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The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of parental participation through the lens of administrators who serve and parents/grandparents who have children enrolled in a low-performing elementary school. Through this understanding of the different perspectives, supports were identified that could lead to increased parental participation at this low-performing school.

In this research, a qualitative interview approach was used. Six parents/guardians of students attending the school and three administrative team members from the school were recruited to participate in individual interviews. They were asked what supports the school could provide to encourage and/or assist parents in participating in their children's schooling.

Through the interview process, I found that there are some logistical factors that influence parental participation, such as scheduling and lack of transportation. Effective relationships are critical in improving participation and can be cultivated by ensuring communication between school and home happens frequently. School sponsored parental participation initiatives and enhancement of the perception of the school within the community are both positive steps to improving parental participation.

LISTENING TO PARENTS: SUPPORTS TO INCREASE PARENTAL
PARTICIPATION IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

by

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I dedicate this work to:

Ted, without your support and encouragement, I could not have completed this long voyage. Your encouraging words contributed to this achievement more than you can comprehend. I love you and can't wait to see what the next chapter of life holds!

Justin, without your support and technology knowledge this achievement would have been even more challenging. Thank you for all the encouraging words and time you spent helping me overcome technological difficulties.

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APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

Throughout the history of schooling in the United States, parents, students, and educators have interacted in ways that produce both positive and negative thoughts, feelings, and actions that in turn produce positive and negative outcomes for students. There have been parents and members of the community who have demonstrated a strong influence over education in collective efforts as well as through individual advocacy efforts (e.g., Moses & Cobb, 2001; Olmsted, 1991). These actions have sometimes made parents, schools, and communities partners in educating children, but sometimes they have led to antagonistic relationships (Henig et al., 1999). Examples include when the authority of parents or the school is challenged, feelings of hostility or superiority toward one another are displayed, or advocating for particular children happens while disregarding the efforts of trying to balance the needs of all students in the school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Because the positive potential role of families and communities in children's learning has long been recognized, it is important to find ways to facilitate and encourage those positive interactions (Khalifa, 2018). Often parents and communities in low socio-economic social locations are still viewed through a lens of disadvantage, deficiency, passivity, and even neglect in our society (Urban, 2009). Because of negative lenses

through which they are viewed, schools are missing out on utilizing resources that can boost student academic outcomes. Low-income families and/or families of color have the potential to make positive contributions to their children's education (Jeynes, 2003).

Educators sometimes reflect a genuine desire to pull parents into participating in their children's education, and at other times they work to keep parents more distant. In most instances, the traditional ideas concerning parent-school relations have been focused on what is best for the school and the children's learning in school and how the parents can assist the school in meeting the goal set forth by educators (Colombo, 2006).

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of parental participation through the lens of administrators and parents who serve or have children enrolled in a low-performing elementary school. Understanding parental and administrator perceptions can lead to identifying supports that will increase parental participation within the school. Increased parental participation leads to positive outcomes for students, families, schools and communities as a whole (Fan & Williams, 2010; Ravitch, 2016).

The origins of education in America were largely family or community based, giving them much influence in the schooling of students. In the early 20th century, the "common school" system was fully established, which took away much influence from the families and communities (Khalifa, 2018). The main control for academic learning went to the educational professionals, though they were still open to influence from stakeholders. In many schools there is a clear delineation between school and community, which makes parents and communities seem external to the school's primary function. As

long as the perception remains that parents and communities are “outsiders,” the need to build partnerships with them is not a priority for school personnel (Adams et al., 2009).

Within the traditional models of parental participation, a misconception held by many educators is that some parents are not very interested in their children’s education or not well equipped to provide the needed support or assistance to the school. This is particularly problematic when teachers, leaders, and others in the school do not share the same demographic profiles as their students and communities (Khalifa, 2018). Often educators reflect dominant middle-class White values and are simply unfamiliar with the values, beliefs, or practices of diverse families (Nieto, 2004). Because of their lack of familiarity, educators may rely on incorrect stereotypical assumptions about families and communities. Many of these assumptions may have sexist, classist, or racist origins. Negative assumptions lead to labeling students as being deprived or deficient (Urban, 2009). These labels have a long history in education and can cause educators to have low expectations and treat students unequally, which marginalizes families and students who already have fragile connections to their schools.

School administrators, parents of color, parents with low incomes and/or parents with low levels of education may have very different ideas of what an ideal partnership looks like. Educators wish to see parents participating in conventional activities, such as attending open houses, parent-teacher conferences, and fund-raisers while accepting teachers’ feedback concerning students’ behavior and implementing recommendations on how to improve their children’s academic performance. Because this “partnership”

positions the educator as the expert who can give parents information to help increase their children's academic achievement, this leads some parents to not feel valued.

To remedy the inequality found in traditional models of school-family-community relations, researchers, policymakers, and educators have recommended changes be made within schools to increase marginalized parents' power (Henderson et al., 2009). Even with recommended changes, mistrust between schools, parents, and communities has not been fully dismantled due to long-standing cultural misalignments, biases, and systematic educational failures (Howard, 2007). Working toward the goal of creating inclusive, equitable, and excellent schools is a long-term process involving all stakeholders. When schools have diverse learners, everyone is challenged to grow, one school at a time.

Parents discuss schools' test scores, or in the last few years, the letter grades the schools receive based on standardized test scores. This discussion occurs between parents, teachers, and administrators to inform stakeholders about what those test score numbers really mean. For some parents, understanding those numbers is very shallow and simplistic. Quite simply, low scores equal bad schools. Most people do not delve any deeper to understand the complexities of our society that our public schools have been charged to rectify. When schools have low test scores, they are often lacking in having a high percentage of parental participation, which occurs for many complex reasons. Since parental participation has been linked to higher academic outcomes for students, it is a worthy goal to attempt to raise the percentage of participating parents in schools (Jeynes, 2003).

Defining Parental Participation

Researchers and schools have defined parental participation in many ways. For the purposes of this study, parental participation is a term that includes any type of parental activity that shows interest and support for their children's education. The term includes the ways parents participate in their children's education through involvement or engagement. The term "parents" refers to the caregiver and person(s) raising the child during his/her school-aged years.

Two sub-types emerge under the parental participation umbrella (see Figure 1). One sub-group of parental participation is parental involvement. "Parent involvement, as practiced in most schools and reflected in the research literature avoids issues of power and assigns parents a passive role in the maintenance of school culture (Warren & Mapp, 2011, p. 7). The energy that drives parent involvement comes from government mandates and schools. School staff and public institutions may feel they know what the problems are and how to fix them. Also, they are the ones to determine the criteria used in evaluating success in resolving the identified problems. In this type of participation, the parent may feel pushed to complete tasks they do not feel is important. Since the school feels the task or goal is important, the parent may go along with completing it as directed by the school staff. On this level of participation the parents may or may not have established a trusting and reciprocal relationship with the school staff (Fenton, Ocasio-Stoutenburg, & Harry, 2017). Examples of parental involvement are when the school identifies projects, goals, and needs and tells the parents how they can contribute. The vision for the school is developed by the school without considering parents ideas, needs,

or wants. With this type of participation, the school is leading the parents to interact in ways the school needs or wants. The parents’ voices are not heard, so they are unable to participate as partners. In this scenario they are more like clients of the school (Jeynes, 2018).

The purpose to involve parents is to support students by assisting with school priorities and programs. The decision-making power rests with the school staff, not shared with parents. When the power is in the hands of the school, the partnerships between parents and schools may be narrow and shallow. Unfortunately, if power is seen as finite “pie” and the parents gain power, the school feels as if they lose some.

Figure 1.

Parental Participation Umbrella



The second sub-group is parental engagement, which is the goal. With this type of participation, the parents join as partners with the school to serve the needs of the students. “Parental engagement designates parents as citizens in the fullest sense –

change agents who can transform urban schools and neighborhoods (Warren & Mapp, 2011, p.7). When schools strive for parental engagement, a lot of listening to parents occurs. Ideas are elicited from parents by school staff in the context of developing trusting, respectful, and supportive relationships. Parents can be challenged to do something they feel is important and school staff learn what is important through developing relationships through working together (Spear, Spotswood, Goodall, & Warren, 2021).

Listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about is crucial to moving the level of parent involvement to that of parent engagement. While all parental participation is positive, research has found parental engagement produces stronger results for students, families, schools, and for their communities (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

A comprehensive literature review on improving parental, family, and community participation reveals information that shows the long-standing struggle schools have had with increasing parental participation. The problem to which my research responds is that schools with students from families with low socioeconomic status often have little parental support, at least in the ways schools define parental support. In addition to current literature, I have reviewed existing research by Desimone (1999), Ford (1995), and Ford and Webb (1994) to illustrate how this has been a struggle in which schools have been engaged for decades.

The histories of oppression that minoritized communities have faced has impacted how students and parents interact with the schools (Hale, 2016). Parents and educators do

not share equal power over how children are treated or what they are taught in schools. An example of this is that schools tend to operate based on teacher and administrator views of student behavior. Educators feel frustrated they are unable to “get through” to parents, and parents and students feel they are unable to “get through” to schools. But in the end the views of the school are prioritized over families’ and communities’ perceptions and values. “Because of this history of settler colonialism, scholars emphasize the importance of understanding the need for communities to craft their own goals based on community needs” (Khalifa, 2018, p. 21). It is interesting to note that the precolonial and Indigenous models of schooling did not give all the power to schools. Those models were community-based and community-led. The leaders of the school were members of the community. With settler colonialism, community control was taken and has yet to be restored (Khalifa, 2018).

The motivation for this study was to investigate what schools need to do differently to garner more parental participation from the administrators’ and parents’ perspectives. By examining the perceptions of administrators and parents regarding their awareness and responsiveness concerning parental participation, ways to improve the home-school-community relationship through effective parental participation have been identified through this study.

With this knowledge, ways to assist parents to participate with the school have been found. This is important to identify because research has shown positive outcomes occur when parental participation happens (Epstein, 1995; Lusse et al., 2019; Okeke, 2014). Often in low-performing schools, educators feel unsupported and have negative

feelings about the parents and the value they place on education (Howard, 2007). Schools are often labeled low-performing because of low test scores, which adds to the pressures and negative feelings educators experience.

Researcher Experience

During my teaching career, I have seen this problem up close because most of my years have been spent serving students from minority and low-income families in low performing schools. As a white female coming from a middle-class family, I was serving students and families with positionalities different from mine. The schools I am speaking of had earned the Title I designation and were seen as the most deficit ridden in the school system. One of the main complaints heard over and over from educators was about the lack of parental support. It was difficult getting parents to conferences, PTA meetings, and school events. It was often difficult to even reach a parent by phone in the event a child was sick and needed to go home. In my view, educators completely misunderstood parental behaviors.

The understanding of this behavior from school faculty is often that parents simply do not care about their children or their futures (Howard, 2007). This is an incorrect understanding, but from many school personnel's perspectives, this is the only explanation that made sense. If the faculty was mainly white and middle class, they could not fathom being absent from their children's schooling experiences in the ways they observed their students' parents behaving. Research shows that parent involvement strategies used in schools are based on middle class European American cultural norms (Kroeger, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Because strategies used in schools are based on

cultural norms different from the cultural norms of the populations being served by low-performing schools, their effectiveness is often low.

The concerns many schools have are widespread. The same complaints about lack of parental support occur at schools serving students from low-socio-economic backgrounds. From my experience, as students progress through the levels of schooling, the issue of lack of parental support becomes more pronounced. The positive effect of parental participation on academic achievement is ongoing throughout the educational process. All schools need to find ways to reach parents who do not respond to the dominant culture's ways of interacting with schools (Khalifa, 2018). Schools serve diverse populations, so instead of deciding some parents just do not care and accepting that simplistic conclusion, more in-depth analysis should occur to understand why disengagement is occurring.

As I reflect on my childhood going to a predominately white, middle-upper class private school, I observed parents being involved. Families at this school had mothers who stayed home and had time to volunteer in the school and attend meetings in the hours during and after school. Often PTA meetings were held in the early evening so fathers could attend. There was always high parental attendance at the meetings, and both parents would be there to support the school and their children. Parents valued education and were paying lots of money to have their children attend the school, and the children achieved on standardized and school-based measures.

As a teacher, I have been at schools that had strong parental support and at others where there was almost no parental support. I have witnessed what research has found:

parental involvement is related to positive education outcomes for students (Pemberton & Miller, 2015). Often the appearance of the lack of parent involvement indicates to educators that the parents do not value education, but I have found there are often reasons parents cannot be involved, although they truly care about the education of their children. As an English as a second language teacher, I understand many of the challenges the parents face. I have often seen parents unable to participate because of language barriers, which is not an unusual problem for schools serving diverse populations (Colombo, 2006). They do not attend PTA meetings and conferences, because they cannot understand what is being said. They do not help with homework because they cannot read English. They sense many teachers do not want their children in their classes because the scores will be brought down by those students. I have seen all of these things while serving diverse populations.

The United States has not had a history of recognizing the positive impact of parental and community involvement. Parents and communities have felt alienated and minimized often within the school community. The positive outcomes of including parents and community are now understood due to an overwhelming amount of research conducted over decades. Strategies to turn this paradigm around have been identified and are now being implemented in schools with varying rates of success.

Purpose of the Study

For many years the importance and need for parental participation in education has been well recognized (Ravitch, 2016). Patel and Agbenyega (2016) recognized parental participation as “the participation of parents in every facet of children’s

education and development from birth to adulthood” (p. 8). Fan and Williams (2010) articulated that family and community participation in the educative process can have a significant impact on student success. Because of the significant role parental involvement plays, the purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of administrators and parents of students who are enrolled in a low-performing school regarding parental participation in the educative process of the students. With this understanding, supports that could lead to increased parental participation were identified.

Increased parental participation correlates to academic gains for students. Therefore, it is imperative for schools to find ways to encourage parents to become engaged in the educational process of their children regardless of social and socio-economic challenges (Jeynes, 2003). The research questions for this study are:

1. What do administrators and parents in a low performing school believe would increase parental participation in the schools?
2. What supports for parents’ participation already in place do the administrators and parents feel are helpful?
3. What supports for parents’ participation do the administrators and parents feel are needed?

Methods

In this study, a basic qualitative research approach was used. Individual interviews conducted by phone were used to collect data. Six parents of students attending Fern Street Community School and three members of the administrative team

were recruited to participate in individual interviews. They were asked what supports the school could provide to encourage and/or assist parents in participating in their children's schooling. This study assisted the administration team in reflecting upon parental participation challenges and strengths as they participated in critical discourse with the researcher.

Transcripts of the interviews were reviewed, coded, and categorized to look for developing themes. Member checking phone calls were made to interviewees to provide further clarification of information and to ensure correct interpretation of data. Reflective notes by the researcher were also reviewed after the interviews and follow up phone calls, which were then coded to uncover categories and themes.

Significance

Students from diverse backgrounds and low-income homes are at a high risk for low academic achievement (Pemberton & Miller, 2015). This study has significance because it assisted in identifying supports parents from diverse backgrounds feel will help them support their children which help them achieve as much as possible in the school setting. By gaining an understanding of the perceptions of administrators and what the parents need and want to raise the level of parental participation, the schools can be better equipped to meet those needs, and gains in parental participation can be made. This study has added to the existing research on parental participation in the education of elementary aged children attending low-performing schools. This information will be of interest to this area of research because it can serve as an illustration of both the limits and

possibilities concerning how to increase parental involvement in schools with similar demographics.

Overview

In this chapter, I introduced the study. I have described the problem, which is the lack of parental participation in low-performing schools. Examining the perceptions of both parents and administrators helped to identify steps to take that could assist in increasing parental participation. In this study six parents and three administrators were interviewed to discuss the obstacles parents face demonstrating interest and support of their children's elementary education experience.

In Chapter II, a review of the literature, which informs my study, is discussed. Key themes in the literature were identified and discussed. The key themes are the purpose of parental participation, strategies to increase parental participation, parental participation programs and their effectiveness, and the obstacles to parental participation. In Chapter III, the research questions for parents and the administrative team were listed in addition to the methodology for the study. Background history of the setting was discussed along with information concerning current status. A description of the participants who were interviewed was provided. Data collection and analysis methods were covered as well as the limitations of this study.

In Chapter IV, I review my key findings, which are organized into topics. Under each topic heading I provide supportive information such as quotes from the people I interviewed. I then end this chapter with a summary of my findings. In Chapter V, I start with a review of the study, which includes a reminder of the problem and purpose for the

study. Research questions are presented along with succinct answers to them. There is a discussion of findings, along with a section on limitations encountered in the study. Recommendations for practice and future research are found next. Finally, Chapter V closes with my final thoughts on this study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental participation has been found to be a major factor affecting student achievement (Epstein, 1995; Lusse et al., 2019; Okeke, 2014). This literature review on improving parental and family participation includes research that impacts this study and strongly indicates parental participation as beneficial for students beginning in early childhood throughout adolescence and beyond (Hall & Quinn, 2014; McWayne & Melzi, 2014; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). It includes research that calls for a dismantling of the traditional views of parental participation and encourages an expansion of the ways families and communities can participate in the education of children (Khalifa, 2018; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Nieto, 2004).

The purpose of this literature review is to examine parental participation supports that have been found to assist in increasing parental participation, which includes both involvement and engagement. The research in this review has clearly found family support can come in many forms, all of which positively have an impact on student achievement. Building respectful and trusting relationships among educators and families help to create and sustain connections that support student achievement (Byrd, 2011).

This literature review is divided into four sections:

- The purpose of parental participation;
- Strategies to increase parental participation;

- Parental participation programs and their effectiveness;
- Obstacles to parental participation.

At the conclusion of this chapter, I discuss Epstein's school-family-community partnership theory. This framework assists educators in developing school and family partnership programs. Epstein's model identifies six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community. Parenting is helping families establish home environments to support children as students. Communicating designs effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress. Volunteering recruits and organizes parent help and support. Learning at home provides information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. Decision making includes parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives. Collaborating with the community identifies and integrates resources and services from within the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. This literature review provides a comprehensive background context in which this study of parental participation may be better understood.

Purposes of Parental Participation

Defining parental participation has been left to the schools themselves (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006). Because of this "schoolcentric" approach, which places the school in the ultimate position of power, educators are looking at low socio-economic, minority families through a lens of disadvantage, deficiency, passivity, and sometimes even

neglect (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011). Park and Holloway (2013) reveal that educators must consider the ways cultural differences impact how parents demonstrate parental participation and then try to bridge the cultural gaps between schools and homes. This is an important step to becoming more welcoming to minority families. This lens must change to view the ways families are making positive contributions to their children's education.

Types of Parental Participation

The current discourse on parent participation suggests that educators need to redefine what parent participation means and include a broader definition that would make involvement more inclusive for diverse families (Spear, Spotswood, Goodall, & Warren, 2021). In this study, parental participation is the term used to describe any type of activity wherein parents show interest and support for their children's education.

Parental involvement and parental engagement are two sub-groups of parental participation in this study. Parental involvement is used in this study to describe involvement that is led by the school. The ideas come from the schools and government mandates. School staff often feel they know what the problems are and how to fix them, so the parents are generally directed by school staff to carry out tasks that will help the school accomplish their goals (Goodall & Montgomery 2014). An example would be asking parents to come to curriculum nights, which will help the school reach its goal of raising test scores. In this example parents come to the school and are told information. They have no input and are expected to go along with the expectations of the school. A school striving for parental involvement will often tell parents how they can contribute.

The school may identify projects, needs, and goals and lead parents to participate in ways the school finds beneficial.

The purpose of parental involvement is to support students by assisting and strengthening programs and priorities decided by the school. The decision-making power is in the hands of the school. Because the schools still retain the power the relationships developed may be surface ones. A trusting and supportive relationship between parents and the school staff is harder to develop with this type of involvement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

Parental engagement is participation that has parents joining as partners with the school to serve the needs of the students (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009). Schools that wish to encourage parental engagement will do a lot of listening to parents and will elicit ideas from them. Schools want to listen to what parents think, dream, and worry about. The goal of parental engagement is to make parents partners in the educational journey of their children.

Parent engagement uses more parent energy to drive the efforts instead of the ideas and priorities coming from the school. This difference allows staff members to learn what is important to the parents through developing more trusting and supportive relationships. Parents are viewed as leaders and are integral to identifying visions and goals for the school (Jeynes, 2018). When there is parent engagement decision-making power is shared between the school and parents. Parents and staff develop a joint vision and form broad and deep partnerships which support students and strengthens families as well as the local community.

Parent participation can be defined in different ways. For example, in a study by Overstreet et al. (2005), parental participation was divided into three categories that are different from the two defined above. One of the three was school involvement. This type of involvement includes activities that take place at school, such as attending open house, and school-related activities that take place at home, such as providing help with homework. Another type is cognitive-intellectual involvement, which consists of activities parents engage their children in that are intellectually stimulating. An example of this type of activity is when parents and children read together. The last category is personal involvement. This type of involvement is about parents knowing what the child is learning in school and having a general understanding of what is going on in the child's social and emotional realms in the school environment.

Using the two categories in my study, involvement includes the same school led activities. Cognitive-intellectual involvement would fall under engagement when using my two categories because parents have the opportunity to include activities they feel are beneficial. Personal involvement could be under both involvement and engagement because it could include school led activities as well as activities parents find are valuable.

It is important to understand that although researchers define parent participation in different ways, the goal is to influence academic performance in positive ways. The more the parents are invited to join as partners and have their voices heard in the school, the stronger the results for academic growth are for the students (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009).

Academic Benefits

An overwhelming number of studies have indicated there are positive academic outcomes stemming from parental involvement, with benefits beginning in early childhood and continuing throughout adolescence and beyond (Epstein, 1995; Lusse et al., 2019; Okeke, 2014). “Particularly in urban schools, school-family partnerships can contribute to a student’s academic achievement and reduce educational disadvantage, regardless of the family’s socioeconomic background” (Lusse et al., 2019, p. 227). The U.S. education system strives to provide students the best education possible and continues to explore ways to improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged groups in our public-school systems. One of those ways is through increasing parental involvement in the schools.

Many studies over a long period of time have shown that parental participation is related to positive educational outcomes for students (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Pemberton & Miller, 2015). Since the purpose has been well established, the question becomes how to increase participation. This is a major question that has been pondered and studied over a long period of time. It is an especially important question for schools serving diverse populations of students, since minority groups of children often lag behind white children in academic performance (Desimone, 1999).

Researchers have suggested that “the missing link in educational equity, in terms of achievement, is parental involvement” (Colombo, 2006, p. 315). A complaint often heard from educators is the lack of parental participation from minority groups of parents, but ways to remedy the issue have been difficult because of the complexity of the school

and community context (Henig et al., 1999). There is consistent and convincing evidence in the research that spans many years that parental participation has a positive influence on student achievement at all ages (Colombo, 2006; Greene, 2013; Hall & Quinn, 2014; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Olmsted, 1991).

Other Benefits

There are benefits to parental participation in addition to improving academic performance. Among those are an increase in parents' confidence about parenting, feeling supported by the school and other parents, and becoming aware of their own and others' challenges as parents. Parents will become aware they are welcome and valued at school and may develop specific skills as they volunteer. They will also become aware of many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of other parents and volunteers. They will also become aware of their child as a learner and will be able to better support, encourage, and help their child at home (Epstein et al., 2009).

Teachers benefit from parental participation, because it leads to a better understanding of families' backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children. Because of this understanding, teachers will develop a respect for families' strengths and efforts and will develop an understanding of the diversity of their students and the families they serve. With a better understanding of families, teachers will be able to consider parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions (Epstein et al., 2009).

Students benefit from seeing their parents participate. They can develop an awareness of family support, the importance of education, and their own role in the

partnership as a courier and communicator. They will be able to see the many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of their parents and other volunteers. When students know there is a partnership between home and school, they will view parents as more similar to the teacher and of home as more similar to school (Epstein et al., 2009).

Strategies to Increase Parental Participation

Positive relationships between educators and parents need to be established, because research studies have found a correlation between parental participation and positive academic outcomes for children on all educational levels (Flynn, 2007). “Positive relationships are strengthened when parents have confidence in their child’s teacher, feel welcome and are clearly invited by the school staff, and experience reciprocity in their communication with the school” (Lusse et al., 2019, p. 229).

Attitudes and actions have been suggested for teachers to help them understand parental and family perspectives and ways to help parents and families feel valued and welcomed in the school setting. Additionally, attitudes and actions have been suggested for all stakeholders in the school, such as having parents included on the governing bodies at the school. These attitudes and actions suggest everyone should be working together to increase parental participation, which will then lead to more positive academic outcomes for students (Fan & Williams, 2010).

Attitudes and Actions for Teachers

Flynn (2007) stated that teachers may not fully understand the importance of parental participation and the effects of parental participation on student achievement. Therefore, one of the most important things for schools to do if they wish to increase

parental participation and support is to evaluate teacher attitudes and actions toward parents. Where positive attitudes do not exist, there are strategies that can help teachers develop the belief that parents are knowledgeable and valuable resources that can be used to help students succeed (Flynn, 2007).

Administrators often focus on ways to engage parents without considering the importance of helping teachers understand the value of encouraging parental involvement. Teachers should develop an understanding of the families being served in the school to help prevent assumptions from being made. Nistler and Maiers (2000) found that in their literacy program there were some barriers that prevented participation, but there was no lack of desire to participate. Often teachers take the lack of participation as a lack of desire to be involved in their children's educations. This misunderstanding is an example of a negative assumption made that influences educators' views of parents and the value they place on education.

A way to address teachers' negative views and communication issues with parents is to provide professional development opportunities. Professional development can be used to train teachers on how to employ techniques that will help create partnerships and involve parents effectively in the school community. In order to create better partnerships between stakeholders and the school, teachers must learn and employ ways to create a welcoming school environment. Examples of professional development topics that would help create that welcoming environment are how schools could create a welcome packet for all parents visiting the school, which could include information such as school contacts and school calendar. Also, an included topic for professional development could

be how teachers can secure translators to welcome and assist families at school functions, especially at open house, prior to the opening of school (Epstein et al., 2009).

Communication between educators and parents is imperative, because it is key to helping parents understand the role the school would like for them to play in the educational process. It is also important for schools to listen to the wants and needs of the parents they serve to find out what role in the educational process parents want to play. Because communication is important, relationship building first is imperative to help parents feel valued and welcome in the school, which will help it develop between all stakeholders. Okeke (2014) found having open communication is an important part of building a positive relationship.

Establishing clear communication and developing positive relationships with parents is crucial. There are multiple ways teachers can make personal contacts, such as through e-mail, phone calls, or home visits. Providing information on such topics as homework and general school policies, as well as specific ways parents may become involved in their children's education is a way to avoid misunderstandings of perceived roles in the educational process. Studies have shown that when given specific requests from teachers, parents are more likely to respond favorably (Fields-Smith, 2005). Making sure there is an understanding of the formal mechanisms for families to communicate with administrators and teachers and explaining ways parents can monitor their children's progress are topics important to cover early in the school year. The written communications may need to be in multiple languages, depending on the families served (Adams et al., 2009).

Historically there have been groups of people who have felt excluded from the education system. People may have not been successful in school and/or may have a mistrust of the educational system. Teachers have a vital role in gaining the trust of families. Something as simple as learning how the parents wish to be addressed (e.g., first names vs. “mister” or “missus”) can go a long way to demonstrate respect. Finding out information about family structures and embracing blended and nontraditional families are also important (Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

Greene (2013) posits that authentic partnerships will require educators to get to know who their parents are in order to gain a better understanding about what they need and value. Conventional approaches, such as parent-teacher conferences, leave little opportunity for gaining valuable insights and cultivating positive parent-teacher relationships. During most of these interactions the teacher does the majority of the talking and there is little reciprocity.

A way to transform this conventional procedure is to rename it as an individual introductory conference. During an individual introductory conference parents and teachers get to know one another, exchange expectations, learn about the students’ talents, interests, and background and make agreements about expectations for the student as well as come to an agreement about communication and roles during the school year. With simply renaming the meeting, the idea of meeting together becomes more positive and focused on building relationships that will benefit the growth of the student (Greene, 2013).

Attitudes and Actions for Stakeholders

Epstein et al. (2009) identified some best practices that can help schools improve parental participation, which leads to improved outcomes for students. These best practices include all stakeholders in the school. Everyone needs to work together to increase parental participation opportunities. Steps various stakeholders can take are discussed next.

Studies on school-family relations that involve low income and/or minority families found educators typically do not welcome, expect, or cultivate power sharing practices with the families of marginalized groups (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002). To model inclusive behaviors, school administrators can encourage and facilitate the development of a parental involvement committee.

Roles can be created for parents on all decision-making and advisory committees. Training for them in the areas in which they will serve is important for them to have a meaningful impact in their roles on their committees. There should also be equal representation for parents on all school governing bodies. Parent surveys can be conducted to match parents to volunteer positions, identify parental interests, talents, and availability. Support networks can provide motivation for parents to motivate each other. A network that links every family with a designated parent representative could be established. There could also be a parent telephone tree to provide school information and encourage interaction among parents (Pemberton & Miller, 2015).

Connecting students and families to community resources can help strengthen and support the students' learning and well-being. Family and community involvement that is

linked to student learning has a positive effect on achievement (Lusse et al., 2019). The school could establish school-community partnerships that facilitate access to community-based programs that could help families find resources that would help them be involved in their children's education (Hall & Quinn, 2014). An example of this may be partnering with a local agency to provide regular parenting workshops on nutrition, family recreation, or child development. Another example would be a community business providing students internship opportunities, mentoring, and experiential learning opportunities (Hall & Quinn, 2014).

These partnerships are a shared responsibility and reciprocal process whereby schools and other community organizations and agencies engage families in meaningful and culturally appropriate ways. Families are encouraged to take initiative to support their children's development and academic growth. Efforts are made by schools and community stakeholders to listen to parents, support them, and ensure there are tools available for all to be active partners in students' school experience (Adelman & Taylor, 2007). Students can help encourage parents to get involved at school happenings (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). Teachers can help students understand the event at school and provide information, such as a flyer for the students to share with their parents. Often if the student is excited and wishing to participate the parents are more likely to attend whatever function it may be.

Parental Participation Programs and Their Effectiveness

There are a variety of programs aimed at increasing parental participation. These programs, and others like them are helpful because research has consistently found the

more families support their children's learning and educational journey, the more their children tend to do well in school, and the more likely they are to continue their education (Hall & Quinn, 2014). Here, I provide some examples of successful parent engagement programs.

PAL Program

“To create welcoming and equitable learning environments for diverse students and their families, school leaders must engage the entire school community” (Howard, 2007, p. 16). There are many ways to improve relationships with diverse parents, but one program that included many components research has identified as effective is the Parent Partnership for Achieving Literacy program, or PAL for short. This program was implemented in a school district in Massachusetts that had high numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Unfortunately, with diverse populations engaging parents has not been an easy task. Because of this frustration the superintendent decided to take action (Colombo, 2006).

“PAL employed a dual approach to increase the overlap of school, home, and community influences by building bridges between mainstream teachers and culturally and linguistically diverse families” (Colombo, 2006, p. 316). This approach included teachers participating in professional development to increase their cultural awareness and improve their knowledge of needs and strengths of the children and families they serve (Colombo, 2006). Families were offered workshops, meetings, and were sent mailings that helped them understand the expectations of the school, with the underlying philosophy that parents and the school were on the “same team,” wanting what is best for

the students. The parents, community members, and teachers collaborated to decide on structure and content of the teacher and family workshops. This gave them voice and power within the process. Issues were identified, and action was taken to remedy the problems (Colombo, 2006).

The program was responsive instead of prescriptive and evolved to meet the needs expressed by the families, such as providing homework help four days a week and providing transportation from the various schools to the PAL program. English classes for parents were also offered. Attendance was consistently high, which was an indication culturally and linguistically diverse valued and wanted to be involved in their children's education.

The PAL program valued the community and sought to communicate with them. Parents were invited to meeting to discuss their concerns and needs and notices of PAL goals and meetings were placed in neighbor markets, churches, and social security offices. Four bilingual parent coordinators were recruited who know the culturally and linguistically diverse community. Through them all types of people came together to benefit the students served in the community.

“The district used the Survey of Out-of-School Youth Outcomes to learn if teachers saw progress in the children who participated in PAL” (Colombo, 2006, p. 318). The results indicated significant progress in reading, verbal communication, and overall behavior.

Parents on Point

Eleanor Roosevelt High School is a comprehensive high school in California. The school serves around 4,100 students. The community is relatively new and is expanding. This high school program was created to empower parents with information and resources on current teen trends to help parents build connections with their children in these areas. We often think of increasing elementary school parental participation, but high school students benefit also. In this program topics included: teen suicide, drug use, social media etiquette, eating disorders, human trafficking, adolescence education, effective consequences, and bullying.

The planning of this program included parents, teachers, classified employees, and community members. The benefits of this program included the wealth of information given to parents through the presenters on the various topics related to teens. Though academic benefit was not documented, feedback from those in attendance demonstrated the program was beneficial (Aguilar, 2015). This program included the components of Epstein's model (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016).

Project EASE

Another literacy intervention was the Project EASE, Early Access to Success in Education. This was a year-long intervention program that included parent education sessions, at school parent/child activities, and at home book centered activities. During the parent sessions, information was received on how to strengthen vocabulary, extend narrative understanding, and how to develop sound awareness and letter recognition.

At the end of the intervention year, measures of home literacy support were collected from parents and a battery of literacy and language tests were administered to the children involved in the intervention. When compared to children not involved in the intervention, children whose families engaged in the school and home activities made significantly greater gains in scores. The effects of this intervention were reported by Jordan et al. (2000) in a reading research journal. This intervention demonstrates there is potential for schools to engage parents in meaningful ways that can improve students' academic performance.

Logan Square Neighborhood Association

The Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) was founded in the Logan Square neighborhood in the early 1960s in response to the suburbanization of the Chicago metropolitan area. The neighborhood experienced a shift starting in the seventies which made it the predominately Latino community that it is today. "Working with Latino families in the group's early organizing campaigns for affordable housing, neighborhood safety, and immigration reform, LSNA organizers soon found that education was a central issue and concern for newcomers" (Warren & Mapp, 2011, p. 170).

The goal of the group was and continues to be aimed at connecting the community and school. This has been achieved by chartering a path that sought to change the nature of school and community involvement by forming connections between the two. The association developed the Parent Mentor program which trains parents to work in the classrooms alongside teachers as classroom assistants. The parents read to children

in small groups, work with individual students, and support classroom activities in various ways.

The parent mentors are paid a small stipend to facilitate and encourage consistent participation. Team building activities between educators and parents help to build trust, dispel myths, and develop common ground. “From its beginning in 1995, the program grew quickly to include eight elementary and middle schools across Logan Square” (Warren & Mapp, 2011, p. 177). Every year the program trains over 150 parents and since the program’s inception until 2011, 1,200 parents have graduated as parent mentors.

The Parent Mentor program is unique because it meets parents where they are and works to figure out what they need from schools. A parent may start at the involvement level, which would include such activities as coming to meetings and gaining knowledge through reading flyers and brochures, then grow into being engaged. Engagement is the goal, where parents are incorporated into the life of the school.

Through LSNA’s Parent Mentor program parent participation opportunities are there for all parents to start at their comfort level and provide a way for parents to move through the program and emerge on the other side as powerful actors in both the school and community. Though the focus of this program is not raising student academic performance all aspects of Epstein’s framework are addressed and working toward students’ healthy development is done by all involved in this program.

Parent Leadership Academy

This program, located at Harmony Elementary School in South Central Los Angeles, California was put in place in response to an emerging desire for leadership

opportunities by parents during the 2007-2008 school year because there was a growing community concern about safety and violence caused by gang violence. There had been at least five times that school year that Harmony had to lockdown and wait for the police to indicate the area was safe and secure.

Harmony Elementary held the Parent Leadership Academies to address the needs identified by leadership at the school. These trainings were designed to build the knowledge and skills the parents needed to be leaders, and covered topics like relationship building, leadership, power, and organizing.

“Parents collectively identified a new issue while talking with each other and with the Harmony staff during these Leadership Academy training sessions” (Warren & Mapp, 2011, p. 93). The issue identified was that Harmony Elementary was run on a year-round schedule, which presented challenges such as students from the same families being on different “tracks”. This led to childcare burdens and different vacation schedules for families. In addition, city-provided youth services were planned for a traditional school calendar.

The parent leaders decided to voice their concerns to the Los Angeles Unified School District board members. Because of the leadership academy training, the parent leaders knew how to address the board and convinced the board to move Harmony Elementary to a traditional school calendar. This serves as an example of how parent leadership can positively make a difference in the lives of children and their families (Warren & Mapp, 2011).

People Acting in Community Together

Founded in 1985, People Acting in Community Together or PACT, is a multi-faith, grassroots organization. Leadership training is offered to community members interested in acting to create change that addresses racial and economic justice issues. “PACT in San Jose built design teams for new autonomous schools that combined educators and parents from the congregation in which the group worked”, (Warren & Mapp, 2011, p. 255).

PACT’s approach to organizing built valuable ties among parents and the community, which resulted in advocating for all children and taking ownership for the practices employed by the schools they designed. “By working together, parents in some schools started by PACT in San Jose, for example, take so much ownership over their schools that they object to language that says the schools involve them in activities”, (Warren& Mapp, 2011, p. 255). The PACT parents firmly assert that they are the ones who helped design the school and create the activities in the first place.

Obstacles to Parental Participation

“Unfortunately, particularly in urban contexts, barriers between home and school may hinder parents from visiting their child’s school” (Lusse et al., 2019, p. 229).

Because of barriers, teachers may believe the parents are absent in their child’s school life due to lack of interest. Mutual trust must be built so barriers resulting from fear and mistrust, and misunderstanding can be resolved. Often parents at schools serving diverse communities have lost their trust of the school and the system as a whole. This is because historically there have been times when White leaders have ignored the education of

minority children (Hale, 2016). In the past there were instances when former slaves built schools for their children, which was an indication as to how much they valued the acquisition of knowledge, so the issue is not that, as a whole, minority parents do not value education. Resolution of these misunderstandings can lead to removal of many barriers between home and school.

Language Barriers

Language barriers are also a problem for many schools (Yoder & Lopez, 2013). The professional language used in schools can be intimidating to many parents. Parents of children with disabilities may need additional support in understanding the jargon used in conversations about their children (Byrd, 2011). In instances where the language may be quite technical, schools may provide a glossary of technical terms in a simplified format. Oral communication may also be preferred to written communication in these situations because clarification of any misunderstanding can be immediate.

There is the language barrier that exists because parents are not fluent English speakers, in which case there needs to be a translator the families are comfortable with. Children should not be used as translators for their parents because this can upset the balance and authority in the parent-child relationship. Any written communication to parents should be translated and may include the use of pictures to assist the understanding of the parents (Howard, 2007).

Physical Barriers

There are also physical barriers that may impede the parents from physically attending school activities (Machen et al., 2005). An example of a physical barrier would

be parents unable to come to school because they have no transportation. Another example would be if a parent has a work schedule that does not allow them to attend school related functions such as curriculum nights or conferences. Childcare for younger siblings is also a reason some parents cannot attend school activities.

If a school helps address these physical barriers, parents may be more likely to attend school functions. An example of facilitating school based parental involvement could be something as simple as scheduling parent-teacher conferences that fit the families' schedules. If there are a variety of meeting times and dates, the likelihood of parents being able to physically attend increases. Providing childcare or alternate locations to meet would also be ways to increase the opportunity to physically meet with parents. Machen et al. (2005) found in a program implemented to raise parental involvement for first grade students, addressing the childcare and transportation barriers produced a result of over a 94% parental participation rate.

Parental Perceptions

Parents may also feel they are unable to support their children due to their own lack of formal education (Flynn, 2007). Parents may not believe they have the knowledge or skills they can use to assist their children in their education. Parents should be assured they are not expected to understand content but can give support in nonacademic tasks, which is valuable to their children. An example of this type of support would be to provide a regular place and time to complete homework. Ensuring the child finishes homework and parental communication with the teacher if the child struggles is also a way to support a child academically.

Another possibility for the disengagement of parents is that they may not understand their important role in the education of their children (Okeke, 2014). Over the last few decades much research has shown how vital it is to have parental participation. In the past the parental role was outside the school, but now more direct participation is expected. In a study conducted by Okeke (2014), the conclusion was reached that most parents simply do not know how to get involved. Conveying specific ways for parents to be involved will demonstrate they are needed and valued in the educational journey of their children.

They may also feel they are only able to follow what they are directed to do by the school if they wish to be educational assets rather than detriments to their children. This school-family dynamic maintains educators' traditional place on top of schools' social and political hierarchy (Colombo, 2006). Parents then remain outsiders to a world where decisions about their children's lives are made by educators who know little about the parents' lives which leads to a failure to draw on their insight and knowledge.

Epstein School-Family-Community Partnership Theory

The Epstein Model is a widely accepted parent involvement framework that assists educators in developing school and family partnership programs. In this model parent involvement includes both home-based and school-based activities with six types of family involvement behaviors. The six types of parent involvement activities Epstein identified are:

- Parenting—Helping all families establish home environments to support children as students,

- Communicating—Designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children’s progress,
- Volunteering—Recruiting and organizing parent help and support,
- Learning at home—Providing information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning,
- Decision making—Including parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives,
- Collaborating with the community—Identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

These six behaviors often overlap and are to provide positive home conditions, home learning activities, communication, and shared decision making within the school, involvement at school, and forming community partnerships (Epstein et al., 2009). This model goes beyond what is usually considered parent involvement activities to include activities in which low-income, ethnically, linguistically, and racially diverse parents could participate. The expected results from this model include student awareness of importance of school, parents increased understanding of and confidence about parenting as the child proceeds through school, and teachers increased understanding of families’ background, cultures, and needs (Epstein et al., 2009).

Bower and Griffin (2011) looked at how effective the Epstein model was in a high minority and high poverty elementary school. The results of this study showed that even

though the model included home and school-based strategies, the strategies did not address ways to bridge cultural gaps between families and the school, though the expected results from the model included an understanding and respect for diverse families. “Over the past three decades, the racial and linguistic demographics of the K-12 student population in the United States have changed dramatically” (Villegas & Lucas, 2007, p. 28). Because of this fact, schools must approach the issue of getting parents involved differently from what has been done in the past. Though the Epstein model expanded the definition of what parental involvement could consist of, the lack of bridging the cultural gaps is a major hurdle to overcome.

“Culturally responsive school leaders have access to power, and they can use their power to give greater access, belongingness, and opportunity to minoritized students and families” (Khalifa, 2018, p. 112). School leaders can either help to resolve or continue marginalization of minoritized students. Culturally responsive leaders must connect with the communities to find their goals and connect with them in the best interest of the students served in the schools.

Many school leaders continually look for ways to create inclusive settings for students, though there may be some resistance to relinquish power from some constituents such as teachers. In creating school, community, and family partnerships there is not a “one size fits all” model to follow. There are numerous factors that go into the level of engagement, involvement, understanding, and the perspective of each party (McWayne & Melzi, 2014). To undertake a journey such as this, leaders must understand they will never create completely culturally responsive schools. The goal is to create

more culturally responsive schools by implementing and/or reforming practices and policies that have not previously been culturally responsive (Khalifa, 2018).

In looking at the Parents on Point, PAL and EASE programs, many components of Epstein's model are evident and worked well in these situations. This makes me question if the amount of variation in people and situations is so much that maybe schools need to try various approaches and ideas until something works. A key finding in the research is that when programs and initiatives focus on building respectful and trusting relationships among school staff, families, and community members, they are more effective in creating and sustaining connections that support student achievement.

Parents are schools' most important partners. Schools can reap large dividends by engaging parents in ways that support student learning (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Through reading research on culturally and linguistically diverse communities, I conclude it is important to engage them, but there must be strategies used that work more positively with populations of color. Different groups in the community and school have different roles to play, but all are important.

Teachers and administrators must take the time to get to know students, their families, and the community as a whole. Educators can do more listening in ways such as giving parents an opportunity to share how they think the teacher can help their child be successful. The teacher can also ask how the parent will help the teacher be successful with the child. Two-way communication should be established early on (Byrd, 2011).

Parents should be made aware of the importance their involvement has on their child's education. They should connect with other parents throughout the community to

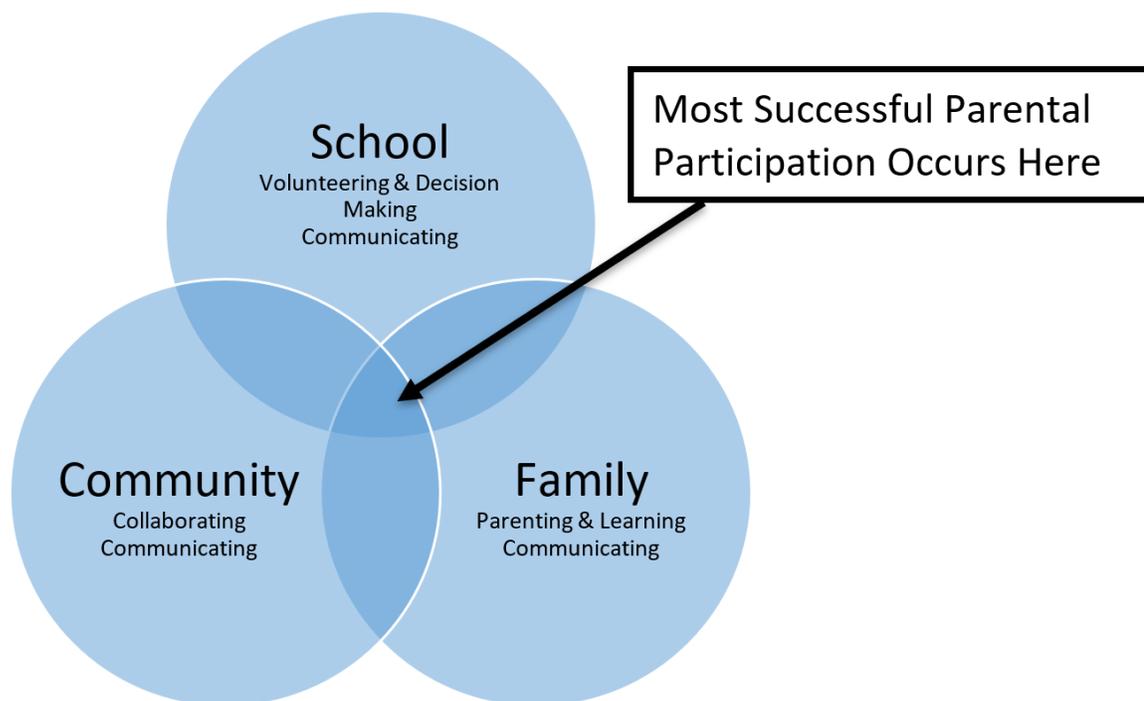
increase the power of their collective voice and use it for positive change not only for the education of their children, but for the education of all children in the system (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009).

Community members must understand the school is a part of the community, not separate (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). Places such as churches can serve as meeting areas to discuss concerns and challenges, and ways to overcome obstacles in the educational system. They can also serve as resources to support families, such as tutoring or mentoring youth in the community.

“Particularly at urban schools, school-family partnership procedures must be designed carefully, because students with a low socioeconomic background and a low parental educational level are most at risk of lack of school success” (Lusse et al., 2019, p. 228). If one approach or model doesn’t work, a search for something different should happen. Just accepting the status quo should not happen in our schools, especially to the detriment of those vulnerable to low academic performance outcomes. The Venn diagram in Figure 2 shows overlapping spheres of influence that have a positive effect on students’ education. From my analysis above, where the three spheres intersect is the area where successful parental involvement occurs.

Figure 2.

Overlapping Spheres of Influence



Parents, schools, and communities partake in a mutual awareness in supporting the education of students (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). The Epstein school-family-community partnership theory suggests that the stakeholders work together to influence the education of students in a positive way. Epstein alluded to this theory as an overlapping sphere of influence among stakeholders in the teaching of children in an effort to make educational progress. This theory is not intended to create effective students but to give them the support to make academic progress on their own.

Conclusion

In this literature review the purpose of parental participation was established. When parents are invited to join as partners, the goal of increasing positive academic

performance is more likely to be achieved. When parents join the school community, they can gain confidence in their parenting as they are supported by the school and other parents. Strategies, such as creating trusting, supportive relationships were discussed. Different parental participation programs and their effectiveness were discussed in this section. There are obstacles, such as language barriers, physical barriers, and parental perceptions. Epstein's framework was introduced and explained in this chapter.

Chapter 3 is about the methods used in this study to investigate supports parents need to improve parental participation. The background of the school studied is included in this chapter. The research questions are also included in this chapter along with descriptions of the setting and participants.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The goal of this study was to investigate what supports parents who are often excluded in the functioning of schools feel are needed to improve parental participation. Six parents and three members of the administrative team were asked for their input through participating in individual telephone interviews. After analyzing those interviews, individual follow-up phone calls were placed to some participants to clarify or extend responses.

Background Context

Before becoming Fern Street Community School, this school was part of the Stoneham County School system and had a long history of poor performance. This school historically served students with low socioeconomic backgrounds. Currently 92% of the students are from low-income families and are eligible for free or reduced priced lunches. According to PowerSchool, 86% of FSCS are students of color.

In the 2018-2019 school year Fern Street Community School opened for students. The university took Fern Street Community School as its laboratory school to improve learning in this low-performing school as part of the University Laboratory School Initiative. The university staff hopes to pull the scores up significantly and partner with the school and community to help the school thrive. The school's motto is "Better Together," which reflects the strong community support for the school. Under the

guidance of the university the school now has an emphasis on hands-on learning, and arts curriculum, which includes music, theater, visual art, and dance. Learning by doing is the strategy now used by the school, along with the four “C”s, which are children, caring, collaborating, and contributing. Leading the school are the principal, the assistant principal, and two co-directors, both from the university.

Methodology

The research methodology for this study was a basic qualitative study. This type of research is found throughout the disciplines and in applied fields of practice. It is a common form of qualitative research found in education and is a perfect methodology for use in this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In particular, this research is a qualitative interview study.

This methodology was chosen because it involves constructing an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. It also seeks to engage the participants in solving the identified problem. Not only did this study listen to the voices of parents, but it also assisted the administration in reflecting on their perceptions and the parents’ perceptions of the level of involvement in students’ education and could possibly change the level of involvement in the years to come. This study engaged administrators and parents in communication with the researcher, who analyzed responses and made suggestions to improve parental participation.

A goal of this study was that after participating in this study the parents would feel more empowered to have their voices heard at any school their children may attend. Another goal was that administration would have an expanded understanding of parental

perspectives and could then tailor expectations that are more culturally responsive to the school community. Through this study I believe the home-school-community connections became stronger.

Research Questions

The research questions were addressed through the interviews. During the interviews, questions were posed to parents and the administration team about the same content but from the two different perspectives. There were seven questions in the administration team interview and nine in the parent/guardian interview. In this research study, I investigated these questions that address the research problem:

1. What do administrators and parents in a low performing school believe would increase parental participation in the schools?
2. What supports for parents' participation already in place do the administrators and parents feel are helpful?
3. What supports for parents' participation do the administrators and parents feel are needed?

Setting and Participants

Fern Street Community School serves around 400 kindergarteners through fifth graders in a rural community. Before becoming a community-school it was a low-performing neighborhood school and was part of the local public school system since 1964. In the 2016-2017 school year Fern Street was partnered with a university because of a mandate from the state legislature with the goal of improving student outcomes. Fern Street Community School opened for students in the 2018-2019 school year.

Under the guidance of the university, the school has an emphasis on hands-on-learning and arts curriculum. The arts curriculum includes music, theater, visual arts, and dance. Learning by doing is the strategy now implemented in the school.

Table 1.

Participants

Participants	Descriptions
Donna	Administration Team
Ella	Parent
Evelyn	Parent
Jasmine	Parent
John	Administration Team
Maria	Administration Team
Mariely	Parent
Stephanie	Grandparent
Tammy	Parent

Participant Interviews

Participant interviews were conducted over the phone, due to COVID-19.

COVID-19 is a highly transmissible, potentially deadly illness. Therefore, restrictions for the state were put in place by the Governor and did not allow for there to be face-to-face-interviews. I made phone calls to individual parents and administrators at times convenient for them. The participants in this study were the parents or grandparents of FSCS students, the principal, assistant principal, and the social worker at Fern Street Community School. I was looking for information from parent participants about what

they felt would have helped them and their children have better experiences at this stage of schooling through increasing parental participation. I asked them to be reflective on their experiences to assist in the planning for the coming school years.

The perspectives of the administrators and parents chosen for the study were important to examine the perceptions regarding their awareness and responsiveness to the challenges of parental participation at Fern Street Community School. I believe by including participants I was given the best insights to have an informative picture of what is happening at Fern Street Community School regarding parental participation. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all participants. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, so they were able to speak freely without fear of any repercussions.

Data Collection

After gaining approval from the university IRB, I contacted the principal of the school and informed her about what I planned to do. After we talked, I worked with the principal to recruit parents to participate in this study. I asked her to give me the names of parents she felt would be honest and open with their responses to my questions and would be willing to donate their time to the study. When I received the names of the parents, I contacted them via email to send them information about the study, and then arranged a time to discuss the purpose and process of the study by phone. I asked the principal, assistant principal, and social worker to participate in the study in order to have a complete view of parental participation at the school. After the initial discussion I made contact by phone and used an IRB approved script during the interview.

After participants agreed to be in the study, they were sent a copy of the IRB approved interview questions. This allowed them time to think about and reflect on the information they were being asked to provide. I conducted the telephone interviews at times convenient for participants. These phone interviews lasted for approximately an hour. I was flexible and conducted the phone interviews when best for participants. Three participants needed to reschedule their interviews during the study due to various conflicts that arose. Phone calls for the purpose of member checking were made to all participants to ensure my interpretation of the data was correct. Participants were offered to have a copy of their transcripts and asked if they had any other interpretations or suggestions for what has been written so far.

In addition to collecting data through phone interviews, I also collected data on the history of the school. This history included information on test scores as well as populations historically served at Fern Street Community School. I researched the background information on when the university took over Fern Street Community School and made it a laboratory school. I used the internet to collect this data as well as making phone calls to the Stoneham County Schools Central Office. This data collection and analysis took approximately three hours. Collecting this background information helped me to understand the context in which my research would be conducted. This pre-interview preparation turned out to be helpful in the course of this study.

Data Analysis

The phone interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Throughout the data collection process, I was looking for codes, categories, and emerging themes in the

responses. I coded the responses as I read through the transcripts to find data that was potentially relevant to answering my research questions. Through this process I was able to construct categories. I then reduced the categories to themes that showed recurring patterns across data produced by this study. I identified four themes that were both comprehensive and illuminating. The data was interpreted, and recommendations were made (Glesne, 2016).

Trustworthiness

After completion of the phone interviews, all participants were contacted by phone to participate in a review of the data they provided to ensure my interpretations were correct. All participants were asked if they had further insights or comments to add to what was written so far. This process was member checking, which supports the validity and trustworthiness of this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). “The process involved in member checks is to take your preliminary analysis back to some of the participants and ask whether your interpretation rings true” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246).

Rich, thick description from the transcripts allows readers of this study to understand the context for my interpretation of the data collected (Glesne, 2016). This also helps readers of my study understand the basis for the claims I will make. Peer review and debriefing allow me to have external input and reflection on my work (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Peer review was done with all interview participants to ensure my analysis of the data and the findings were correct. All agreed with my interpretation of the data obtained. Conversations were held over the phone and lasted

approximately 40 minutes. The offer was made to send the information through email or go through it on a phone call. All three chose to discuss the information over the phone. A request was made by the administration team for them to receive a summary of the recommendations provided in the study. The summary is in Appendix E and will be sent after approval by my dissertation committee.

I saved and organized all my documents related to my study, which included coded transcripts, recordings, and relevant notes. Computer files are saved using a secure online file storage service for five years. All other documents are saved in a locked file storage container and will also be kept for five years. Saving and organizing these things give me an audit trail, which increases the trustworthiness of my study (Glesne, 2016).

Researcher Positionality

During my childhood I observed parents being involved in their children's education. As a teacher in the public schools, I have seen involved and uninvolved parents. In the recent past I have been an English as a Second Language teacher in two schools, one having moderate parent involvement, and the other having little parent involvement.

In the 2019-2020 school year I moved to a high school and am the ESL teacher for students in grades 9-12. At this level, I am seeing even less parental involvement than I have ever seen on the elementary school level. I am also a parent myself and was highly involved in my children's education. I am white and privileged and did my best to make my participants, which included minority parents, poor parents, and middle-class parents

feel comfortable and their contributions valued. Because of all these factors I recognize that my positionality will play a role in my data collection and analysis in this study.

To minimize the effects, I was reflexive of my positionality during the data collection and analysis process. I did this by keeping a reflexive journal in which I recorded my personal thoughts about me as the researcher, my assumptions, interactions, and feelings toward my research and the participants. I reflected on how my thoughts, feelings, and assumptions possibly affected the data I was collecting (Glesne, 2016).

Reporting Data

The results of this study informed school leaders about the challenges parents face in regard to parental participation levels and identified possible ways to mitigate those challenges. Also identified were multiple ways to engage parents in their children's educational journey during their elementary school years based on the needs of the parents interviewed. I reported my findings in four different areas. The first area is parents' and administrators' perceptions of the logistical factors that influence the participation level of parents. The second area is building effective relationships between parents and schools, which is critical to improving the level of parental participation. The third section is school sponsored parental participation initiatives. Finally, there is a section discussing the need to enhance the perception of the school within the community at large.

Limitations

Because of COVID-19 the way I collected data had to change significantly. My hope for this study was to conduct focus group interviews. My plan was to conduct a

focus group interview with parents, though the administration team interviews would be individual. This type of interview would have allowed parents to have interactions with other parents and could have produced more complex conversations. Those conversations may have possibly led to deeper insights into the problem posed in this study.

A significant limitation was the phone interviews happened one time. There was no time to build trust with participants and increase their comfort level with me and the process, though I felt the participants were speaking openly with me and the conversations flowed easily. Phone interviews do not allow me as the researcher to observe participant behavior or non-verbal communication, which can add to the meaning derived from an interaction. Participants were also unable to see me and observe my non-verbal responses. I briefly considered doing a Zoom meeting, but then thought about the fact that some participants may not have easy access to such technology. Additionally, there could be privacy concerns by using this type of technology.

Another limitation was that I was interviewing parents already motivated to participate in their children's education. The parents interviewed are not the ones that never attend school functions, but they did offer some insights about why some parents are not involved. They were able to offer the insights based on their knowledge of parents at the school who, for various reasons do not participate.

The limitations of this study do not alter the significance of the study. Information from this study can be used to develop a model for establishing effective home-school-community partnerships with communities that share similar demographics to Fern Street Community School.

Conclusion

I wanted to encourage parents to become or continue to be advocates for their children. I believe this study showed the parents the leadership team wants to hear what they need and want from the school and will strive to make changes to accommodate their needs. This study was the first step to open the door for communication between parents and the school. It is my hope the communication continues after my study is complete.

I conducted this study to examine the perceptions of administrators and parents of students enrolled in a low-performing school regarding parental participation in the education of children. The goal was to identify supports parents will find useful to increase their participation in their children's educational journey.

This dissertation includes five chapters. Next, we will move to Chapter IV for the presentation the findings from the study. This chapter is organized thematically. Chapter V is a discussion of interpretations of the data. There are also recommendations for ways to use the information to increase parental participation for administration and parents.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The positive impact of parental involvement in student achievement has been well documented for decades (Epstein, 1995; Lusse et al., 2019). The question has been how to facilitate an increase in parental participation, particularly in schools whose students come from high poverty families and communities. Because of the important role parents play in the education of their children, I chose to conduct a study that could illuminate areas where improvements and opportunities could be made to increase parental participation. In this study the perceptions of three members of the administrative team and six parents/grandparents of students enrolled at Fern Street Community School, a high poverty school, were examined through of individual interviews conducted on the telephone. With the information gained, this school and others in similar circumstances may better provide supports so that parental participation can increase.

Through this study there were nine individuals participating. The variations and commonalities in the perceptions of the six parents/grandparents and the three members of the administrative team of Fern Street Community School are revealed. Participants were of different ages, social classes, educational levels, and family structures. They participated in a phone interview and were asked questions pertaining to parental involvement at Fern Street Community School. All individuals that participated in this

study did so voluntarily. To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were used throughout the study.

In this chapter, four key findings or themes are presented. They were identified by coding and categorizing the transcribed interview responses. I briefly identify each theme below and then provide more detail on each theme in a section dedicated separately to each topic. I then provide a summary that offers an overview of the key insights gained in this study. The key findings were:

- Logistical factors influence the level of participation;
- Effective relationships between parents and the school are critical in improving parental participation;
- School sponsored parental participation initiatives are positive steps to improving parental participation;
- Enhancing the perception of the school in the community at large can contribute to improving parental participation.

Logistical Factors That Influence Parental Participation

Parental participation is regarded by the study participants as vital in the educational preparation of children. There are some situations schools and parents have no control over, and these influences are of vital importance to acknowledge and strive to find ways to positively respond. Although the parents and administrators understood the value in a parent participating in their child's education, they acknowledged challenges parents face. The following are major logistical barriers identified by participants in this study:

- Work schedules
- Childcare
- Transportation

Work Schedules

One of the major challenges to parent participation expressed by participants in this study was parental work schedules. Machen et al. (2005) identified this obstacle as a common challenge that school leaders must find practices and policies to assist working parents to become more involved. Many of the parents at FSPS are working full time jobs and therefore are unable to participate as they would like. Sentiments about how time affects participation was expressed in two ways: conflicts with parents' work schedules and conflicts with various school-based events and activities. Many parents expressed the desire to be present in the school during the school day. During the interview a parent participant, Jasmine, expressed just that:

I would love to be more involved but I'm working. I want to leave my job right now or work somewhere else. My goal is to work closer to home, to find something else to do so that I'll be able to just flex my schedule a little bit more than what I can because I'm on a totally different schedule when we start school . . . so then I can be more involved during the school day.

The administrators of FSCS also want to involve as many parents as possible. They all acknowledged work schedules are a major barrier that impedes increasing parental participation. Though work schedules pose an issue for many parents, the administrators' goal is to continue to find ways to involve because they understand the importance of this type of partnership. John, an administrative team member, shared,

I would always love to have more parental participation, because I just think that it's so important to the academic success of students and to the culture that we create as a school community. Also, once kids know that their parent will come to school and pop in on them, that will sometimes stop some problem behaviors.

The problem of work schedules as a significant barrier is common for many parents. Many of the interview participants wish to be involved in the school building, but since school hours and work hours are often the same this is a hard barrier to overcome. Maria, another administrative team member, shared,

I think that people are doing their best, most of the time, both teachers and parents. And so it's important to recognize our parents are socioeconomically diverse and must go to work. Because of that, there may not be a traditional face-to-face interaction, but there can still be ways for them to be involved.

Unfortunately work and school day schedules are not easily adjusted. This leaves the reality that parents that must work will be unable to participate in all the ways they would like. Those interviewed said based on the times they are available to participate they are pleased with their level of involvement. Members of the administrative team also understand parents must work and want to accommodate their needs. At the same time administrators must be aware of the demands put on teachers' personal time. Because they are hesitant to impose on teachers' personal time it is harder to often offer a wide range times for parents to participate.

Childcare

Work schedules were only one challenge expressed. Many families at FSPS have multiple children, and they vary in age. Several interviewees expressed that it is hard to be involved at the school when there are younger children at home. This issue which

hinders parental involvement has been found by other researchers (Lusse et al., 2019). Parents having younger children with them while attending parent/teacher conferences, assisting in the classroom, or helping supervise students in any way during the school day adds to the difficulty of being involved in the school community. Even though childcare is a common issue for families, some parents bring the students and their younger siblings to the meetings as Evelyn, a parent participant, shared with me:

I know in a few of the meetings I went to some of the people will bring their kids and you know, sit at one of the tables and you give them a little activity or something to do.

It was mentioned by a parent that she had attended a meeting at the school where childcare was offered. She expressed how that was such a nice option for parents to have but offering this service had not been something routinely provided. This parent explained how difficult it is to try to pay attention to information shared in a meeting while also supervising young children.

When I asked Evelyn if she thought providing childcare regularly would help encourage parental participation at FSPS she responded by saying:

I'm honestly not sure about that. But I guess something we got to keep in mind is a lot of parents probably wouldn't feel comfortable with that. Asking for that kind of support isn't easy, if that makes sense. You know, some parents will be alright, that'll be awesome. But you have a lot of parents that choose to do it by themselves. And probably if they can't do it, then they just do whatever they can do, or however they can deal with it.

Members of the administrative team acknowledged issues concerning childcare but are unsure about what could be done to consistently provide childcare during meetings and activities. Donna, a member of the administration team, shared:

I feel we have the faculty and staff who would be willing to support initiatives, such as providing childcare during meetings, to garner teacher-parent engagement. However, I think that there is hesitation in overwhelming teachers with additional responsibilities outside of teaching. So, I hesitate in that, speaking from an administrator's perspective. It's just hard asking them to take on additional responsibilities for extra-curricular requirements. We have such high academic needs. So, for example, rather than asking teachers to actively participate in parent meetings or providing childcare for those meetings, I would prefer a whole tutoring session.

For many parents with multiple children, and/or young children, it is hard to be as involved as they would like. Attending activities while having to supervise children is too much of a burden for many. Johnson, et al. (2004) found that providing childcare for school meetings reduced this barrier for parental participation. It would be helpful for parents to have a childcare option so they could attend activities and not be distracted by the responsibility of caring for children.

Transportation

Because FSCS serves families that are in a high poverty community, another issue brought up often during the interviews was transportation. Parents may wish to participate but simply cannot get to the school without transportation. During the interviews this barrier was brought up repeatedly. Donna, an administration team member, shared,

Because we are a small rural community, we do not have access to extensive amounts of free public transportation. There is limited public transportation in the form of what's called a SKAT bus. I do believe that that too requires a small fee, and there are only specific stops located within the city. So that is not always an option. A lot of families are not where that is easily accessible.

When asked for ways of overcoming transportation barriers, a member of the administration team thought in terms of specific responses to individual situations, such as Donna's response to transportation issues for a parent: "Last year I had a specific parent that couldn't come because she didn't have a car, so I went and got her."

Transportation is a concern in this rural community. There is no free transportation option, and the option that is available is a limited one that is not easily accessible for all. The school accommodates parents by providing transportation when asked, but there is no set plan to assist those needing this service on a consistent basis. Johnson et al. (2004) found that providing school-arranged transportation reduced this barrier for parents' participation.

Even though there are multiple logistical factors that hinder the ability of parents to participate as much as many of them would like, the interviews revealed actions the school has taken to accommodate parents and their varying needs. Maria, an administration team member, shared,

I think that we try to have the supports that we have in place for things like having multiple times available, like for conferences, or you know, rolling pickup times for things like iPads.

The administrators of FSCS are using many practices identified by Khalifa (2018) to be more responsive to the needs of the families they serve, such as understanding the

perspective and knowledge of the community and using that perspective and knowledge to better respond to the needs of those they serve. Parents recognize and appreciate the attempts made by the school administration team to include all parents and find ways for them to be involved. Mariely, a parent, expressed this feeling when she said,

Yeah, I feel like they try to be flexible and work with you as much as they can. They really want to make it good for us. They want us to be involved so whatever they can do to make it easier for us, they will try to do.

Transportation is one of the most common and difficult barriers for many high-poverty schools to overcome. FSCS has administration team members ready and willing to help when asked but no set, consistent way to handle these situations. The issue of transportation is also more difficult where the school is located because they are in a rural area with limited public transportation. Work schedules, childcare, and transportation are the logistical barriers identified by both the administration team and parent participants alike.

Effective Relationships Between Parents and the School

Both parents and the school play a pivotal role in educating children. Parents are the child's first teacher. They teach essential skills used in life and academic skills. They also provide love and support that help the child to develop into a healthy person. When schools partner with parents in positive ways, students' success is impacted through greater academic achievement (Pemberton & Miller, 2015).

All the interviewees believe their role in their children's education is important. They understand their parental participation in their children's educational journey has a

lasting impact on academic achievement. Building effective parent-school relationships is vitally important to increasing parental participation, which leads to the positive impact. Greene (2013) puts forward this idea that to know what parents need and value educators must first build authentic relationships. Participants identified the following actions as authentic relationship builders which are interconnected to one another:

- Welcoming a broader definition of what constitutes parental participation
- Effect communication between home and school
- Authentic relationships
- Feeling valued

Broader Parental Participation Definition

Changing the ways schools perceive appropriate and consistent parent involvement could assist in moving towards greater parent participation. For some of the parents interviewed, partnerships will not have the same look as the traditional view often expected by schools as seen through an educator's lens. They expressed accountability for being involved and expressed a strong sense of care for the educational achievement of their children. They linked their involvement to positive outcomes for their children.

Several participants shared that there are more ways to be involved than those traditionally recognized. This idea has been reflected in a study by Abdul-Adil and Farmer (2006), which found that a broader definition of parental participation would make involvement more inclusive for families of color. Home-based parental participation activities were among the less traditional emphasized as important by study participants. Learning at home is a type of parental involvement identified in Epstein's

framework (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). Mariely, a parent participant, shared her perspective on home based parental activities:

I think knowing what they're working on that day or that week is helpful. I like to talk to them about you know, what they're learning and maybe help them with it or you know, something might come up and we can relate it to what they are learning at that time. I enjoy being with them as they are learning and being able to talk with them about it.

Many participants felt as Mariely does. They agree that once they are given information on skills required for their child to be successful in all subjects at each grade level, they can assist and offer support at home. Examples of activities include taking interest in what their children are learning at school through initiating discussions about the various subject areas, helping with and checking homework, keeping an open line of communication with teachers, and sending items the teacher requests for classroom activities. These activities have been found to be positive contributions to children's educations (Park & Holloway, 2013).

Both the parents and administration team recognized the positive impact of employing learning at home activities. A member of the administration team said, "Parents are wanting to know how to support instruction." All participants recognized and respected the benefits of parents' participation in this capacity to improve children's educations. It was mentioned by both the administration team and parents that some parents may shy away from this type of parental involvement because of their limited education or because they do not know what is being taught at school.

During the interviews both parents and administrators expressed the knowledge that it will be hard to reach some families. There would need to be ways discovered to provide information to those hard-to-reach families. An administration team participant mentioned the possibility of scheduling home visits to assist and embrace all families. Parents would have the opportunity to share information about home situations and educators would be able to share school and/or classroom expectations that might affect student achievement.

Parent participants want to feel their contributions to their children's educations are valued. All parents cannot contribute in ways traditionally recognized but are contributions, nonetheless. These contributions are often home-based activities because those are the only parental participation activities the parents can be involved in for various reasons. Expansion of the definition of parental participation activities and appreciation of the value of these activities are needed to be inclusive to all families.

Effective Communication

While the focus of employing effective communication may be to improve school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs, children's progress and to recruit and organize parent help and support, there is overlap in many areas. Good communication from schools help to raise the percentages of parents volunteering. The participants expressed that activities such as learning at home are predicated on receiving good communication from the school.

During interviews we discussed what an effective parent-school partnership looks like and ways to establish them. Throughout the interviews, parents and the

administration team emphasized the importance of good communication between the parents and the school leaders. Based upon the responses there were five types of communications the participants identified as regularly taking place at FSCS:

- Engaging in face-to-face collaboration;
- Receiving and sending telephone calls to the child's teacher and school administrators;
- Receiving and sending text messages to the child's teacher and school administrators;
- Receiving and sending emails to the child's teacher and school administrators;
- Receiving letters or memos from the child's teacher and school.

It is clear the school leaders are aiding in the creation of positive and effective partnerships through regular communications using the various communication types listed above. Maria is a member of the administration team who shared:

We definitely reach out to parents in multiple ways. We send things home in bookbags and make phone calls home with Connect-ED. Since being on-line we're posting things in Google Classroom and putting things on teachers' Google sites. So, I think that we're doing a pretty good job of creating ways that parents can stay up to date about the things that are going on.

Participants stressed that the more relevant information about students or school-based parental participation opportunities is shared between home and school, parents become more readily prepared to volunteer help to the students and/or the school. Mariely, a parent participant shared this very idea when she said, "When I feel like I have very clear instructions, very detailed instructions about what to expect with

something I feel a little bit better about it.” Effective communication with families means that the school welcomes and consistently supports families to support their children. When there is two-way communication among the school and parents concerning school programs and children’s progress, the ending result will be better outcomes for students. Effective dialogue “develops out of a growing trust, a mutuality of concern, and an appreciation of contrasting perspectives” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004, p. 26).

Effective communication is needed to ensure parents are informed of the activities available for them to participate in. Parents also need to effectively communicate with the school so that their needs can be taken into consideration when it comes to planning for parental participation. Communication is a two-way interaction between the school and parents and is necessary to result in the highest level of parental participation possible.

There are many ways to communicate effectively, which is beneficial for all stakeholders in the school community. One of the many benefits is the establishment of effective communication expectations being clearly communicated. Effective communications can also convey that the school is a welcoming and caring place, which helps develop a feeling of community. Mariely shared, “They (FSCS educators) have made it very clear that they’re really hopeful to hear from the parents and have their voices heard.” Educators can share information about curriculum, school events, and other important school information. Through the information gained the school can better develop appropriate strategies to improve parental participation, which leads to improving student achievement.

Authentic Relationships

Another essential for many parents interviewed was building authentic relationships built on trust with teachers and the leaders in the school. The school is taking steps identified by research to build important relationships, such as taking the time to share positive information about students. Often schools only contact parents when something is wrong, so this can be a powerful tool to help make the positive, authentic relationship. A grandparent, Stephanie shared:

The principal's great. Every week she has someone from the school call just to see how my granddaughter is doing with the on-line learning. They know how to talk to people. They seem so loving there and they get a smile on their faces and just come up to you. They just care about everything, so genuine and wonderful.

Another step mentioned by parents is the administration team participating in school events. This has allowed parents and educators to get to know one another on a deeper level. Parents and children like seeing the administration team participate because this gives parents opportunity to talk with the leaders of the school and form a more trusting and supportive relationship.

All the respondents share the belief the creation of a welcoming and comfortable environment during the school day and outside of regular school hours is an important first to encouraging more parental participation. It was noted by many that the school administrators strive to build strong, supportive relationships with the families FSCS serves. Evelyn, a parent participant, spoke of the importance of Donna, a member of the administration team, being involved in the community and the impact it has on building trust with the parents of FSCS and having a positive impact on how the school functions:

I heard really, really bad things about the school and then, I'm not sure, but when the university took over Donna had a huge impact on what's going on. She communicates well and she makes it a point to, you know, know who her students and her students' parents are.

FSCS administrators have worked to build a welcoming and responsive school environment. The school staff is perceived as genuine, which shows parents they really want and need their help and are there to support parents. Ella, a parent participant, reflects how she feels about support from the leaders in the school:

You know, someone is there all the time to help. Whatever I need to be helped with or if I have questions or concerns, I've always got somebody to help whether it's just talking about something on the phone or meeting in person.

Authentic relationships are vital to encouraging parental participation.

Participants felt having supportive relationships based on trust between the school and home can go a long way to boost parental participation. The parents appreciate the principal being a longtime member of the community. This adds to the trust the parents feel toward her.

Feeling Valued

Throughout the interview process parents expressed how the administration team made the feel valued and welcomed in the school. They mentioned the team as being flexible, caring, and having the best intentions for parents and students served at FSPS.

Flynn (2007) found one of the reasons some parents feel unable to support their children is because of their lack of formal education. I found a reflection of this finding while doing my research study. When I asked Tammy, a parent participant, why she

thinks some parents do not wish to be involved in their child's education, her thoughtful response was:

Part of it could be didn't have a very good experience in school. Part of it is they can feel overwhelmed or feel like they don't really know the educational jargon. Knowing educational jargon increases their comfort level when communication with educators. I don't really know the reason for the discomfort, but I've always looked at that as being one of the reasons why parents may not be involved or are as overtly involved because they are involved in other ways.

In a study conducted by Okeke (2014) a conclusion was reached that most parents do not know how to get involved. This was reflected in my study when a parent, Mariely shared how she felt when she started trying to build a positive relationship with the school and become involved in her child's education:

At first, I was very nervous, very unsure about what I can bring to the table. I was very insecure. So, once I kind of just got out of my own way and just kind of, I don't know just got little brave and just said okay I'm just gonna try it. I'm just gonna try my best and do what I can. I'm here at least. Once I got that mindset and stopped being, you know, insecure about it, that really made a big difference for me.

Feeling as though one can contribute in ways that are valued is a strong motivator for parents to become active in their children's educations. For many parents, experiences with schools have been negative, so feeling that their ideas are valued can go a long way to encourage the reluctant parents to step outside side of their comfort zone and engage in parental participation activities.

School-Sponsored Parental Participation Initiatives

All parents saw value in attending school sponsored events. These events included both involvement and engagement level activities. Providing varied opportunities gives parents the ability to choose an activity that meets their comfort level. Parents had positive feelings about the activities sponsored at the school. Examples of school-sponsored parental participation activities include:

- Parent Council, which allows parents to have their voices heard about what and how things should be done at the school;
- Community Based, such as Lunch and Learn, which involves pulling in community resources to make parents aware of information and resources available to them;
- Student centered activities, such as Fall Festival, which allows students to take part in games and activities sponsored and organized by the school and the Parent Council.

Parent Council

Schools benefit when they include parents in the decision-making process. When parents provide their opinions and preferences regarding issues under consideration, they are more likely to buy-in to school policies and initiatives. When parents are made aware of the complexities of running a school, they are often more supportive. Additionally, parents can help the school reach out to other parents. This is because they have informal access through extra-curricular activities and neighborhood connections.

One of the most frequently mentioned parental participation activities at FSCS was the Parent Council. This initiative is one that is a powerful catalyst to help parents move from involvement in their children's educations to engagement in their educations. John, a member of the administration team, explained how the process of identifying Parent Council members begins:

We asked every teacher to send two names to the administration team and then we contacted the parents and invited them. We told them the teacher elected them because she felt they would be a good representative. This is how we've started building it up.

Epstein and Sheldon (2016) found shared decision making within the school as one of the important activities to incorporate in a school wishing to improve parental participation. Though this initiative FSCS offers parents an opportunity to have a voice in the decision-making process, Mariely shared more parents may wish to participate in the group but may be nervous being a participant in a group with that much power. She offered a way to help parents feel more comfortable in being involved on that level:

I think maybe just trying to reassure the parents as much as possible. Kind of like there's no wrong answer, you know, just make your best effort. Basically, just make them feel comfortable about trying. Sometimes I'm nervous to ask questions. If it were very detailed and clear cut about what they can expect they may feel better. Reassure them that just being there makes a difference.

Parent Council is an initiative that has been well received by those involved at FSCS. The goal is to have more parents become part of the council. John, a member of the administration team, shared, "Parents are urged by other parents to kind of build up the Parent Council, so that has helped increase the number of members." The parents

servicing on the council currently want to feel they have something to contribute, and they feel the contribution is valued. Since they feel valued, they are more likely to make the effort it takes to contribute. Many parents are nervous getting involved in a decision-making capacity because they doubt their ability to serve in that role. They are also unsure of the expectations and if they can deliver what is expected of them. This is an obstacle to overcome in order to increase the number of parents becoming involved in this capacity.

Student-Centered

Another favorite activity mentioned multiple times was when there are opportunities for parents to come to school and participate with their children in an activity or watch them in a performance. Stephanie, a parent participant, shared,

They have nights where they invite parents to come in and they get the children to do like a play. They act things out and all the children did really good. They made up the play and did a really good job. There were a lot of children that participated. Parents will come out to see their children.

Parents enjoy participating with their children in a variety of school-based activities. Multiple activities that involved the students were well received by many parents at FSCS. Mariely, a parent participant, shared,

They did a Valentine dance, which was really nice. It was for the upper grades and it was just parents or grandparents that came with the students. It was really sweet. I like things like that. There are also festivals and activities that they call "parent night" or "parent game night" and they'll have different games and stations and stuff for the kids to do.

This is a type of parental participation activity parents feel comfortable attending because the expectations for parents are simply to attend and take part in a planned activity that includes their children.

Community-Based

Schools are increasingly relying on collaboration with partners such as local businesses, after-school care providers, higher education, foundations, and other community-based agencies. Building better connections to meet the needs of children and further the goals of school reform starts with effective school and community partnerships. Hall and Quinn (2014) found it is helpful for schools to establish school-community partnerships that facilitate access to community-based programs because this helps families find resources and opportunities that help them improve their lives and can lead them to becoming more involved in the education of their children.

Stephanie, a parent participant found one of the Lunch and Learn sessions especially valuable to her. This session brought in a community resource that could provide opportunities to families at FSCS. Stephanie described the Lunch and Learn session to me:

They had a class one time there that you could sign up for and they was like trying to get people to join the credit union. They was telling how good it was to join a credit union. That's something everybody needs to try because it's different than banks. There's a lot of good things you can do when you join a credit union. They explained it all.

In this study parents interviewed mentioned a desire to have educational opportunities such as computer classes, GED or college classes held at FSCS for all

members of the community, not just parents with children at the school. Because this was brought up in the interviews multiple times and was clearly an area of interest, I asked Donna, a member of the administrative team about the possible opportunities that could be offered:

We did have a conversation with a local community college. They actually approached us about offering GED courses here on our campus. However, at the time, there was a spacing issue and they wanted to leave the devices here. We could not accommodate the space in the classrooms, so we didn't have office or storage space. It wasn't something that we were able to move forward with. Really it came down to not having enough space.

Finding ways to bring in community resources is seen as a positive step by the interview respondents. Many valued the information shared through the various meetings that included community resource information. Mariely, a parent participant shared:

I know at one of the after-school events that they had; they had a bank. They were there to just kind of answer questions of any kind of financial or banking, or like 401K questions. I do remember they did have that, and I found that interesting.

Based on the responses of the parent participants, more of this type of interaction with the community at large would be welcomed. Bringing in community resources for families to make those connections is recognized by parent participants as beneficial.

Enhancing Community Perception

Consistent community involvement and engagement with schools have been shown to have significant short-term and long-term benefits. Research has shown when communities, schools, and families work together to support learning, students tend to

earn higher grades, attend school more regularly, stay in school longer, and enroll in higher level programs.

The parents at FSCS praised the programs offered, the dedication of teachers, administrators, and all staff. They were all happy to be a part of the school community but would like to see the community increase their engagement and support. Several parents expressed a desire to grow the school community by enrolling more students from the community at large. Also expressed were concerns from several parents interviewed about how the school is perceived by the community, which causes the community to not be as involved and supportive as the respondents would like. The main concerns effecting community perception are:

- Negative History
- Misconception of School Program

Negative History

The parent participants explained to me during the interview that the school has a history of being troubled and that even after the university made Fern Street a community school, this perception has continued. The negative perceptions in the community are that the students do not behave in class and there is high teacher turnover because of the difficult student population. They expressed frustration by what people in the community have said to them about their choosing FSCS for their children. Ella shared her frustration:

I've heard several parents talk down about the school. When they decide on where they want their child to go to kindergarten right off the bat, FSCS is not one of the schools they like. I ask their reason and they say the kids are bad. I say there are

bad kids in all schools, so it's not just there, I've seen it myself. I tell them they aren't giving the school an opportunity and the program is wonderful. I feel a lot of parents don't give the program a chance because of the reputation it had before.

Because of the negative reputation of the school before the university took over the educational program, many in the community do not wish to send their children to FSCS. This negative perception is one that bothers the study participants. They would like for the community to realize the school is being led by different administrators with a completely different educational philosophy and program. The hope is to eventually put the past behind and garner more support of the new program.

Misconception of School Program

Since the interviewed parents are very pleased with the educational opportunities their children are receiving, they wish parents in their community could understand the value of FSCS. The community does not understand why the traditional approach of students sitting quietly at desks doing worksheets is not the approach used. The community members have also shared their concern about how students will transition to a more traditional style of education after their elementary years. A parent participant, Tammy shared, "Since FSCS students will not be used to sitting quietly at desks, completing work independently, parents in the community are afraid it will be too much of a change." The community simply does not have an accurate perception and understanding of the program, which frustrates those parents that do understand and see the benefit of what is being offered. Stephanie, a grandparent, shared, "They see the university has taken over and they wonder why, but I see it as good because it is a college that can give a better education."

Aspects of the program especially valued by FSCS parents is the opportunity for children to participate in the arts. Several mentioned how much their children are enjoying participating in plays and putting on various class performances. They would like to see more people in the community to become involved with the school and are trying to help change the reputation. This is being attempted through continuing to talk to others about the school and sharing their children's positive experiences being a student there.

Summary

Though Fern Street Community School has many of the characteristics of a low-performing school they are taking steps to correct one area of utmost concern, which is improving parental participation. These steps include such initiatives as forming a parent council which includes parents as decision making partners for the school, creating a welcoming environment, and striving to pull in community resources to inform families of tools they may find useful.

During interviews logistical factors that impede many parents' abilities to be as involved in their children's educations were voiced. These logistical factors were work schedules, transportation, and childcare. Appreciation for the efforts of the administration team to form strong parent-school partnerships by putting in place initiatives that encourage parental participation were consistently mentioned.

To my surprise, an area of concern for several respondents was finding ways to enhance community perception of the school. Respondents believe the negative perception of the school based on its history is harming the reputation within the

community now. Also, during the interviews several mentioned the community misunderstanding the educational program is a factor in the negative perceptions. Through enhancing community perception, the parents at FSCS wish to increase enrollment which will give more students access to the innovative program.

Though FSCS had similar issues reflected in previous studies found in literature on this subject, this school is well on its way to finding ways to improve involving and engaging parents. Some promising practices found in the literature suggests that when working with parents from diverse backgrounds, it may be beneficial to incorporate the following four strategies for interaction: empower the families to help their children in academics; use outreach programs to reach families in the community; connect them to community resources; and offer resources to provide support for families (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006). FSCS respondents identified the use of these practices at the school.

The respect for the school's leaders and mission was easy to hear in the statements of the parents interviewed. Multiple times parents and administrative team leaders mentioned how COVID-19 has, of course, caused many plans to be put on hold. I am impressed and encouraged by the initiatives for parental participation that were in their infancy when COVID-19 put an abrupt halt on these plans. The positive, supportive relationships between parents and administration were evident during the interviews. Fern Street Community School is just waiting for the school to fully open and get back on track. I am hopeful my study helps those at FSCS enhance and improve on what has been planned.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought to illuminate factors that limit parental involvement in schools that serve students from low socioeconomic families. This has been a problem for decades (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Desimone, 1999; Khalifa, 2018), and there is much research over this long timespan searching for answers (Jeynes, 2003; Pemberton & Miller, 2015). There are many ideas on how to improve parental participation and many assumptions concerning why this is and has been the situation in many schools serving this student population (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). Because Fern Street Partnership School serves a low socioeconomic community, the leadership of FSPS is interested in finding ways to increase parental participation. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of both the administrative team and parents of FSPS students. By finding out the perceptions of both groups, supports can be identified, and gaps in supports may be exposed from which goals for addressing them may be derived. Key findings include:

- Logistical factors influence the level of participation;
- Effective relationships between parents and the school are critical in improving parental participation.
- School sponsored parental participation initiatives are positive steps to improving parental participation;

- Enhancing the perception of the school in the community at large, can contribute to improving parental participation.

Below are each of the research questions and my interpretations of the data provided by parent respondents and members of the administrative team.

Research Question 1

What do administrators and parents in a low performing school believe would increase parental participation in the schools?

Participants shared that logistical factors heavily influenced the level of participation and they felt they were doing all that their schedules allowed. The participants spoke of the difficulty of participating during the school day, which are also the hours most parents work. There is no way for parents to stop working to participate during school hours, but participants suggested having alternative times to participate in multiple activities. Though there are multiple times for some opportunities, even more flexibility would be welcomed. Weekend activities were mentioned as a good time for parents, though administration expressed the desire to protect the personal time of staff.

Several expressed that they would really like to be more involved, but their schedules do not allow them to participate more. Jasmine stated, "I try to go to all the meetings, but I can't come during the day because of my work." Therefore, increasing parental participation levels for them is not something they feel is feasible. They mentioned wanting to be able to come into school while students were on campus. It was mentioned several times that they wish they could come into the classroom and support their child's teacher more by doing things such as reading with children or helping with

art projects. Also, performing such duties as supervising students at lunch or on the playground were ways parents would like to contribute their time to the school.

Several shared they were pleased with their involvement in their child's education by doing activities such as discussing the school day with their child, helping with homework, sending in requested supplies, and communicating with the school through email or phone. Though these actions cannot be measured or documented by the school, parents consider them to be parental participation activities that are valuable to enhancing their children's educations. Parents clearly expressed an expanded view of how parental participation can be defined.

The parents described their level of participation as "good," though several stated that they wish they could participate more. Ella, a parent participant, stated, "I'm doing all I can do." Parents viewed participation as taking part in activities at school as well as being involved with the educational process at home, so that increased their perceived level of participation to "high" in some cases. They are motivated to be involved in home-based activities as well as school-based activities. There were several that stated they feel their participation is at a high level because they are involved whenever an opportunity presents itself at school because their work schedule is more flexible than many parents.

The administration team viewed this question in several different ways. For some on the administration team there is the desire to increase the levels of parental participation while still feeling positive about the current levels. One said parental involvement was at an acceptable level. Another described the level of participation as

“spotty” and “hit or miss,” while another described the level as low. One administrator John, mentioned, “We got to think about parent participation doesn’t always mean them coming in the building.” He went on to say there are some parents that never physically come to the school but call often. If all the ways parents participate are acknowledged, he feels the participation would be closer to a “medium” level, which for him is acceptable.

Members of the administration believe one way to increase parental participation would be to add resources such as childcare and offering food to existing opportunities. Childcare was an obstacle frequently expressed during the interviews. Parents expressed how helpful it would be to have childcare at meetings so they would not have to be distracted while trying to fully participate in the meeting or activity. Administration understands why this would be a helpful option to have for parents but is unsure how this could be put into place in a consistent manner.

Transportation is another factor that influences participation, though this was not an issue for any participants interviewed. Members of the administration team shared they know of parents struggling to overcome this obstacle. Unfortunately, the school is in a rural area without easily accessible public transportation. Administrators work with parents as needed to provide transportation.

Some of these logistical factors could be overcome with the assistance of a discretionary fund, which the school do not have at this time. All the members of the administrative team mentioned how COVID-19 changed the trajectory of parental participation the school was on. They are hopeful when the normal school schedule returns, parental participation efforts will move in a positive direction.

Jasmine, a parent participant at FSCS, had a notably different response concerning ways to increase parental participation. Jasmine expressed her general opinion that there are some parents simply not interested in the education of their children. She believes there is little that can be done to increase parental participation for some parents. This was a concern for her and a perspective she had a difficult time understanding. During our interview she shared her frustration with me:

Some people just don't care. You know, it's the overall mentality about some of this stuff. And you have to first of all realize that your kids did not ask to be here, and you need to do anything and everything you can to make it better for them. Some do not value education. First of all, you got grandparents raising the kids. And then you have the young people raising kids. They don't know what to do. Many are just used to taking so much that they want you to spoon feed them. If they come out, they want to feel like they get something out of it, like a free meal.

Jasmine was the only participant who expressed this perception, but this quote reflects an attitude that is often expressed by people, parents, citizens, and professionals alike. What is notable is that even though Jasmine was the only participant to express this concern, it sits below the surface of much discussion of parent involvement and implies the deficit thinking often attributed to parents in low-performing schools. This response demonstrates the need to inform those with this view of the many factors that lead to parents being unable to participate in their children's education and the importance of finding ways for all parents to engage in parental participation activities.

Research Question 2

What supports for parents' participation already in place do the administrators and parents feel are helpful?

Parents mentioned supports in the form of various school-sponsored parental participation initiatives that provide opportunities requiring differing levels of commitment that help them to be involved on levels that match their comfort levels. There were some favorites mentioned, such as being a volunteer at lunch to help supervise students. There were events planned for students that allowed parents to participate in multiple ways. They could volunteer their time during the event, be a member of the team helping to prepare for the event or send in items needed for the event. Parents liked being able to have choices of how to be involved in meaningful ways.

Parents often mentioned the parent council, a decision-making group, as a powerful opportunity for parents to be engaged. This is an example of a type of parent involvement in Epstein's framework, decision-making, which includes parents in school decisions and develops parent representatives and leaders. Ella, a parent on the Parent Council, said, "We come up with good ideas and have good things for the school." Another opportunity mentioned was the Valentine dance. This was an event planned by the parent council but included other parents to implement the event. They enthusiastically described the parents joining their children for the dance, as well as parents volunteering to send in supplies needed. Ella also added, "The Valentine dance was very successful."

All the administrative team enthusiastically mentioned the parent council as a way for parents to become involved in decision making for the school. If parents are not interested in decision making there were opportunities mentioned, such as the events like

dances, also mentioned by the parents. Administrators also mentioned Lunch and Learn events where various agencies in the community would come and share information with parents.

Effective relationships begin with effective communication as a major component. Communicating is typology number two in Epstein's framework of parent involvement. Effective communication with parents means that the school welcomes and consistently supports parents to support their children. When there is two-way communication between the parents and school concerning school programs and children's progress, the end result will be better outcomes for students. Effective dialogue "develops out of a growing trust, a mutuality of concern, and an appreciation of contrasting perspectives" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004, p. 26).

Parents mentioned the school helps parents be involved by using effective communication. Examples include making announcements through emails, phone calls home, or flyers sent home with the students to let them know what is happening at the school. The parents appreciate the clear and frequent communication about what specific opportunities are being offered for parents to participate in. Parents voiced they are aware of the welcoming attitude of administrators, and the conscious efforts made by the administrative team to get more parents involved. Parents expressed multiple times that the administrators at FSCS are always helpful and accommodating when possible. These effective relationship building actions are critical in improving parental participation. It is also positive that the administration team is African-American, which is reflective of the population served. This aids in forming the trusting relationships needed between school

and home. Additionally, the principal has a history being a member of the community. In fact, she attended elementary school there, so she is a well-known figure in the community.

The administrative team mentioned supports that help parents participate such as providing multiple time slots to participate in opportunities. Some of the opportunities mentioned were open houses, parent/teacher conferences, and rolling pick-up times for iPads. Also mentioned were the communications between the school and home that help families become aware of participation opportunities. Communications that assist parents in knowing when they can participate are announcements made through ConnectEd, flyers sent home with students, and posts made online.

Most parents are not aware of all the various supports used by other parents, though they felt that the ones they themselves use are helpful for the whole population of the school. They are aware other parents are attending events and are involved in helping to plan and provide items needed for events to happen. Because they see the parents participating the parents interviewed in this study assume all parents are getting announcements, as they are, in some form. Parents are aware of other parents' participation but not specifically the ways parents find out about the various activities and the reasons those parents chose to participate in those certain events. Also unknown is the supports possibly used to ensure parents get to the event.

Members of the administrative team stated that parents use the supports provided often. An example of this would be the fact that when different time slots are offered to accommodate various schedules, those time slots are used. Administrators also mentioned

there are supports provided on an “as needed” basis. They explained there have been times parents have expressed needing transportation to or from events. In these situations, the administrative team works to personally provide the needed transportation. Though this type of support has been provided, there is no set procedure for parents to request this support.

Several parents shared they were pleased with their involvement in their child’s education by doing activities such as discussing the school day with their child, helping with homework, sending in requested supplies, and communicating with the school through email or phone. Though these actions cannot be measured or documented by the school parents consider them to be parental participation activities that are valuable to enhancing their children’s educations. The parent participants clearly expressed an expanded view of how parental participation can be defined, and feel the administrative team supports parents who wish to be involved in their children’s educations from home.

Research Question 3

What supports for parents’ participation do the administrators and parents feel are needed?

In order to increase the interviewee’s parental participation, parents said more of a variety of days and times need to be offered so that as multiple parent schedules can be accommodated. It was mentioned several times having some events on Saturdays would help parents have time to attend. They shared that often when parents get home from work, they are tired, must get various chores done at home, and then it is too much of a burden to then go to a school event.

Providing more of a variety of days and times for parents to participate in activities was mentioned by the parents interviewed because, as Ella stated, “Some parents work crazy hours, you know.” In addition to offering a variety of days and times, providing childcare at events consistently was mentioned by several respondents. Transportation was also acknowledged as a barrier for some parents.

The administrative team felt several actions could increase parental participation. One action mentioned several times was to provide childcare during meetings. John, an administration team member, shared, “I think if we would have some kind of childcare that would alleviate a barrier for many parents.” Because many parents are the sole parent in the family, there is no one to leave the children with when a parent wants to come to an event or meeting at school. Also mentioned was providing food, though it was stated that the school really doesn’t have the funds for this. This administrative team member felt there should be a discretionary fund to provide for items such as this. Providing food is seen as important because providing it would help the parents have one less thing to do or take care of before being free to attend a school function.

A few parents also mentioned that providing food at meetings and events is a great way to get parents to participate. This is because parents get off work and then have a hard time fixing dinner and then going out to a meeting. If dinner was already taken care of, parents feel it may be easier to persuade more parents to attend meetings and events. Tammy, a parent, expressed, “When you have food it helps bring people together.”

Parents were interested in FSCS offering opportunities for parents to further their educations. They mentioned the desire for GED classes to be offered on campus. Several suggested having the university offer college level classes also. One interviewee also mentioned allowing parents to teach classes in areas they are comfortable. She said she is someone very comfortable with computers and could lead a class for parents that need help with technology. She felt there are probably other areas of expertise untapped in this pool of parents and by having parents leading activities, other parents may feel more inclined to participate, which would hopefully lead them to participate in other areas.

There was also a lot interest in having more of a connection with the university. An example of this would be for parents to assist in supervising field trips to attend events on the university campus. A parent mentioned a world culture event held on the university campus. She feels it is important for students go to the university instead of occasionally the university coming to Fern Street Partnership School. There was a strong feeling that more of a connection to the university is needed.

Members of the administrative team mentioned a desire to increase the frequency of student performance or presentation opportunities throughout the school year. A connection between involving students in performances or presentations and having high parental participation in those events has been established. An example an administrator mentioned was having a class share what they have been learning. A different class would be selected monthly and parents would be invited to come to hear the presentation. The hope is that parents from the class along with their friends and other family members

would attend the meeting. The administrator said this has been tried at other schools and has been successful.

Effective relationships that begin with effective communication need to continue being developed. Communicating is typology number two in Epstein's framework of parent involvement. Effective communication with parents means that the school welcomes and consistently supports parents to support their children. When there is two-way communication between the parents and school concerning school programs and children's progress, the ending result will be better outcomes for students. Effective dialogue "develops out of a growing trust, a mutuality of concern, and an appreciation of contrasting perspectives" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004, p. 26).

Several of the parents interviewed expressed how much it bothered them that the community does not have a positive perception of the school. They explained this comes from the negative reputation the school had before the university took over the academic program. The negative perception also comes from a misunderstanding about the current program and the benefits of the program.

Collaborating with the community is typology number six in Epstein's framework. The perception needs to be strengthened to then obtain the support of the community. This support from the community could help assure equity of opportunities for families to participate in community programs or obtain community services. Matching community contributions with school goals will assist in strengthening the educations of the children at Fern Street Community School and provide more

opportunities for interactions between the school and community, which in time can assist in changing the negative perceptions of the school within the community.

While it is important to have findings that provide answers to the research questions in mind, I believe it is also important to acknowledge insights that are unexpected outliers from the interviews. One of those unexpected points made by an administrator was how important it is to acknowledge when faculty and staff have done a good job and be satisfied with what has been accomplished.

I was pleased to hear Maria, one of the members of the administrative team express a level of satisfaction, while at the same time acknowledge the desire to keep looking for ways to improve the parental participation at FSCS. She expressed what I feel is such a healthy, positive way to frame the work of increasing parental participation:

Of course, you never say “Okay, our work is done.” I mean, nobody’s going to do that, but one needs to reach a point of saying, “I’m not going to keep the pressure on myself. I’m just doing the best I can, and I’m satisfied.” I also let teachers know they’re doing a good job, and you know, we appreciate the work they are doing to involve parents.

All the parents wanted the leadership team to know they are pleased with the opportunities provided at FSPS. Because of COVID my interviews were conducted over the phone; therefore, I did not know the race or ethnicity of my participants, except for administrators. I do know the school is made up of 86% students of color and because the administrative team is also people of color, the success of improvement in parental participation may be because parents recognize themselves in the school leaders. The participants wanted to provide encouragement to continue moving forward with the

initiatives already in place. They all shared disappointment that many of the parental participation activities have been put on hold because of COVID-19. They are hopeful that when things return to normal the activities will resume.

Parents and members of the administrative team were pleased with the types of school sponsored initiatives being offered to increase parental participation. Logistical factors affect the ability of parents to participate as they would like. Work schedules are the biggest obstacle found during this inquiry. Parents would like to see more times available to participate in activities, but from the administration team's perspective, faculty and staff must have their personal time protected.

Parent Council is an initiative that both the administration team and the parents would like to see expand with more parents choosing to participate. Administration shared that they would like to see parents asking other parents to become involved. They feel parents being asked by other parents may encourage more participation. Participation in Parent Council is a decision- making activity which falls into typology number five of Epstein's framework. This type of initiative helps parents feel ownership of the school which can then lead to shared experiences and connections with other families. These connections with other parents are one way to bring even more parents into this type of parental engagement activity, which could lead to greater support and understanding of the school.

Limitations

The limitations of this study do not alter the significance or transferability of the study. Information gained from this study can be used to improve or develop a model for establishing or improving home-school-community partnerships between stakeholders.

Originally this study was going to be conducted using focus groups, but because a pandemic set it my plans had to change. I had to change to individual interviews over the phone. I feel the study turned out well, but I do wonder if different or additional information would have been found if I would have been able to proceed as planned.

This study had a small sample size of six parents and three participants from the administration team. All participants were from the same school. This small sample size is not representative of all the participants from a low-performing elementary school, though there were many similarities found between this study and others on parental participation, such as work schedules being a major hindrance that limits parents' abilities to participate in children's educations as they wish.

I interviewed parents that are already involved in their children's educations. I wonder what different information I would receive if I were able to talk with parents that do not participate. Pursuing parents that are not willing participants goes against IRB protocols, but it would be interesting to find a way to talk with those that are impossible for whatever reason, to get to parent participation events.

All parents interviewed were a mother or grandmother. I believe this is because women are often the ones that oversee the educational process of their children. I wonder what different answers I would have gotten if I had interviewed fathers. I know some of

the women I interviewed are single mothers and if someone is to be involved in their children's educations it falls solely on them.

Recommendations

Having a comprehensive approach to partnerships between school, families, and communities allows school to build on their strengths. An approach that is comprehensive fosters positive attitudes about the school, families, and community members because it respects the varying capacities of the school population. Actions and activities related to the six types of partnerships found in Epstein's framework that are suggested below are intended to provide parents and administrators with ideas to increase parental participation (Epstein, 1995). This framework describes the general categories of partnerships that exist between schools, families, and communities. There is often overlap between the categories. The categories are:

- Parenting: Helping families establish home environments to support children as learners
- Communications: The use of effective forms for school-to-home and home-to-school communications
- Volunteering: The recruitment and organization of a school's volunteer program
- Learning at home: Helping families assist their children with homework and recognizing other learning at home opportunities
- Decision-making: Including parents, students, and community members in the school decision-making process

- Collaborating with the Community: The identification and integration of resources and services from the community

Though qualitative examinations are not specifically designed to yield generalizable data in the manner that quantitative studies might (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), some recommendations are warranted due to the consistency of the themes that emerged in this research. Data yielded several common perceptions and experiences among participants. As a result, researchers and educators should not overlook these findings and themes but continue to explore areas of parental participation to add to the knowledge base and inform practice. Below are practical recommendations for parents and administrators.

Recommendations for Practice

Results showed that participants in this study have mostly similar perceptions while also having a small variation in some perceptions. With pronounced attention on student success and research suggesting that parental involvement influences student achievement, the significance of parental involvement should not go unrecognized (Fan & Williams, 2010). Across the country educators continue to strive for academic success for all students. Because of this focus it would be advantageous for educators and researchers to pay attention to approaches that could possibly strengthen parental involvement.

Parents and the administration team in this study strongly articulated that communication was one of the most important types of parental participation. Epstein et al. (2009) state, “Two-way communications increase understanding and cooperation

between school and home and show students that their teachers and parents are in contact to help them succeed in school” (p. 58). There are numerous approaches to facilitate communication such as conferences, PTA meetings, weekly folders, handbooks, emails, newsletters, phone trees, and websites that may be employed. Many of these approaches are being utilized by FSPS and should continue as ways to encourage communication between the home and school. It is critical to cultivate two-way communication with all parents throughout the year, not just with parents of struggling students.

For Parents

The results of this research study have several implications for parents. It is important for parents to understand that together they have a powerful collective voice that can make a difference in the education of their own children and for all children attending FSCS. It is important for them to make and maintain connections with teachers and administrators at the school. By forming and maintaining these connections they will be able to make their needs known so that they may be addressed, and they will be able to share their ideas and vision as to how the school should function. They must strive to be change agents and continue to be engaged in the decision- making process within the school.

Children often have a high level of trust in the opinion of their parents throughout their schooling, therefore parents can choose to use this existing relationship to collaborate with their child and educators in order to develop attainable goals for their child and help to ensure educational success (Flynn, 2007). Parents are their child’s first and most important teacher. When they are involved in their children’s schools, children

have higher achievement as well as more positive feelings toward school (Colombo, 2006).

Parents play a vital role in helping other parents become involved. Through their interactions with other parents, they can inform and encourage them to take a more active role in the education of their children. Parents engaged in the initiatives, such as parent council, can encourage those parents that are involved to move to the level of being engaged. Parents trust other parents and are more likely to participate if they see others taking on those roles of being actively engaged. A network could be formed to link all families with parent representatives.

They can make a difference in how the community views FSCS by continuing to share their experiences at the school and with others the mission and philosophy of the school. Because the community has several misconceptions about FSCS, such as it is the student teachers leading instruction instead of licensed teachers, it is imperative for parents of FSCS students to continue sharing their experiences with others. Not only can they share their experiences but ask questions of those that speak negatively of the school and take the opportunity to clear up those misconceptions. Parents can be strong advocates for FSCS in the community. In time the negative attitudes can be changed if multiple positive perspectives are shared.

For Administrators

The results of this study also have implications for administrators as well. Having a comprehensive approach to partnerships between schools, families, and communities allows schools to build on their strengths. This kind of approach also fosters positive

attitudes about the school and about families and community members because it respects and utilizes the various capacities of the school population.

Administrators must continue to reach out to parents to get to know them and their needs. It is important to make efforts to ensure all parents become involved in their child' education. Educators should provide numerous opportunities and recruit volunteers widely so that all parents can find ways to become involved that are not confined to in-person participation at the school during school hours. All parents must feel that their time and talents are welcome.

The interviews suggest parents wish to have multiple times available to participate in school sponsored activities. This is due to many parents are working and wanting to be involved, but because of work schedules it is difficult. There could be flexible schedules made for volunteers that designate specific times and descriptions so that parents know what opportunities there are available and exactly what they will be asked to do.

From an administrator's perspective, the protection of the personal time of faculty and staff has to be considered, but maybe there is a way to have some trade time opportunities to encourage faculty and staff to participate at times more convenient for the parents.

Another suggestion is to provide childcare during meetings and activities. There are parents who don't feel comfortable coming to meetings with their children because they cannot focus entirely on the meeting or activity while also supervising. If there were

consistent childcare provided by a parent volunteer or a faculty or staff member it is likely more parents would feel comfortable attending.

Providing food was also an option to be considered. Because parents feel so rushed after getting home from work, feeding their children, then rushing to a meeting, many just do not make it. By providing food, such as pizza, the chore of feeding the children is relieved, and then parents can find the time to attend the meeting.

Administrators also need to continue to make parents feel comfortable and viewed as valued partner in their children's education. The parent council has been an excellent way to give parents a way to have input into policies that affect their child's education, develop a feeling of ownership of the school, share connections with other parents and become aware of parents' voices in school decisions. This initiative has been well received by the parents interviewed. Because of this positive view, once school returns to normal the parent council should be able to move forward with plans that were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is likely this parental decision-making body will grow and have a powerful influence in how the school functions. Administrators should find out from parents what they need to become more involved in this decision-making role and then try to find ways to accommodate those needs, such as varying days and times of the meetings. It may also be helpful to assemble the parent council with parent representatives from major groups in the school, such as English-language learners, and/or representatives of major ethnic groups. Pulling in representatives from the university and the community may be beneficial.

There are some parents that are only able or willing to be involved from home. Schools should help all families establish environments at home to support their children as students. Some ways to do this are:

- Make parent support a topic discussed at the beginning of the school year.
- Encourage parents to spend at least 30 minutes a day working with their children on academics.
- Offer suggestions to parents on how to strengthen academic skills.
- Ask for input from parents on homework assignments.
- Have a library of games students can check out to play at home with a family member.
- Provide a way for parents to get answers about assignments.

Online activities, involvement through social media, and in-home family activities are examples of how to engage parents and support the school-home connection for those needing or wanting home based parental participation opportunities. There may be parents without access to computers that further complicates their ability to participate. Open school computer labs or libraries can provide parents with access to blogs, teacher web sites, learning software, the Internet, and social media, which can provide an avenue for those parents to take part in their child's education and build a relationship with the school community. It is important to practice caution to avoid creating feelings of guilt among parents who may not want to or be able to volunteer in traditionally recognized ways. Thought should be given to inviting parental participation in ways that demonstrate respect for their abilities and preferences.

Educators could better serve parents through first identifying, then encouraging and supporting them. A parent survey asking what information and workshops they would find most helpful would identify their needs. Educators could then organize programs that acknowledge and exemplify respect for parents who choose to participate in their child's education from home. There should be ways created to offer parents information that would be helpful in giving quality support to them as they participate in supporting their child's education from home.

Implementing the suggestions above will help parents to have confidence about parenting and gain an understanding of their child's learning as they progress through school. Parents may also have positive feelings of support from the school, which can lead to stronger home/school partnerships which benefits all.

Many interviewed were troubled by the negative perceptions of the school within the community. To address the negative perceptions the school could create a more positive image through actions such as:

- Improve communication within the community: Inform community of positive things happening at the school.
- Match community contributions with school goals: Illustrate how the community can contribute to school goals.
- Integrate child and family services with education: Work closely with agencies and service providers to assure equal opportunities for all families.

- Extend use of school building for community use: Provide the school as a place to hold community activities, thereby elevating the status of the school within the community.
- Provide services to the community: An example would be to start a recycling program, which could raise money for a needed discretionary fund.

There are many benefits to improving community perceptions of the school. With an improved perception the school can have access to multiple sources to get support to accomplish their goals. The community can become more united around the shared responsibility of educating youth and can offer mentoring experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research has consistently shown parental involvement positively impacts student success. Because of this positive impact educators must strive to improve parental participation levels. As educators work to improve parental participation, they may refer to studies such as this to increase their understanding of the perceptions among parents and educators regarding parental participation. To assist in overcoming perceived obstacles research needs to be expanded to develop even more understanding of parental participation for all families. Recommendations for future research include but are not limited to the suggestions below.

Follow-Up

It would be beneficial to research if the level of parental participation has improved a few years after implementation of additional strategies suggested by this study. I believe it would be best to wait three years or more to give FSCS time to

implement strategies effectively. Also, due to in-person learning and school activities being suspended because of COVID-19, I believe when school re-opens and returns to a normal schedule FSCS will need some time to regain the parental involvement level lost over the many months of the school building closure.

The research could be carried out in a similar way using both perspectives of parents and the administrative team. I would suggest conducting focus group interviews because I believe having parents together as a group could help generate authentic conversations. Because the administrative team consists of the principal, assistant principal, and the social worker I would suggest one-on-one interviews so that those team members feel comfortable sharing their true insights without fear of possible repercussions from their supervisor.

Involvement of Fathers

Another suggestion for future research would be to interview fathers to find out information about how to increase their level of involvement in their children's educations. Parental participation perceptions from fathers may have varied from the perceptions of mothers. They may have different needs and wants as parents. Finding out what those needs and wants are would be helpful to increase their participation as well as demonstrating to their children that fathers value education and can be actively involved.

Comparing Needs of Mothers and Fathers

An extension of the research on involvement of fathers would be to compare and contrast results of my study, which only involved women, to a study on the involvement

of men. By looking at the two there may be some different strategies to implement if the goal is to increase participation of men in the school.

Debriefing

I debriefed with the three members of the administration team individually. During these conversations I shared the findings of the study and the recommendations. The conversations were positive ones and recommendations offered were well received. The administration team requested a summary of my recommendations to use for 2021-2022 school year planning. The summary will be sent once the dissertation has been approved. Below are the recommendations.

ORGANIZING TO INCREASE PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Educational leaders should not expect participants to reach the desired goal of engagement on a linear, or uniform timeline. As with students, participants will grow in their level of comfort at their own pace. The recommended program below provides suggested activities for three points within the school year; beginning, middle, and end and includes activities that accommodate all levels of participation. This provides ideas to increase participation levels at whatever point individuals start and provides ideas to move toward the desired goal of engagement.

Beginning of 2021-2022 School Year

1. **Survey parents:** Ask parents what information and workshops they would find most helpful, and identify volunteer interests, talents, and availability. Identify barriers to participation such as childcare and transportation.
2. **Provide information on child development:** Conduct workshops on how children develop during childhood, including what to expect during the middle and high school years.
3. **Establish home visiting programs:** This will give teachers an opportunity to share school and classroom expectations and give parents the opportunity to share information concerning situations that might affect student performance.

4. **Offer school space:** Make room for parent-led support groups and parenting education classes. This space can be used for community gatherings also and can be a space used to connect with others. Extending the use of the school building to the community will assist in integrating the school into the community in a positive way.
5. **Capitalize on parent attendance at community events:** Attend community events and offer outreach materials such as brochures outlining the school program and philosophy, as well as school phone numbers and welcoming messages.
6. **Sponsor a parent sharing night:** Have parents share their best ideas and strategies for nurturing, homework, discipline, or other topics that can help other parents start the school year off on a positive note.
7. **Establish multiple ways to gather feedback:** Reach out to parents and community members to get to know them and their needs. These ways could include email, phone, in-person, a suggestion box in the school, or social media.
8. **Publicize volunteer opportunities:** Provide multiple opportunities and recruit widely so all parents or community members can find some way to become involved. This involvement does not have to be in-person at school during school hours.
9. **Include parents in decision-making.** Ensure there are parent representatives from major groups in the school, such as English-language learners, and/or major ethnic groups. Possibly include a representative from the university and the community. Properly train parents for the roles in which they will serve (e.g., curriculum, budget, school safety, etc.)
10. **Identify those parents only able or willing to be involved from home.** Offer support and alternative ways to engage. Online activities, involvement through social media, and in-home family activities are examples of ways to engage families from home.

Mid-Year 2021-2022 School Year

1. **Maintain communication with the community:** Inform the community of the positive things happening at the school and continue to publicize volunteer opportunities.
2. **Match community contributions with school goals.** After getting to know the community members, it will be easier to illustrate how the community can contribute.

3. **Conduct a mid-year survey.** Ask parents for any insights as to how the school year is progressing, any changes to needs/wants for information, and workshops, volunteer opportunities, and barriers preventing participation.
4. **Continue to include parents in decision-making.** Hand over as much responsibility to organize and lead efforts as possible. An example of this would be for parent representatives to be the ones to construct the agenda and lead the meetings.
5. **Monitor feedback.** By monitoring feedback changes can be made to meet the evolving needs of parents and community members.

End of 2021-2022 School Year

1. **Look for indicators of success:** Determine if there was an increase, decrease, or stable level of participation when compared to past years.
2. **Conduct surveys:** Ask parents as well as community members what worked this year, what did not, and what changes should be implemented for the next school year.
3. **Recognize people for their efforts:** Recognize all the efforts made by people who have served on the school advising committees and in other decision-making roles. This will not only let them know their contributions were valued but may also inspire others to take a more active role in the coming school years.
4. **Celebrate positive outcomes.** Share with the school and community the positive outcomes increasing participation has had. This can be presented orally at a gathering, on social media, or through a written communication. It is important to communicate, in some way, that the efforts are making a difference in the lives of the children in the community.
5. **Plan for the 2022-2023 school year:** Establish a planning committee that includes all stakeholders to review outcomes from the 2021-2022 plan to increase participation from the parents and community. Based on the results make plans for the coming school year.

I was pleased my recommendations were well received and met with enthusiasm.

I am happy my study is helping inform the steps the school will use to increase parental participation for the upcoming school year. One of my goals for this dissertation was to

provide guidance to assist the school in improving their parental participation rates. I believe this goal has been met, and I feel good about this work.

Final Thoughts

This study has the potential to be helpful to FSCS and I am pleased that what I have done is going to be useful to a school near me. I heard many positive comments from parents about the people leading the school. I found the leadership team to be a dedicated group of people striving to serve the community well.

I found the parents and administrative team were open and honest with me during the interviews. I felt they were all wanting the best for the school as a whole and were giving me their best, thoughtful responses throughout the interviews.

There were responses from both parents and a member of the administration team that were refreshing. When I asked parents if they were satisfied with their level of participation they said “yes,” though they would welcome other opportunities. An administrator said she also was satisfied with the level of parental participation at the school. This was the most unexpected statement of all.

I have found throughout my almost 30 years in education, members of administrative teams are never satisfied with the level of parental participation. I have found it is important to have reasonable expectations of the population you serve. In addition to having reasonable expectations of the populations you serve, as a leader you must have reasonable expectations of your faculty and staff.

This leader acknowledged the parents work and can't change their work schedules to become more involved. Also acknowledged was the fact that adjusting times to

accommodate parent schedules will be asking too much of staff members. Unfortunately, for reasons often unknown there are those parents that lack the desire to participate in their child's education. This administrator acknowledged this reality exists and though attempts to engage those parents will continue, the focus should be on positive progress being made in increasing parental participation.

This ability to assess the entire situation and arrive at being satisfied was such a nice surprise during this study. Too often reality seems to escape leaders as they push those around them to try to attain results that are very difficult to attain, if not impossible. Because of this push for the unattainable, staff members often feel unappreciated and morale goes down. This often leads to burnout and high levels of turnover. I have worked in multiple schools that have experienced having leaders with extremely lofty goals. Low-performing schools seem to destroy themselves from the inside out.

This leader encourages staff members to continue to move forward in a positive direction. She reinforces that yes, they are doing a good job, yes, they are valued, and yes, they have done enough. I know as a teacher it is so important to be given those messages. It can make the difference between staying or leaving a teaching position.

I found this school to be an impressive one the university has created with the help of supportive, caring, professional leaders. The parents I interviewed were so complimentary of the program and the entire faculty and staff. My findings can lead FSCS to implement even more supports and opportunities to help the school move more parents into being even more involved, and eventually to being engaged in FSCS opportunities.

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APPENDIX A.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the research proposal, I raised questions that address the research problem. Below were the possible interview questions:

	CFE #1 Parenting	CFE #2 Communicating	CFE #3 Volunteering	CFE #4 Learning at Home	CFE #5 Decision Making	CFE #6 Collaborating with the Community
RQ #1 What do parents in low-performing schools say would increase their participation in their children's schools?	Would information about parenting increase parenting behaviors?	Would improving communication increase parental participation?	Would expanding volunteer opportunities increase parental participation?	Would including learning at home activities increase parental participation?	Would including parents in decision making increase participation by parents?	Would increasing collaboration with the community increase parental participation?
RQ #2 What supports for parents' participation already in place do the parents feel are helpful?	How is the school supporting parents?	What are some ways see the school communicating effectively with parents?	How is the school ensuring parents that wish to volunteer are getting the opportunity?	How is the school supporting learning at home?	How are parents involved in decision making?	How is the school collaborating with the community?
RQ #3 What supports for parents' participation do the parents feel are needed?	How could more support for the parenting role be provides?	How could communication between home and school improve?	What can be done to increase the level of volunteerism?	What supports and resources could the school provide to help parents in supporting student learning at home?	How can the parents become more involved in the decision-making process?	What can be done to increase collaboration with the community?

APPENDIX B.**PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How would you describe your level of participation in your child's education?
2. Are you satisfied with this level? Why or why not?
3. Does the school already have supports in place that help you be involved?
4. How frequently do you or parents you know use the supports provided?
5. What could be done to increase your level of participation?
6. How about increasing the participation of other parents?
7. How does this school provide opportunities for parents to be involved?
8. Are there any additional areas where you would like to see more opportunities for parental participation?
9. Is there anything you would like leadership to know about how to better facilitate parental involvement?

APPENDIX C.**ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How would you describe the level of parental participation at your school?
2. Are you satisfied with this level? Why or why not?
3. Does the school already have supports in place to help parents be involved?
4. How frequently do parents use the supports provided?
5. What could be done to increase participation?
6. How does this school provide opportunities for parents to be involved?
7. Are there additional areas where you would like to see more opportunities for parental participation?

APPENDIX D.
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Supports to Improve Parental Participation
Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor: Stephanie Helsabeck and Dr. Carl Lashley
Participant's Name: _____

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?

This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of administrators and parents regarding parental participation and find ways to increase the amount of parental participation.

Why are you asking me?

The reason for selecting you as a participant is because you are a parent of a student or on the administrative team.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

The researcher will call you at an agreed upon time to answer some questions concerning parental participation. This phone call will be about an hour long. There may be a follow-up phone call at a later date.

Is there any audio/video recording?

Yes, there will be audio recording. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described below.

What are the risks to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

What if I have questions?

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Stephanie Helsabeck, who may be reached at (336)588-6112 or Dr. Carl Lashley at c_lashe@uncg.edu.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study, please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

How will you keep my information confidential?

Information will be stored on a password protected computer. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.”

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, in this study described to you by Stephanie Helsabeck.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E.

ORGANIZING TO INCREASE PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Educational leaders should not expect participants to reach the desired goal of engagement on a linear, or uniform timeline. As with students, participants will grow in their level of comfort at their own pace. The recommended program below provides suggested activities for three points within the school year; beginning, middle, and end and includes activities that accommodate all levels of participation. This provides ideas to increase participation levels at whatever point individuals start and provides ideas to move toward the desired goal of engagement.

Beginning of 2021-2022 School Year

- 11. Survey parents:** Ask parents what information and workshops they would find most helpful, and identify volunteer interests, talents, and availability. Identify barriers to participation such as childcare and transportation.
- 12. Provide information on child development:** Conduct workshops on how children develop during childhood, including what to expect during the middle and high school years.
- 13. Establish home visiting programs:** This will give teachers an opportunity to share school and classroom expectations and give parents the opportunity to share information concerning situations that might affect student performance.
- 14. Offer school space:** Make room for parent-led support groups and parenting education classes. This space can be used for community gatherings also and can be a space used to connect with others. Extending the use of the school building to the community will assist in integrating the school into the community in a positive way.
- 15. Capitalize on parent attendance at community events:** Attend community events and offer outreach materials such as brochures outlining the school program and philosophy, as well as school phone numbers and welcoming messages.
- 16. Sponsor a parent sharing night:** Have parents share their best ideas and strategies for nurturing, homework, discipline, or other topics that can help other parents start the school year off on a positive note.

17. **Establish multiple ways to gather feedback:** Reach out to parents and community members to get to know them and their needs. These ways could include email, phone, in-person, a suggestion box in the school, or social media.
18. **Publicize volunteer opportunities:** Provide multiple opportunities and recruit widely so all parents or community members can find some way to become involved. This involvement does not have to be in-person at school during school hours.
19. **Include parents in decision-making.** Ensure there are parent representatives from major groups in the school, such as English-language learners, and/or major ethnic groups. Possibly include a representative from the university and the community. Properly train parents for the roles in which they will serve (e.g., curriculum, budget, school safety, etc.)
20. **Identify those parents only able or willing to be involved from home.** Offer support and alternative ways to engage. Online activities, involvement through social media, and in-home family activities are examples of ways to engage families from home.

Mid-Year 2021-2022 School Year

6. **Maintain communication with the community:** Inform the community of the positive things happening at the school and continue to publicize volunteer opportunities.
7. **Match community contributions with school goals.** After getting to know the community members, it will be easier to illustrate how the community can contribute.
8. **Conduct a mid-year survey.** Ask parents for any insights as to how the school year is progressing, any changes to needs/wants for information, and workshops, volunteer opportunities, and barriers preventing participation.
9. **Continue to include parents in decision-making.** Hand over as much responsibility to organize and lead efforts as possible. An example of this would be for parent representatives to be the ones to construct the agenda and lead the meetings.
10. **Monitor feedback.** By monitoring feedback changes can be made to meet the evolving needs of parents and community members.

End of 2021-2022 School Year

- 6. Look for indicators of success:** Determine if there was an increase, decrease, or stable level of participation when compared to past years.
- 7. Conduct surveys:** Ask parents as well as community members what worked this year, what did not, and what changes should be implemented for the next school year.
- 8. Recognize people for their efforts:** Recognize all the efforts made by people who have served on the school advising committees and in other decision-making roles. This will not only let them know their contributions were valued but may also inspire others to take a more active role in the coming school years.
- 9. Celebrate positive outcomes.** Share with the school and community the positive outcomes increasing participation has had. This can be presented orally at a gathering, on social media, or through a written communication. It is important to communicate, in some way, that the efforts are making a difference in the lives of the children in the community.
- 10. Plan for the 2022-2023 school year:** Establish a planning committee that includes all stakeholders to review outcomes from the 2021-2022 plan to increase participation from the parents and community. Based on the results make plans for the coming school year.

If there are any questions concerning any suggestions offered, please contact me to talk further.

Stephanie Helsabeck – call (336) 588-6112 or email me at s.helsabeck@yahoo.com