this idea and the mismatch of the definition between administrators and parents. In this survey, it became obvious that parents do feel that this phrase is important to defining their satisfaction with relationships and with the school. While best interest is a subjective and individualized term, it may be useful to develop a definition from administrators that can help communicate the goals of the school to the parents. In addition, it may be useful to encourage a parent team to develop parent definitions of best interest so there can be a mutual goal of a higher level of trust.